

BREAKING THE FRAMES OF THE PAST: PHOTOGRAPHY AND LITERATURE IN
CONTEMPORARY ARGENTINA, CHILE, AND PERU

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ABSTRACT

Breaking the Frames of the Past: Photography and Literature in Contemporary Argentina, Chile,
and Peru

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Breaking the Frames of the Past examines recent visual and literary work about the periods of historical violence in Argentina, Chile, and Peru. In my dissertation, I argue that these cultural productions can challenge the linear conception of historical time, and reveal the existent tensions and blind spots present within the cultural memory realm of each nation.

By examining the specificity of the materials and the aesthetic strategies present in the works, I hope to elucidate a necessary introspective turn in memory- what I have nominated *metamemory*, present in works that not only seek to interrogate official national paradigms, discourses of the past, productions of knowledge, and memorial imperatives, but also works that are profoundly aware of their condition *as* memory objects within a cultural memory realms.

Breaking the Frames of the Past is divided into two parts, *Part One: Images*, engages with memory at a broader collective level, and analyzes the different ways the photographic medium has been used to represent the past and craft a sense of national belonging. *Part Two: Texts* is concerned with subjective memory, and the overlap between childhood memories lived simultaneously within the frame of a period of historical violence. I discuss literary work written by those born during these periods of violence in order to see how from their subjective experience and through their works they can assert to the existing tensions within cultural memory paradigms. In examining novels by those who are “the Secondary Characters” of

history, I argue that their use of metafictional strategies is able to counter the feeling of displacement and sense of belatedness that is present in postmemory works.

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my family- my parents Jorge Wurst and Claudia Cavassa, my sisters Mariella and Gaby, and to my grandfather, who passed away around this time last year, I keep your memory with me. I dedicate this dissertation to my beautiful grandmother, Tessy Cavassa Castañeda. I remain in constant awe of her resilience and am forever grateful for her love, her generosity, and her unwavering belief in me, and in all I could do.

INTRODUCTION

In what ways does the past seep into the present? How do images and texts facilitate the intrusion of a time into another time, particularly when the past refers to the memory of periods of historical violence and trauma? The question of memory in Latin America is not a new one. In fact, memory has become a protean paradigm in the critical interpretation of political, social, and cultural phenomena. The centrality of memory is present in almost every realm; politically- through laws and institutional and official state-sponsored efforts such as truth and reconciliation commissions, socially- in the creation of commemorations, memory spaces, and memorials, and culturally- in art practices, aesthetic creations, and performances. Furthermore, memory has also anchored itself within the contemporary Latin American Studies field with a rise of publications, conferences, and research that engages with memory studies and its paradigms. Memory has been described as an “obsession” (Jelin 2001), “an imperative” (Dosse 1998), “a boom” (Huysen 1995), and “an inflation that can become yet another more spectacular form of oblivion” (Bosteels 2005). Is there anything new to be said about memory? This dissertation attest that there is.

Breaking the Frames of the Past examines contemporary visual and literary work about the periods of historical violence in Argentina, Chile, and Peru¹. The title of my dissertation anticipates my argument at a broader scale: First, that these cultural productions can unsettle the

¹ The military dictatorship in Argentina (known as “El Proceso de Reorganización Nacional” and “La Guerra sucia”) from May 24th 1976-1983, the military dictatorship in Chile that started with the Coup d’Etat September 11th, 1973 and lasted until 1990), and the period of political violence in Peru (known as the “Conflicto Armado Interno”) a conflict between the armed terrorist group Partido Comunista Peruano –Sendero Luminoso (from now on referred to as PCP-SL). With the exception of *Buena Memoria* by Marcelo Brodsky- a photo-exhibition inaugurated in 1996 and published in 1997-, all of the works discussed are from the first two decades of the 2000s, particularly from 2010 and beyond.

linear conception of time that is largely adopted in official memory discourses, and second, that these visual and literary works can reveal the existent tensions and blind spots present within the frameworks of the cultural memory realms of each nation.

By examining the specificity of the materials and the aesthetic strategies present in the works, I elucidate how they signal to a necessary introspective turn within contemporary memory productions- what I have named *metamemory*. Metamemory works evidence two main things: one- a self-awareness of the author's own place of enunciation imbedded in the work itself, and two- an awareness from the authors and artists of the condition of their creations as future memory objects, which will circulate within specific cultural memory realms and possibly beyond into international art and memory markets. This self-awareness, I argue, should not be thought of as merely self-indulgent or as a capitalistic strategy, but as a way that destabilizes deeply imbedded and hegemonic national imaginaries about the past as well as contemporary memorial imperatives in the present.

The late twentieth century 'memory boom' - the obsession with memory as central to political and cultural practices at a global scale²- (Huysen 3) has given way to a burgeoning rise in the cultural memory production, constituting both a demand and a market in the past thirty years³. Indeed, for Huysen, the attention to memory and the return to the past is a way to anchor temporality and rescue a sense of materiality of a national past lost to globalization and the unstoppable speed of technological modernization. Though Huysen writes from a Euro-focal historical context, it is easy to see how the 'memory boom' can be thought of as a universal phenomenon.

² Huysen explains the 'memory boom' as "a form of contestation of the informational hyperspace and an expression of the basic human need to live in extended structures of temporality, however they may be organized" (In *Twilight Memories. Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia*. Routledge, 1995, pp.9-10.)

³ For more on memory markets in Latin America, see Bilbija, Ksenija, and Leigh A. Payne, editors. *Accounting for Violence: Marketing Memory in Latin America*. Duke UP, 2011.

More than two decades have passed since Huyssen wrote about the memory boom, and given the omnipresence of technological modernization, globalization, and hegemonic memory discourses, it is necessary to now think of the way in which memory can be thought of, no longer as a ‘boom’, or as a necessary return to the past in order to anchor temporality. Taking into consideration the ubiquity both of technological advances and of the late twentieth century attention to historical memory, it is important to think about memory work that can find new ways to unsettle and engage with the past. The return to the past can be read not as what safeguards a sense of stability in an ever-changing world, but as something that is in the same frequency as the current present, its particular tensions, and imperatives.

I argue that the works analyzed here signal a new turn in the twenty-first century that responds to the memory overload of the memory boom. The hindsight distance to this memory obsession as well as the vast production of knowledge and information surrounding memory has contributed to the creation of works that engage with the past through a self-reflexive and introspective lens. This new turn allows new forms of engagement with the times and tenses of memory and alternative approaches to the past that go beyond the merely commemorative, citational or elegiac approach to memory. Additionally, these memory works become platforms to host new memory actors, new forms of kinship, and possibilities of representation.

In that sense, it is also essential to think how this new turn on memory comments and intervenes the fundamental role of the dynamics of intergenerational and familial structures of remembrance. The much discussed notion of postmemory- introduced by Marianne Hirsch as the creative investments and aesthetic interventions of a generation who grew dominated by narratives that preceded their births⁴- also needs to be updated to take into consideration how this

⁴ Hirsch first developed the notion of postmemory in her book *Family Frames. Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* (1997) in relation to children of Holocaust survivors. Her following book *The Generation of*

self-reflexive turn can amplify, unsettle, and queer the familial genealogy in intergenerational transmission.

Similar to the notion of the ‘memory boom’, ‘postmemory’ can also be thought as a concept that can extend beyond Europe and the memory of the Holocaust. In “distinguishing from memory by a generational distance and from history by a deep personal connection” (Hirsch, *Family Frames* 22) it is easy to identify the universalizing potential of the notion, as familiar transmission of memory and a deep connection to history is something proper of individual memory that is present everywhere.

In recent years, postmemory has been both used and critiqued by scholars working on different historical contexts, mediums, and time periods. The multiple discussions surrounding postmemory have influenced Hirsch’s own definition of the term. In the newest definition of the concept, postmemory includes not only familial trans-generational transmission but also distant contemporary witnesses, those who remember and are in contact with the past by imaginative investment but also by an affective investment, creating thus “a form of solidarity that is suspicious of empathy, shuttling instead between proximity and distance, affiliation and disaffiliation, complicity and accountability” (Hirsch, “Connective Histories” 339)⁵.

This revision of postmemory has allowed me to find an aperture to expand the notion to think about those born *during* the periods of political violence and military dictatorships, and thus gather an archive of visual and narrative works by the sons and daughters of the generation that experienced the historical past, whose childhood and coming of age experiences overlapped with the time of violence. How does this position of being “in-between” a past that does not fully belong to them influence their approximation to memory? How can we think about the temporal

Postmemory. Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust (2012) amplifies the term to take into consideration other second-generation memories and cultural and collective traumatic events and experiences.

⁵ Hirsch, Marianne. “Connective Histories in Vulnerable Times” *PMLA* vol 129, no.3, May 2014, pp.330-349.

potential of the “post” in postmemory when there is a simultaneity in which the past of childhood memories overlaps with the past of a historical memory of violence? Moreover, how do we think about the potential of the “post” installed in a time where discourses of memory and memorial imperatives abound and dominate cultural spheres and national imaginaries?

I take the notion of postmemory not as a theoretical anchor, but as a platform that allows me to gather different contemporary artists from Argentina, Chile, and Peru that are united by this experience in trying to reconcile their own subjective memories growing up during historical violent past. I argue that the postmemorial anxiety and feeling of displacement felt by those writers and creators whose own history is overshadowed by the generation that preceded them (Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*), can be countered by creating metamemory works that are anchored in a present that is placed at the foreground. These works are self-reflexive both of their place of enunciation, and of the cultural realm they are a part of. Most importantly, the imbedded introspective reflection present in the works allows a wider reflection in the reckoning with the past that can critically counter hegemonic and official discourses of memory.

Thus, this dissertation is not only a dissertation about memory, but also about the potential in the use of the photographic and literary mediums by this generation, in their capacity to bring specific memorial tensions to the shore and engage time tenses together. Concretely, this dissertation shows how these works make the past seep into the present, and the present into the past.

In *History, Memory and State-Sponsored Violence: Time and Justice* (2013), Berber Bevernage posits that the normalized linear time adopted by memory politics in reconciliation efforts- the belief in a linear and strict division that separates past from present- can help successor states to claim a new identity and clear themselves from historical debts so as to enable

them to focus in the present and the future- a clean break that will lead into the future process of a “new nationhood” and thus pacify the troublesome force of memory in the present (84). Under this naturalized, progressive, linear temporality, and the promise of non-repetition (*Nunca más, Para no olvidar* dictums) the past is considered as what needs to be acknowledged in order to move further away from it, to move forward as a nation into the promise of a utopic and democratic future that is always in the horizon. Is it possible to find new forms of engagements with the past that can distance itself from this progressive and teleological approximation? Is there the possibility of different temporal orders and approaches to memory beyond the merely citational or commemorative? How can subjective memory and remembering from a particular position allow *a queering of time*?

The recent temporal turn in queer studies (Lee Edelman 2004, Jack Halberstam 2005, José Esteban Muñoz 2009, Elizabeth Freeman 2010, Caroline Dinshaw 2012) has critically questioned official temporal framings that dictate normative life. In *Time Binds* (2010), Elizabeth Freeman introduces the notion of chrononormativity as a mode of implantation, a technique by which the State organizes the value and meaning of time- with calendars, schedules, time zones, work hours- being interiorized to the point they seem like somatic facts. Freeman signals how this normative implementation of time follows the logic of time as productive, thereby following a serial cause and effect. In that sense, “the past seems useless unless it predicts and become material for the future” (*Time Binds* 6). This allows me to posit that these teleologies of living inform not only the way we relate to the present but also the engagement with the past that is mediated by the cultural memory realms and the imperative to remember.

In positing that the works analyzed are “queering time”, I use “queer” beyond sexual connotations and practices, but primarily as an attempt to unsettle the conventional and the

normative hegemonic discourses that mediate our relation with the past. The idea of “queering time” is conceived as a resistance to subsume to redemptive narratives, social scripts, and political approximations to the past. “Queering time” thus has to do with ways of being with the past that are “out of sync with the ordinary measurements that dictate everyday life, that engage heterogeneous temporalities and new temporal engagements that distance from the conception of time-as-measurement towards a singular goal” (Dinshaw, *How Soon is Now* 4). This gesture is also present in the queering of a particular memory imaginary, found in the resistance to the performative imperatives that can be present within specific cultural memory realms.

Thus, to think about the queering of time allows me to close-read the images and texts present in this dissertation as that which can go beyond the canonized, official, or institutional narratives that safeguard national past. The visual and narrative work discussed in this dissertation bypass and critically comment those official memory practices and imperatives that engages with the past in a way that inevitable falls into the logic of a productive and redemptive experience that smooth out the complexities and inheritances of the violent past.

Memory tensions and methodological challenges

The tensions that I see within cultural memory in these three countries are specific of their political and national history and, I believe, are crucial to unsettle universal memory paradigms that should not be taken necessarily at face value but that, to the contrary, should enrich the notions that were initially formulated with a Western and euro-focal perspective in mind.

Therefore, I want to discuss the idea of the “blind spot”- that which gets left out of sight- to an introspective reflection about the approach to memory as a Latin American scholar and researcher. That is to say, I am aware that this dissertation will (also) become another production

of memory within both the Latin American Studies and the memory studies field, and this makes me reflect on my own place of enunciation, the place from which I write.

As a Peruvian scholar working on memory, I often find it telling that when I present work in international memory conferences I am inevitably always placed in the “Memory *in* Latin America” panels. I highlight the “*in*” because there is a sense of tokenism in the gesture- to be included just as long as it is as being part of that difference, included but leaving the frameworks of knowledge untouched.

The “*in*” following the word “Memory” seems to me also as a limitation- as if the reflections presented can only be thought of “*in*” that specific context and not as a part that contributes to the larger discussion regarding memory. When I present at panels, I know I have something to say beyond presenting a particular historical context that may be exotic or unfamiliar to others. I know that in the resistances that I find in my own materials to fit into national and universal paradigms, there is a wider reflection about the potential and limits of these paradigms.

A concrete example comes to mind. At a conference in Frankfurt in 2017, I was to present in a panel right after Aleida Assmann’s keynote address. Aleida Assmann and her husband, Jan Assmann, are considered key contributors to the memory studies discipline for their work on collective and cultural memory. The same year of the conference, they both had won the prestigious 2017 Balzan Prize on Collective Memory for, among other things, their “decades long exchange about very different historical realities and models and their work presenting collective memory as an integral part on the formation of identity”⁶.

⁶ <https://www.balzan.org/en/prizewinners/aleida-and-jan-assmann>

Assmann's keynote address focused on different ways in which individuals and groups perceive the past and different modes of transmission focused on Holocaust memory that constitute an important part of contemporary memory culture in Europe. Among other things, Assmann posited institutional and official frameworks as those that are able to safeguard the past for collective memory. Though the talk was detailed and informative, it also felt limited and insular, even though the centrality of the presentation seemed to suggest that these frameworks could -and *should*- be applied at a broader scale beyond Europe and Holocaust memory. I remember that while I was hearing the talk, I kept thinking how much different historical contexts and socio-political realities could complicate the assertions that had just been presented.

My panel (to the conference's credit, this was not a "Memory in Latin America" panel, but a "Memory and Photography" one) was right after Assmann's keynote, and I presented still thinking about the limits of the categories introduced during the talk, jotted down in the corner of the printed copy of my fifteen-minute paper. My presentation focused on the use photography and the complicated and asymmetrical structure in the elaboration of collective and cultural memory in Peru, what would later become one of the chapters of this dissertation.

By happenstance, the paper I presented, the one that immediately followed Assmann's keynote "Frames of Transmission" was titled "Breaking the Frames of the Past: Photography as Screen, Photography as Contract." In my presentation, I asked: how can we reflect on the limits of a normative framework of memory or the idea that "official memory can safeguard individual and collective memory" (Assmann, 2011) in a highly stratified and centralized nation as Peru, where the social, political, and cultural power resides mostly in the coastal capital of Lima? How can we think about homogeneous frameworks of the social life of memory in countries where social, racial, and spatial divides influence and determine the transmission, mediation and

institutionalization of cultural memory? I asked what were the potential and limits of cultural memory practices and productions when there is a clear asymmetry between those who produce cultural memory discourses, those who are the targeted audiences of these discourses, and those who actually experienced and inherited the legacy of past violence and trauma. Finally, I proposed to think about alternative modes of memory engagements that can counter the homogenization of a collective national identity and ways of approaching the past.

This experience marked a turning point for me as a scholar, because it made me realize the reflections in my work transcended the insularity of “Memory *in* Latin America”. It made me realize that the specificity of my research could both destabilize and expand the categories and frameworks presented as foundational theories of memory and that these theories could be innovated from the specificity of a research that extends itself beyond European context.

Several theorists working in Latin America have contributed to unsettle memory paradigms and enrich the production of knowledge of memory from specific historical contexts. My dissertation puts in dialogue both the memory studies and the Latin American studies fields, in order to find a fertile territory of reflection. Among the scholars who have contributed to the question of memory, I want to briefly underscore the works that have been instrumental in furthering my own questions on the tensions present in the cultural memory field and the key ideas their work put forward, ideas that I engage with throughout this dissertation.

One of the fundamental hypothesis regarding memory in Latin America that different scholars agree on (Nelly Richard, Willy Thayer, Idelber Avelar) is that the dictatorships in the Southern Cone did not represent a transition from democracy to dictatorship, but instead one from State to Market, ushering a continuation of the violently imposed past through the neo-liberal era.

In a similar vein, The book *The Untimely Past: Postdictatorial Latin American Fiction and the Task of Mourning* (1999) by Idelver Avelar reflects on the role of literature in confronting the danger of the commodification of material and cultural life that seems to preclude the very existence of memory. For the author, the past needs to be forgotten because the market demands that the new replace the old without leaving a remainder- since it is on the very nature of the market to have an eternal substitutionary logic.

As influential as this book was, however, it is important to think about the limitations and contradictions that can be posed when reading it today. For one, the book was published in 1999, before the “memory boom” fully reached its peak in Latin America. Reading it under this post-boom moment of the first decades of the 2000s, it begs the question- what do we do now that the demand for memory has become so strong that it constitutes a memory market of its own within neoliberal nations and a risk of commodification in its own right? Does that cancel the role of literature -or any artistic memory practices- in countering the danger of commodification of material and cultural life that can lead to oblivion? As with the examples of memory studies canonical paradigms, Latin American ones can also be revisited, questioned, amplified.

Another important question throughout the dissertation is how to read the subjective turn that is present in postmemory. In *Tiempo Pasado. Cultura de la memoria y giro subjetivo. Una discusión* (2005) Beatriz Sarlo is critical of the concept of postmemory, and wonders what is it that truly distinguishes memory from postmemory. She determines that what distinguishes postmemory from memory is not its vicarious, fragmentary, or mediated condition, but instead its subjective implication in the past events that are being represented. Though Sarlo clearly identifies the presence of a subjective turn (*giro subjetivo*) in contemporary memorial practices, the resurgence of the subject, she is suspicious and cautious in believing that the reemergence of

the subjective first person can truly account or capture the essence to be rescued of the past. Her reading and critiques are useful in order to think about the possible narcissistic drive that constitute postmemorial work that rely on the subjective experience and uses autofictional strategies. Although it is obvious that there is a certain self-centeredness within the work, I argue that this introspection and fixation on the present as it travels through a vicarious past, should not be seen as a detriment, but as a turn that allows the discussion of memory to open up and include more actors, points of view, and histories regarding the past. Along the same veins of the recent critical memory work in Argentina of Jordana Blejmar (2016) and Cecilia Sosa (2014), this dissertation engages with the question of postmemory in ways that unsettle and queer the familial transmission of memory, complicating not only the postmemorial paradigm but also the hegemonic national imaginary regarding conventional discourses and its imperatives.

Latin American critical thinkers engaging with memory not only challenge given memory studies and paradigms, they also provide a lexicon that can be extremely useful and rich in thinking about memory and its theorization. In thinking about the politics of cultural memory in post-dictatorial Chile, Nelly Richard has turned into a fundamental voice that has offered productive theoretical notions and metaphors to think about the politics of cultural memory and its existent tensions. Among her most fruitful and central ideas, which will be discussed throughout the dissertation are “cultural residues” (*residuos culturales*) that challenge the insufficient language of political consensus (*Cultural Residues* 2004) “memory outbursts” (*los estallidos de la memoria*) the unexpected and abrupt ways in which the past can interrupt the present (*Crítica de la Memoria* 2010) and the potential space that opens up (“*el espacio bisagra*”) a space of aperture from where to think about all the works that resist to any attempts to closure and easy resolves that attempt to suture the wounds of the past (*Latencias y sobresaltos* 2017).

Throughout the elaboration of this project, I have had a constant and consistent dialogue with these ideas, and they have greatly contributed to my own reflections on cultural memory tensions, temporality, and the place of the past.

The critical work present in this dissertation is anchored in the praxis of close reading. By close-reading contemporal visual and narrative work, I discuss the way in which the past is put into meaningful and transformative relations in the present. The act of close reading is described by Elizabeth Freeman as a queer gesture- one that dwells and takes its time in reflecting on the complexities and richness of each aesthetic intervention. Freeman writes “to close read is to linger, to dally, to take pleasure in tarrying, and to hold out that these activities can allow us to look both hard and askance at the norm (...) Close reading is a way into history, not a way out of it” (Freeman, *Time Binds* xvii). Thus, the reflections present in this dissertation also follow the queering of time that is present in the works themselves.

Close reading has allowed me to explore the plasticity of the mediums, their materialities, the aesthetic strategies in their uses, potential and limits. What is innovative about this dissertation is precisely its attention to detail, to the materiality of the objets, to the form, and the various ways different time tenses are put into dialogue with one another. Close reading the aesthetic interventions of these works of memory have also opened up a space that reveals the symptoms and tensions in the present realities of each nation: tensions like the risk of memory commodification, the performative imperative embedded in the duty to remember, tensions in the mediation of memory and transgenerational tensions of those that experienced history from the margins, Thus, this is not only a dissertation about memory, or the past, but a dissertation deeply embedded in the present, and the negotiations that exist between tenses, in the way that time is interiorized and arranged regarding the past.

This dissertation also provides a new comparative frame to think about memory in Latin America. While Argentina and Chile seem to be an obvious pairing for comparison- given the historical similarities of experiencing repressive and authoritarian military regimes in the seventies and the subsequent imposition of neo-liberal politics in the return of democracy, I found it productive to think about the contrast in the way memory is approached in the present. While memory in Argentina rests upon an unchallenged foundation that it was the State the perpetrator of violence, in Chile, the question of memory is inevitably tied to political affiliations. The same historical event- the military coup by Pinochet on September 11th of 1973 can be read in complete opposite narratives and form part of different memory formulations- as a radical interruption of the utopian promise of the socialist government of Salvador Allende, or as the event that “saved Chile from socialist chaos” and heralded Chile into economic progress. These polarizing views influence memory efforts, cultural memory productions, and evidence national tensions and ruptures.

In contrast to Argentina and Chile, the beginning of the period of political violence began in Peru *with* the return to democracy. The question of memory has been highly contested ground in Peru because it also hosts geopolitical and racial tensions- since most of the violence occurred in the highlands and far away from Lima, the capital. The asymmetry of violence, which mostly affected the Andean population, seem to be more in tune with the histories of violence experienced in Guatemala with the Rios Montt dictatorship or with the guerrillas in Colombia in the late XXth century. However, I find that the comparison and contrast between these three chosen countries create a productive and fertile space for reflection.

In thinking about memory in Peru, I identify the way the has also been kept repressed- how society in Peru has found no real way to walk through the tensions that the historical violent

past brought to the surface, through the stigma and the social and cultural fractures the period of political violence in Peru both unleashed and was a symptom of. It seems that, in Peru, looking at the past is similar to walking through broken glass- because the surfaces of violence revealed other violences underneath.

This dissertation brings forth a new comparative framework that puts Peru at the forefront in the discussion of memory in Latin America. The visual and literary works presented are able to reframe memory away from a particular redemptive or citiational approach to the past. By showcasing the blindspots presents within cultural memory it also produces a productive space of aperture- a space for new actors of memory and critical questioning of its limits and potential. Adding Peru to the discussion of memory in the Southern Cone allows, in all of its contrast, to reflect back different dimensions of memory in Argentina and Chile previously unaccounted for. This is present not only in the close-readings but on the very structural organization of the dissertation.

Breaking the Frames of the Past is divided into two parts: **Part One: Images** and **Part Two: Texts**. The division is a play on W.J.T Mitchell concept of “image-text”; “imagetext” designates composite, synthetic works that combine both image and text and “image-text” with a hyphen, designates relations of the visual and the verbal. In this dissertation I discuss both-composite works that combine both image and text, and also the relations between the visual and the verbal in memorial work that addresses the past.

Part One: Images focuses on a more public and collective memory and the representation of the past through photography. **Part Two: Texts** focuses on post-memorial testimonial, autofictional, and metafictional novels of those who grew up during the dictatorships and periods of political violence- under the historical shadow of the past. The concluding

chapters of *Part One* and *Part Two* are focused on photography and literature work in Peru. This decision was crucial to allow a cross-reading with the works presented in Argentina and Chile and to craft a reflection on the different dimensions the tensions within each cultural realm could take.

In order to present an innovative reading, I have organized the chapters based on the specificity of the mediums that are used: Photography and Literature. In *Part One: Images* each chapter tackles a specific type of image: photo IDs, Domestic photographs, Documentary Photography and artistic portraits. The titles of the chapter signal the multiple ways in which photography can be used in regards to memory- as a trace, as a mirror, as a screen and as a contract.

In Chapter 1, I first present one of the earliest engagements between memory and photography- '**Photography as Trace** examines the way the medium is used for its indexical quality; the ability to certify existence. I map how the use of the photo ID has evolved into different forms of engagements with newer generations. This chapter mostly focuses on Argentina, but towards the end I also include a reflection on the use of the photo ID in Chile and Peru. Drawing upon the reflections on photography and temporality present in the work of Roland Barthes, Walter Benjamin, and Didi-Huberman, I illustrate how the use of this particular photographs allow the potential to form a dialectic between temporalities that can illustrate a refusal to the historical time given by State sponsored narratives, particularly in the use of the Photo ID by the Madres of Plaza de Mayo

In Chapter 2, '**Photography as Mirror**' I look at the use of domestic photography in two post-memorial projects- "Nando, mi hermano" present in the photographic essay *Buena memoria* (1997) by Marcelo Brodsky and the photography exhibition *Ausencias* (2011) by Gustavo

Germano. I reflect upon how the use of these personal archives allows the artists to make the losses left by the disappeared be visualized beyond their condition as disappeared subjects, giving an insight a representation of absence but also of the world left behind. I also reflect on how both works engage with temporality: With Brodsky I argue that it is his use of the caption that reworks the optical unconscious (Benjamin, “A Short History of Photography”) present in the photographs. It is precisely the use of the captions written from the present that allows the readers to rescue their hidden dimensions, granting them what Susan Sontag has called a “posthumous irony” (Sontag, “Melancholy Objects”). With the project *Ausencias* by Gustavo Germano, I read the juxtaposition of the original and reenacted images as what allows a visualization of absence and also a contemplation of loss and the irreversibility of time. Since both projects use domestic photography, and can be thought of as “memory photo albums” of their own, I also think about the presence of “the familial gaze”- what Hirsch describes as “the powerful gaze of familiarity which imposes and perpetuates certain conventional images of the familial and which “frames” the family in both senses of the term” (Hirsch, *Family Frames* 11). In reflecting on both projects in tandem, I find a contrast in how the familial gaze is approached- While Brodsky’s selection of the images of his brother challenges what would be included in the ideal familial gaze, Germano’s selection and reenactments of the photographs in the Entre Rios community adheres to a commitment of the conventionality and ideal of the gaze. This allows me to ask if loss in Argentina can be configured in any other way other than relational? A question that will be revisited in *Part Two*.

The last two chapters of *Part One* are titled **Photography as Screen, Photography as Contract** and engage with the contraposition of hegemonic cultural memory archives whose imperatives screen something out of view and, in contrast, the use of photography as a

collaborative event, drawing upon Ariella Azoulay's theorization on photography as a social contract. **Chapter Three** examines the demands of a memory market in Chile with the publication of the *Archivo Histórico de 1973* by the newspaper *El Mercurio* (2013) and the book *Memoriales en Chile* (2008), both efforts are published as a response to the demand of memory in the frame of the anniversary to the coup (40th anniversary and the 35th anniversary respectively). Both books however, in a sense, hollow out history, proposing an engagement to the past that is akin to what Marita Sturken has called "tourism of history" (*Tourists of History*).

In contrast, I examine the mobilizing force of photography present in the documentary *La ciudad de los fotógrafos* by Sebastian Moreno (2006), a son of one of the founding members of the Asociación de Fotógrafos Independientes (AFI), an association of freelance photographers that played a key role of resistance and demand during the period of repression in Chile. Through a postmemorial lens -since Moreno frames the documentary with his own memories of growing up juxtaposed with the history of the labor of photographers and of military repression- the documentary evidences photography as a collaborative event and as a form of civic engagement between citizens. For **Chapter 4** I do a close reading critique of the photographic exhibition *Yuyanapaq: para recordar* (2003) The first exhibition that gathered a photographic archive and presented a "Visual narrative of the Peruvian Civil Armed Conflict" in Peru curated by Mayu Mohanna and Nancy Chappel. Though the photographic exhibit constitutes an important visual archive and effort of reconciliation, I argue that the curatorial discourse of the exhibition evidences the asymmetry of memorial production in Peru and showcases the tensions of citizenry and national belonging. In contrast, I look at a recent photography essay and exhibition entitled *Uchuraccay* by Peruvian photographer Franz Krajnik (2018). In it, the photographer works with one of the communities most affected by past violence and evidences an alternative engagement

with the past rooted in Andean temporality. I argue that the photographs offer an engagement with the past beyond its mournful or elegiac citation, dismantling the stigmas about the community of Uchuraccay that were still prevalent within a part of the national imaginary.

Part Two: Texts is composed of three chapters each of them close-reading a novel written by a member of the post-generation. In **Part Two**, I contend that the postmemorial anxiety of being eclipsed or overshadowed by the history of the generation that came before- the general feeling of displacement felt by those that didn't "experience" history- is reworked through ludic investments, irreverence, introspection and self-awareness of both their place of enunciation as authors and of their work as a memory object within a specific cultural memory realm. In the same spirit as in **Part One**, my work is not interested in gathering an all encompassing "literature of memory" but in *how* literature is used, how the creative investments of each of these "secondary characters" use the written word, literary genres, and forms- and how these aesthetic interventions challenge memorial and performative imperatives (Perez and Carri), knowledge production (Agüero), and political re-framings of the past that empty words from meaning (Zambra). In turning the light on those the secondary characters that lived *under the shadows of history*⁷, what emerges?

In Chapter Five **The Rebel Daughter(s)** I discuss the work of two women, reluctant members of Argentina's 'wounded family', and daughters of two disappeared parents: Albertina Carri and Mariana Eva Perez. I content that their works *Los Rubios* (2003) and *Diario de una princesa montonera 110% Verdad* (2012) by Mariana Eva Perez exhibits a contestation to the memory discourses and imperatives that seem to over-determine their identities. I focus on the novel by Mariana Eva Perez, her use of parody, and the experimentation with genres; the

⁷ This phrase is present in Zambra's novel *Ways of going home* (2011).

autofictional, the blog, and the fairy tale. Drawing upon Gabriel Gatti's description of post-orphan and of subjects that are simultaneously subjects/objects of study within the memory realm, these works showcase a rebellion in being part of the "wounded family" in Argentina, or, more precisely, of being considered *only* that.

Chapter Six- **The Writer as Protagonist** reflects on the use of metafiction in two works by Alejandro Zambra- his short story "My Documents" present in the collection *My Documents* and his novel *Ways of Going Home*, published in 2011. Through a close reading of both works, I argue that the metafictional strategies present in the novel are able to counter the generational anxiety of "being a secondary character of history". Zambra uses fiction that engages with an asynchronous time, one that ambivalently positions himself as both author and character and positions the reader in the time of the "now", a moment with no duration that is full of potential. Through the illusion of an autobiographical voice that seems to place us at the very present moment of creation within the novel, Zambra is able to craft an introspective work that comments on its own status as a memory object. Thus, through his literary inventiveness, Zambra is able to make the secondary character of history into a protagonist- showcasing the way metamemory can counter the fear of displacement present in the postgeneration.

The last chapter, **The Mourning Son(s)** begins with the literary productions published in 2015 of two opposing inheritors of the historical past- a son of one of the highest member of the military in Peru (Renato Cisneros and his novel *La Distancia que nos separa*) and a son of two anonymous fallen PCP-SL members (Jose Carlos Agüero and his work *Los Rendidos. Sobre el don de perdonar*) After a brief comparison and contrast of both works, I focus on a close reading of Agüero latest work, *Persona* (2017). His dual position as a son of PCP-SL members and also as a researcher of memory, brings him to a limit position of what can be said and represented-

and a critical stand to memory discourses from opposing positions- both the epic narrative of the PCP-SL that frame his father's death as a heroic sacrifice, and the totalizing and unquestioned authority of aesthetic discourses and knowledge productions in the art world and academic circles in Peru. I argue that confronted with the exhaustion of words and discourses, Agüero turns to the cosmos and to the stripped materiality that remains once the subject and the discourses that situate them prove insufficient. Through an exploration of different media- photography, facsimile reproductions of printed materials, visual interventions- Persona signals the limits of memorial discourses and of the subjective, and turns to the common universal materiality shared by all.

Finally, this project is in itself a self-reflexive contemplation on the interplay between individual and collective memory, experienced also in a deeply personal way, as the period of political violence overlapped with the years of my own childhood and coming of age. I want this dissertation to be read also as an exercise that is conscious of my own place of enunciation, of the fact that I am also, in a way, a secondary character in the history of the past, and that I can also find ways to unsettle the times and tenses of memory. Structurally, this dissertation also echoes a meta-dimension- it is in itself an image-text that combines and designates relations of the visual and the verbal. It is also conscious of the blindspots present not only within cultural memory realms but also in the intellectual and artistic discourses that explain or anchor the past.

In reflecting on the imperatives of memory and the insufficiency of language to fully navigate the uncharted zones of memory, this dissertation also searches for a new language and a new way to read the aesthetic materials by slowing down and lingering in the details and materialities of each work analyzed. As with the materials gathered in these pages, I also search

for a language that can convey a sense of introspection, critical distance, but also a profound connection to the past in order to explore its limitless potential.

PART ONE: IMAGES

The relationship between memory and image can be traced all the way back to early philosophical texts in the Antiquity, Medieval, and Early Modern period⁸. For philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle, and St. Augustine, memory was thought of as an internal process for knowledge and introspection, in which the image plays an instrumental role. These philosophical writings all coincide in describing memory as a process where the subject interiorizes the objects and landscape of the present as a mental image -what Aristotle calls a *fantasmata*- that can be easily retrieved and that persists within us through time⁹. It is the capacity of humans for storing, arranging, rearranging, and recalling the vast universe¹⁰ of our mental images what gives a platform for boundless artistic creation. In the Aristotelian conception of memory, the image is not the object itself, but our own interiorization of the objects, rendering each image unique and

⁸ See Yates, A. Francis. *The Art of Memory*. Chicago UP, 1966. Among them - Plato's Dialogue *Phaedrus*, and *Theatitus*, Aristotle brief treatises "On Sense and the sensible objects" and "On Memory and Recollection" present in *Parva Naturalia*, Seneca's LXXXIV Letter to Lucilius 'On Gathering Ideas', St. Augustine *Confessions*, particularly Book X and XII.

⁹ Aristotle "On Memory and Recollection" asserts that the act of thinking is impossible without a mental reproduction of an image. He links the image to a sensible faculty- and the act of remembering as a recognition of an image and of recollection as an internal search of an image that was first found in the outside order and has now been interiorized by the subject.

¹⁰ In Book X St. Augustine's *Confessions*, he marvels at the capacity of memory to hold not only the ephemeral, but also the material vastness of the universe "A great marvel rises in me; astonishment seizes me. Men go forth to marvel at the heights of mountains and the huge waves of the sea, the broad flow of the rivers, the vastness of the ocean, the orbit of the stars, and yet they neglect to marvel at themselves. Nor do they wonder how it is that, when I spoke of all these things, I was not looking at them with my eyes- and yet I could not have spoken about them had it not been I that I was actually seeing within, in my memory, those mountains and waves and rivers and stars which I have seen, and that ocean which I believe in- and with the same vast spaces between them as when I saw them outside me. But when I saw them outside me, I did not take them into me by seeing them; and the things themselves are not inside me, but only their images. And yet I knew through which physical sense each experience had made an impression on me" (Book X. Chapter VIII. XV) (My emphasis)

autobiographical.

The Missing Photographs

I begin *Part I: Images* with this reflection on memory, images, and their interiorization within, to talk briefly about my own, and how it relates to the memory of the political violence in Peru. On July 16th of 1992, two trucks packed with over 1000kg of explosives detonated at 9:15 p.m. in Tarata, one of the busiest streets in the urban district of Miraflores, Lima. This marked the biggest terrorist action done by the PCP-SL in the capital, accounting for the destruction of 183 homes, 400 businesses, 150 wounded civilians and 40 deaths. The bombing paralyzed much of the city, and, more importantly, it galvanized public attention to the civil armed conflict. Tarata became a turning point in Peruvian history- it symbolically marked a moment of awareness of the ferocity of violence that, for over a decade, had taken over in the highlands of the nation.

I was seven years old when the bombing happened. We lived in a building not far away from the district of Miraflores, and my mother's photography studio was located in a street adjacent to the street of Tarata. I remember my mother and father drove to Miraflores that night, to witness what had happened. I remember both of them coming back and telling my sister and I about the chaos, the narrow streets filled with rubble, debris, and destroyed infrastructures. If I can visualize the aftermath of this attack so clearly in my memory it is because of the photographs my mother took that night and the following day. I remember the images perfectly- in black and white- the way they captured that destruction.

When I began this project, I asked my mother for those photographs, the illustrations of my memory. She looked for them for weeks, but finally realized she had lost both the original prints and their negatives, now impossible to trace back. Yet, even without their material presence, I *do* go back to those images, I have those black and white photographs within me, anchoring the memory of that historical event- they are my own *fantasmata*. It is from the physical absence of those images that my memory of the event appears or (re) appears so clearly in my mind. Through her lost photographs, I remember. In my memory, I do not carry the bombing itself, but instead the images of the destruction in the aftermath of the bombing, as well as the impression they left imprinted in me. These photographs signal my encounter with a historical moment that marked my own personal memory as well as the history and memory of the nation. Her photographs became my catalyst for remembrance. It is from the material absence but presence in memory of those images that I now write.

Photographs, National Belonging and Blind spots

Photographs have a resonant and transcendent power. Even without the materiality of the physical object, images can transcend individual recollections and expand into a collective fabric of remembrance. In fact, photographs, like memory itself, can provide a platform in which to anchor national meanings and construct a sense of a national belonging, creating a visual common ground among individuals (Sturken 1997:20).

Ideally, photographs can contribute to the creation of collective memory of a nation. It is the camera image's capacity to travel and circulate the liminal space between the public and private realm that allows the individual to engage with their national history at both a personal

and collective level. Thus, the act of seeing can create a sense of national belonging, not only as an individual subject but also as a *citizen* who is part of civil society¹¹.

However, this idea of photography and the subsequent act of seeing as providers of citizenry and national belonging would imply that there is a unanimous agreement about the memory of the past and of the recognition of visual symbols as representatives of the whole of a nation. Photography can help create a sense of national belonging, yes, but it can also blur those lines and make the idea of citizenry and belonging more complex. Photographic images can become iconic cyphers of national history and identification, creating a common ground between a group of individuals, but it can also leave people out of the frames of the national imaginary and the recounting of the past.

Photography can instead showcase the shortcomings and contradictions present in the act of seeing; it can both reveal *and* conceal more than what appears on its surface. Thus, the imperative of seeing can inadvertently exhibit the blind-spots in the use of photography, where - behind the iconic and nationally recognized images- remnants of the unresolved tensions of the past are brought to the surface in the present. Furthermore, photographs can also complicate official narratives and memory discourses that attempt to encapsulate and frame the hegemonic historical time of the past. This is in no way detrimental to the value and potential of photography, on the contrary, it turns photography into an acute critical medium through which to think about the complexities of memory, temporality, and the mediated representations of the past.

What I remember most of my mother's black and white images is the physical devastation of the urban landscape- the piles of rubble, the collapsed buildings, the cluttered

¹¹ Ariella Azoulay talks about this extensively in her books *The Civil Contract of Photography* (2008) and *Civil Imagination: A Political Ontology of Photography* (2012).

streets. I don't remember faces, I can't recall the terror of those who truly lived through it. I am conscious that those images, though so formative and central to my own memory, cannot fully grasp the scope and human devastation of the event, or the way the event itself was but a fracture of the destruction and chaos experienced in the highlands.

Photographs then, never capture a totality, never translate a full multidimensional experience or the complexities of what they represent. Photographs are limited by their frame, limited by their scope, limited by the perspective of the photographer and the circulation of their viewers. *And yet*. Photographs are pure potential, they can move through and across time, putting the past into a meaningful and transformative relation with the present.

What makes the photograph unique from other forms of representation is that it is anchored in an irrefutable and concrete reality that frames the photographed subject in time and space and brings it into the present¹². The ability of photography to put both temporalities in dialogue is one of its greatest and most haunting accomplishments, one that I will explore in depth in this Part One of the dissertation.

I believe that in photography we can find a visual language that offers a way out of the dichotomy of a "living" present and an ontologically inferior, absent, or distant past. The very essence of photography is its contact with the world, its dialectical potential- by capturing those traces that are teeming with life, photography can mobilize the force of the past instead of burying it in a lineal temporality in which the only way to move forward towards the future implies leaving the past behind.

¹² Roland Barthes calls this the *noeme*: the "that has been": The Intractable. What I see has been here, in this place which extends between infinity and the subject (operator or spectator); it has been here and yet immediately separated; it has been absolutely, irrefutably present, and yet deferred (1980:77). The photograph is an extended loaded evidence. It showcases the fact that an object (or a subject) has indeed *existed* and that it has been there where I see it (1980:115).

In his 1931 essay “A Short History of Photography” Walter Benjamin¹³ address the different temporalities that are embedded in the act of seeing, what he calls the *optical unconscious*:

...No matter how artful the photographer, no matter how carefully posed his subject, the beholder feels an irresistible compulsion to search such a picture for the tiny spark of contingency, *the here and now with which reality has, so to speak, seared through the image character of the photograph* to find the inconspicuous place where, within the suchness of that long past minute, the future nests still today- and so eloquently that we, looking back, may rediscover it (Benjamin “Short History” 271).

For Benjamin, the significant value of the image does not rest on the subject photographed or even on the photographer- he opens up the authorship of the image and its meaningfulness as something produced beyond the artists intentions, as something that is given also by the spectator’s investment with the image they behold in the present. This coincides with Roland Barthes reflections on photography, who rescues the subjective and signals that it is the viewer who, looking at the image with the knowledge of what occurred after the image was taken, attributes a value to the photograph. Barthes work on the *punctum*- the pointed detail of an image that moves the spectator¹⁴- is also an essential exercise in bringing temporalities together: the viewer finds the moving detail of an image in the present with the introspective knowledge and emotional investment of those captured in the image in the past.

¹³ Walter Benjamin’s reflection on photography is framed within his larger reflections on the aesthetic politics of mass production (“The Work of Art in the Era of Mechanical Reproduction” written in 1936) and is entrenched by the historical context of the spread of fascism and repression in Europe. Benjamin regarded the mass-produced photograph with a revolutionary potential. In “The Author as producer” (1934) he argues that the technological innovations of photography can transform our relations with time. The cultural agent must therefore utilize the photographic production in order to create social and political change.

¹⁴ In *Camera Lucida. Reflections on Photography*. Hill and Wang, 2010.

Along the same lines, Didi-Huberman¹⁵ also emphasizes photography's ability to communicate and disrupt our perception of history and of existence. In order for this to happen the spectator needs to read the images- photographs only become decipherable once the spectator unlocks what the images have to say (2008). Didi-Huberman attributes an almost ethical responsibility to confronting images and what it is they rescue about the past.

Barthes, Benjamin, and Didi-Huberman's reflection highlight the dialectical work of images- where multiple time-spaces are present. In *Images in Spite of All*, Didi-Huberman writes "Images touches time by deconstructing the narratives, it brings into the surface what survived of *a hidden time*¹⁶, it makes visible the return of the absent" (174). For the author, it is imperative to know how to look at images so as to see that of which they are survivors, by doing so, images liberate the past so as to open both our present and future.

By taking into account the different temporalities of the image¹⁷- the time that is captured in the photograph and the passing of time also embedded in it, these authors are able to conceptually elevate the insights of photography beyond the focus on what they present in its two-dimensional materiality. Barthes, Benjamin, and Didi-Huberman write about photography

¹⁵ The work of Didi-Huberman traces a dialogue between history, images and truth. In *Images In Spite of All* (2003) he meticulously reads four photographs taken by a member of the Sonderkommando (the Jews who were selected to oversee the extermination in the gas chambers of the concentration camps) as survivor images that showcase photography's ability to curb the fiercest will to obliterate history (2008:23). The first part of the book is the curatorial text for the exhibition *Mémoires des Camps. Photographies des Camps d concentration et d'extermination Nazi 1933-1999*. The second part of the book addresses the polemic caused by the exhibition and the accusation of images totalizing or fetishizing the unrepresentable. Didi-Huberman engages with the debate on the aesthetic unimaginable and finds an ethos in the act of looking at an image which is summarized in the title: *In spite of the limitation of the images, in spite of them not being absolute representations of the past, in spite of the hermetic and inaccessible and unimaginable history, in spite of all, we must look*. His subsequent work *When Images Take Position: In the Eye of History* (2009) engages with the work of exiled artist Bertolt Brecht and the way he uses images and photomontages as a critical tool that deconstructs the narrative of history. In images and in the position of the spectator, Didi-Huberman sees a possibility to create a critical approach to history.

¹⁶ My emphasis

¹⁷ The different spatio-temporal moments present in the image (moment of creation, moment of circulation, moment of intervention and moment of reception by the spectator).

not only as an instrument that can capture the past, they transcend the instrument and image itself in order to emphasize how- in the act of viewing from the perspective of the present- photographs can unlock the potentials of the past.

To reflect about photography from a memory lens means to take into account these reflections, paying close attention to the materiality of the photograph and what it captures, but also never forgetting how photographs are installed within- or at the margin- of cultural institutions and political/ideological imperatives.

The images discussed in *Part I* take many different forms: photo IDs, portraits, domestic and documentary photography, and institutional photographic archives. These images travel time and space, they are reinvested and transformed: some become iconic and thus integrate a part of civil imagination, others become documents of proof and evidence of truth for political demands, others enter into institutionalized art circuits through expositions and museums. Above all, as the images transit within the porous boundaries of the public and the private, they, like the lost photographs imprinted in my own memory, can illuminate a new horizon to think about the past and its potential as *presence* in the present and future.

CHAPTER ONE, PART ONE

Photography as Trace: Photo IDs and Black and White Portraits

Upon its first emergence, photography was halted by its indexical nature: its ability to directly capture a reality that, until that point had been represented mostly through painting. The latent etymology of the word, which indicates the meaning of photography as “a notation in light”, also describes its (original) technological process: the shutter exposure bounces light off an object or a body back into the camera, activating a light sensitive emulsion that creates an image.

Writing in the late nineteenth century, Charles Sanders Peirce and Henry Talbot in *The Pencil of Nature* (1844) both identified photography’s potential with the unmediated closeness with which it touched reality¹⁸. For Peirce, the indexical is the process of signification in which

¹⁸ Peirce, C.S. “Logic as Semiotic: The Theory of Signs” Peirce complex classification of signs defines the index as a sign that is connected to the referent along a physical access, such as a thumbprint, offering one to one correspondence with the thing it represents. He emphasizes the technological advanced proposed by photography, not necessarily as an artistic medium but as a conveyor of information. Hirsch indicates that in the Peircean tripartite definition of the sign (symbol, icon, index), “the photograph is defined as both an icon, based on physical resemblance or similarity between the sign and the object it represents, and as an index, based on a relationship of contiguity, of cause and effect, like a trace or a footprint” (Hirsch, *Family Frames* 6)

the signifier is bound to the referent by an actual contiguity or connection in the world¹⁹.

Similarly, Talbot highlights the capacity of this new technology to produce an unmediated reflection of nature, bypassing the autonomy of the photographer as a sole creator.²⁰ For the authors, the potential of this new technology resides on its unmediated ability to touch and capture reality, thus producing a pure representation of what had been.

A century later, the emphasis on the indexical relationship between the referent and the photograph was made more complex by integrating within it a reflection on time. Barthes in *Camera Lucida* (1979) and Phillippe Dubois in *L'acte Photographique* (1983) among others, coincide in seeing the very essence of photography in the act in which light is captured and *seared through time and space*²¹. According to Dubois, with each photograph a piece of time escapes its ordinary ephemeral nature and is protected against its own loss. Similarly, Barthes affirms every photograph is a certificate of presence possessing an evidentiary force which testimony bears not on the object but *on time* (87-89). For Barthes the presence of what has been captured is never metaphoric. He states that the photograph is literally: “An emanation of the referent- defined as the necessarily real thing that has been placed before the lens, without which there would be no photograph (...) From a real body, which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me, who am here; the duration of the transmission is insignificant; the photograph of the missing being, as Sontag says, will touch me like the delayed rays of a star” (Barthes, *Camera Lucida* 76-77, 80-81).

Barthes and Sontag's reflections on photography are published around the same time and dialogue with one another. Both touch upon the elegiac quality of the photograph, its potentiality

¹⁹ *The camera does more than see the world, it is touched by the world* (Batchen, *Forget Me Not* 3)

²⁰ In these XIX century reflections Nature is thought of as the signifier, as a referent.

²¹ Dubois, emphasis is mine. Echoes Benjamin's often quoted “Theses on the Philosophy of History” (1942) which describes how the image of the past can sear in an instant like a flash.

as an image of memory and knowledge, and the indexical power that resides within the images. In her collection of essays *On Photography* (1977) Sontag reflects on the indexicality of the image as a certification of presence that can be used as a legal force for its evidentiary quality “Photography furnishes evidence. Something we hear about, but doubt, somehow seems proven when we are shown a photograph of it” (“In Plato’s Cave” 05). The photograph’s ability to capture not only nature but also the materiality- *the presence*- of a person that exists or once existed makes the photograph also a *document*, a visual proof to make a demand.

This evidentiary quality of photography was put to a political use in countries dealing with violence and State repression. Photographs not only became a source of verification, they became visual supports of demands for the thousands who claimed for a family member or loved one who had been disappeared. In Argentina and Chile, the disappearances of citizens were done in a systematic way by the repressive forces of the military regimes during the dictatorships of the mid 1970s. In Peru, disappearances were mostly done by the insurgent terrorist group PCP-SL and by the counterinsurgent military forces of the state.

This chapter focuses on the indexical quality of the medium, and how photography is used by citizens, activists, and artists, both during the height of repressive regimes and in subsequent memory projects in the present. I will map out the evolution in the use of the traditional black and white portrait and photo IDs in order to highlight the dialectical potential of the images to bring the past into the present. Though I mainly focus on Argentina, I will briefly put into dialogue the cultural iterations and representations of the black and white portrait in Chile and Peru and the particularity of its use among different historical contexts.

The Trace in Photo-criticism

The relationship between the photographic medium and the trace of reality it captures has been essential in the critical thinking of photography. Trace is defined as a perceptible sign of something that has *passed*, a tangible remnant of *what is gone*, a product both of absence in the present (something is gone) and presence in the past (in spite of all, *something remains*, what has been captured). The very existence of trace depends on this ontological change in space and time. For Aristotle, change and movement is the essence of time- as time is the movement from *time-not-yet* to *time-no-longer*, a trace can therefore be the material link that remains in space in the transient and ephemeral nature of time.

In *Of Grammatology* (1976), Jacques Derrida elaborates the concept of trace specifically for the written realm²² - “a mark of the absence of presence, an always- already absent presence of the *originary lack*²³ that seems to be the condition of thought and experience” (254). Later, on *Writing and Difference* (1978), he expands this view, emphasizing that the trace “constitutes the present by the very relation to what it is not” (Derrida, *Writing and Difference* 394). In essence, trace is a dialectic between what *has been* and what *remains*, as such, it contains within it a relations to the past, the present, and other projected spaces in time. This is in line with the Augustinian conception of time as one that is not necessarily determined by change between tenses, but instead as were all three tenses coexist: where a decision in the present is informed by a knowledge and memory of the past that can, in turn, influence decisions in the future tense. Memory then, and temporality, does not necessarily have to be thought of as heading towards one linear progression forward but instead as *a layering* where a multiplicity of temporal planes can coexist. Thus, the trace can be a material symbol of this coexistence.

²² Arche-writing as what underlies the living presence of speech.

²³ My emphasis.

If we extrapolate Derrida's ideas on the trace- which are focused on the act of writing- to the ontological possibilities of photography *as trace*, it's easy to see how the concept of trace amplifies: while Derrida sees in the trace a lack of what can never be reproduced in its totality (focusing on the absence *in* the present), in photography what is rescued is precisely the opposite: what *remains* (of the past) *in* the present. Therefore, from the lens of photo-criticism, the trace is halted as *the potential of the indexical*, - not as a lack, or the incompleteness of the whole, but instead as the proven, material, physical connection to the referent the photographic image can establish in the present.

Barthes and Dubois emphasize that what is captured in the photograph is not only trace but also *time itself*- both in the photographic process "light captured and seared through time and space" (Dubois 1983) and its materiality "which testimony bears not on the object but on time" (Barthes, *Camera Lucida* 89). As Hirsch points out in her reading of Barthes *punctum*: The puncture of the *punctum* is not the detail of the picture but *time itself*. Finding in the photograph a conflation of past and future "this arresting anti-narrative wound of the *punctum* can combat the narrative of death, leaving time- death and life- suspended, signaling irreplaceable loss and interminable mourning" (Hirsch, *Family Frames* 5). Though this chapter focuses on how photography can illustrate alternative conceptions of historical time, I will also discuss how time itself can intervene and alter the idea of the trace in photography, particularly that of the referent in the photo ID and its evolving meaning and use in the last decades.

We did not know what nobody could deny- "Percepticide" and the manipulation of the visual Field in Argentina

The phrase "We did not know what nobody could deny" was used to describe the paradox of wide-eyed knowing and eyes-closed terror faced by Argentinians during the military

dictatorship. The state of repression instilled by the military regime was swift and systematic. Under the doctrine of “national security” and promise of wholeness, the military junta vowed to cleanse and eliminate the threat of political dissent that loomed over Latin America and road-blocked the economic transformation towards neo-liberalism pushed forward by the Chicago School of Economics in the Southern Cone. As Naomi Klein describes in *The Shock Doctrine. The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (2008) “The pattern of disappearances was clear: while the shock therapists were trying to remove all relicts of collectivism from the economy, the shock troops were removing the representatives of that ethos from the streets, the universities and the factory floors” (110).

This promise of “wholeness” and cleansing pushed forth a systematic destruction of a substantial part of the Argentine nation. An intention to transform the group as such, to redefine its way of being, its social relations, its fate and its future. Indispensable to this transformation was altering the optics of what could be seen and registered by the citizens. This process included a transformation of the city itself- above the surface, the cleansing was staged visually- integral to the *Proceso* was the beautification of the urban landscape. Three weeks after the coup, the newspaper *La Prensa* published the following editorial: “All over the Republic a thorough cleansing is under way. From the walls and facades of public and private buildings (...) The walls are being cleansed of the filth [of inscriptions and graffiti] those signs of tribal frenzy. Soon enough the surfaces will shine through, released from that nightmare by the action of soap and water.”²⁴

Yet, below the surface, the most important cleansing was underway, as *La Prensa* warned: “The country is called to the practice of new customs. The walls and surfaces must be

²⁴ “Hacia una limpieza general” Editorial in *La Prensa*, April 19th, 1976. Quoted in Feitlowitz, Marguerite. *A Lexicon of Terror. Argentina and the Legacies of Torture*. Oxford UP, 1998.

cleaned. But minds too must be cleansed, for that is where the error was born”. The massive cultural and ideological cleansing went beyond a specific political ideology- it targeted to eliminate what was at the heart of political and social activism- the transcendental belief in solidarity, the impulse of social interconnectedness and feeling of kinship among individuals. Though the streets of Buenos Aires were pristine and the gardens and parks well kept and full of flowers, public space was no longer a platform or a place of encounter, recognition, or dialogue between its citizens. The city became, simply, a hollowed-out stage, covering a whole macabre underworld of sadistic violence just underneath.

Constant fear and the omnipresence of the state created a schism between knowing and seeing. If censorship controlled what was printed and read, interiorizing fear and the ever-present surveillance of the state altered the relation with what could be seen, recognized, or even acknowledged as a reality. Feitlowitz argues that the junta’s manipulation of space created a warped sense of reality among citizens. As one of the testimonies gathered by the author attest: “You got to a point where you didn’t dare to direct your gaze, you were no longer *able*²⁵ to focus”.

By manipulating space and severing the relationship between what could be known and what could be seen and recognized, the junta made every citizen a reluctant witness and accomplice. In *Disappearing Acts. Spectacles of Gender and Nationalism in Argentina’s Dirty War* (1997) Diana Taylor introduces the notion of *percepticide* to describe the gesture of turning away one’s gaze as an act of self-blinding for protection. Taylor remarks that the triumph of the Dirty War had much to do with the way it forced people to look away from the acts of state violence and the erasure of citizens in this *hidden-in-plain-view* cleansing. This incorporated

²⁵ Emphasis by Feitlowitz. This quote is the epigraph from the chapter “The House of the Blind”. In it, Feitlowitz is especially interested in the feeling of disconnection produced by the junta, the way it made accomplices out of regular citizens who were in no way affiliated with the military regime.

internal practice is precisely the one responsible for shattering the community bonds and civil solidarity among individuals. As Feitlowitz states: “The Dirty War occurred, at least in part, because Argentines were too terrified to look at each other in the eye” (192).

If the cornerstone of solidarity and of social interconnectedness is the ability to really *see* the other, to recognize the other as one, the state of distrust created by the junta was successful- not only for what it physically changed and altered in the urban landscape -the simultaneous beautification and elimination of its possibilities as a public platform- but in what it changed in the most private and personal of realms. The junta’s power and control altered optical relations between citizens, constituting an unspoken network of looking and turning away. Ruled by fear, the state of distrust was able to seep into the core of human senses and alter individual perception: what one counted as visible and could be shared with others. Thus, it canceled the very tenants of empathy- the prompt for emotion and action fueled by both compassion and outrage at the horror that is witnessed.

In the realm of collective civic imagination, the act of *percepticide*, together with the prevalent censorship in the public sphere, contributed to the fact that there is not a single iconic image that adequately represents the scope of violence and repression experienced in Argentina. Indeed, there were no images of the State repression that circulated in the public sphere during the dictatorship. Even today, there are no pictures of the death flights, no pictures of torture, no pictures of the systematic abductions of citizens. As Victoria Langland attests in her essay “Fotografía y Memoria”²⁶: “There is no photograph that summarizes, or can adequately represent the mass atrocity of state terrorism” (88). Yet, the lack on an iconic image did not deter the centrality of the photographic medium as a tool for visibility to demand justice and political

²⁶ In Jelin, Elizabeth, and Ana Longoni (editors). *Escrituras, imágenes y escenarios ante la Represión*. Siglo XXI, 2005.

mobilization in Argentina. On the contrary, the use of the photographic medium and the subsequent iterations of the photo IDs has contributed to restore the bonds ruptured by the state of fear imposed during the dictatorship.

The Madres of Plaza de Mayo and the *trace/presence of the desaparecidos*

In 1977, shortly after the beginning of the coup and in a highly controlled and censored environment, the Madres of Plaza de Mayo appeared “brought together by the agony and controlled fury that only a mother whose children had been taken away could feel, [they] became the only visible oppositional presence during the dark years of the dictatorship” (Montaldo and Nouzeilles, *The Argentina Reader*). Much has been written about the political, social and gender politics of the Madres and their weekly circular marches around the main square of Plaza de Mayo²⁷. I want to focus on their use of the Photo IDs- not only as a visual tool to demand truth, justice, and the presence (*Aparición con vida*) of those that had been disappeared, but also, I will argue how the use of the photo ID illustrates their discursive oppositional stance to the temporality pushed forth by the *Nunca Más* truth commission discourse and the political measures of the Alfonsín and Menem presidencies.

In a profoundly courageous act, the Madres took back public space as a platform for human and social connectedness. The presence of the Madres altered the pristine landscape and created the possibility of a communal public bond between citizens unified under the same demand. Their physical presence confronted citizens to the reality that had become diffused and out of focus out of fear: the demand for the victims who had been swept up by the radical cleansing of the military regime. Even among targeted violence and criticisms as “crazy” and

²⁷ For more on The Madres de Plaza de Mayo see Taylor, Diana. *Disappearing Acts. Spectacles of Gender and Nationalism in Argentina's Dirty War* (1997), Vásquez, Inés & Downie, K. *Un país. 30 años. El pañuelo sigue haciendo historia* (2006), Fisher, J. *Mothers of the Disappeared* (1989), Gorini, U. *La Rebelion de las Madres* (2006).

“irrational” (called by the press “Las Locas de Plaza de Mayo”) the Madres, as well as their demands, are still a force that has persisted through time. More importantly, with the use of the photo IDs, the Madres were able to create and mobilize a political presence of those abducted by the state: *the desaparecidos*.

The leader of the military junta, Jorge Rafael Videla was once quoted saying “Los desaparecidos no están, no existen” (“The disappeared are not [here], they do not exist”). This is a contradictory and haunting declaration- Videla refused the existence of the *desaparecidos* by simultaneously acknowledging the absence of their presence: “No están” [They] *are not* here”. Like the Derridean trace, in naming them, even if it is in the context of refusal, Videla acknowledges the ontological vacuum left by the *desaparecidos*, implicitly confirming their existence in the lack they have left behind.

Towards the end of the dictatorship, in May of 1979, another leader of the Military Junta, General Roberto Viola, stated: “This war, like all wars, leaves some aftereffects, great wounds that time, and only time, can heal. They are caused by the losses; the dead, the wounded, the detained, the ones ‘*forever absent*’²⁸”. Both declarations are symptomatic. While Videla acknowledges the *desaparecidos* presence by their absence in the present realm [They are not *here. No están*], Viola’s description of the *desaparecidos* as the “forever absent” makes them a presence immune to the healing powers of time. If there is a wound that time cannot heal it is precisely the one described as timeless- the eternal permanence of a spectral presence/absence forces that wound to remain open. If we recall again Aristotelian conception of time as one defined by change- the *desaparecidos* presence is one that exists *out of time itself* since there is no change in their being or closure that signals that they cease to be.

²⁸ Videla and Viola’s remarks are cited in Bevernage, Berber. *History, Memory and State-Sponsored Violence. Time and Justice*. Routledge, 2013, pp. 40.

The Madres take notice of the discursive slips in the political stances of the military junta. Once the dictatorship is over, the Madres refuse to accept the official discourse and measures offered by the democratic transitional justice of the truth commission- one that would facilitate mourning for the Madres. Instead, the Madres reinforce the unresolved spectrality of the *desaparecidos* to strengthen the validity of their demand. The photo IDs contribute to represent the elusive and ghostly collective presence of the disappeared as they are physically lost in time and place. By illustrating their ghostly presence, the Madres offer a view of historical time that is not linear or progressive but traces a movement that permanently circles back into the past. The Madres conception of the *desaparecido* and the use of the Photo ID configure the *desaparecido* as a simultaneous *trace/presence*- the photographs signals their trace- (all that remains in spite of their physical absence) and the signification imbued to the photo ID takes the still photograph out of the realm of a stasis and immobility, rescuing the *desaparecidos* from mortality and closure.

The Madres Refusal of public mourning and of linear temporality

The struggle of the Madres has been recognized internationally, and their use of the Photo ID in the public space is a symbol of demand for justice and accountability has become a universal gesture replicated in Chile, Peru, and other nations in and beyond Latin America. In Argentina, both the photo ID and the *desaparecidos* occupy a ubiquitous presence in the civil imagination of the country. The image of a mother with a photo ID of their disappeared son or daughter close to their chest or blown up in placards is effective insofar as it brings multiple meanings together: it reverts a practice used by the state for bureaucratic control purposes to reclaim that same state for the presence of the ones disappeared, it highlights the relation

between the *desaparecido* and the one making the demand, and it gives cohesion to a collective community united by a common purpose and struggle.

The work of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo has been confronted with evolving memory struggles, particularly in transitional justice efforts and impasses of what to do with the presence of the *desaparecidos* and with the national past history and its legacies²⁹. Paramount to the Madres is the resistance to any political measure that would count the *desaparecidos* as dead and offer an artificial closure to their plight. The ethical and political stance of the Madres is one that refuses to place the time of the past as one that can be put behind in subordination to a present and future reconciliation. Instead, the Madres insist on seeing the *desaparecidos* as a spectral presence that is *in between* life and death, making the act of public mourning- and of symbolic closure- impossible.

In “‘La Muerte No Existe’ The Madres de Plaza de Mayo and the Resistance against the Irreversible Time of History” (2013) Bevernage reads the Madres spectral representation of the *desaparecidos* and their collective refusal to publically mourn -or recognize death as a possibility- as a radical resistance to the historical time given by the truth commission report of the CONADEP. This is demonstrated at a discursive and political level, as well as embedded in the public act of their marches. Additionally, I argue that the Madres consistent use of the

²⁹ During the transitional efforts after the military regime, President Alfonsín strived to acknowledge the atrocities of the past with the creation of CONADEP (1983), yet his political measures were often contradictory and driven by military pressure, particularly in the crafting of the “Punto Final and Obediencia Debida” law decree (1986). This law excluded from prosecution all members of the military and security forces who had acted under orders and resulted in around 300 pardons. Towards the end of his term, Alfonsín stated that “Argentina could not survive if it did not free itself from the burdens of the past”. Similarly, and under the discourse of National Reconciliation, President Carlos Menem issued a series of amnesty laws (1989) anchored in a historical discourse that talked about the closing of ‘chapters’ and claimed that the amnesty aimed at the painstaking and delicate task of closing bitter and painful stages [etapas] in Argentine national life”. Though the Presidency of Nestor Kirchner in 2003 mobilized the work of Human Rights and of the Madres, (the overturning the Punto Final and Obediencia Debida Law in 2005, for example) the Madres still reject the discourse of closure given by transitional democracy and persist in keeping the presence of the *desaparecidos* alive in the present.

original photo ID of their disappeared loved ones also illustrates this radical refusal of the historical time proposed by transitional justice efforts of the CONADEP and the Alfonsín government.

Bevernage maintains that the Madres use a spectral language by refusing to speak of the *desaparecidos* as dead, instead they are (re)-imagined by them as *desaparecidos por siempre*³⁰, impermeable to the changes of time. The Madres insistence on the slogan *Aparición con vida* has been classified by others as stubborn and progressively irrational as time passes. Yet for the Madres, it is a necessary slogan to counter the mere dictum of *Nunca Más*, which the Madres denounce as an empty Alfonsinian slogan of closure. The President of the Madres, Hebe de Bonafini, explains: “We know what happened. We are not mad, we do not ask impossible things. *Aparición con vida* is an ethical slogan in principle. As long as one single murderer remains on the streets, or children *will live* to condemn them.” Bevernage points out that the stress on the spectral presence of the *desaparecidos* used by the Madres challenge the presumed inferior ontological status of the ‘dead’ past which can facilitate neglect and impunity in the present by providing a symbolic closure of the past.

The Madres stance remains consistent in the political and ethical level by their collective refusal of reparations, exhumations, lists of victims, and memorial plates.³¹ They criticize the

³⁰ Adopting Viola’s description of the *desaparecidos* as the “forever absent”. In a speech given in front of the ESMA in the mid-1990s, on the occasion of the 19th anniversary of the coup, Hebe de Bonafini remarked “Of course, the corpses kept appearing. Today, at the many years of distance, they return! And return! And return! And those corpses that appeared that time on the beaches of Santa Teresita, they were the proof that our children return, they return in each one who cries out, the return in each one who protest, they return in each of you!” Cited in Bevernage, 36. Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo. Pido Castigo! [23 March 1995] at: <http://madres.org/asp/contenido.asp?clave=1140>.

³¹ This has caused internal divisions between the Madres, who have divided into two groups in 1986- the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo lead by Hebe Bonafini and a separate group led by María Adela Antokoletz named “Madres de Plaza de Mayo- línea fundadora”. Despite their differences, both groups kept meeting weekly for their marches in the Plaza, but Hebe’s fraction accused the línea fundadora of being too sympathetic to the suture/closure efforts of the transitional democracy and accused them of being “Alfonsinistas”.

CONADEP discourse, which focuses on a detailed narrative of tactics of repression and torture as well as mass extermination and secret graves during the dictatorship. For the Madres, this exhaustive account creates a “truth of the graveyards” (*verdad de los cementerios*) that results in a static “memory of death” (*memoria de la muerte*). The Madres concern is that this discourse would facilitate the symbolic burial of the *desaparecidos*, who, along with the past, would be buried with time. Instead, the Madres opt for the use of a fertile memory (*memoria fértil*)³²- an active memory of the past that stresses continuity instead of closure in its never-ending search for justice.

The radical resistance to historical time of the Madres is also seen in their weekly circular marches around Plaza de Mayo. Inés Vasquez (1999)³³ points out that the Madres circular marches are held counter-clockwise in order to symbolize their defiance with the general idea of temporal linearity and historical progress.

If, as we have seen, circularity in general offers us another mode of representing time, distinct of the irreversible layering/spreading [*escalonamiento irreversible*] of past, present and future, the physical circularity that the Madres present to us enables the integration of these three instances that are established by dominant culture to produce the illusion of temporal order. An integration that we could describe as follows: while we walk around the plaza, the *desaparecidos* (bound to the past in the classical conception of time and the thought of the establishment) *are here again*³⁴.

For Vásquez, the marches trace an alternative temporal logic where the past is not subordinated or ontologically inferior to the other temporal tenses. Instead, the counter-

³² “Like the economic reparations, the amnesty laws or the recuperation of accomplices of the genocide in elected positions in the ‘democracy,’ oblivion is another variety of impunity. The Madres have the recipe of ‘fertile memory’ in order to fight oblivion. This fertile memory of the Madres considers the value of life to be supreme, secures the rehabilitation of the *desaparecidos* as activists and tries to build bridges to new generations of solidarity and militant men and women. Asociación de Madres de Plaza de Mayo. *Memoria Fértil. La dictadura, la impunidad y la compleja trama de complicidades 1976-2005*. Buenos Aires: Libros Editados, 2005.

³³ Vásquez, Inés. “Algunas relaciones entre ética y política en la post-dictadura. Parte I” [6 November 1999] at <http://www.madres.org/asp/conetendio.asp?clave=168>. (Cited and Translation in Bevernage, 2012).

³⁴ My emphasis.

clockwise march offers a radical vision in which the past is not the starting point of a historical time that is gradually left behind in name of progress to the present and future. Thus, the transit of both these temporalities (present and future) *have the past as a horizon*, not as something that can be buried, but instead as what guides and informs these tenses. In the counter-clockwise march, the idea of progress is irrevocably tied to a persistent and symbolic *return* to the past.

The use of the Photo ID as resistance to lineal time

I contend that the consistent use of the original photo ID through the years visually illustrates the Madres ethical and political stance to refuse the temporal logic of historical time given by the CONADEP truth commission and the transitional efforts of reconciliation. The use of the photo ID highlights the representation of the *desaparecidos* as a collective spectral presence caught between past and present, whose meaning and ideals are trans-generational and trans-temporal³⁵. This in-between interval space stands against the pre-determined itinerary for memory and its already established connections between past and present. The formal qualities and composition of the photo ID, the trace of presence it captures, and its functional evolution in time and space- as it transits between the public and private realm- attest to this.

In its stripped original use, the 4x4 black and white portrait certifies a citizen's identity, and their civil status. Since its creation, the photo ID has been used by the state and other social institutions as a form of regulation control and as the visual certification of belonging to a nation's infrastructures.

In Peirce's taxonomy of signs, a photograph such as a portrait photo ID would be considered both an icon and an index. The icon establishes meaning through resemblance (the

³⁵ "We, the Madres de Plaza de Mayo know that our children are not dead; they lie in the struggle, the dreams and the revolutionary promise of other youngsters. We the Madres de Plaza de Mayo encounter our children in every man or woman who rises to liberate his or her people. The 30,000 desaparecidos live in every one who dedicates his/her life so that others could live" Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo. Nuestras Consignas. At: <http://www.madres.org/asociacion/documentos/consignas.asp>.

image captured in the photograph resembles the referent) and the index offers a one-to-one correspondence with the thing it represents, it affirms a physical evidence in space and time (T visual proof that a person was in front of the camera when the image was taken), in the photo there is then a physical trace of its existence, like the trace left by a thumbprint.

It was this one-to-one correspondence what prompted the initial use of the photo IDs as search tools in Argentina. The photo IDs brought to police stations, hospitals, and churches individualized each demand- a necessary gesture to distinguish the disappeared beyond the generality and possible duplication of names. However, once the Madres took public space as a platform of encounter and demand, the transition from individual recognition to collective plea turned the photo ID into a collective image of a national presence- one that transcended individuality and illustrated loss that pertained all – *Los desaparecidos nos faltan a todos*.

The inherent formal qualities of the photo ID, a 4x4 black and white frontal portrait that tightly frames the individual photographed from the neck up, is instrumental in creating an illustration of the spectral collective presence brought forth by the Madres. Against a white background, it captures the frontal close-up which pose and solemn facial expressions adhere to a strict protocol of predefined gestures, reinforcing the formality required for its conventional use as images of official documents.

Thus, the formality and uniformity of its form: the black and white close-up against a white background, gives the photo ID a highly malleable quality that transcends both the time and the individual captured. Because of the uniformity of its form and background, every photo ID can become equal parts of a mosaic, equal part in the collective canvas of loss. Though every photo ID portrays a specific individuality, its form lends itself to illustrating a homogenizing collectivity. Despite the genetic specificity present in each photograph, the images function “as

markers, identifying an entire movement” (Taylor, *Disappearing Acts* 159). This is consistent to the discursive stance of the Madres, who emphasize the collective nature of their plight, to see the *desaparecidos* not as an individual loss but instead as a collective presence³⁶.

The mosaic of photo IDs stand opposite to the repressive verbal lexicon of terror and visual control imposed by the dictatorship. The collective mosaic of the photo IDs became part of a visual lexicon that prompted citizens to calibrate their out-of-focus and turned-away gazes, and suture the schism between knowing and seeing.

The particular format of the photo ID reinforces the discourse of spectrality of the Madres- since the format of the portrait is not bound to a particular identifiable time and place, it is not anchored in a determined and constrained spatio-temporality. Instead, the white background allows a fluidity and freedom in its imaginary reconstruction and presence. In *Forget me not: photography and remembrance* (2004) Geoffrey Batchen mentions how photographs are like time machines insofar as they resemble the ebb and flow of a memory, and conjures the ghosts of the past back into life as a real component of the present. The white background allows the photo to not be anchored in a particular time of being and thus, the images can travel through time, adapting to its dynamic flow.

In their refusal for exhumations, economic reparations, and commemorative lists, the Madres forego the material search that could offer a sense of symbolic closure in the recognition

³⁶ Other artistic forms are also used for this. In September 21st of 1983 the Madres collaborated with the artistic collective headed by Emilio Crexel, Rodolfo Agueberry and Julio Flores in the collective action “El Siluetazo” which consisted in tracing the outlines of a human body and covering the city with the representations of the “absent body” of the disappeared. Once the trace of the bodies of the disappeared were outline, the silhouettes were plastered all across the city. “El Siluetazo” was effective insofar as it represented the materiality of absence through the ghostly presence of the outlines, these paper cutouts with life-like dimensions juxtaposed against the very real and physical space of the urban space. This intervention in space was effective in bringing forth the materiality and the dimension of the absences in quantitative terms. The abstract number of 30,000 disappearances was materially visualized as it took over the urban landscape. “El Siluetazo”, like the use of the photo IDs, collectivized the trace left by the disappeared, the outlines provided a uniformity- a ghostly outline trace of a tangible presence in the public sphere, one impossible to ignore.

of death. The Madres reiterate how the *desaparecidos* transcend the materiality of their bodies. Hebe de Bonafini states: “A handful of bones does not identify them because they are dreams, hope and an example for the generation to come”, thus any type of posthumous honor like the inclusion in lists is deemed as unnecessary. The Madres explain “We do not need lists. We have photos” (*Nuestras Consignas*). Like the counter-clockwise circular marches, the reliance on the photo IDs and not on posthumous lists as their proof of presence, insists on the permanence of their interrupted lives. The use of the photo-IDs by the Madres contribute in making the presence of the *desaparecidos* timeless, a return that escapes the static futility implicit in a transient and mortal existence subject to a progressive lineal temporality.

The consistent use of the photo IDs by the Madres is a conscious and deliberate choice—by using the same original image used for their initial demands, they also emphasize the complicit lack of cooperation of the state in their search for their disappeared loved ones. Like their counter-clockwise marches, the use of the original and dated photo IDs in the present create a collective spectral presence that insists on returning to the past for the construction of the present and future, an ethical and political stance of resistance.

The transit and travel of the trace

If at first the photo ID was used as a certification of existence (an evidence) of the individuality of the referent, the passing of time shifted the initial quality of the Photo ID into becoming a symbolic image that illustrates a collective presence and struggle. In the transit from individual demand to public demonstration, the referent of the photograph becomes de-individualized and self-referential.

In other words, in its collectivization, the referent is displaced and absorbed by the iconicity of the form, thus achieving a meta-dimension that, like the counter-clockwise marches

always circles back to itself. In its transit from individual to collective demand, the referent is displaced to the form of the photo ID and what it so effectively represents- the struggle of the search- which will be appropriated by other nations and become a universal symbol of public protest and resistance.

The subsequent use of the photo ID is also subject to transform as it travels different times and spaces. In the last decades, the collectives H.I.J.O.S and Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo³⁷ has reinvested the images as a marker of genetic inheritance that stresses the permanence of the legacy of the *desaparecidos* against the threat of oblivion and impunity. The photo ID and the idea of the trace also evolves and serves different functions as they travels public, domestic, and institutional spaces³⁸.

In the private realm and freed from their political use as a tool of demand, the 4x4 photo ID do not have the dates of the disappearance inscribed in them since the image does not function as an evidentiary document of proof. Within the domestic space, these photographs are re-signified as family pictures, designating a place of ritual (2009:350). This, once again, shifts the ontological value of the referent. If in the public sphere, the idea of the photograph carrying the trace of the disappeared adhered to being and highlighting *the persistent presence of a collective loss*, within the domestic sphere, the trace becomes- similar to the Derridean trace- a

³⁷ H.I.J.O.S (Hijos por la Identidad y Justicia contra el Olvido y el Silencio) is a collective of sons and daughters of *desaparecidos* who organize and protest against impunity through performative disruptions called *Escraches*- a type of demonstration collectively done to publicly shame those who are above the law and the impunity of those who participated in the genocides of the dictatorship. The Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo are a collective of Madres of *desaparecidos* who are committed to the search of the children of the *desaparecidos* born in captivity and given away to families complicit with the military regime. To read more about the lineage between the groups and the influence of genetic inheritance and continuity see Taylor, Diana. "You Are Here": The D.N.A of Performance" in *The Drama Review M.I.T. Press*, Vol 46. No 1. Spring, 2012

³⁸ In her visual ethnography "Lo invisible revelado. El uso de la fotografía como (re)presentación de la desaparición de personas en Argentina" (2009) Ludmila da Silva Catela traces the use of photography in three different realms: its ritualistic use in the domestic space, it's political use in the urban space of protests, and its institutional use in the cultural memory realm (publications, exhibitions, and museums).

trace of all that remains. As such, the photograph and the referent within it become singular and individual again, acquiring an elegiac and ritualistic quality. Within the domestic private space, the Madres can grieve the loss of their loved ones, without fear of subsuming to a closure narrative or “*memoria de los cementerios*”. Within the private space, the photographs then acquire a nostalgic density, they become a memorial force against the threat of oblivion posited by death.

Elegiac Objects: Photography as memento mori

Photo-criticism has often explored the relationship between photography and mortality. From Sontag description of photography as a “memento mori” (“*In Plato’s Cave*” 15) to Barthes *Camera Lucida* written in bereavement after the death of his mother, to Phillipe Dubois description of photography as a “thanatography”- the visual representation of death (*L’acte photographique* 1983). As mentioned in the introduction, it is perhaps photography’s ability to capture what was once teeming with life what causes the fascination with the medium and leads to philosophical debates around what remains in spite of the transient nature of time and the impermanence of existence.

In his essay “The Ontology of the Photographic Image”³⁹ critic André Bazin goes as far as arguing that the motor of representation in plastic arts is anchored around the very human fear of death and oblivion. He traces a common thread from the Egyptian rituals of embalming to the European tradition of painted portraits, and eventually of portrait photography- as representations that are invested in a captured image as it stands in an existential fight against the inevitability of mortality and what Aristotle described as “ceasing to be in time”. Bazin notes “the image helps us remember the subject and to preserve him from a second spiritual death” (04). This second

³⁹ Bazin, André. “The Ontology of the Photographic Image” in *Film Quarterly*, Vol.13, No.4, Summer 1960, pp.4-9.

spiritual death is the death of being forgotten, the symbolic death by oblivion. Forms of representation are able to sublimate time and become “the last word in the argument with death by means of the form it endures” (06).

What is interesting is the double movement- while the photograph is a form of representation that offers a symbolic permanence against the inevitable progression of time, it is *also* the passing of time what endows the image with its nostalgic density and talismanic value. In fact, it is this particular use what allows photography to transcend being thought as a mere mechanical photocopy and gives it a transcendental and emotional density. As Benjamin points out: prescient knowledge in retrospectively looking at images can grant them an emotional density (Benjamin, “A Short History of Photography”)⁴⁰. Similarly, Sontag describes photograph as elegiac objects, its talismanic uses “expresses a feeling both sentimental and implicitly magical: they are “attempts to contact or lay claim to another reality” (“In Plato’s Cave” 15). The endowment of value of the image is, according to Sontag, a result of the passing of time- which grants what she describes in another essay as the image a *posthumous irony*- turning the past into an object of tender regard by the generalized pathos of looking at time past (Sontag, “Melancholy Objects” 71) she continues: “Photographs state the innocence, the vulnerability of lives heading toward their own destruction, and this link between photography and death haunts all photographs of people” (Melancholy Objects” 71). Thus, looking back at images that would otherwise be mundane can shine and be filled with meaning once we attach to them the knowledge of the past in the present.

Along the same lines, Barthes entire reflection of the *studium* and the *punctum* in *Camera Lucida* rests on this dialectic between temporalities- when Barthes sees his mother’s

⁴⁰ How for example the photograph of an image of a woman that we now know has killed herself will make the image more melancholic, or we will attribute a haunting density to it (Benjamin 1936).

Winter Garden photograph filled with love for her and the bereavement of her loss, it is both the subjective love and experience of grief what makes him rescue the small pointed details of the image, details that wouldn't be rescued or meaningful to any other viewer. The process of self-discovery embedded in Barthes description of seeing and being moved by the Winter garden photograph articulates an encounter of temporal tenses and familial relations- in looking at the image Barthes becomes the care-taker of his mother, "bridging the gap between his five-year-old mother and his own memory of her" (Hirsch, *Family Frames* 2).

The image then becomes more than a mechanical reproduction but instead an irreplaceable object of talismanic and paradoxical qualities- the photograph, a material object we can frame, place in an album, physically hold in our hands, captures a presence that has become impalpable, impossible to reach again. And yet, as Margaret Olin notes in *Touching Photographs* (2012), in the material act of touching the photograph, we are able to trace a connection, a contact between the people in the photograph and the outside viewer. Olin explains photography is not just a visual practice, but a tactile one as well, it is precisely the idea that we can materially hold the memory of a person in our hands what gives it its added value as an object.

The combination of the haptic and the visual gives these portraits a mystical power. In Batchen explores this elegiac quality of photography and traces its uses back to nineteenth century images. He describes photography as an art of remembrance, something that has remained a constant practice through time. Photographs, he argues, are catalysts of remembrance- as they turn into objects, memorials, and part of a developed narrative in family albums- they become touchable entities with a comforting solidity in its memorial function.

This elegiac framing of images also travels the public space. When the Madres pin the photo IDs to their chests and close to their hearts they are exhibiting a minimalist form of public

exhibition that emphasizes the familiar link, what Diana Taylor has described as a an established genetic continuity within generations “an epidermal, layered image in which the bodies were connected, genetically, affiliative, and politically” (Taylor, “You are Here: The D.N.A. of Performance” 160). This gesture is inscribed in an ancient tradition of carrying a miniature portrait of a deceased loved one in a medallion or broche. By incorporating the photograph with the trace of their loved ones the body itself becomes an accessory that displays the private affection in public, making the body a platform of remembrance.

Reconstructing the Family Portrait in Contemporary Times

The contemporary use of the photo ID by the Madres and by the Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo and H.I.J.O.S stubbornly insists on an affirmation of the genetic link between the *desaparecidos* and those making the demands for their presence. In both cases, the use of the photo ID updates the initial demand- for H.I.J.O.S the blown up images of the photo IDs are used in their *Escraches* against impunity; for The Abuelas use the images to illustrate their life-long search for identity of the children of the *desaparecidos* who were born in captivity and given away to families who were connected with the military regime.

The possibility of genetic continuity is visually explored in the 2011 exhibition *Memoria Gráfica de las Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo*. The exhibition consisted on a pair of photo IDs hung at eye-level surrounding the interiors of the gallery. For every two photo ID of a disappeared couple there is a mirror. Thus, the spectator is asked not only to recognize the loss of the *desaparecidos*, but also to see themselves as the possible missing family offspring of the disappeared (Figure 1.1, 1.2) With every spectator that occupies this place, the image in the mirror fills the gap of the absence left by the rupturing of families and the loss of the *desaparecidos*. The interplay between the dated photo IDs and the dynamic reflection of the

mirror, pulls the spectator to consider their own live relation to those black and white photo IDs. The mirror and photo IDs makes past and present dialogue with the possibility of continuity; signaling towards the future and the hope of restoration of the familial core that was disrupted.



Figure 1.1 *Memoria Gráfica de las Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo*, 2011



Figure 1.2 *Memoria Gráfica de las Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo*, 2011

In the use by H.I.J.O.S and by the Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, the photo ID is reinvested with meaning through its dialogue with the present. There is again, a double movement- though the reinvestment of the images highlight lineal progressive continuity in the familiar links and inheritance of generations, it does so by stubbornly overlapping the past images and their persistent indexical force into active, dynamic, present contexts. This action grants the original photo IDs with an enormous force and material evidentiary value. In this reiteration, it eclipses the spectral representation of the *desaparecidos* put forth by the Madres. The photo IDs simultaneously convey time and the passing of time, which is precisely what makes the images and their significance evolve and break way from their original framing as static civil documents of proof.

Reconstructing the (visual) Archive of the *Detenido-Desaparecidos* in Chile

In Chile, the legal description of the disappeared subject is *detenido-desaparecido*. In contrast with Argentina, where even as the state disappearances were done in plain view there was still a furtive and secretive air around them, in Chile the coup had been staged in such a massive and theatrical scale, that the process of detaining “political suspects” was made explicit by the Military regime as a legal procedure to create a new order. The state of shock produced by the coup and the myth of Chilean exceptionalism- the belief that Chile was a land of political and cultural sophistication, with a democratic and resilient political constitutionalism- made it difficult for Chilean citizens to believe the scale of violence and repression brought by the coup. In fact, shortly after the coup, many citizens targeted as political suspects willingly turned themselves into the Estadio Nacional⁴¹, naively believing in due process and unaware of the

⁴¹ In the weeks after the coup, the Estadio Nacional in Chile was converted into a detention center, it infamously became a site of torture, death threats, and extra-judicial executions.

horrors that took place within. It is calculated that around 3000 people were detained and disappeared, and around 30,000 citizens were imprisoned and tortured during the dictatorship.

The documentary *La Ciudad de los fotógrafos*⁴² (2006) by Sebastian Moreno highlights the collaborative relationship between the mothers and family members of the *detenidos-desaparecidos* and the Asociación de Fotógrafos Independientes (AFI), a labor association of independent photographers who daily captured the brutal repression and violence experienced during the dictatorial military regime. Despite being in a highly censored environment, and despite having no platform where to circulate their photographs within the national territory (as the main newspapers were complicit with the regime), the AFI created a massive archive of documentary images that began circulating in the foreign press and caught the attention of Human Rights organizations internationally.

One of the most striking images of the documentary is a photograph of Ana González, a mother and activist who lost all four of her children to the Pinochet military regime. In the photograph, González is shown in a ceremony with four photographs, one for each of her disappeared sons, pinned to her chest (Figure 1.3). Her chest reads like a disjointed family album; four lives interrupted and yet brought back together on the body of the mother who brought them to life. What makes the photograph striking is the tragic excess it conveys- the pinned photographs overflow the frame of the mother's body, as if evidencing how no single body could contain a loss that big. In the documentary, Gonzales recalls that the family only had one photograph of the entire family together. She explains:

It was really, really hard for me to find a photograph to pin to my chest. They were four [disappeared members of her family]. I couldn't find one, because we never had a photographic camera in our home. It is just by chance that I have one family photo- when

⁴² In Chapter Three of Part One I will give a detailed description of the particular Chilean historical context. The chapter will also have an in depth analysis of the documentary *La Ciudad de los fotógrafos* and engage with Ariella Azoulay 's theory on photography, the civil gaze, and the theorization of photography as an event.

a photographer passed through by our street and asked if we wanted to have our picture taken. I don't think we had enough to eat that day, but, still, we had the idea, the illumination, the magic, to say "Yes, of course, come in". And it's the only photograph that exists of all of us together. Not having a photograph of the family is like not being a part of the history of humanity⁴³



Figure 1.3 Sebastian Moreno, *La ciudad de los fotógrafos*, 2006



Figure 1.4 Sebastian Moreno, *La ciudad de los fotógrafos*, 2006

⁴³ The translation is mine.

The photograph (Figure 1.4) shows a youthful Ana at its center, surrounded by her children, all of them smiling mischievously and connected to each other by the interlocking of their arms. Against a modest stripped brick wall, Ana also smiles widely, holding her youngest daughter on her lap. Her children are close in age, all neatly dressed, vivacious, and tidy. In the composition, the family occupies the entire spatial frame of the image, conveying an idyllic plenitude, an all-encompassing warmth. Seeing a close-up of the image with the knowledge of the disappearances and the knowledge that this photograph is the only material proof of the complete family, gives this survivor image a poignant and tragic dimension. The poignancy lies also in the interplay between that frozen utopic moment of unity captured in time and Ana's own reconstruction of the family portrait pinned to her chest years later (Figure 1.3). The newly reconstructed image showcases both the excess of the dictatorship and the resilience imbedded in the gesture to reconstruct what was shattered.

When Ana says that “not having a photograph of the family is parallel to not being part of the history of humanity”, she is giving the photograph an existential, life-affirming dimension—the photograph surpasses being only an evidence of proof but also grants a space of belonging and kinship. To be a part of “the history of humanity” means to be seen and considered beyond being a name in a list, beyond being simply a citizen. Though the original members of the AFI disbanded shortly after the dictatorship was over, some of the founding members remained committed to use photography in the fight against effacement and oblivion in the present.

In the documentary, Claudio Pérez, one of the founding members of the AFI, searches through all of the lists and memorials of the disappeared in order to create a complete visual archive of every *detenido-desaparecido*. He insists on this quest because, according to him, “There is always a life there to discover” (“Hay una vida siempre ahí por descubrir”) Claudio

travels across Chile in order to track down a photograph of every *detenido-desaparecido* present in the historical record of the *Informe Rettig*, the Chilean Truth Commission published in 1991. Once Pérez speaks with the families and takes a photograph of the image of their disappeared loved one, he takes a portrait of the family member holding the photograph of their disappeared, placing both images into his visual archive (Figure 1.5, 1.6).



Figure 1.5 Sebastian Moreno, *La ciudad de los fotógrafos*, 2006



Figure 1.6 Sebastian Moreno, *La ciudad de los fotógrafos*, 2006

This gesture signals also the interplay of temporalities imbedded in the creation of the archive- just as the photograph of the *detenido-desaparecido* is important, so is the life left behind in their absence, and those who survive these absences daily. The inclusion of their photographs illuminates a “political hauntology”- what Taylor describes as the moment of post disappearance as the visualization that continues to act politically even as it exceeds the ‘live’ (Taylor “Dancing with Diana: A Study in Hauntology” 64).

Pérez describes his labor as an urgent way to bring individual presence back to the thousands who could be forgotten under statistics or lists of names. “Every day, we carry pictures of loved ones with us, in our wallets, in our clothes. There is always an image *that remembers you*. We also carry within ourselves the presences of the *detenido-desaparecidos*. There is a *detenido-desaparecido* in every one of us⁴⁴.”

The photographs of his search and the archive he attempts to construct do not highlight death but instead aims to produce an animated memory against the possible effacement and oblivion present in being considered just a name on a list of victims. Moved by the force to go beyond the cold legalese and rhetoric of truth commissions, this archive attempts to rescue the cultural residues- what Nelly Richards describes as “the wounded materiality of remembrance” (*Cultural Residues* 4).⁴⁵ In painting a multidimensional portrait of the *detenido-desaparecido*, each photograph uncovers a life. Each name and life rescued does not end or is defined by the moment of disappearance, but instead carried on with each family member that survives them and brings their memory into the present through the creation of this new visual archive.

Peru and the double *desaparecido*

⁴⁴ Translation is mine.

⁴⁵ Richard, Nelly. *Cultural Residues. Chile in Transition*. Minnesota UP, 2004.

In Peru, the use of the Photo ID did not have the massive or mainstream effect in civil imagination as in Argentina and Chile. Nevertheless, the portrait photo IDs were used similarly as evidentiary proof to state a demand- especially by the grass-root organization ANFASEP (Asociación Nacional de Familiares Secuestrados, Detenidos y Desaparecidos) established in 1983 by Angélica Mendoza⁴⁶ and a group of women searching for their disappeared family members in Ayacucho. The photo IDs are used in their public demonstrations and are also a part of the mosaic memorial “Un Santuario” located at the Museo de la Memoria in Ayacucho, founded in 2005.⁴⁷

The photo ID has also entered national imagination as part of one- if not the most- emblematic and iconic image of the memory of the armed conflict in Peru. The photograph *Denuncia* (Figure 1.7) taken in 1984 by photo-journalist Vera Lentz in Ayacucho, closely frames a small pair of hands holding a faded photo ID of the profile of a man. *Denuncia*⁴⁸ became the most known photograph of the exhibition *Yuyanapaq (Para recordar)*, inaugurated in 2003 and described as a visual narrative of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission published in 2002. In contrast with the massive collection of photo IDs used in Argentina and in Chile, the image

⁴⁶ Angelica Mendoza, better known as “Mama Angélica” is considered a symbol of strength and resilience in Perú. She has spent the last three decades searching for her son Arquimides Ascarza Mendoza, who was detained and disappeared by military counterinsurgency forces in 1986.

⁴⁷ The use of the photo IDs in public memorials also have a reiteration in Chile and Argentina. In Chile, a memorial in Puente Bulnes contains 936 photo IDs of the disappeared, occupying a space in the capital of Santiago. What is striking is how the images have faded. Printed in clay, they are literal pieces of a mosaic, collective representation of loss that needs to be tended to. The images also form part of the Museo de la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos in Santiago as a part of their permanent exhibition. In Argentina (and against the initial complain of the Madres) the photo IDs of *the desaparecidos* have also been displayed as mosaics in the Memorial Park of Buenos Aires and in the Museo de la Memoria in Córdoba.

⁴⁸ In Chapter Four of Part One I do a close reading of the image and of the larger implications of its iconicity and the way it has seeped into civil imagination. I also discuss the curatorial regime that chose the image from an archive of 1700 for the *Yuyanapaq. Para recordar* exhibition.

Denuncia is a symbol of memory struggles and its precarious place in civil imagination during the early 2000s in Peru.



Figure 1.7 Vera Lentz, *Denuncia in Yuyanapaq (Para Recordar)*, 2002

The image composition produces a sense of closeness- by aligning the point of view of the person who holds the photo ID with the one of both the photographer and the spectator- *Denuncia* is able to transmit a sense of intimacy in the viewer. Yet, for all of its conveyed closeness, it keeps the photographed subjects identity at a distance. There are multiple absences present in the photograph- we do not know who is the man in the faded photo ID, we do not know who are the hands that hold that small image and make the demand, and we do not know where the demand is being made, or if it has been heard. The photograph keeps the relation between the disappeared and the one making the demand ambiguous. The faded photo ID within the image signals to the futility of the demand and of a state and society to recognize the loss.

In a country with almost double the number of victims (69,000) than in Argentina and twice as many disappeared than in Chile (9,000), there is no consensus of national tragedy or a coherent and unified sense of national loss. In his article “Political violence, ethnicity and racism in Peru in time of War” Nelson Manrique suggests that the sense of national tragedy in civil society does not exist as it does in Southern Cone countries because the majority of victims in Peru are not seen as having the same rights as the fully recognized citizens of the nation (“Political violence” 24). Thus, the case of the *desaparecidos* in Peru constitutes a *double-disappearance* in the sense that, since most of the victims were Quechua-speaking Andean peasants living in the highlands, they were also a presence that was already symbolically invisible to the capitalist-centric national imaginary.

The abysmal cultural and social chasm between the Andean peasants of the highlands and the Criollo modern citizens of the coast and capital, constructed an interiorized barrier that insulated the highlands almost as a foreign territory within the nation. This distance made it impossible to see, and almost impossible to think how the pervasive violence of the civil armed affected an integral part of the national community.

In a way, the Andean subject has already been disappeared by the state. The skewed and unequal view of national citizens was endemic to the Civil Armed conflict and its twenty-year duration. In the final chapter of Part One, I will closely read the image *Denuncia*, and how it symptomatically reveals some of the tensions present in the official cultural memory realm in Peru.

Transmission of the trace- Reimagined Family Portraits

I want to end this reflection on trace with two photographic exhibitions: The portraits of Rodrigo Abd in the collective exhibition *Desaparecidos* presented by the Culture Department at

the Lugar de la Memoria, la Tolerancia y la Inclusion (LUM) in Lima in 2016, and the exhibition and photographic essay *Los Hijos. Tucumán Veinte Años Después* by Julio Pantoja, exhibited in Buenos Aires in 2011. Both projects consist of monochromatic portraits of the family members of the disappeared in the present and open a space for a fruitful meditation on temporality, memory, and the interplay between presence and absence.

The series of photographs by Rodrigo Abd consisted on large-scale frontal time-exposure portraits of family members whose loved ones have been disappeared during the civil armed conflict. The portraits aim to capture the inheritance of loss that is lived every day by the surviving family members through highly aesthetized portraits (Figure 1.8, 1.9)- the detailed close-ups of the subjects and the back lighting used against the black background produce an almost opposite effect to the inherent expressionless and sober formality of the photo IDs. The portraits large scale aim to bring to the foreground an affective and eloquent testimony of grief inscribed in the facial expressions of those the curatorial regime describes as being “trapped within the folds of a past that does not leave them alone” (Exhibition pamphlet, 2016). I do not agree with this curatorial framing and will show how, by thinking of these portraits from a different angle, we can distance from a reading that poses the photographed subjects as static, helpless or trapped in time.



Figure 1.8 Rodrigo Abd, *Desaparecidos*, 2016



Figure 1.9 Rodrigo Abd, *Desaparecidos*, 2016

Abd uses a hand-made wooden camera (known as the Afghan camara)⁴⁹ to create these large-scale portraits of the family members of the disappeared citizens. The process of taking the photograph requires the subject to stand still looking at the camera for several minutes as the portrait is being taken. The photographed subjects faces the camera and the unwavering stillness and intent gaze⁵⁰ of the photographed subject towards photographer moves beyond the event of the photograph being taken and springs towards the future and the future viewer. The still gaze of the photographed subjects convey a message that wants to be transmitted -something Ariella Azoulay has pointed out as the agency present in the photographed subject that takes part in the photographic event: the notion that the photographed subject knows the image will be seen, and thus, the photographed subject will stare back at the viewer who sees them (Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography*).

In these portraits we see how the past is not configured as an insulated period that spans from 1980 to 2000 but instead is carried through the years and experienced through uncertainty, resilience, and loss. Similar to the visual archive gathered by Claudio Pérez in Chile, these portraits illustrate how the experience of loss transcends the historical temporality of the conflict and is carried into the present realm. The trace the image captures is the passing of time itself. It transcends the framing of the curatorial discourse that describes the photographed subjects as “trapped in the folds of time”- on the contrary- I argue that the photographed subjects consciousness of the future viewer configures a movement of the photographed subjects between different temporal planes. The photographs can then be seen not simply as “icons of suffering”

⁴⁹ The Afghan camara was originally used in Afghanistan in the 1950's by street photographers to create photo IDs.

⁵⁰ In this case, I am not using gaze in a Lacanian, Foucaultian or Mulvenian theorization as a particular optical dynamic in power relations, but instead simply as the look given by the photographed subjects. I am interested in how the photographs stare back at the viewer.

but instead as images that provide an aperture for imagination to those that remain so radically unfamiliar with past history and its open wounds.

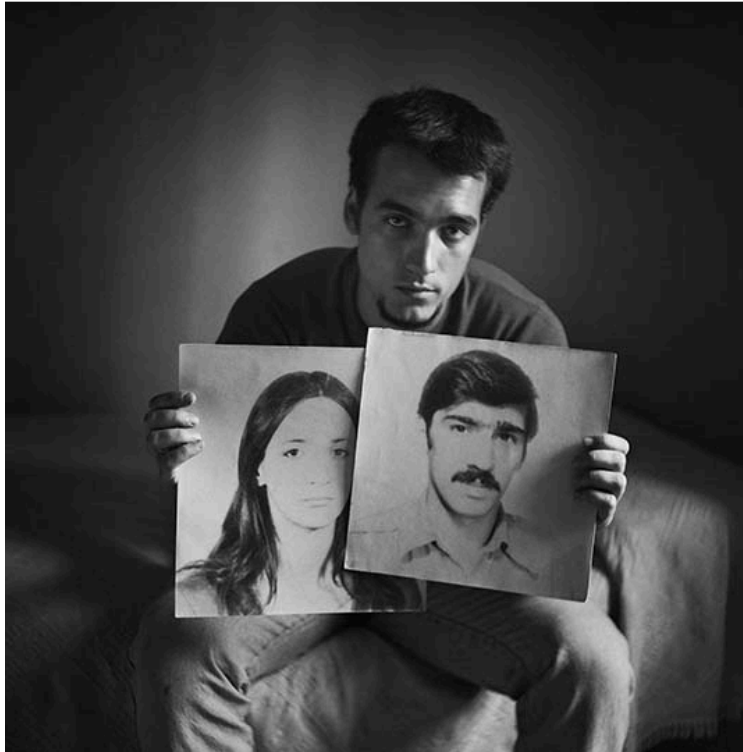
The inheritance of loss and emotional continuity between temporal tenses is also present in Julio Pantoja's photographic project *Los Hijos. Tucumán Veinte años después* (2011). The project revisits the smallest providence of Argentina, Tucumán, where military forces radically targeted popular organizations and labor unions under the military "Operativo Independencia" in 1975. Pantoja photographs the sons and daughters of the disappeared victims within intimate settings and familiar spaces. He includes as a caption their name, age, profession, and the year the portrait is taken (Figure 1.10, 1.11).



Alejandra Viecho, 21 años, estudiante de Trabajo Social, 1997.
7 de 38

CERRAR

Figure 1.10 Julio Pantoja, *Los Hijos*, 2011



Pablo Gargiulo, 20 años, estudiante de Abogacía, 1996.
13 de 38

CERRAR

Figure 1.11, Julio Pantoja, *Los Hijos*, 2011

In contrast to the compositional uniformity of Abd's portraits- Pantoja's portraits distance themselves from the photo-ID and formal studio portraiture and instead showcase a diverse and particular singularity in each of their photographed subjects. The different and intimate settings (many of the portraits are taken in the subject's bedroom), the objects surrounding the subject, and the varied poses each photographed subject takes evidences what seems to be a collaborative dialogue between the photographer and the photographed subject in how she/he wants to be represented. Though the title of the project signals a type of classifying uniformity of the group (*Los hijos*)- the images resist the generality of the term.

This gesture illustrates one of the crux in the motor of creation and post-memorial reflections of the children of the disappeared, a quest to find out: what am I besides a son or a daughter of a *desaparecido*? How do I resist being overshadowed by this legacy? Within the project, there is an individuality that asserts itself in the images, giving the spectator a small opening to imagine both how the subject is shaped by the inheritance of loss, but also how they grow into their own individual subjective identity separate from the parental affiliation.

Twelve out of the thirty-eight black and white portraits include within it the photographs of the disappeared parents within the image, updating the gesture originally made by the Madres de Plaza de Mayo to showcase the affiliative and genetic connection between generations.

Similar to wearing a portrait in jewelry or clothes, the gesture of holding a photograph within a photograph is a tradition that began in the XIX century that answers to the need to include the virtual presence of those absent, as if, in capturing the overlapping presences -the photographed subject wearing a photograph of those that have passed- a symbolic union can be achieved. Batchen notes that the photographed subjects want to draw attention not only to the image they hold, but also to the materiality of the photograph as a touchable entity and the comforting solidity of its memorial function (Batchen, *Forget me not* 12). The trace is then updated from the generation that came after the disappearance, capturing not a frozen past, but the familial relations that continue in the present albeit being marked by the personal experience of absence. Touching the images is a gesture that directly confronts the ontological uncertainty that surround all the *desaparecidos*. By their material and symbolic inclusion, this new portrait not only stands against the second death of not being remembered, but also includes those who remember in the same temporal and visual plane.

With the inclusion of the meta-image, the portrait sutures together the familial continuity of generations that was once disrupted. Pantoja notes that, at the time of the project, most of the photographed subjects age coincided with the age of their parents at the time of their disappearance. In this photographic encounter, multiple temporalities are converged- the photographed subject has caught up in age to the memory of their parents before their disappearance, and traces of the genetic and personal inheritance they carry are within them in the present.

The photographs also accurately portray the family interactions within a family of a *desaparecido*. Many of the subjects met their parents *through* photographs, their memories and familial ties refer to those photos, to speaking to these images as they were growing up, evoking their presence. To include the photograph within the photograph was a way of faithfully capturing this relationship and familiar dynamic of the children who were marked by loss. Pantoja explains “to incorporate the meta-image as a protagonic concept was a way to capture the attachment of the two generation that simultaneously represent the single individual, present in their physical traits, in their hair-dos and personal objects (Pantoja, *Los Hijos* 10). The portraits with the included photographs of the disappeared parents become not only a symbolic union of generations, but also an accurate portrait of familial dynamics experienced by the *hijos*. Within a single image, these photographs captures an alternative conception of the family album, one that is not guided by a lineal narrative that includes the common rites and events that unfold in family life, but that instead incorporates loss as a defining marker of experience.

A particular photograph from *Los Hijos* epitomizes the ability of the medium to become a platform able to host different temporalities. The image is a frontal portrait of a young woman looking directly at the camera, standing in front of a door. The woman is holding two

photographs- one of her parents holding her as a baby, and a larger photograph of her as a child of approximately 4 or 5 years holding a larger copy of the same original family portrait of her parents holding her. The caption reads “Laura Romero. 26 años, estudiante de Artes, 1996” (Figure 1.12).



Figure 1.12 Julio Pantoja, *Los Hijos*, 2011

Like a set of Russian dolls, the portrait by Pantoja show how Laura has within her a smaller version of herself, both of them united by the original family portrait they hold twenty or so years apart. If time is measured by change, but change, is also dependent on the passing of time, the portrait illustrates the very movement of the passing of time through the changes it captures and what remains constant in all three images. Though we see the subject grow older,

the original family photograph remains the same- a constant and constitutive symbolic bond that keeps the familial connection albeit the impermanence and elusiveness of time.

If photography is, as Barthes describes, a literal emanation of the referent, “a sort of umbilical cord links the body of the photographed thing to my gaze” (*Camera Lucida* 18) in this photograph we see the genetic continuity and the integral part photography plays in maintaining the familiar connection. The image of the parents holding Laura Romero is the umbilical cord that links their bodies to Laura, it captures the moment that evidences the physical closeness that once existed between the three family members. The original image where the three are captured in the same time and space is particularly powerful in showing the affiliative connection that persists through time.

Laura is held by her mother as her father wraps his arm around her; both of them direct their gaze towards Laura, tenderly. All three family members are physically close and visually connected. Laura is held and she is protected, and her parents are watching over her. We know that this idyllic interaction is not timeless, but that is the memory Laura carries with her. With Laura holding the second image of her as a little girl holding that first family photograph, we are able to see the constitutive role it has had for her. The first family photograph remains a constant in a life that survives, evolves, and physically changes through the years. Laura is simultaneously the baby held in her parent’s arms, the little girl that grows up with this image as a symbolic presence and assertion of the parental bond, and the young woman who now shows these talismanic objects of family connection to the viewer.

The genetic continuity represented by the Madres, Abuelas, and H.I.J.O.S continues its lineage in the work by Pantoja. By capturing both the photographed subject and the presence of the disappeared -whether by including a photograph of the disappeared parents or by the

symbolic objects of memory- two temporalities are sutured together, not in order to move beyond the past, but instead as one that includes the presence of the past as what characterizes and informs the present. The meta-photographic composition of the project refreshes the possibility of the medium and its capacity to capture time by the intricate layers of temporal planes that are inscribed within the image.

Pantoja's portraits dialogue in an interesting ones with the ones captured by Roberto Abd for the *Desaparecidos* exhibition. While Abt uses a particular photographic technique that slows down the moment of capture to reveal how the absences are felt in the present, Pantoja composes image that recreates the family portrait and the time that spans in the personal and familiar experience of loss. In both cases, the imperative is not only to remember the disappeared but also to capture the work of remembrance and the relations that keep those presences alive in the present.

The paradox of memory and photography is that we physically touch, frame, and wear images of presences that we can no longer materially encounter as we do in the photographs. The impossibility to encounter the referent in the flesh, makes them into a ghostly presence, but one that is not necessarily frozen within the folds of time. The trace in photography discussed in this chapter transcends the Peircean definition that indicates the trace as merely what evidences the relationship of contiguity with the subject captured, as all that remains. Instead, if we read the trace in photograph in its dialectical potential -as Benjamin and Barthes have- and take into account the role of the viewer in the present as one that grants value and meaningfulness of the trace- we can engage with its transcendental and mobilizing force.

As the multiple materials discussed above show, the use of photography can break the rigid frames of lineal temporality and create a dialogue between tenses. Moreover, the

progression of time can also inform and expand the original use of the photograph as indexical proof of existence. The use of the black and white portraits in Argentina, Chile, and Peru evolves- from its empirical possibilities at the moment of demand, to the political possibilities of their mass production and collectivization, to an affective potential as memorial and artistic cultural objects.

In all its different iterations, the idea of trace itself evolves as it transits different times and spaces. Contrary to the assumption of the indexical as stable, we see how malleable and how easily it can be retroactively endowed with meaning. The trace then is a vehicle to capture the familial and social interconnections between temporalities. The trace in these photographs showcase a stubborn insistence on the past as it continues to occupy a place that resists closure in the present. Thus, the use of this images illustrates the radical refusal to the second death by oblivion that comes with the passing of time.

CHAPTER TWO, PART ONE

Photography as Mirror: Domestic Photography and the Family Album in *Buena Memoria* by Marcelo Brodsky (1997) and *Ausencias* by Gustavo Germano (2008)

Marcelo Brodsky and Gustavo Germano are both two contemporary visual artists that experienced the Argentinian dictatorship from childhood with the personal loss of their younger brothers, both of them apprehended and disappeared by the military regime. Both artists exiled to Spain and came back after the dictatorship had ended with two important projects: the photographic exhibition and essay *Buena Memoria* by Brodsky (1997) and the exhibition *Ausencias* by Germano (2008). Both projects intervene and reorganize domestic photography and personal archives in order to convey the devastating effect of the disappearances in Argentina and the effect of loss within the intimate sphere, in spaces of leisure and in the mundane of everyday life. Both projects engage with the narrative of political history by bringing to the surface what survives from the time turbulent time of the past. In that sense, the photographs touch time by lifting a veil to a private domestic time that is interrupted and radically altered with the violence of the regime.

Photography as mirror refers to the process of familial recognition present in both projects, and the way they successfully make the abstract concept of *absence* concrete and personal through rescuing those intimate archives, not by the use of the trace of the materiality of the absent but precisely by the hollowed outline the absences leave behind. By capturing the effect of those absences and what these presences leave behind in their disappearance, the way

these absences altered space (Germano), personal memory, and meaning of past experiences (Brodsky).

Photography as mirror simply signals how in seeing photographs, especially domestic photographs, even if they are not necessarily our own, the spectator can be moved and affected, because in their intimate representation, they also reflect back a sense of the familiarity that can be identified, and as such processed in a sort of universal empathic vision. In short, in seeing these photographs that were once relegated to the intimate and familiar space now out in the public cultural memory realm, we also see ourselves, reflected back in the images, we identify with their familiarity, their conventions, the aspects of everyday life that shape our own becoming.

Vernacular /Domestic Photography

Vernacular photography, defined by Geoffrey Batchen as the ordinary photographs that were made by everyday folk from 1834 until now, are photographs that preoccupy the home and the heart but rarely the museum and the academy, or official accounts of history (“Vernacular photographs” 262). In essence, vernacular photography is domestic photography that has entered the museum and the artistic medium.

Throughout the chapter, I will refer to the images analyzed as domestic photography, even though their final integration within the artworks and art world places them more accurately in the category of the vernacular. This is because I find that it is essential to think about the imperatives present in domestic photography and how these photographs are shaped. These photographs provide a mode of representation that serves as counter-archives to the visually indexing forms of control of the modern era- such as the prison mug-shot, the medical record, and, as discussed in the previous chapter, the photo ID.

Owning Memories: Family Albums

Before we analyze the photographic projects mentioned above, it is necessary to do a brief reflection on domestic photography and its origins. Upon the invention of photography, it the practice of photography was dependent on a specialist, a craft reserved to an artisan that was knowledgeable not only in taking photographs but also in the chemical process necessary for their development. In his essay “Popular Memory and Technology- Consuming Kodak” (1991) Don Slater points out that with the simplification of the developing process⁵¹, photography became a mass-produced and mass-marketed commodity. Kodak’s slogan: *You press the button, we do the rest* emphasizes the reliability and simplicity of the process, democratizing the use of the medium for everyone and expanding the space and the ways in which photography could be practiced. Indeed, the invention of snapshot photography allowed to capture someone beyond the formality and stiffness of traditional studio portraits and their homogeneous backgrounds. Outside of the studio, and now within the confines of one’s own domestic, intimate and familiar space, one could capture and be captured through informal settings, intra-personal interactions and leisurely time. The accessibility of the photographic technology also expanded the place of the camera, as it became a necessary object within the domestic realm with an ubiquitous presence in ceremonies, social functions, rites of passage, and family leisure.

In the marketing of the photographic camera, the company stated: “Kodak enables *the fortunate possessor* to go back to the light of his *own*⁵² fireside to scenes which would otherwise fade from memory and be lost”. Kodak positioned itself as the gatekeeper of the mundane, enabler to access, retain *the specificity* of a memory that would otherwise ran the risk of getting lost. Thus, with the invention of the camera as accessible within the intimate realm, memories

⁵¹ In 1888 the Eastman Kodak company camera was introduced- a camera with 100 frames that once finished was sent back to the fabric in Rochester (United States) to be loaded and sent back to the consumer.

⁵² Emphasis is mine.

become something *we can possess*, something we can capture that turns into a tangible object to touch, store, and access or return to within the confines and warmth -illuminated “by the light of our own fireside”- of our own private spaces.

Photography allows the family to construct their own visual history as private citizens in negotiation with a public ideal. Indeed, there is a symbiotic relationship between the idealized domestic leisure portrayed by the media and advertisements and domestic photography itself- both imitate and feed off of each other, both contribute to constructing and perpetuating a family ideal, and, consequently a familial gaze.

This negotiation between the public and the private open up the intimate layers of the family album to the point where they become familiar and recognizable by the viewer outside of the family realm that composes it. Since domestic photographs in family albums follow visual patterns, shared codes of existence, and social conventions, when we see someone else’s family album and feel a profound personal resonance and recognition with the images, what we are recalling are not necessarily our own albums, but something *socially constructed*- the adherence to common codes of representation and the imperatives to produce the *right* pictures and include the same marked events.

There is a paradox in the use of domestic photography in memory practices- it simultaneously particularizes an otherwise diffused collectivity⁵³ and it also produces a sense of recognition by highlighting the universality of human experience, reinforced by the sense of recognition and familiarity these images produce in the viewer (Hirsch 1997). Perhaps that is why both projects are so evocative and have had such success as memory work in Latin America.

⁵³ Represented in the mosaic of thousands of uniformed and interchangeable photo IDs.

In this chapter, I examine the use of domestic photography and family albums in order to reflect on the way both authors effectively use these domestic archives in order to represent absence. In reading both projects in tandem, I also want to signal the contrast in how both projects engage with the familial gaze- what Hirsch refers to the powerful gaze of familiarity which imposes and perpetuates certain conventional images of the familial and which “frames” the family in both senses of the term⁵⁴. Within a cultural context, the camera and the family album function as instruments of a familial gaze (*Family Frames*, 1997).

In Argentina the familial is also an inscription in the process of loss. Loss is imagined through the familial bonds and relations, constituting a “wounded family” of the disappeared. These family ties the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo (*Madres*) Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo (*Abuelas*), the Relatives (*Familiares*), the children, (*H.I.J.O.S*) and the siblings (*Herman@s*) use the biological kinship as a motor of their political activism (Sosa 2014) and configure an important part of the Argentinian national imaginary.

In this chapter I signal how while Gustavo Germano’s project reenactments cater to the conventions and codes of the ideal family, Brodsky selection of images of his brother for his own personal/public album distance from images that would be usually chosen to constitute the familial ideal of the family album. Yet both cases reinforce the national idea of imagining loss through relationality. It begs the question- can loss be imagined without the connection to the familial?

Through a close reading of the selection of images in both “Nando, mi hermano” in *Buena Memoria* and *Ausencias*, I examine the aesthetic reinvestment both authors give to the domestic archives- through the recreations in *Ausencias* and the use of the caption in “Nando, mi

⁵⁴ In *Family Snaps: The Meaning of Domestic Photography*, Spence and Holland also emphasize that conventionality in domestic photography is a negotiation with a public ideal, one that reinforces cultural identity constructed through codes of normality (Spence and Holland, *Family Snaps*).

hermano” both authors are able to flesh out the loss of the disappeared, allowing the past and present to encounter each other through the photographs.

Buena memoria

The project *Buena memoria* has had two forms: a photographic installation inaugurated in 1996 and as a photographic essay published in English and Spanish in 1997. The exhibition staged at the Escuela Nacional de Buenos Aires -the secondary school that Brodsky attended- included as its central piece a blown up black and white class photo (Figure 2.1) The image is marked by the author who uses colored pencils to inform about the whereabouts of his classmates, symbolically intervening the *what-has-been* with the *here-and-now*.



Figure 2.1 Marcelo Brodsky, *Los Compañeros*, in *Buena memoria*, 1997

The installation also includes individual portraits of the grown classmates holding the class photo (Figure 2.2)⁵⁵, a gesture similar as the one seen in Pantoja’s *Los Hijos* only in this case, it is their own past selves inscribed in the school photo. In the book, these updated portraits are next to their cropped presentation in the School photo. Next to it, Brodsky includes a small text that updates the life of the *compañeros* of the school photo, creating a visual high school reunion of sorts.



Figure 2.2 Marcelo Brodsky, *Buena memoria*, 1997

The *Buena memoria* class photo has become a powerful symbol for cultural memory in Argentina and beyond. The altered gigantograph, which measures 69x46 inches has been exhibited in multiple places and has had recognition in both national and international contexts, not only as a memorial artifact but also as a work of art. Indeed, *Buena memoria* has entered the contemporary art canon, and has been acquired by both the Modern Museum of Modern Art in New York City and the Tate Modern in London.

In their essay “The Afterlives of Class Photos” Leo Spitzer and Marianne Hirsch reflect on the condition of school photos as forms of certification, visual evidence of a joint

⁵⁵ The inauguration of the installation took place in a commemorative mood, as it marked the twentieth year since the beginning of military rule in 1976.

commonality and of belonging (2014: 257). The repression of the military dictatorship ruptured the bonds between families and social communities- by recuperating and intervening the class image Brodsky signals a move towards a lost unity, severed by repression and exile. But it also transcends into creating a bond between a past and a future generation. Furthermore, as Hirsch and Spitzer point out, the animation of the image of the past interrupts the move towards oblivion, using photographs to mediate and elicit affective responses on the part of his viewers to, in Jill Bennett's words (2005), create an empathic vision that aligns the spectator with the subjective position of those who grieve (Hirsch and Spitzer "Afterlives" 265). This is amplified also by the very nature of the photograph, as school photos are part of the formative experience of subjects across different cultural realities.

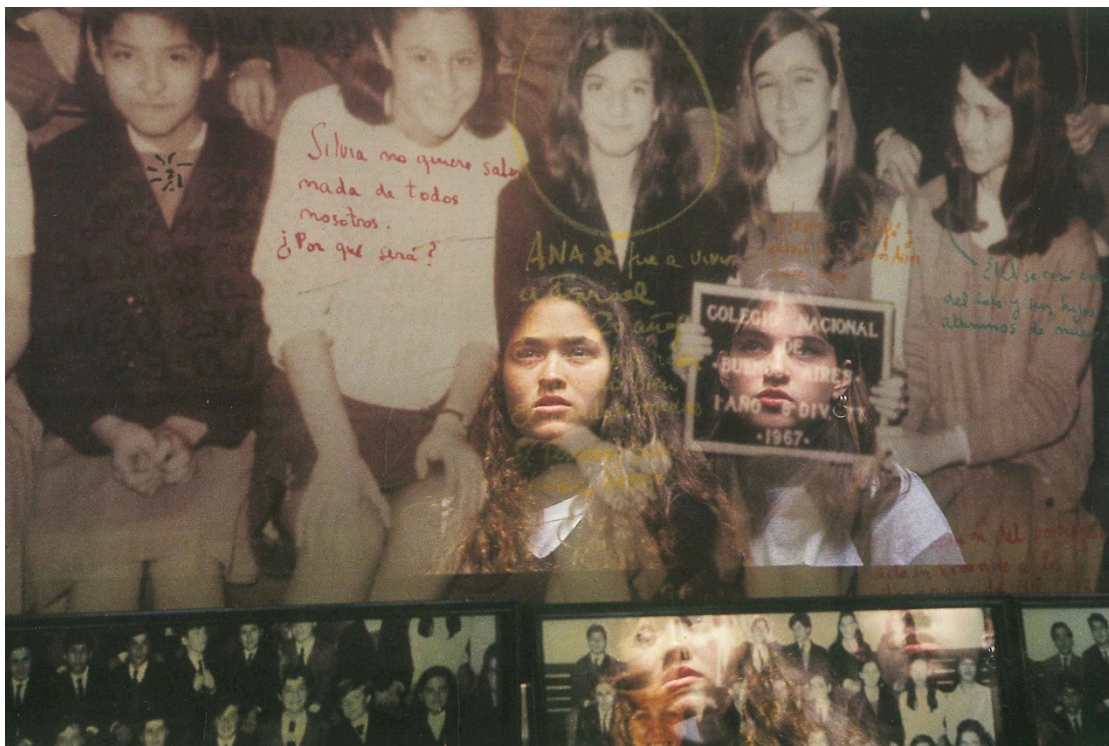


Figure 2.3 Marcelo Brodsky, *Buena memoria*, 1997

The book also includes photographs Brodsky took during the inauguration of the exhibit. These images show the reflection of current students of the high school looking back at the images (Figure 2.3). These images visually evokes empathic vision, and it also illustrates a moment of encounter, between generations and temporalities, a contained space where past and present can meet.

Even though *Buena memoria* is mostly associated with the class photo, the photographic essay of *Buena memoria* also includes written texts by Brodsky, the Argentinean poet Juan Gelman, and the writers Martin Capparrós and Jose Pablo Feinmann. It includes photographic registers of the opening exhibition held in 1996 and other memorial artifacts, such as captures of a domestic super 8mm film made by Brodsky's father and scrap of pieces of paper with the author's own handwriting. By gathering these personal archive and material traces of memory, the photographic essay turns almost into a personal private/public family album. One that gathers Brodsky's own memories and experiences of boyhood- constituting also his sense of self through the images. The need to (re)-construct his own family album stems from his return to Argentina, and the necessity to anchor a sense of self within a returned territory that seems unfamiliar at first. Brodsky writes:

When I came back from Argentina after living in Spain so many years, I had just turned forty, and felt the need to work on my identity. Photography, with its precise ability to freeze a point in time, was the tool I used for this purpose (1997:21).

In the album, Brodsky assembles images and contemplations of the affective bonds that shaped him- the personal memories that constituted his sense of self and his sense of belonging in private and family realms and also outside of them, in the public institution of school, and in affective bonds created outside of the family realm in childhood friendships. Using both images and language, Brodsky creates a visual narrative of himself and his own history with the

retrospective knowledge of how these past images have *changed* in the present, gained a new density because of national history.

Seen outside its historical context and local aesthetic, seen without the text that accompanies them, the images present in *Buena memoria* could be thought of as just that- a collection of good memories. Yet, what do we do with a snapshot of a “buena memoria” when it has been colored by the violence and horror that came after it was taken? How do we reconcile these good memories and keep them from being tainted by what followed or what was unfolding at the time?

As mentioned in the last chapter, to see a familiar photograph with the present knowledge of tragedy produces a “posthumous irony”⁵⁶ and what Benjamin loosely refers to as contingency- it is the knowledge of events that occur after the image was taken that draws or engages the viewer (1931). Barthes also touches upon this effect- in examining how the feeling of grief affected his own experience of seeing the pictures of his mother when she was younger.⁵⁷ It is through this personal investment that innocuous snapshots of good memories are suddenly charged with emotional density and symbolic value.

I want to focus on the series of photographs included in *Buena memoria* entitled “Nando, mi hermano” (“Nando, my brother”). This series is the most personal out of *Buena memoria*, a collection of family images Brodsky uses to rework the loss of his brother who disappeared August 14th, 1979. Though the images are evocative by themselves, it is the use of the caption below the photographs that reveal the hidden, personal value as they engage a nostalgic view of

⁵⁶ This effect is also pointed out by Hirsch in *Family Frames* when analyzing the family photographs present in the Holocaust Bridge. Hirsch notes that in their familiarity and profound disruption they capture the lives that left and the lives that continue to be (1997:251).

⁵⁷ In the article “Touching Photographs: Roland Barthes “Mistaken” Identification” (2012) Margaret Olin argues that what the author wrongly identifies as the punctum (the pearl necklace, for example) that moves him is not necessarily in the photograph itself but in Barthes own affective memory with the referent.

the past with the knowledge of the future of that past, of the eventual disappearance of Nando. The interplay between the knowing captions and the tenderness of the photographs illustrate the depth of loss. One that is not measured by the collective 30,000 disappeared but by the hundreds of details and intricacies that shaped and constituted the memory of Brodsky's brother.

This personal collection of photographs show Fernando not only as a presence constituted by familiar relations but also as an individual that is marked by his future condition as a disappeared citizen. If the systematic disappearances made by the repressive state made citizens vanish, become invisible, photography is able to bring to surface the symbolic trace left of these presences, not only making them visible but also to make visible all of the world that they left behind. Brodsky is able to create this simultaneous portrait of his brother through anchoring the seemingly mundane images with captions that bring to the surface what was invisible at first view within the images themselves.

Benjamin's concept of the optical unconscious and the inscription are useful to illustrate Brodsky's strategy to engage the viewer and grant the snapshots an affective value. The inscription is what guarantees a critical awareness and constructive function of the image, what anchors photographic meaning (Benjamin "A Short History of photography"). As mentioned in the introduction, the "Optical Unconscious" emphasizes the ability of the camera to expose the invisible that is not seen in plain sight, that flashes too fast, and would not be captured otherwise. Camera's ability to stop and capture time and motion can grant us access to what hides behind and inside the transparently visible. Though Benjamin applied this concept to scenes of rapid motion, it is a useful jumping off point to think of how this process can be applied in the retrospective action of seeing old family albums and domestic snapshots within a post-memorial context, where the past is so informed by the present and vice-versa.

The invisible present within the image of the past is only made visible by observing the images in the present, with the knowledge of the past. Brodsky- as a beholder of his family photographs- searches in his pictures for that tiny spark of contingency “the *here and now* with which reality has seared through the image character of the photograph”, and inscribes his findings within the captions that anchor the images. This dynamic between the informed caption and the family photograph illustrates a play between temporalities, where it is the present that influences and amplifies the *what-has-been* of the images beyond their mere indexicality.

Captions never share the same time of the photographs. They are either thought of before an image is taken -and consequently pre-determines what the camera will capture- or they precede the images, finding in this retrospective act of looking a way to complete their meaning. The captions including in “Nando, mi hermano” rescue the invisible hidden in the visible, where Nando is both the author’s brother and a future presence that will be disappeared by the state. Brodsky cements this through the inscription- the captions that complete the photographs and gives them their piercing dimension. Thus, the inscription and the optical unconscious work together, are informed by one another, and present the affective value of the image. This value, given by Brodsky’s own personal investment with the image, is made accessible to the rest of the viewers through the narration present in the captions- engaging the spectator to see Nando through the eyes of the grieving author.

The photograph “Nando en el Parque” (“Nando in the Park”) shows Fernando as a teenager standing in the Rivadavia Park (Figure 2.4). He is wearing a black turtleneck, his posture slightly hunched, his hands tucked away in the back pockets of his jeans. In the background a political graffiti “Peace is Strength” is etched with black aerosol on a marble monument, where the scene of an oath is also carved. Right next to it, a sculpture of Simon

Bolivar riding a horse and waving a sword. The eyes of the sculpture are blindfolded and the Argentinian flag hangs limply around the neck of the horse.



Figure 2.4 Marcelo Brodsky, “Nando, mi hermano” in *Buena memoria*, 1997

In the caption of the photograph, Brodsky gathers all of these details together and wonders:

Why is Bolivar blindfolded with a handkerchief?
and why does an Argentine flag hang from his horse's neck?
Justice, the sword, blindness, history, power, peace and strength
turn around my brother

in a strange game of premonitions.⁵⁸

Though the majority of the images that compose this album refer to idyllic family outings, vacations with warm summer landscapes and bodies of water, and the closeness of the family unit as they embrace and pose for the pictures (Figure 2.5) the images that are most poignant are the ones in which he appears by himself.



Figure 2.5 Marcelo Brodsky, *Buena memoria*, 1997

The inclusion of the photograph “Nando en el Parque” is important insofar as the author does not shy away in including and re-reading photographs that do not perfectly fit perfectly into the parameters that frame domestic photographs. In contrast with the innocence of the series of snapshots shown above (Figure 2.5), “Nando en el Parque” (Figure 2.4) captures a political air of discontent, an uneasy encounter of the young boy with patriotic symbols that have been intervened ominously, anticipating a betrayal.

The photograph “Nando en el Parque” (Figure 2.4) captures a tension in the missed gazes- Fernando does not look at the overpowering statue behind him and the statue- grandiose

⁵⁸ The edition of *Buena memoria* that I use has both English and Spanish captions.

and blind, does not overlook at Fernando either, the statue's head tilts up and looks towards the right field, and Fernando stands in the left. Fernando does not look at the camera either, his own gaze fixed at something beyond the frame. The elements rescued in the inscription as those that anticipate a betrayal echo opposite dynamics of power and domination, inadvertently illustrating the national contempt youth faced during the military dictatorship. During the dictatorship, young adults and teenagers were seen by the military regime as a threat that needed to be control, homogenized and disciplined, turned into a productive and faithful body for the state. The heroic national statue is intervened by a makeshift blindfold, a symbolic gesture of protest that hints at the discontent and injustice of the time. But by retrospectively rescuing this element, the blindfold acquires also other meanings- one that could refer to the self-imposed blindness- the percepticide (Taylor, *Dissapearing Acts*) so prevalent in Argentina- that controlled how one related to the visual field and self-imposed a selective blindness.

A similar sentiment is rescued in "Fernando en la Fiesta" ("Fernando at the Party") (Figure 2.6), a black and white image of a party or celebration. Fernando appears at the right margin of the photograph's frame, out of place, with his eyes closed as the party unfolds around him. Next to him are adults dressed in fancy dresses and tuxedos, facing away, both from Fernando and giving their back to the camera. Again, there are no gazes in the photograph that meet each other, no point of encounter. The end of Brodsky's inscription states:

The back of the guests remind me a little of the way people turned their backs on what was happening around them during the worst years of the military dictatorship. There also seems to be a generation gap: the grown-ups ignore the children, represented by Fernando, and *look the other way*.



Figure 2.6 Marcelo Brodsky, *Buena memoria*, 1997

This photograph also veers away from the shared codes and conventions of what would constitute a photograph included in a family album: for one, no one is posing, in fact the photographed subjects seem to be completely unaware of the presence of the camera. The composition does not seem to have a focal point, and the framing does not seem to include any of the adults within the total framing of the image. The image does not meet any of the codes and conventions that would determine the inclusion of it in an album. Yet, Brodsky includes it into his, an intentional gesture. This image, perhaps even more clearly than “Nando en el Parque” creates an imagetext- the photograph and the caption that anchors the image create a composite image of the act of percepticide- without the inclusion of the caption- the photograph is just another disposable, flawed, badly taken photograph. Without the visual image, the text does not fully convey the complexity of the phenomenon of percepticide, one to which youth was especially prone to.

The photograph and Brodsky’s inscription brings together the seamlessly inconspicuous details that convey that broken bond within society, and create an entirely alternative representation distant from the original intention of the photograph. The work of selection of the images and the captions that makes us see these seemingly mundane



SACANDO PECHO: La foto es en Chile junto a una cascada, cargando la cámara de Super 8 y sacando pecho. Lo que más me inquieta en esta imagen es que no sé si el retratado soy yo o Fernando.
STICKING ONE'S CHEST OUT: The picture was taken in Chile, by a waterfall. The person is lugging the Super 8 camera and sticking out his chest. What disturbs me the most about this image is that I do not know if it is of me or of Fernando.

Figure 2.7 Marcelo Brodsky, *Buena memoria*, 1997

photographs in another light, makes them resonate with posthumous irony. Ultimately, the act of seeing the images for Brodsky brings him back to a reflection of himself. In the photograph titled “Sacando Pecho” (“Sticking One’s Chest Out”) (Figure 2.7) of a young man carrying a super 8mm camera by a Chilean waterfall he shares “What disturbs me of the image is that I do not know if it is of me or of Fernando” a different but also overlapping effect happens with one of the first pictures he includes in the series “Fernando en la Pieza” (“Fernando in our Room” (Figure 2.8)- at the most intimate of spaces- their shared bedroom. Fernando sits at the edge of the bed, in the center of the image “His face is blurry. His movement, today nonexistent, diffuses him before the lens” yet he still considers the image one of the best he has of his brother, not necessarily because of the conventions that inform what “a good photograph is” but because it

recalls a space of intimacy where the memory of his own vocation as a photographer was inherited (with his father's camera) and put to practice by trying to capture the presence of his brother, whose blurriness echo the ontological instability of the disappeared- presences impossible to apprehend or fully grasp.



Figure 2.8 Marcelo Brodsky, *Buena memoria*, 1997.

The closing image of *Buena memoria* is a photograph of the two brothers standing next to each other, in a boat on the Riverplate (Figure 2.9). The image is taken from the upper deck of the boat, the high angle shot is able to include the river as a protagonic presence in the composition, taking 2/3 of the frame. The presence of bodies of water is a leitmotiv throughout

“Nando, mi hermano” and constitute several of the backgrounds of the family photographs. The



unstopping flow of the river evokes reminds us of the relentless movement and passing of time.

Figure 2.9 Marcelo Brodsky, *Buena memoria*, 1997

The brothers stand close next to each other, slightly squinting as they look up to the camera, both of them smiling. Next to them, a tilted wooden sign reads: “PROHIBIDO PERMANECER EN ESTE LUGAR” (“IT IS FORBIDDEN TO REMAIN IN THIS PLACE”). Like the blindfolded statue, this seemingly innocuous sign acquires a posthumous density that signals two things: first, it evokes the impossibility to fully return to the past- how as much as we can revisit our personal memories aided by photographs that can help us reconstruct that moment

in our minds, it is impossible to stay in that past. Secondly, the image also alludes to the ontological instability of the disappeared, who remain suspended in a nowhere that cannot be traced.

The background also reads as a tragic foreshadowing of the destiny of many disappeared in Argentina, whose bodies were thrown to the River plate, never to be found “*It is forbidden to remain here*”. The last image of the book shows a close-up of River Plate, occupying the entire frame of the photograph “*Into the river they threw them/ It became their non-existent tomb*”. *Buena memoria* concludes with that image of the river, a body of the water that remains in constant movement, and thus forever changing, impossible to become a place of solace or of mourning.

As I mentioned before, the album made by Brodsky defies the conventions of what is normally included within the family albums, in doing so, it provides a poignant representation of a familiar memory that has been shaped and informed by loss- experienced in the past, and experienced now in the present. The interplay between the captions and the photographs allows for a dialogue between temporalities, so as to represent simultaneously both their initial innocence and simplicity and also the tragic unfolding that followed after their capture.

Recreating Absence: *Ausencias*

Ausencias inaugurated at the Centro Cultural Recoleta in February of 2008 and has had two different iterations in Brazil and Colombia. The photographic project consisted of fifteen large format diptychs of photographs taken from family albums of members of the province of Entre Rios, Germano’s hometown located at the north of Buenos Aires. Each dyptich consists on a reproduction of the original photograph and, right next to it, a re-animation of the image made

thirty years later, showcasing the passing of time and *making visible* the absence of those who were subsequently disappeared by the military regime.

For the recreation of the second photograph, Germano visited the exact location of the original image and counted with the collaboration of the surviving friends and family members who were also in the original photos. The surviving members of the photographs re-enacted the poses thirty years later. Underneath each pair of images, the author captions the year in which the photographs were taken and the names of the individuals present in each one. The absence thus becomes tangible in both the visual form and in the written form of the caption.

The photographs in *Ausencias* transcend the representation of the desaparecidos beyond the uniformity and collectivization of the black and white photo ID. The project visualizes the presence of the disappeared beyond the close-up frontal expressionless portrait, trading the white background of the images for outdoor landscapes and warm domestic settings. If the use of photo-ID was effective insofar as it created a collective mass visualization of demand and provided the indexical proof of the trace of the disappeared, the use of domestic photography in Germano's project moves beyond it, highlighting the disappeared, beyond their collective status as disappeared. More specifically, it showcases how their loss inhabits within personal and familiar spaces, conceived as relational and visualizing the "wounded family" of the national imaginary. The images in *Ausencias* show the disappeared as family members, sons, daughters, fathers and mothers, brothers, sisters and friends. If the use of the photo-ID shows the condition of the desaparecido before the disappearance itself, *Ausencias* visualizes the literal absence left by the disappeared. The memory evoked in the specificity of the Entre Rios community transmutes itself to the Argentinian nation as a whole.

The project includes a family portrait of Germano with his three brothers, in the original photograph we see his younger brother, Eduardo, who was disappeared by the military in 1977.

(Figure 2.10)



Figure 2.10 Gustavo Germano, *Ausencias*, 2008

The image not only recreates the original composition, but also each brother reenact their own past expressions- Gustavo with a serious look sits next to Guillermo who recreates the mischievous expression present in the original image. Germano, who also exiled to Spain during the dictatorship, returns to his hometown for the completion of this project. Through the visual medium he integrates his own familiar loss into a community, assembling an album where loss is both public and collective.

Photo albums assert themselves as objects that reinforce and validate integration to the social/familial realm and, consequently, to the fabric of a national community. In “The Ontology of the Photographic Image” Andre Bazin describes the presences in family albums as “lives halted at a set moment of their duration, freed from their destiny (...) for photography does not

create eternity as art does, it embalms time, rescuing it simply from its proper corruption” (1960:8). This idea is key- the snapshot captures not only presences but also *time itself*. In their printed materiality it assures a preservation of time in the future- an action that sublimates the general and universal anxiety of our impermanence on earth. No matter the subject’s material destiny- and in this case, the agonic condition of uncertainty of the disappeared, and those who are witness to their halted lives-, the domestic photograph and the album asserts these presences firmly anchored in their familial roles, the object preserves -not only corporeal- but also symbolic existence.

Absences as Relational

As I mentioned, in *Ausencias*, Germano creates a public family album that is collective as well as personal. The project is personal because it includes the absence and presence of his disappeared younger brother, reaffirming a fraternal, familiar, and affective link present in the work. It is also personal because it marks the experience of return of the exiled subject. A return to a home familiar and recognizable but that has been forever changed by the thousands of disappearances endured in the community. The project is collective in nature and the absences are conceived in terms of relationality- both in the very material conception of the project and in the intended effect in the spectator.

In its conception, the project depends on the network of relations of the disappeared: the collaborative act is two-fold: the families and friends of the disappeared are involved in carefully selecting a photograph out of their own personal family albums to integrate the public album assembled by Germano and -more crucially- collaborate in posing for the reiteration of the original photograph- a highly emotional and difficult task⁵⁹.

⁵⁹ There has been some criticism by some of the participants of the project. They described the act of holding the positions for long periods of time as an exhaustive physical and emotional task. The act, together with the emotional

Germano's use of domestic photography is informed by the conventional uses of photography, which capture the absences as particular recognizable roles and the losses -stand in to symbolically represent loss from a particular familiar position. The project touches upon the affective relations and connections between the photographed subjects. The images inscribe the "wounded family" and its inscription to loss, the absences configured the familiar and social relations.

In Figure 2.11, the absence of Raul Maria Caire is integrated as it represents the loss of the disappeared as a marital loss- showing the performative reenactment of the rite of passage of marriage, a union legitimized by the catholic religious institution. In the recreated photograph both bride and priest reenact the adequate context necessary to officialize the union of marriage into existence (this echoes Butler and Austin discussion of the ontological power of performance as one that must be done within the right surrounding context). In the reenacted photograph both the priest and the bride assume their roles and positions within the empty church, but now without the presence of the groom the union is incomplete. (Figure 2.11).

intensity present in recreating the photograph (and the memory of the event it captured) made the action almost unbearable for some participants.

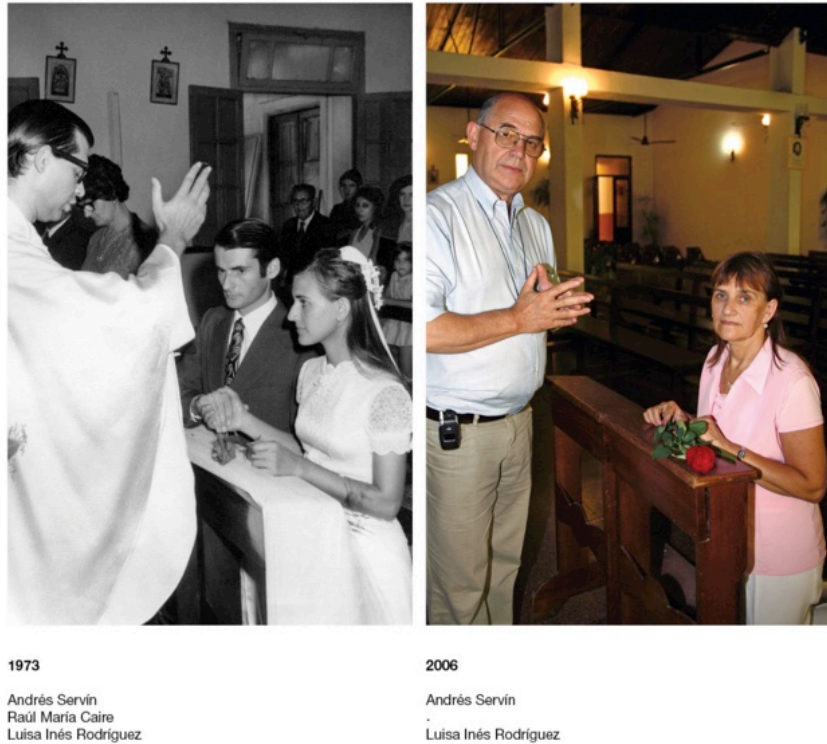


Figure 2.11 Gustavo Germano, *Ausencias*, 2008

The absence of Claudio Marcelo Fink is conceived as the maternal bereavement of losing a child (Figure 2.12). The original photograph shows Fink's mother, Clara Atelman de Fink standing, her head slightly tilted to the right as she smiles, affectionately gazing at her son, who sits on the wooden table next to her. The image adheres to idyllic conventions, showing Clara standing over her son, in a position that signals protective care and nurturing. The original image captures a mundane moment of tenderness within the domestic space- the afternoon light that enters through the window on the right gives the whole moment captured a sense of warmth. The absence present in the recreation of the second images alter the space and the dynamic role between the subjects- no longer watching over her son, Clara looks directly at the camera, her hand placed on the chair her son once occupied. In the assemblage of this public/personal/collective album, Germano selects images that echo the conventionality of family ideals but also the bonds that are inscribe in them, capturing not only social rites but also

the affective foundation that strengthen these social and familial bonds. By doing so, *Ausencias* creates the possibility of broad-based identification as the images are stand-ins to represent loss symbolically experienced from particular relational and recognizable positions and familiar dynamics.



Figure 2.12 Gustavo Germano, *Ausencias*, 2008

Absence as Presence

In her essay “In Plato’s Cave” Sontag describes how in family albums “each family constructs a portrait chronicle of itself- a portable kit of images that bears witness to its connectedness, the photograph is both a pseudo presence and a *token of absence*⁶⁰” (16). I find that through the interplay and iteration of the photographs, through their connected similarities and through their contrasts, Germano has reconstructed the *effect of absence*: the project speaks not only about the passing of time but of how those absences are felt in the space and people surrounding them. The loss that is represented in the second image represents an impossibility in representation, a presence impossible to recreate, and a simultaneity- the reenactment not only

⁶⁰ Emphasis is mine.

cites the past but also inscribe in this new representation the ache of the reenactment in the present, now with the loss inscribed in the photograph.

As I mentioned in Chapter One there have been other artistic efforts to represent the loss and absence of the disappeared. The collective action of *El Siluetazo* embodied and collectivized the presence of the disappeared and made it a tangible and physical presence in the public sphere impossible to ignore or turn away from. Like the photo IDs used by the Madres, the outlines provided a uniformity- a collective ghostly outline and trace of presence. *Ausencias* strategy is diametrically opposite to *El Siluetazo* and to the collective use of photo IDs used by the Madres. Though both names are ambiguous, *Ausencias* trades the ghostly traces visualized in *El Siluetazo* and fleshes the world left around the absence. *Ausencias* fills in the outlines left by the trace, making the presence of disappeared bodies particular within a specific landscape and setting.

Ausencias showcase the way loss is felt in space and time. By capturing the now unoccupied space in the recreated photograph; it visualizes physical absence. By showing the contrast in the interplay of both portraits seen in tandem and how the surviving protagonists of the images have aged, it visualizes the passing of time- the project thus expands the notion of photographs as “tokens of absence” by amplifying the experience of disappearances as loss felt both in time and space by others.

By including the pair of photographs- the original and its recreation-next to each other, it relates the Barthesian *that-has-been* to the impossibility of that time ever being captured again- this is characteristic of the act of remembrance- it visualizes the nostalgia when looking at personal photographs of those who are no longer with us- staging the missed encounter of the

here-and-now with the *that-has-been*, an impossible return. *Ausencias* reenacts the nostalgic action of looking back at old images with an awareness of the inescapable effects of time and includes this feeling in the recreation of the original photographs.



Figure 2.13 Gustavo Germano, *Ausencias*, 2008

Though most images present in *Ausencias* recreate a familial bond, a couple of the photographs included also show the intimate and social bonds of friendship. In the original photograph, taken in 1971, five friends: Delia Calleja, Zuelma Calleja, Elsa Raquel Diaz, Ricardo Godoy and Victorio Jose Ramon Erbetta, are gathered outdoors, leisurely sitting under a tree (Figure 2.13). Above them, a makeshift white tent shelters all five subjects from the sun. In

the original image, the friends are closely gathered and sit in relaxed positions, wrapped in deep conversation. The ease conveyed in the original photograph, the casualness of the intertwined limbs- arms crossing other arms, legs touching other legs- signal not only their physical closeness but also attest the effortlessness of the camaraderie. Though the photograph could be a poster image- an idyllic representation of outdoor leisure (young, good-looking friends enjoying the outdoors and each other's company) it is not a posed photograph -only Ricardo looks at the camera, a gesture he replicates in the 2006 iteration- but a *moment captured in time* evoking the brilliance and innocence of youth and the intimate bonds of friendship.

The iteration of the image made in 2006 revisits the same landscape, but the dynamic between the photographed subjects is forever altered by the absences of Elsa and Victorio. Delia and Zulema, the two sisters who in the original image smile and look attentively at Elsa as she talks, now look blankly to the distance, their bodies no longer engaged in conversation or intertwined with one another. Absent entirely is the complicit look between Elsa and Victorio. Ricardo still looks at the camera, wearing a white shirt and jeans. Without the orbiting presence of Elsa and Victorio who gave centrality and cohesion to the composition of the original photograph, the remaining survivors dis-engage, the composition of the new photograph appears unbalanced. All three remaining subjects show obvious and natural evidence of aging and maturing, subject to time's progression in the thirty years that have passed.

Yet, despite all of the physical changes one thing remains constant: the tree in the background. In the second photograph, made thirty-six years later, the tree stands behind them, just as tall and fuller than before, the leaves now providing the shadow the make-shift tent did in the original image. The material landscapes of Entre Rios remains unchanged and familiar, even with the thirty year difference between the original capture of the images- the sprawled field of

palm trees, the hillsides filled with feathered grass, the shorelines of the river all remain the same (Figure 2.14).

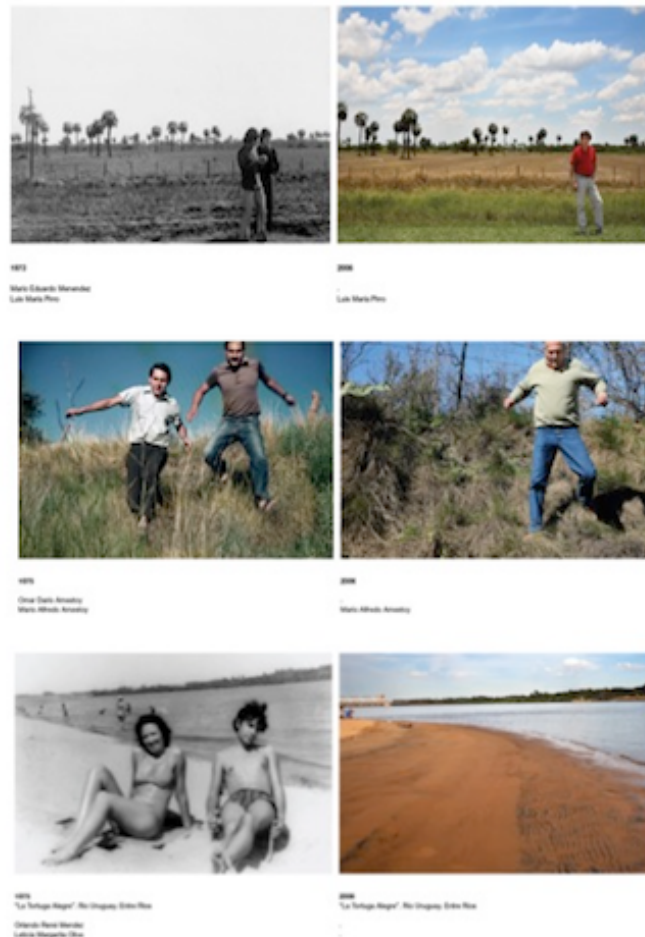


Figure 2.14 Gustavo Germano, *Ausencias*, 2008

The unchanged presence of landscape, its stability and permanence on earth, signify place as silent witnesses of the passing of time. In the images, we see the contrast between place- as somewhere solid you can always return to- as it stands in opposite relation to time -which remains elusive and impossible to grasp completely. Even with its transformations, the places remain as permanent platforms, the stage for a possible return, witness to idyllic and mundane moments, tiny private histories, rites of passage, and collective public actions. This solidity

stands in stark contrast with the very condition of human existence- how we are all subject to time's relentless progression - the way lives can be altered and taken away so completely, how it can be- in the case of the disappeared- vanished into thin air. The aging of the collaborators that recreate the original photographs in contrast with the unchanging background, invites the reader to meditate on their existence, the passing of time and the things and material landscapes that endure. The images invite the viewer to think of their own family albums and how the make-up of the subjects that appear in it has changed in time should they revisit the familiar landscapes and attempt to recreate their own photographs.

In the inclusion of the original photographs *Ausencias* evidences the normalcy that was interrupted, in the recreation of these images, *Ausencias* shows the lives that continued despite being forever marked by loss⁶¹. Finally, in the connection between these images side by side we are able to grasp something fundamental about the human experience of resilience. Photographs not only speak of death but also of the renewal of life as it continues to be (Batchen, *Forget Me Not*). This resilience of the lives that lived and continue to live despite carrying a constant loss.

This potential of continuity, of lives that continue even in being shaped by absence is evoked in the photographs that frame the *Ausencias* series (Figure 2.15, 2.16).

⁶¹ A literary description of the progression of grief present in the short story "Ironhead" (2005) by American writer Aimee Bender captures this beautifully: "For many weeks, all they ate were casseroles brought by the neighbors. When they ran out of those, the mother went into the kitchen, gathered ingredients, and made spaghetti. She was slow and heaved, but she did it, and the family ate together that night: *four*. While she cut the mushrooms, she cried more than she had at the grave, the most so far, because she found the saddest thing of all to be the simple truth of her capacity to move on." ("Ironhead" in *Willful Creatures*, Aimee Bender)



1975
"La Tortuga Alegre". Rio Uruguay. Entre Rios

Orlando René Mendez
Leticia Margarita Oliva



2006
"La Tortuga Alegre". Rio Uruguay. Entre Rios

Figure 2.15 Gustavo Germano, *Ausencias*, 2008

The first photograph is of a young couple- Orlando Rene Mendez and Leticia Margarita Oliva laying by the river “La Tortuga Alegre”, since they are the only ones in the original photograph, the iteration simply shows the empty landscape, the unchanged shore, a quiet landscape emptied of vital presences. The last photograph of the album revisits the same couple, who sit in the interior of a bedroom by the edge of the bed, both of them joined in a collective effort to hold their newborn baby girl dressed in white: Laura Cecilia Mendez Oliva: the youngest photographed subject in the collection. Orlando and Leticia’s eyes meet halfway through the contemplation of their daughter, while Laura looks directly at the camera, smiling widely. In the photograph recreated by Germano, it is only Laura who remains, again dressed in white, staring directly at the camera again, solemn. In the absence of her parents, she now supports her own body: her elbows are propped to the edge of the bed, her fingers intertwined as she holds her own hands.



Figure 2.16 Gustavo Germano, *Ausencias*, 2008

Though certain material things have changed -the color of the walls, the fabric of the curtains-, it is undeniable that in her genetic inheritance Laura carries and continues the presence of her parents. The image includes some of the most important symbols of domestic photography: maternal and paternal bonds and infant innocence (*Family Snaps*, 1993). This visual epilogue highlights continuity because the traces of the disappeared are not only included in the original photograph but in the genetic makeup and presence of Laura. In contrast with the first image of the series, which showcases a desolate shoreline, the last photograph opens up the album of *Entre Rios* towards a future unfolding. It rescues the persistence of the past as it continues in the present through the lives that survive and that remember.

What is left out of the family album

As mentioned before, popular snapshot photography reinforces a universal continuity of shared experience. Germano's assemblage of this public/personal/collective visual narrative follows the same conventions and imperatives inherent in the assemblage of family albums and domestic photographs: it reinforces hetero-normative conventions, highlights social rites of passage, as well as the progression and expansions of family. As a visual narrative, it is subject

to the family gaze- the image of an ideal family and acceptable family relations that mediate every culture (Hirsch, *Family Frames* 11). The absences included are protagonists whose identities are anchored in their familial role and in relations the viewer recognizes and can relate to as familiar.

Family albums reveal from what is included in them but also by what is left out, the pictures that do not integrate the albums, that do not fit the family ideal. The family album of *Ausencias* does not include the protagonists as political subjects in mobilizations or acts of protests or resistance⁶²- this is not necessarily an intentional artistic choice made by Germano - since the project was collaborative in nature- the images Germano assembles have been previously chosen by the families as how to best convey their disappeared and their absences. Furthermore, the absence of problematic images is also an inherent condition of both domestic photography and the assemblage of family photo albums themselves. In these albums, subjects are not included as desiring subjects but as they fulfill a role within the composition of the familial ideal and structure- informed by the unspoken guidelines present in the taking of the photographs of what should be represented and remembered for posterity, influenced by the familial gaze and the public and social conventions imbedded in it.

Though use of domestic photograph bridges the national loss to be integrated as personal and familiar, the photographs will always be insufficient to capture the specificity in the identity of those losses. Every human contains multitudes and, as such, what is captured in family photographs is only a sliver of their presence. Captured in family albums are subjects in negotiation with the family and public ideals that inform their poses. Moreover, the negotiation

⁶² The absence in the portrayal of political militancy has been recurrent in cultural memory objects in Argentina. In his reading of the classic Olivieri film *La Noche de los Lapices*, critic Hugo Vezzetti argues about the sanitization of memory in cultural memory representations- the highlight on the disrupted innocence and youth and the need to show the military regimes horrors experienced, overshadow the political agency and militancy of these subjects. (In *Pasado y Presente. Guerra, Dictadura y Sociedad en la Argentina*, 2002)

between subjective experience and specificity (with all its contradictions) and a smooth universalizing (identifiable, easily relatable) narrative constitute one of the main tensions and subsequent creative anchors in present in post-memorial practices in Argentina to be reduced just as part of a Wounded family, or an exploration of loss beyond thinking of it as relational. In Chapter Five of *Part Two*, I will focus on narratives that question, resist, or make complex both familial and memorial imperatives.

Afterlives of Good Memories

What do Germano and Brodsky do we do with good memories in the retrospective act of looking from the present and how do they reconcile the tension of the affective opposites- caught between the idyllic moments captured in the original photographs and the devastating history that followed? The first thing that we see is that these memories do not cancel each other out, instead they are informed by one another. In their use of domestic archives, Germano and Brodsky make these conflictive temporal/emotional opposites dialogue. While Germano does it be reenacting the images and integrating the absence left by the disappeared into the photographic reiterations made in the present, Brodsky rereads his family images through the lens of the present, his inscriptions anchor the invisible present in images, making the posthumous irony visible. Both re-workings transcend the visual imagination of the disappeared as one indistinguishable collective entity- but also as one that is framed by the familial inscription of loss.

The use of photography in these projects produces a familiarity in the spectator, the images reflect back to the viewers like mirrors, in them it is possible to see one's own albums and memories, informed also by the social conventions of domestic photography. In the construction of these two domestic albums the authors dig through their own experience with

loss, exile, and return. The reinvestment in the family snapshots allow both Brodsky and Germano to reencounter their own familiar memory and create a public memory object that is able to translate the sense of personal loss experienced by them into a wider audience, a national imaginary that recognizes the disappeared beyond their condition as disappeared and as particular losses within the wounded family.

CHAPTER THREE, PART ONE

Photography as Screen, Photography as Contract

Archivo Histórico El Mercurio. Imágenes 1973, (2013) Memoriales Chilenos (2008) and La ciudad de los fotógrafos (2006)

What does photography show and what is the intent of it? What are the opacities and the blind-spots documentary photography can reveal? Furthermore, what are the ethical dimensions of documentary photography and their afterlives- the way they are used and framed? In these two final chapters of *Part One* I will reflect on the role documentary photography has played in Chile in order to illustrate how photography can be used to produce a market-ready smooth memory for consumption: particularly in the publication of two books: *Memoriales Chilenos* and *Archivo de 1973* published by the newspaper *El Mercurio* in the frame of the anniversary of the coup. As contrast, I will discuss Sebastian Moreno's documentary *La Ciudad de los Fotógrafos* (2006), which tells the story of the AFI (Asociación Gremial de Fotógrafos Independientes) and the role of documentary photography during the dictatorship in Chile.

In contrast with the images we have discussed in the previous chapters- the indexical photo IDs and the familiar domestic snapshots that testified a time before the time of violence- documentary photography attests to the materiality and reality of that violence. Rescued in the present, where they too have become a past, it is worth it to ask about their reach (photograph as contract) and the risk of these images in diffusing the confrontation they were originally intended to produce (photography as screen)- the way photographs are framed in contemporary memory practices can either highlight or diffuse the tensions present in civil society and its relation to the

past. What do images reveal beyond what is printed on photographic paper? These two final chapters of *Part One* discuss the blind-spots of cultural memory discourses, the tensions that are revealed in the institutional framing of documentary images, and the possibility of encounter and collaboration present in new photographic projects.

Do images speak for themselves?

One of the central debates in photo-criticism has to do with the relation between photography and the reality it captured. Formalists argued that the power of photography lies in its indexical quality of the image and its faithful representation of reality. For postmodern critics, however, photography is nothing *but* pure mediation. Authors like Victor Burgin, John Tagg, Allan Sekula and Susan Sontag, challenge the mythic aura of neutrality photography is supposed to have, arguing that far from providing an unmediated and direct access to reality, photography is a representation in which meaning is culturally created.

Postmodernist critics reject the notion that photographs are somehow co-natural with its referent since every image is framed and set to a particular construction⁶³. Sontag explains how these subsequent constructions are part of the context of the image. She emphasizes that even socially concerned photography, which assume its work can convey some kind of meaning or truth, can have this meaning drained away, overshadowed by the different uses of the discourse into which it is absorbed (“The Heroism of Vision” 06).

Furthering this argument, Allan Sekula not only dismantles the notion of autonomy of photography (as one which has an intrinsic, independent meaning that can be found within the image) but he also sees photography as engaged in the pervasive logic of the commodity form, absorbed by mass culture and “enlisted in the spectacle that gives imaginary flesh to the abstract

⁶³ In his essay “The Invention of Photographic Meaning” (1984) Sekula argues that each photograph has a representational task at hand characterized by a tendentious rhetoric embedded in it (05).

regime of commodity exchange” (Sekula, *Photography Against the Grain* 80). For Sekula, photograph is an incomplete utterance that always depends on external conditions in order to signify.

If asked, Sekula, Tagg, Burgin, and Sontag would emphatically answer that images *do not* speak for themselves; their meaning is culturally created and they are complicit with a capitalist regime⁶⁴, lacking autonomy or political potency- an illustration of a moment effectively depoliticized. Sekula mentions: “Photography has contributed much to spectacle, to retinal excitation, to voyeurism, to terror, envy and nostalgia and only little to the critical understanding of the social world” (*Photography Against the Grain* 62). Signaling an image fatigue, these authors are especially critical of documentary photography and its claim to an objective truth. The mass circulation of documentary photographs of violence of the time -distanced from their geographical context and social reality)- solidified their claim that the images were prone to become ideological tools emptied of meaning or political effect, giving into passivity in the viewer and reducing the photographed subject as a captured passive agent for voyeuristic contemplation. It is important to mention the historical context into which the criticism was written- After the WWII period and with the bombardment of images of political atrocity (coming from abroad, the Vietnam War and Third world photography depicting violence and poverty), documentary photography was denounced as patronizing, pornographic, and exploitative. The asymmetrical relation between where the photographs were taken and how they circulated in American mediums cemented the view of photography as predatory, complicit with imperialism and its political and economic interests. Thus, the criticism is a product of its time.

⁶⁴ Sontag claims that “whatever the moral claims made on behalf of photography, its main effect is to convert the world into a department store or museum-without-walls in which every subject is depreciated into an article of consumption, promoted into an item for aesthetic appreciation” (“The Heroism of Vision” 110).

The supposed passivity of the viewer is a good point of the departure to think about the condition of *photography as screen*. In *Multidirectional Memory* (2009), Michael Rothberg reworks the Freudian concept of “screen memories” (1899) as memories that stand in or substitute for a more disturbing or painful memory that it displaces from consciousness. For Rothberg “this concept illustrates how a kind of forgetting accompanies the act of remembrance” (*Multidirectional Memory* 12). The image of the screen is conceived with both functionalities in mind: as a barrier that conceals that which has been suppressed, and as a site of projection that reveals in a flash unconscious fears and desires (*Multidirectional Memory* 13).

Photography as Screen/ Photography as Contract

I take this concept to think about how the use of photography in cultural memory realms can also become screens that hide the complicated tensions present in the image and the reality it captures. *Photography as screen* takes into account the mediated character of photographs discussed by postmodern criticism. The mediations of the images in cultural memory realms contribute to produce a screen that veils the unresolved historical tensions, bypassing confrontation and producing a sense of complacency or passivity in the viewer. Both Chile and Peru have instances of photography being used as a screen by the discourse that frames the images- whether to cater to a particular memory market and smooth out persistent historical tensions (Chile) or to produce a sense of national unity (Peru) that symptomatically sets the population apart by those who are to remember and those captured in the images.

In covering up the historical tensions, photography as screen silences the protagonists that take part in the photographic event. In contrast, the concept of *photography as contract* pays attention to the collaborative meaning that is inscribed in the photographic event by its actors. One of the oversights of the postmodern conception of photography is that, by anchoring the

meaning of photography in its cultural framing, it completely erases the agency present in the act of photography itself and all the subjects that contribute in the creation -and meaning- of the image. Contemporary approaches in photo-criticism, particularly the work of Ariella Azoulay, thinks of the practice of photography and its social ties with citizenry, by doing this, it challenges the limited frame -of both image and cultural representation- that supposedly produces photographic meaning.

Azoulay sees documentary photography as a civil contract in which meaning is negotiated and a product of the encounter of several protagonists (2008). In *The Civil Contract of Photography* (2008) and *Civil Imagination. A Political Ontology of Photography* (2012) Azoulay describes photography as a civil medium and a priceless source to produce a recognition that is not given by a sovereign state (2008). In her writings, Azoulay transcends the ontological framework of photography that grants sovereignty to the photographer as agent of the field of visual from which the photographed is produced. Arguing that photography is an event that is not conditioned by the eventual production of a photograph, she sees it instead as a platform upon which to trace the encounters between those present in *the event of photography*, and regards this event as a potential site of collaboration. Furthermore, Azoulay argues that what is seen in the image, the referent, is never a given: the meaning of photography is not owned by a single agent (neither by the photographer, the photographed subject, its cultural frame, or subsequent circulation) but is *instead a product of negotiations between citizens that want to be recognized as such* (*Civil Imagination* 25) [My emphasis]. Azoulay, dismantles the dichotomy that allocates photographic meaning inside/outside the frame to think about photography as a dynamic *social* and *civil* practice. In doing so, she amplifies the frame of photography and gives agency to the photographed subject beyond being simply “captured” by the camera.

In *The Civil Contract of Photography* (2008) Azoulay argues that photography then can be considered a political practice that can assert citizenry and open up potential history as well as reconfigure dominant memory narratives. The civil contract of photography traces a relationship between citizenship and photography as a framework of partnership and solidarity among those who are governed that is neither constituted nor circumscribed by a sovereign power. This conception of photography allows us to see the potential ways in which memory can open up, decentering the hierarchical dominant relations present in the visual economy of photography and producing new narratives that intervene the political space as well as the cultural realm.

Hollowed History: El Mercurio's *Photographic Archive of 1973* (2003) and the sterilized landscapes of *Memoriales en Chile* (2008)

The military coup of 1973 marked an abrupt ending to government of Salvador Allende and the socialist vision of the Unidad Popular party. The dictatorship solidified a deep polarization within the nation between the Conservative Christian Right and the Left that is still ongoing. To this day, the discourse of the Right still affirms that the military coup is “what saved Chile and made it into the economic and modern power it is today”. Pinochet economic measures installed a neo-liberal economy that had deep consequences in the social, cultural, and political realm.

As I mentioned in the introduction, many cultural critics argued that the transition to democracy marked a movement not from dictatorship to democracy but instead from State to Neo-liberal Market. Nelly Richard points out that this transition to a Market society became a vacuum that depoliticizes the nation, eliminating community bonds and replacing them with individual consumerist logic (*Critica de la Memoria*). The logic of neoliberal consumption

leaves no space to encounter the fragments of memory of historical violence. Indeed, the past can become another commodity to be consumed in the present. Yet, in order for the past to enter the logic of the market, it has to do so in a way that produces no confrontation to the viewer/consumer.

A clear example of how the use of photography can lend itself to produce a screen that veils the ruptures of the past and produce easily consumable narratives can be found in two coffee table books published within the commemorative frame of the thirty-year anniversary of the military Coup in Chile. El Mercurio's *Photographic Archive of 1973* (2003) and *Memoriales en Chile* (2008). As mentioned in the introduction, the return to memory has become a contemporary obsession and globalized imperative to turn to memory for comfort. This imperative produces a demand and in an organic and natural way creates a market for memory, thus, the demand of memory naturally inserts itself within market logic.

In *Tourists of History* (2007) Marita Sturken warns that the risk in the commodification of memory is that by consuming an object of memory one maintains an a-critical distance of the horror of the historical events- thus acting as tourist rather than citizens or locals of history (05). Memory markets and their product evidence a de-politization of the past. Ksenja Bilbija and Leigh A. Payne provide a clear example of this problematic by focusing on a memory souvenir object that is for sale at the Museo de la Solidaridad in Chile: a keychain with a stenciled image of the gaze and glasses of Salvador Allende. For the authors, the selling and to consuming of this product parallels the effect of selling Che Guevara t-shirts in clothing stores: it depoliticizes the icon. The image of *El Che* is sold in the capitalist market precisely because it doesn't constitute a -socialist, revolutionary- threat to the market. In the same way, the image of Salvador Allende's glasses may only appear on a keychain when he is no longer perceived as a threat to capitalism

or democracy. Thus, the creation and consumption of the Allende replica may ignore the struggle over the authentic version of the past (Bilbija, Payne, 2011).

In a similar way, the act of consuming photographs and images of the past can produce the same historical erasure and sense of complacency in the viewer. Sontag explains that the lure of photographs is that they simultaneously offer us a connoisseur relation *to* the world and a promiscuous acceptance *of* the world- crafting a deceptive mastery of experience and empathy. As we shall see, the two coffee table photograph books are clear examples of the transformation of a turbulent past into a smooth, easily digestible, and consumable commodity aesthetic object that can produce comfort and screen the necessarily confrontation with the historical reality of the past. The two coffee table books ironically illustrate how, in an effort to produce marketable products within the high demand in a cultural memory market (the 30th anniversary of the coup), both publications have emptied out the contents of memory, creating a smooth surface that has little to do with the turbulent past they claim to memorialize.



Figure 3.1 *Archivo Histórico El Mercurio. Imágenes 1973, 2003*

The *Archivo Histórico El Mercurio. Imágenes 1973* (Figure 3.1) uses the archive of documentary photography of the year when the military dictatorship began in order to produce an object of memory that- stripped of historical context and meaning- gives the appearance of neutrality and erases the complicity of the newspaper *El Mercurio*. The book, organizes the archive of documentary images in clean-cut categories (“Vida Cotidiana”, “Juventud” “Cultura y Espectáculos”, “Manifestaciones”, “Vida Política”, “Gobierno”, “El día 11” and “Nuevo Régimen”) organizing the chaos of the time under neutral categories that bypass the political confrontations that seeped into every realm of social and private life during the dictatorship.

According to Nelly Richard this thematic separation immobilizes memory, silencing the turbulence of the images and cleansing the historic confrontations they originally reproduced (Richard, *Crítica de la Memoria*). Moreover, the photographs are framed and centered against a sober white background, with no captions or any present commentary. The result of silencing the images and dividing them into arbitrary categories strips the photographs of their complicated density and historical causality; the random organization of the images barely scrape the surface of the unfolding events that preceded 1973, and the repercussions that came afterwards.

The silencing of the images offers a sense of neutrality, sober distance, and apparent objective presentation of history. However, as Richard notes, this editorial cleansing conceals the original tendentiousness that originally framed the images in *El Mercurio*, and more perversely, the complicit involvement and ideological intervention of the newspaper and its propagandistic intervention and contribution to the sense of chaos that incited the military intervention on 1973.

During the 1970s and in the subsequent military dictatorship (1973-1988) the newspaper *El Mercurio* had a conservative agenda that adopted a clear political position against the left and particularly against President Salvador Allende and the political party of Unidad Popular. *El Mercurio* photojournalism⁶⁵ used images to fit a narrative of chaos that perpetuated a vitriolic discourse against socialism and the possibility of a socialist government. The use of photography fits Sekula's description- the images became signs of a message characterized by a tendentious rhetoric invested in discrediting the left.

In his investigation "El Mercurio" contra la Unidad Popular. Un ejemplo de propaganda de agitación entre los años 1972 y 1973" (1982) Claudio Duran mentions that during the decade of 1970s *El Mercurio* not only assumes a "political" function to "defend" the soul of Chile and the free market society but it also, correlatively, assumes a propagandistic function. During the period of Allende's government (1970-1973) the propaganda operates within crisis or provokes it- using a fear-mongering discourse to heighten chaos and disorder, using hate as its most effective catalyst (1982:65). In the original use within the newspaper, the images served as illustrations (or evidence) of an out-of-control and apocalyptic state that urged for a political change. Above the photographs, inflammatory headlines like "Hordas marxistas en acción", "Colas de dos días para comprar la carne" "La infamia comunista" "Al borde de la locura colectiva", "Fuerzas armadas toman el control" (Figure 3.2) moved forward an agenda of social and economic chaos that could only be stopped by military intervention, thus justifying the coup and military dictatorship that followed.

⁶⁵ Documentary Photography and Photojournalism are close forms of photography whose approaches often overlap. While documentary photography usually expands a longer time frame in order to capture the complexities of a historical event, photojournalism is more immediate and concerns breaking news stories. Some theorist argue that photojournalism close relationship to news media makes it more complicit with sensationalism and the market logic of consumption. (Wells, L. (Ed) Price, D "Documentary and Photojournalism: issues and definition" in *Photography: A Critical Introduction* (pg.69-75). New York: Routledge, 2007



Figure 3.2 *El Mercurio* Front Page September 12th, 1973

The re-publication of the images screens out the original framing of the photographs, one that moved forward a rhetoric that insisted to produce disarray and perpetuates social division and antagonism within civil society. The current editorial camouflage, done through the cleansing of the original captions of the images and its neutral categorical reordering, absolves the complicit role *El Mercurio* played in favor of the military intervention.

In order to sell memory, this photographic archive is turned into a marketable “memory object” of consumption, bypassing the necessary confrontation mentioned above. The updated cleansed images, depured of their historical context and arbitrarily arranged, run the risk of producing oblivion and absolving the viewer’s responsibility to engage with the images and critically reflect about the past and the conditions in which this crucial archive was created. In other words, the cultural mediation that frames these images veils the antagonisms the images perpetuated in their original context and the profound divisions within civil society.

The marketing of memory is also present in a glossy coffee table book titled *Memoriales en Chile. Homenaje a las víctimas de violaciones a los derechos humanos*. (2008) The book (Figure 3.3), gathers ninety-two sites of memory across Chile (including memorials, sculptures, and plaques in honor of the victims of the dictatorship) photographed by Alejandro Hoppe. The book is beautifully crafted- it has a hard cover with glossy coated art paper pages in full color, it can hold its own as an art-memory object. Following a tourism guide organization, the book is structured as a photographic route that begins in the north of Pisagua and ends in Punta Arenas. According to the introduction “the sequence of photographs follows an aesthetic criteria with the intention to give a rhythm to the visual itinerary⁶⁶” (*Memoriales* 13).



Figure 3.3 *Memoriales en Chile. Homenaje a las Víctimas de Violaciones a los Derechos Humanos*. Fotografías de Alejandro Hoppe, 2008

⁶⁶ The translation is mine, the original quote is: “Memoriales en Chile está estructurado como un recorrido fotográfico que comienza en el norte, en Pisagua, y termina en Punta Arenas. La secuencia de las fotos en esta sección obedece a criterios estéticos con la intención de darle un ritmo a itinerario visual” (Introduction, 2008:13)

Richard argues that the aesthetic emphasis of the *Memoriales* book follows an institutional imperative that subordinates the images to aesthetic harmony (*Crítica de la Memoria*.) Subtracted from their social exteriority and without the information of their social functions, the book disengages with the period of violence and its victims, veiling the meaning of the memorials, reduced now to hotspots on a guided-tour itinerary. Thus, the work of memory is displaced by the aesthetic and decorative dictums that *promote* the sites as sites of travel, obscuring their initial function as sites of remembrance. Richard notes that the lack of critical surveillance around the scenery of memory can reverse the signs of the homage. The aesthetic over-figuration of memory as editorial objects of contemplation is achieved at the expense of the recognition of the victims that the memorials photographed intended to identify and commemorate (2010).

Like the *Archivo of 1973*, the photographs of *Memoriales*, emptied of informational and historical context, become part of a brochure that skips critical reflection in order to turn memory into an attractive tourist route. The use of the glossy photographs displaces the viewer as *citizen* for the viewer as consumer, or more precisely, the viewer as *tourist*. In front of the landscapes emptied of meaning or political content, the viewer can adopt the typical detached and distanced position of the tourist described by Sturken, one that visits and follows the proposed route but does not participate critically or engages with the history and social meaning inscribed into each site photographed. We can think of the proposed route as a more palatable version of dark tourism.

The elegant assemblage and diagramming of both archives neutralizes their political power- creating, in Sontag's words, an acquisitive relation to the past that feeds aesthetic awareness while promoting emotional detachment (1977: "The heroism of vision"). In sum, in

order to fit within the easily consumable frame of the art book, both commemorative publications end up obscuring what the images capture, putting up a screen that diffuses the traumatic past the photographs (supposedly) attest to.

Photography as Contract: *La Ciudad de los Fotografos*

In both *Archivo del 73* and *Memoriales* the photographs are used in a passive way in line with the supposed conciliatory present that smooth out the tensions, violence, and political confrontations of the past. The 2006 documentary *La ciudad de los fotógrafos* by Sebastian Moreno rescues the political reach of photography and its active role as a political tool against the repression of the Chilean dictatorship. In the documentary, photography is showcased for its active role that vibrates within the social realm, engaging the citizen politically.

As mentioned in Chapter One, *La ciudad de los fotógrafos* narrates the story of the AFI (Asociación Gremial de Fotógrafos Independientes), a community of labor formed in 1979 and organized around the political task of documenting and circulating the images of violent repression of the military dictatorship during a time of deep censorship. The documentary explores the potentiality of photography as a practice of resistance that reclaims the right to the city- not only as a place to inhabit but also as one in which to expose the repression that was practiced daily and in the light of day by the Chilean military regime.

The documentary, filmed by the son of AFI founding member Jorge Moreno, explores nostalgically the social reach of the photographic practice. Instead of sterilized landscapes and images emptied of their original historical context, the documentary animates the photographs of the past and revisits their place in the present. The documentary also captures a past in which the city was seen as a place of political struggle where civil relations could be formed and where photography turned into a social and political practice of resistance.

La ciudad de los fotografos is frame from a post-memorial perspective the son of the photographer who experiences in childhood the curiosity of the practice of photography and the way memories of the dictatorship are mediated through photographs. From this post-memorial lens, Sebastian asks: “Where is the city that my father photographed? What things did he see in it that no longer exist?”⁶⁷ This question is immediately followed by images of the violence in Chile juxtaposed with his own memories and childhood photographs (Figure 3.4).



Figure 3.4 Sebastián Moreno. *La ciudad de los fotografos* (film stills), 2006

⁶⁷ My translation. The original “Donde está la ciudad que mi padre fotografió? Qué cosas vió en ella que ya no existen?”

The juxtaposition of the idyllic moments of childhood with the violence captured on the street illustrate the conflation in the author's own experience with the historical past- one in which childhood innocence and family bonding historically overlap with what was being felt outside on the street- scenes of authoritarian violence and repression. Against this violent background, the photographers of the AFI produced what Azoulay describes as a *social encounter*- a collaboration between photographed subjects, photographer, and the actors that participate and negotiate the meaning of the images.

The documentary is organized around interviews with the AFI members and punctuated through a re-visitation of the photographers to the sites where they took their iconic photographs (Figure 3.5). Through this organizational structure, the documentary rescues both photography and the city as powerful forces- not only in exposing violence but also in granting *recognition* for the citizens forgotten by the sovereign power- it showcases the social dimension of photography in all of its realms- within the community of labor, in the interaction (and collaborations) with the photographed subjects, and in rescuing the public sphere as a political stage for civic negotiations.

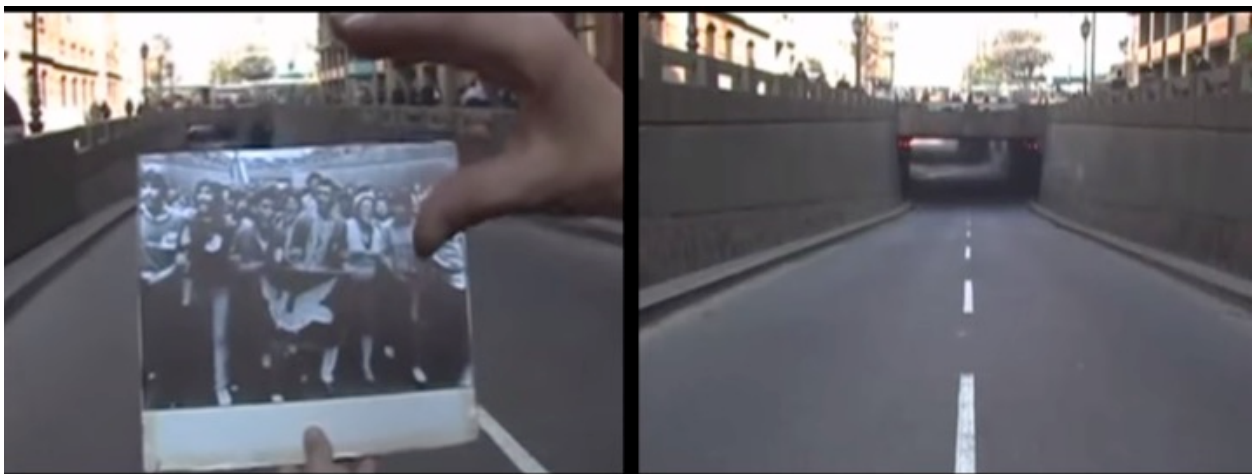


Figure 3.5 Sebastián Moreno, *La ciudad de los fotógrafos*, 2006

One of the photographers, Jorge Ianiszeski, relates how the AFI formed in an effort to legitimize the practice of photography and have a credential that would allow this group of independent photographers to go out to the street to work. The formation of the AFI not only legitimized their place and professional role but also became what Claudio Perez, another AFI founding member, describes as a “place of human encounter”, giving a sense of community in a time when communal bonds had been broken by fear.

The AFI produced a place and sense of legitimacy to their labor, to the function of being a photographer. This labor was described by a founding member as being “not as an authorial agent of the image but as an “*invisible* actor capable of capturing the essence of a moment⁶⁸”. This idea of the photographer as an invisible actor and not an authority of creation closely relates to Azoulay’s critical stance toward the postmodernist criticism of photography. The main flaw with the postmodernist critique of photography’s predatory qualities is that it assumes the ownership/authorship of the photograph lies in the photographer. This makes photography a product that is subject to reification and value determination. This can allow us to see photography, above all, as a social practice, one in which the meaning and thus value of the final image is a negotiation between the participants of the photographic act. In addition, the act of photography can offer a space of political relations that is not exclusively mediated by the ruling power of the State and not completely subject to the national logic that still overshadows the political arena. This civil political space, is one that the people using photography-photographers, spectators, and photographed people imagine every day life and its alternative possibilities. (Azoulay, *Civil Contract of Photography*12).

⁶⁸ Translation is mine. Original quote is “El fotógrafo es un actor invisible, fotografía y lo que queda es la esencia del momento”.

The AFI was united by their professional commitment and- most importantly- by the common ideal of putting an end to the military dictatorship. In interviews, several members coincide in their belief in the role photography could play in its contribution to exposing the abuse of the military regime and the discontent of the citizens of Chile. Ianiszeski affirms that the union was formed not only to assert a place and value to their profession and their labor, but also for its contribution in ending the dictatorship “We began to realize the importance photography had as a document...the way it could help to end the repression of the dictatorship by visualizing it”.

For the photographers, this could be done through capturing and circulating the moments of confrontation between citizens and the police and military. By capturing political protests, the demands of the mothers of the disappeared, and collective actions of dissent, the photographs made by the AFI showed what society refused to see, what the press and television did not show because of the media censorship.

Since the AFI was constituted by freelance photographers whose images were not complicit or dependent on a newspaper’s interest, the photographers had freedom to capture the dissent and non-conformity with the regime of power. Because no medium would publish the images locally, the photographers used to exhibit their own photographs on the streets, hanging their images around their chest. The photographers became mobile exhibitions, and the streets the platform in which the images of the violent reality appear- images that would otherwise remain unseen. Simultaneously, they transformed the urban landscape into a stage where information and political dissent could be accessed. As Oscar Navarro reflects “We showed what people did not want to see. We began to create a conscience, an emotional reaction in the gut, in

the soul”⁶⁹. The act of seeing the images hoped to create a civil community of discontent able to challenge the authoritarianism of the State. Internationally, the AFI partnered with foreign agencies like Reuters and human rights associations to circulate their images of violence and confrontation abroad in hopes to gather international attention.

The AFI did not only focus on capturing violence but also, and perhaps most importantly, in granting visual recognition to the disenfranchised, the demonized protestor (“hordas marxistas” according to *El Mercurio*) and the victims and families of victims and thousands of those disappeared by the repressive regime.

Thus, the documentary showcases the power of photography as an exercise of *citizenship*- it evidences how the practice of photography provided modern citizens with an instrument enabling them to develop and sustain civilian skills that are not entirely subordinate to governmental power and allows them to exercise partnership with others not under the control of this power. When Moreno asks at the beginning of the documentary “Where is the city my father photographed?” he foreshadows and reveals the intention of the documentary- tracing a route opposite to the one set out by the *Memoriales* book. The documentary is a reconstruction of a city where citizenship was re-activated through the imperative of making visible and producing recognition of citizens and the repression they faced. It reveals the psychic density of the places revisited, the historical violence they contained, the history each site holds and the human relations configured around them. Thus, the city not only belongs to the photographers, but to all those that collaborate in the act of photography and assert their civil right to protest within it.

The act of photography in *La ciudad* is portrayed as an act of collaboration, the disenfranchised photographed subjects are not passive agents but work in collaboration with the

⁶⁹ My translation. The original quote is “Mostrabamos lo que la gente no queria ver. Se empieza a crear entonces una consciencia, una reaccion en el estomago, en el alma.”

photographers of the AFI to create images that will become statements, visual truths that exhibit the intolerable. Ana Gonzalez, the mother of four disappeared sons whose family photograph I mentioned in Chapter One, looks over the iconic images and identifies in each one the photographers that took them. In the interview for the documentary she describes the collaborative dynamic between the family members of the disappeared and the photographers “we did [protest] actions *so the photographers would show up*, the photographer was indispensable [...] We would arrange with them so they could be there- one of us would talk to them, “we are going to do this, please be there⁷⁰” (Figure 3.6).



Figure 3.6 Sebastián Moreno. *La ciudad de los fotógrafos*, 2006

In contrast with the conception of the photographed subject as a passive subject who is just the object of the predatory look of the photographer, what is described in the documentary is a dynamic which makes the photographed subject an active agent and collaborator in the subsequent meaning of the image. Forming a symbiotic relationship- the photographer relies on

⁷⁰ The translation is mine. The original quote is: “Las acciones se hacian para que llegaran los fotografos, se trataba de muchas otras cosas mas, pero el fotografo era indispensable, nosotros nos poniamos de acuerdo con ellos para que estuvieran” “Las companeras se encargaban de conversar con los fotografos para decirles “tal dia vamos a hacer esto, por favor esten ahi”

the subject to capture the images and the mothers use the photographers as both their medium and platform to expose their civil disobedience, resistance, and political demand to the State, offering an alternative to the institutional structures that have abandoned and injured them.

The photographers mention the social dimension of their practice- they were immersed right in the center of the actions. This, according to Jorge Ianişzewski allowed the protestors to feel safer⁷¹ and engaged with the photographic event- The protestors knew that their actions and the image subsequently created were going to be developed, printed, and circulated, becoming important visual records, an alternative archive to the curated images that were part of the complicit news media.

The photographed subject knew the utility of the photographer beyond the act of taking the image. They worked with an understanding that the photographs captured would be printed and then disseminated as visual proof of the political conditions the photographed subjects were openly resisting. The presence of the photographer -not only as photographer but as *citizen*- also offered them a sense of protection and safety to those who used the public space to show their resistance. The photographer's labor was not reduced to simply capturing a moment in time but to actively *watch* the space of confrontation, holding the authorities accountable to abuses of power and violence.

Throughout the interviews, the photographers of the AFI coincide in seeing in their labor a deep sense of national responsibility and solidarity with their fellow citizens. Their cameras, as some members emphasized, became a tool of political power. For them, their cameras had the potential to end the dictatorship through these three objectives: in giving presence and

⁷¹ Oscar Navarro echoes this sentiment when shooting protests "When I saw how [the police] grabbed a man, I got right in the middle and started shooting like crazy so that these assholes would feel watched. That is when I realized that I had an important weapon, my camera became my weapon." The original quote is: "Vi como agarraban a un hombre y me puse a disparar como loco para que los huevones se sintieran observados. Fue el momento que me di cuenta que tenia una arma importante...y derrepente mi cámara se convirtió en mi arma."

recognition to the demands of the disenfranchised, in capturing the moments of repression and hold the government and authorities accountable in their abuse of power, and finally in developing, printing and circulating their photographs –both at home and abroad- in order to gain political attention.

In one scene of the documentary, Oscar Navarro returns to the public square where he took one of his most iconic images- a visceral result of a violent confrontation that left a young boy laying helpless on the ground, with one of his eyes hanging outside his eye socket. Navarro recalls that when he saw the young boy lying on the ground with his hands covering his face, he came closer and asked him to uncover it, to show the brutality and excess of the police force.

Though the documentary shows the photographers social commitment (national, political) in their profession, it also confronts its ethical limits. For Ines Paulino, another member of the AFI, who was also at the same protest and witnessed the same violent moment with the injured young boy, this event became a turning point, evidencing the point in which the photographs had become desensitized by the violence, gathering around the injured in order to take the best shot.

A scene like the one described above captures the sense of exhaustion and image fatigue experienced by the photographers. The AFI members became so used to capturing violence that that violence started to inhabit in them. Navarro recalls how in their permanent search for violence, they started to lose their ability to become shocked. “We just became shooting machines” this posed an ethical dilemma for them- Navarro rhetorically asks to others but also to himself- “*Did you photograph pain just so you could feel you took a good photograph?*”

The documentary does not explore the ethical ramifications of the labor yet this remains of crucial importance because it diffuses the line that divides the role of photography as a

political tool of demand, and its subjugation to a market that demands those images. Azoulay points out that the circulation of works of art and photographs of horror operate with a similar logic: while in art what determines the value of the photograph is its capacity for innovation (insofar as it dialogues with the movement that came before its construction and is regulated by a canon and determined cultural stances), the circulation of horror photographs and their conditions for visibility operate within the same substitutive logic: an image acquires value insofar as it becomes more shocking than the last. Thus, the ethical dilemma for the photographer- does the search for a never-ending shock surpass the initial purpose of demand and exposure of violence? If the demand for such photographs comes from Human Rights association abroad, is there a danger that the photographers internalize a need to morbidly capture violence in order to fulfill the international demand that consumes the image in the first place? But, if this demand is to put an end to the violence, is this effort justified?

Moreno posits this reflection of the photographer's internalized violence and mechanically producing image-products towards the end of the documentary, yet does not explore the ramifications of this tension in the labor. The inclusion of this problematic in the documentary reads less as a critique and more as a cinematic story-editing device that contributes to the descending arch of the narrative, marking a descend from the somewhat nostalgic remembrance of their practice and idyllic faith in the labor of photography as political intervention. This final- and necessary- reflection acts more as a device that marks the exhaustion of the photographers and the sense of draining this daily exposure to a never-ending violence produced towards the end of the regime.

The interviews with the photographer are punctuated by their return to the original place where they took the images, a similar gesture of reenactment done in Germano's work but now

through the opposite side of the lens- as it is the photographers and not the people pictured the ones that are posing in these places. Towards the end of the film, the photographs hang their famous photographs around their neck, becoming again mobilized exhibits of the past. A few passersby walk by and stop to look at the images, but there is an indifference to their past power, a lack of potency captured in their present view.

Through a post-memorial lens: life prevails

Despite this final image fatigue, the documentary ends as it started, returning to the postmemorial lens and the memories of childhood overlapping the tensions felt in the streets. The film might be portraying a collective and historical organization, but it is also a profoundly personal portrait that highlights familial continuity in the future. The last filmed sequence returns to photographer Luis Navarro, who revisits Lonquen (a site used as a mass grave) and shares a black and white portrait he took of his father the moment he told him he had been arrested for taking photographs. The portrait shows Navarro's father covering his face, as if not wanting to see the reality that stood right in front him, what could be thought of symbolically as a national attitude adopted by a part of society. However, Navarro does not linger in this symbolic gesture of self-blinding, and immediately after shows a black and white portrait of him and his son, who is also holding a portrait of Navarro with his camera (Figure 3.7) "This is why I have a small child. *In spite of everything, life prevails*"⁷²

⁷² My emphasis and translation. The original quote "Le tome esta foto a mi padre, después de salir de estar preso, cuando le conte tuvo ese gesto. Esa foto fue ese querer no ver. Por eso tengo a mi hijo pequeño. A pesar de todo, *la vida se impone*"



Figure 3.7 Sebastián Moreno, *La ciudad de los fotógrafos*, 2006

The documentary ends as it begins, with Sebastian Moreno's voiceover and his reflection of memory and photography against the background of family and documentary images, all mixed together. He, like Navarro's young son, is that life that prevails- the one that *sees* and *captures* again -now through a different medium- the civil contract of photography. The generational continuity is also present in how Moreno intertwines the history of the AFI with his own personal memory as the son of one of its founding members, as someone who experienced both the social turmoil of the past and also the idyllic moments of childhood, all mediated by the presence of a camera. In fact, the opening scene of the documentary shows Jorge Moreno, Sebastián's father, assembling a makeshift camera built with an empty box of tea, a scene that constitutes one of Sebastian's "earliest memories".

For Moreno, photographs became what gave him access to the experiences of the past- both public and private. "I was thirteen years old when they killed the priest of our town. I wasn't there but *when I see the photograph it is as if I had*" [My emphasis] this also holds true in the intimate private sphere of memories, Moreno concludes the film: "When I remember my childhood, a lot of things remain blank, when that happens *I return to look at the photographs*

and things begin to reappear. I recover the landscapes, the moments, the smells. I find again the city my father photographed, it's people, my house.⁷³” [My emphasis] The post-memorial lens through which the story of the AFI is narrated frames history as a *reencounter*- it reanimates the past the photographic labor and the city as a site of struggle but it also showcases the way in which both memories- collective and individual, weave together.

In contrast with the stillness of the hollowed out *Archivo de imagenes de 1973* or the curated landscapes of the *Memoriales* tourist route, through this interwoven personal and historical narrative, *La ciudad de los Fotografos* mobilizes the documentary photographs of the AFI, rescuing their historical and social context. Moreno returns to the past and the city not as a smooth surface, but as one that vibrates- exhibiting its violence as well as its moments of collective unison against authoritarian repression. Through the post-memorial frame, Moreno sees the city his father had captured, a community that affirmed itself through the common goal of making visible the intolerable. Moreno rescues documentary photography and the labor of the AFI as a vital practice that was able to capture Chile's political struggles and resistance. Through his artistic reinvestment and narrative, *La ciudad de los fotógrafos* replicates this gesture, turning the lens not towards the sites or scenes of violence, but towards the photographers who, in exercising this form of resistance, evidence the possibility of solidarity and recognition present in the civil contract of photography.

⁷³ My translation. The original quote is the following “Al recordar mi infancia muchas cosas quedan en blanco. Cuando eso sucede, vuelvo a mirar las fotografías. Las cosas vuelven a aparecer. Recobro los paisajes, olores, momentos. Vuelvo a encontrar la ciudad que mi padre fotografió, la población, mi casa” (Sebastian Moreno, *La Ciudad de los Fotografos*, 2006).

CHAPTER FOUR, PART ONE

Photography as Screen, Photography as Contract

Yuyanapaq (2003) and *Uchuraccay* by Franz Krajnik (2018)

Temporal Re-orderings

The collection of photographs *Uchuraccay* (2018) by photographer Franz Krajnik, consists on 126 black and white images that detail the day to day life, the mundane moments, the celebrations, rituals, domestic, and ludic experiences of a small but infamous Andean community in Peru located at 4800 meters above sea level, in the heights of the province of Huanta, department of Ayacucho, deep within the highlands of Peru. The images vary from wide angled landscape shots and birds-eye view of the landscape surrounded by mountains, to intimate and textured encounters of the land and captured moments of transit, pause, celebrations, and day to day lives of the villagers in the community.

The recent publication of the collection of photographs in 2018 (Editorial UPC) was extremely well received by the public, with presentations at the Lugar de la Memoria and winning of multiple awards, including the first prize in the annual national photography contest Eugéne Couret. The photographs were exhibited in various locations and the collection was covered by multiple media outlets, which described the project as “un ensayo fotográfico de la recuperación de un pueblo” (a photographic essay of the recovery of a community). The collection of photographs was particularly meaningful as they commemorated the 35th anniversary of the Massacre of Uchuraccay, one of the most tragic and emblematic events in the

history of political violence in Peru⁷⁴. On January 26th of 1983, three years into the civil armed conflict, a local guide and a group of eight journalists from Lima who were investigating the increased tensions between subversives of the PCP-SL and the local peasants of Ayacucho, were killed by a group of local villagers of the community. The massacre became national front-page news and caused countless of repercussions for the community⁷⁵. Most crucially, it was anchored within official discourses as an example that further cemented the fraught relations and abysmal distance between the Andean citizens with the modern citizens of the coast and the capital of Lima. The official reports attributed the violence to a paternalistic view that cast the Andean subjects as living in an enclosed territory at the margin of modernity and national progress, affirming that the citizens lived in a “backward” time different from that of the modern progress of the nation.

Uchuraccay not only dismantles an hegemonic imaginary regarding the territory and its citizens. The project also, as I will show in this chapter, presents an alternative temporal framework to think about the past that challenges the frameworks of national history and traditional memory discourses and explanations regarding the violent past experienced in Peru. In my opinion, *Uchuraccay* is one of the most eloquent cultural memory projects to date and yet, it has no images of the past, no images of suffering, no images of victims or ruins or traces of historical violence.

⁷⁴ The Civil Armed Conflict in Peru spanned from 1980 until 2000. During those years, more than 69,000 Peruvians, the vast majority from the poorest and most rural zones of the Andes, were victims of political violence and caught in a fight between the government and the armed extremist splinter groups of the Peruvian Communist Party, predominantly PCP Sendero Luminoso (The Shining Path). (Burt 2007; Theidon, 2009)

⁷⁵ Besides the death of the eight journalist from Lima, the community experienced chaos, the attention unleashed the most vitriolic racial and social discrimination, and they had to endure the subsequent systematic executions of 135 villagers by both the Shining Path, as well as by the counter-insurgent forces of the Armed Forces. Caught between the line of fire, the remaining survivors were forced to exile the community, to which they returned on October 10, 1993. The return and re-founding of the village was a necessary step to “provide themselves with a new historical authenticity and re-signify the memory of the past..” (Ulfe, 2018)

What does it mean to have a memory project with no images of the past? To think about memory not as mournful or merely elegiac or commemorative, or mediated by the state imperative to solemnly recognize the past for the sake of national progress? What does it mean, in short, to think about a memory of the past in a present that showcases loss but loss *within* presence, the richness and legacy of absences as they act also within the present tense? We need another time to think about the past; to move past the modernist dichotomy of a “living” present and an ontologically inferior, absent, or distant past, that one must turn around and look back in order to *move on* to the promised utopic and reconciled democratic future of the nation.

For example, how can we reflect on the limits of a normative framework of memory in a highly stratified and centralized nation, in which the social, political and cultural power resides mostly in the coastal capital of Lima? How do we think about the “frameworks of the social life of memory” in a country where social, racial, and spatial differences influence and determine the imaginaries that contribute to create national identity and an official historical memory of the past? What are the potential and the limits of cultural memory practices and productions when there is a clear asymmetry between those who produce cultural memory discourses, those who are the target audience of these discourses, and those who actually experienced and inherited the legacy of past violence and trauma?

In this chapter, I engage with the idea of photography as screen and photography as contract presented in the last chapter by putting in dialogue the project *Uchuraccay* (2017) with the first photographic exhibition of the violent past in Perú, the exhibition *Yuyanapaq. Para Recordar. Visual Narrative of the Peruvian Armed Conflict* (2003). Though the project was absolutely necessary in order to mobilize memory in Peru, I want to problematize its framing and its curatorial discourse, and discuss how it symptomatically shows the blind spots present in the

anchoring of the past by official cultural memory practices. Conversely, I will explore the way the past is (re)thought and (re)presented in *Uchuraccay* in order to propose this artistic project as a new alternative national archive that captures a new mode of thinking about the ludic possibilities of memory within the present, and also exemplifies a project of collaboration and engagement within the photographer and the community, creating a civil engagement that highlights the idea of photography as contract.

The narratives provided by an urban, centralist and capitalist centric state and its official reconciliation discourses not only homogenizes the past but also invisibilizes -in the sense of *leaving out of sight*- the complexities in which Andean communities experience the past: not as a closed-ended narrative but as one in which the past is placed in front of the present. The disconnect between official discourses of the past and grass-root engagements with time and with the historical past, captures the ambivalent and chiasmic relation between official discourses and the experience of past by the communities that were the most affected during the conflict, and who endured most of the violence, loss, and devastation.

We can thus reimagine a set of possibilities produced out of temporal and historical difference, rescuing the potential of Andean experience of trans-temporality to capture narratives from within that are able to rewrite the official narratives and hegemonic frameworks given to them about their own past.

Through this intersectional understanding, my intention is two-fold. First, this theoretical engagement anchors my critique surrounding the curatorial discourse of the *Yuyanapaq* exhibition, as well as the symptomatic tensions and blind spots it revealed. Second, I want to underscore how Krajnik's project commits to present an integration of the Andean cosmivision of history and time- presenting through the collaboration with the photographed subjects a vision

that has “no post or pre in their vision of history, that is not linear or teleological; the past-future is contained in the present (Rivera Cusicanqui, “Ch’izinakax Utxiwa”), an integration of the past as a vital everyday part of the present. This relationship to the past presents us with a form of engagement with memory that should be integrated into the national collective imaginary, as it showcases a true collaboration that dismantles the asymmetry in the mediation of cultural memory in Peru.

Uchuraccay as Synecdoche- backwardness in time

The 1983 massacre constituted a turning point in the history of violence of the Peruvian armed conflict, a before and after that marked the community as well as the national imaginary. Shortly after the massacre, President Belaunde named an investigatory commission headed by the lauded writer Mario Vargas Llosa and a group of expert anthropologists, linguists, and lawyers. The commission was set to travel to Ayacucho and to the town of Uchuraccay in order to investigate the root and reasons of this violent encounter between the villagers and the journalists from Lima. The *Informe de la Comisión Investigadora de Uchuraccay* (Vargas Llosa et al. 1983) concluded that the killings had been a communal decision of self-defense supported by an absent state that encouraged villagers to take action if confronted with the insurgent forces. It also- and perhaps most importantly- attributed the confusion of the villagers in mistaking the reporters as terrorist *as a series of cultural misunderstandings*, attributed to ignorance and a pre-modern primitivism of the highly isolated communities.

In the *Informe*, Vargas Llosa uses the authority of the anthropological discourse to emphasize the fragmented nature of the Peruvian nation. He casts a difference between two different Peru’s: an “Official Peru” (“Peru Oficial”) and a “Deep Peru” (“Peru Profundo”) separated from the rest of the nation. This *Peru Profundo* is one defined by a lack- of

opportunities, resources, and horizons. It is described as economically backward and alien to western modernity and historical progress. “The very notion of progress must be difficult to conceive or adopt to communities that have never experienced any improvement in their living conditions, except for a prolonged stagnation” (Vargas Llosa, *Informe*).

According to Juan Carlos Ubilluz (2003), the persuasive force of this official discourse is that it reproduced an existent Andean paradigm that was able to veil the state’s involvement and contribution as causal for the massacre. The Andeanist paradigm, similar to the Orientalist paradigm described by Edward Said, is the belief that the Andean world is radically Other. This belief supports a national reality based on the segregation of the Andean masses who are kept at the margins of a modern national project, carrying and replicating a colonial heritage of domination and subordination.

The dualism between the two Peru’s extends itself beyond Uchuraccay and comes to represent a generalized Andean Indigenous Peru. Thus, Uchuraccay becomes a synecdoche, a part that represents the whole of the Andean region and Indigenous citizens at the margin of a national and modernist project (Theidon). This belief allows an endemic discursive segregation that consistently portrays Andean subjects of the highlands as if they were outside of the flux of history.

Enrique Mayer mentions that this separation within the national territory is not only spatial or cultural but it is also *temporal*- both Peru’s are separated by an abysmal distance in both time and space. The time-space marginal to the modern progress of the nation is configured as asynchronous to the modern national time of progress. Uchuraccay then not only represented a particular (and foreign) space within the national territory, but also became a charged signifier

that represented a *backwardness* in time, deeply rooted in an archaic and imperial history that naturalized colonial relations of subordination.

The notion that the Andean world occupies an ancestral time and space at the margins of civilization contributes to produce an image of a frozen and immobilized imaginary. An image that was endemic to the indifference of part of civil society during and in the aftermath of the period of political violence. Makena Ulfe mentions points out that the *Informe de Uchuraccay* and the subsequent debates it sparked reproduced a capital-centric paternalism and essentialism in which both the conservative right and the progressive left coincided in denying the decision-making capacity of the Andean subject and invisibilized the subsequent deaths and losses of 135 members of the community, as well as the forced exile of the survivors from Uchuraccay (Ulfe, “En Blanco y Negro”).

The “abysmal cultural and social chasm” between the Andean world of the highlands and the modern citizens of the capital, contributed to reproduce an interiorized barrier that made it impossible to see, and almost impossible to think of the violence and losses of thousand of Peruvians as actual national losses, as -using Judith Butler’s terminology- *grievable lives*⁷⁶. The question is, how can these losses be integrated into a national imaginary if their lives are conceived as occupying a different- ancient, mythic- time and space?

Do the use of photographic archives reinforce this antagonism and irreconcilable temporality? It is important to question what gets left at the margins of the framing of photographic images when used in official historical narratives. In that sense, the idea of photography as screen, as introduced in the last chapter, can stand as a substitute of present antagonism and deeply entrenched and unresolved historical tensions.

⁷⁶ Nelson Manrique suggests that the sense of national tragedy in civil society does not exist as it does in the Southern Cone countries, because the majority of victims in Peru are not seen having the same rights as the fully recognized citizens of the nation (2008).

In speaking about the Andean visual economy, Deborah Poole states that in the XIX century Peru, photography was used to regulate and normalize colonial relations of domination, value, and race. This produced an asymmetrical relation between the viewer and the subjects- the photographs of the Andean subjects became a screen where viewers protected both their fantasies and preconceived notions that fixed the rural indigenous subjects as static, passive, anonymous and voiceless “types”. Does this symbolic silencing and veiling continue in contemporary cultural memory practices and its use of documentary photography? As we shall see in this chapter, photographic archives can both veil antagonisms in the present in order to restore a sense of unity in the nation, but photography can also create a space of aperture that dismantles the inherited visual colonial legacies and open up the narrative of the past into more fertile and inclusive territories.

Yuyanapaq. Para Recordar: Re-awakenings and the national duty to see.

Along with the Truth and Reconciliation Report of 2002, a “visual narrative” of the TRC was published and exhibited in the capital of Lima in 2003. The exhibition inaugurated in the Rivagüero Mansion, a decaying colonial styled house deteriorated by time and in the process of reconstruction in the bohemian district of Barranco, Lima. Curated by Mayu Mohanna and Nancy Chappel, *Yuyanapaq: Para Recordar (2003)*⁷⁷ consisted in a selection of 200 archival images out of an extensive and wide range of archives consisting of newspapers, human rights organization documentation, magazine, police and military files, independent photographers and victim’s family albums, amassing a content of over 90 separate archives and 1700 images. A

⁷⁷ There has been a substantial number of scholarly work regarding the *Yuyanapaq* exhibit- its pedagogical and cultural reach (Ulfe 2009), its insertion within a memory market (Ulfe and Milton, 2011), the power of photography to create emphatic vision (Saona 2009, 2014, Vich 2015) and the emphasis on its curatorial discourse (Hoecke 2008). Two studies, “Memories of Reconciliation: Photography and Memory in Postwar Peru” (Poole and Rojas, 2010) and “What the Past Will Be: Curating Memory in Peru’s Yuyanapaq (Murphy, 2014) address the contradictions and fractures of the representation of the past.

selection of 200 photographs were published in the catalog and exhibited in Lima (with itinerant national and international exhibitions. It is now permanently displayed in the National Museum of Peru (Museo Nacional del Peru), a gesture that officially and symbolically integrates the period of political violence as a necessary and integral part of the Peruvian national history.

Both the commission and the exhibition shared the same objective: to transmit the historic knowledge of what unfolded during the twenty years of past violence in order to create a collective memory and thus unify the fragmented nation. “Yuyanapaq”, as Salomón Lerner, President of the TRC points out, “is a word in Quechua that means “to remember” but it also means “to wake up”, to open one’s eyes (Foreword, Catalog *Yuyanapaq*).

The exhibition marked an important and necessary step in addressing the nation and its past history of violence. The exhibition did awake a need for national memory and it was in part by the poignant power of the photographs that in 2003, Angela Merkel, chancellor of Germany, decided to donate two million dollars to the Peruvian Government in order to build a Museum of Memory, what would later become the Lugar de Memoria, Tolerancia y Reconciliación (LUM). The visual narrative create an important archive and produced in the capital a necessary awareness of the need for memory- for spaces of memory, for cultural memory practices, and for important discussions surrounding a difficult and unresolved past.

In *Yuyanapaq* the act to see is framed as a national imperative, as an encounter needed in order to produce a new found awareness that collectively awakens and unifies the once indifferent nation. The curatorial texts of *Yuyanapaq* emphasize the power of images and of seeing as a significant eye-opening experience. The process of “remembering” is paralleled with discovering a truth via sight, the act of seeing as the necessary action to produce a new found awareness that collectively awakens and unifies the once indifferent nation. The curators explain:

“The act of seeing, of understanding by the way of images implicates Peruvian society to know their history, get closer to the truth. In this sense, the decision to walk through the house requires a decision to remember” (Exhibition pamphlet, 2003). Herein lies an important contradiction: how to remember that which the (targeted) audience is confronting “for the first time” as an “eye-opening” experience? To whom is the act of seeing directed?

Though the goal of *Yuyanapaq* was to use photography as a medium to recognize the past in order to build national unity, the curatorial discourse that frames the exhibition reveals an asymmetrical relation between citizens, between the victims and those that experienced the violence and the past, and those tasked with the duty to remember. This is present in the very prologue of the photographic archive, a dedication that reads:

A las victimas, al Perú (For the victims, for Peru)

The comma symptomatically sets both groups apart - it honors the victims but unintentionally displaces them from the collective unity of those who are asked to open their eyes and remember. The viewer is thus the collective nation that is asked to wake up and encounter the history of violence that had been unfolding within the nation for twenty years and recognize its victims “a collective identity whose stability and cohesiveness remains largely unquestioned” (Poole and Rojas, 2010). In contrast, the victims are included insofar as they become instrumental visual icons that facilitate the encounter of the viewer with the unfamiliar past, a civic duty necessary in order to move forward into a unified and democratic nation.

To be fair, this asymmetry is not exclusive of the Peruvian context and pertains to one of the main tensions faced in memory practices. As Marc Augé suggests- a certain ambiguity is attached to the expression “A duty to remember”. Augé points out that those who are subject to this duty are obviously those who have not been direct witnesses or victims of the event of which

one intends to preserve memory. “It is clear those who survived the holocaust or the horror of the camps, do not need to be reminded of their duty to remember” (*Oblivion* 87). To whom, then, do official cultural memory practices preserve memory for?

In the exhibition as well as the catalog, photography is presented as a medium that conveys the facticity of historical events and of a chronological temporality supported in the texts that accompanied the images, taken from the TRC official narrative. Yet, the selection of the photographs is based not on the findings of the commission, but on the aesthetic intentionality of the curators and of their understandings of what photography could achieve in “engaging and sustaining the viewer” through the act of seeing. Images thus, were used to perform an affective narration of the truth commission report. For the curators, the selection of images was intended to fix visual icons in order to create a visual and evocative imaginary of the past. In an interview, the curators state: “The situation called for art to serve as a palliative against pain; aesthetics and history would be combined to evoke a response of compassion, solidarity, and reconstruction. We felt this could be accomplished through the language of photography” (Hoecker, “Making Yuyanapaq”).

KM Murphy wonders if this imperative to create an archive of beautiful, poignant, iconic images, overshadows the imperative of the testimonial narrative of the TRC, which primary goal was to *unveil* the unspoken truths that had been denied and give a platform and voice to the victims of the conflict. It begs the question, does the use of images as symbolic icons (tragic and beautiful) overshadow the use of documentary images as a visual narrative?



Figure 4.1 Vera Lentz, *Denuncia*, in *Yuyanapaq. Para recordar*, 2003

No image illustrates this tension better than the previously discussed photograph by Vera Lentz *Denuncia* (Figure 4.1) a tightly framed shot that shows a small pair of hands holding a faded photo ID of a man in his profile, looking beyond the frame. On an allegorical plane, the image symbolically conveys the fragility of holding memory in one's hands as all that there is- a sign of grief, loss and human struggle that transcends national and cultural boundaries. The composition of the image conveys a poignant intimacy. The angle of the photograph demands an intimate physical closeness between the body of the photographer and her camera and the body whose hands hold the photo ID, in its composition there is an alignment between the photographer, the photographed subject, and the viewer- all three direct their gaze to the small and precarious photo ID, sharing the same visual distance with the faded photo ID.

Denuncia became the most iconic image of *Yuyanapaq*, serving as the book cover of the catalog and entering the national imaginary as an icon of memory⁷⁸. Though the image gives the

⁷⁸ What the curator Mohana calls "Icons of suffering" to refer to the most impactful and evocative photographs of *Yuyanapaq*.

spectator a sense of closeness, the multiple absences of the image make the demand of the image abstract, operating only from an aesthetic plane that screens the original demand of the photograph. What makes the image powerful is the gesture and the simulacrum of closeness it produces with the viewer. The composition of the image, which gives a centrality to the hands holding the photo ID seems to evoke this object as all that is left of the disappeared, all the evidence of the demand. The image operates on an allegorical plane that symbolically- and beautifully- conveys the fragility of holding memory. Once again, we see the photograph as a talismanic object that occupies both physically and emotional spaces. *Denuncia* evokes the condition of photography as a cherished object, what Marita Sturken describes as the emotional power of photographs: Photographs represent the unattainable, it is infused with the *desire to hold the unattainable in one's hands*" (*Tangled Memories* 22) [My emphasis]. The image's poignancy is in simultaneously capturing all there is left of a demand and the futility of the demand.

There is, however, another image included in the archive that is not included in the catalog or exhibit that reverses the angle of *Denuncia*, making the demand much more explicit. The photograph (Figure 4.2), taken by photojournalist Manuel Vilca the same day, shows the woman who makes the demand defiantly holding up the faded photo ID and looking directly to the camera and to the future viewer. She is clearly familiar with the visual codes of demand and reenacts the gesture of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo and other protests made by family members of detained and disappeared citizens across Latin America.

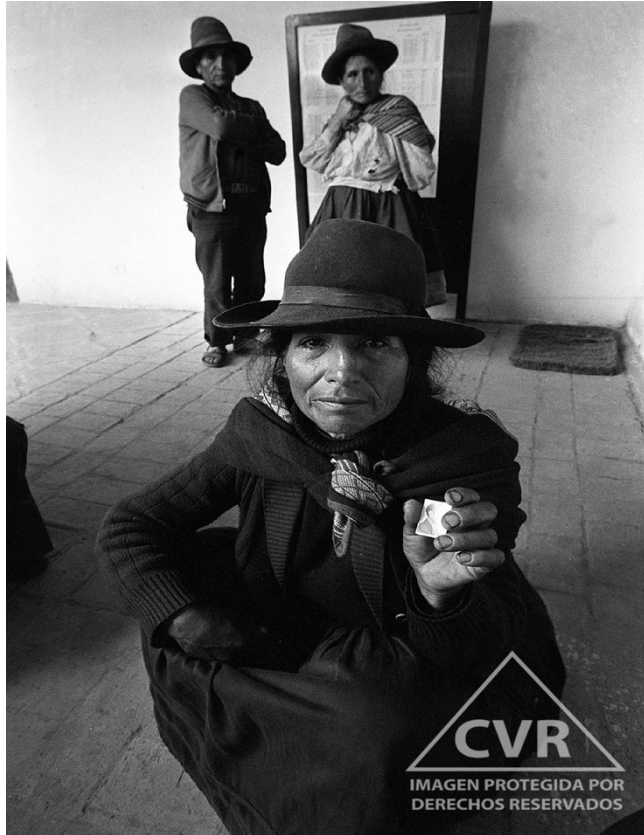


Figure 4.2 Manuel Vilca, *Yuyanapaq. Para recordar*, 2003

This image shifts the photo ID from being an object of aesthetic contemplation to one used as a tool and platform for political demand. The photographed subject participates actively in the photographic event, the use of the photographer as an alternative framework for citizens to the institutional structures that have forgotten them. In the background, two peasants, a woman and a man with his arms crossed, look suspiciously at the photographer, both witnesses and part of the photographic event.

While the iconic condensation of *Denuncia* diffuses the political agency of the gesture into an abstract theme of suffering and loss, in an affixed an anchored past, the image relegated to the online archive fleshes out the demand, showcasing its urgency as well as the use of photography as a platform for recognition.

In an interview, Mohanna justifies the decision to include the Lentz photograph to the exhibition and relegate Manuel Vilca's photograph to the archive. She states: "The photograph [Manuel Vilca's photograph] is also powerful. You can see the woman's watery eyes. You can imagine her struggle, how many times has she gone looking for her disappeared family member. But, aesthetically, it is not as powerful as the Vera Lentz photograph. *There are elements that distract you.* That doesn't happen in the other photograph (Quoted in Martinez, *Of Guardians*). [My emphasis]

It seems as though the elements that distract the message of the photograph are the ones that inform us of the agency and action of demand. It amplifies the context of the image, including the presence of the subject making the demand beyond the symbolic gesture of holding memory in one's hands. By reducing reconciliation to a symbolic gesture, the use and selection of the images reveal how, in the effort to unify the nation, it also bypassed horizontal inclusions of the citizenry and agency of the photographs beyond their status as victims and icons of suffering.

Does the use and selection of photographs in *Yuyanapaq* speak for themselves? Mario Montalbetti states the following: "We know that images do not speak themselves. But the belief that they do, that "images speak" seems to be the perfect excuse to exempt us from saying anything about their verbal report. That is another way of not wanting to say, of using images as an alibi, of wanting to escape the symbolic order that we no longer recognize as a defense or as an explanation of the Real." (Montalbetti, "El significado ya no es lo que era antes").

Montalbetti's Lacanian reading of *Yuyanapaq* showcases the risk of iconicity and the trap of assembling a visual narrative that bypasses the historical by focusing on the aesthetic. This is precisely what can turn images into screens, complicity in producing passivity in the spectator.

Denuncia becomes a cypher, not only of the plight of the disappeared but also of the projected curatorial desire of engaging the viewer as citizen to unify the nation. By reducing reconciliation to a symbolic visual gesture, it inadvertently reveals the paradox of seeing, the way that, in an effort to unify the nation via sight, photographs- especially beautiful ones- can also turn into screens that veil necessary confrontations- for example: what contributed to the national indifference of the past, or the ideological imaginaries (like the distinction between a “Peru Oficial” and a “Peru Profundo”) that contributed to the rise of terrorism in the first place.

This allows me to propose that the exhibit, in a way, reinforces the distance and visual economy described by Poole- just like in the XIX century, the iconic photographs that constitute the official archive of the *Yuyanapaq* can also serve as screens where to project a redemptive encounter with a national history in its way of healing.

In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004) Sara Ahmed mentions how expressions of collective shame can work as a form of nation building insofar as what is shameful about the past is covered over by the statement of shame itself. Under the cloak of collectivity, seeing can become a self-satisfied action that diffuses the individual spectator confrontation with their own indifference to the past. Ahmed asks: “*in allowing us to feel bad, does shame also allow the nation to feel better?*” (*Cultural Politics of Emotion* 102) [My emphasis].

Thus, the national subject, by witnessing their own history of injustice towards others can, in their shame be reconciled, but only to themselves. Thus, the patriotic-awakening-via-seeing reveals the national asymmetry mentioned at the beginning: “our shame” is about “their pain” (Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion* 10). Much like the symptomatic comma in the dedication of the catalog shows, the patriotic-awakening-via-seeing screens the persistent cultural and social distance still present within the nation- even in its effort to suture it. There are

still two Peru's present within the dichotomy of those "remembered" and those supposed to do the "remembering". In that sense, similar to the historical lineal temporality of truth commissions that insulate the past as distant and finalized, the iconic images of *Yuyanapaq* enter the national imaginary but only as static icons in the service of the promise of a reconciled present.

Trans-temporal memory and Return to Uchuraccay

The black and white images of Franz Krajnik tell a story that makes visible and unsettles canonical and "official memory" that fix the Andean subject and world as passive icons, or silenced victims. If you see the images from first to last you see a progressive close up, the way a distant, bird's eye view of an elusive space and time slowly transforms and turns into the familiar closeness of a community looked at from within. From the distance of the panoramic view of the Apu Rahuzilca –the protective mountain (Figure 4.3), and the wide-shot landscapes of the highlands- to the intimate spheres and domestic spaces of the community (Figure 4.4).



Figure 4.3 Franz Krajnik, *Uchuraccay*, 2018



Figure 4.4 Franz Krajnik, *Uchuraccay*, 2018

There is an arc and a journey that is both individual and collective. The photographs were taken across more than eight trips to Uchuraccay and one can see the way the sense of familiarity unfolds as the images progress. If anything, the photographs shift the meaning of what it means to call the highlands “Peru profundo”. In the project, the depth is not an abyss that distances and separates Peru in two, as an unsolvable enigma that explains a national chasm, but instead, it is re-signified to exhibit and dismantle the superficial discourse that surrounded both the paternalistic and the vilified view of the Andean world. Indeed, Krajnik shortens the visual- and symbolic- distance, and integrates himself and his camera view inside the community, capturing a memory that is lived from the inside. As a photojournalist, this is obviously not an easy task, especially taking into consideration the fraught history of a community that was destroyed precisely by the confusion and confrontation with journalists in 1983.

Despite initial reservations, Krajnik is welcomed inside the New Uchuraccay, cohabitating in the daily lives, rituals, and celebrations of the community, his photographs dismantle the discourses that conceived the Uchuraccainos as magical, primitive subjects that operate in completely different codes of belief. For one, many of Krajnik’s photographs show the religious syncretism of the community- the integration of the Andean cosmovision to catholic traditions like baptisms (Figure 4.5) and religious imagery- particularly evocative is the presence of a dove on top of the Apu (Figure 4.6) a signifier of the holy spirit that watches over the community. A general theme of re-birth is present throughout the collection of photographs, framed also by the 20th anniversary of the return to Uchuraccay.



Figure 4.5 Franz Krajnik, Uchuraccay, 2018



Figure 4.6 Franz Krajnik, Uchuraccay, 2018

Yet, even though the anniversary of the return is conceived in terms of a rebirth and a celebration of life, the community does not forget the tragedy that caused their exile and their eventual return. The troubled past is integrated and memorialized in the land itself by the planting of one hundred and thirty five Quenuale trees, one for every live lost during the years of violence (Figure 4.7). Similarly, the past is also ritualized with ceremonies that bring past and present, light and darkness together (Figure 4.8). For the community, the constitution of their official renaming as New Uchuraccay, and their inclusion as a District in 1993 was seen as a symbolic reparation that affirmed their belonging to the national imaginary.



Figure 4.7 Franz Krajnik, *Uchuraccay*, 2018



Figure 4.8 Franz Krajnik, *Uchuraccay*, 2018

Krajnik's project is certainly collective, but it is also profoundly personal. In his introductory essay to the collection "Trans Temporal. A Memory Essay" the author mentions that his own experience of loss and an immense void left by the forced and prolonged absence of a loved one, made him look for answers in the small Andean community that rose from the ashes. He travels to Uchuraccay multiple times in order to find out how "one can co-exist with pain" (2018:158).

In *How Soon is Now?* Dinshaw mentions that often our experiences depart from the metrical clocking of time that measures a succession of moments one after another. She indicates that both sleep and sorrow exemplify that our lived sense of time can differ from the measured time of successive linear intervals. This is true not only in an individual sense, but also at a collective level. The photographic project of *Uchuraccay* intersects both experiences- it is both driven by the personal quest of the author and illustrates the way past sorrow and loss is lived collectively by the community.

In that sense, far from dealing with the time of the past as a mediated and distanced presence, the community of Uchuraccay incorporates the past as a presence in everyday life. In contrast with a modern westernized conception and experience of temporality as linear and progressive (where looking at the future implies leaving the past behind) the Andean worldview places the memory of the past at the foreground of all future experiences.

Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui describes Andean temporality as a relation to the past that commits to the present-*aka pacha*- which in turn contains within it *the seeds of the future that emerge from the depths of the past* [in the original quechua: *quip nayr uñtasis sarnaqapxañni*]. [My emphasis]. This image brings back the live memorial of the Quenoales, each live tree representing a loss in the past. As such, the past is imbedded and kept present in everyday life and is also part of a carnivalesque and ludic time that celebrates the return from exile to Uchuraccay.

The community in Uchuraccay has been able to re-signify memory as an active production where the past can be transformed from static history into a political and symbolic part of the present, a memory of the *pacha* (the commitment to the present), of the now (Ponciano del Pino, *En nombre del gobierno*). Along with an evangelical discourse of rebirth present in ceremonies of baptism and day of remembrance where both light and darkness is presented, the carnival of the return from exile in October transforms the memory of the violent past- the massacre of 1988, the national attention and discourses imposed, and the eventual exile- into one that allows for a new present that incorporates the past in a constant becoming.

This visual representation is in line with the Andean world view that visually and linguistically place the past in front of the present: Linguistically, in the Quechua language the main conjugations are done in the past tense, the language itself does not have a proper future

conjugation besides its contraposition and combination of the past and present tense. Visually, there is the belief that- since the past has already happened- it must be integrated and placed in front of them instead of behind them. Putting the past in the foreground allows to build and to face the unknown of the future. The use of black and white in the photographs serves to trace a proposed route into which past, present, and future can overlap. The images are not anchored to a specific time that can be dated and thus cannot be closed into one single reading. The monochromatic color scheme also furthers the interplay between darkness and lightness, both necessary in dealing with trans-temporal sorrow that can be re-signified and continuously transformed.

It is not that the experience of past sorrow suspends the linear succession of time, but the incorporation of this past into the temporal *now* creates an alternative temporal framing in the process of memorialization of the past. As such, the photographer distances from capturing what Henri Cartier-Bresson has called “the decisive moment”: the simultaneous recognition, in a fraction of a second, of the significance of the event as well as of a precise organization of forms which give that event its proper expression (Cartier-Bresson, *The Decisive Moment* 2003) and instead opted to search for the moments *between* that before and after.

Inspired by the photographs of Robert Frank in his series *The Americans*, Krajnik’s photographs show the *interstitial moment*: a moment of waiting, of intermediary mysteries that places us in the middle of a history, where we don’t know if we are at the beginning, end, or really in the middle. By middle I refer to a moment as it is unfolding. What Kerouac in his prologue to *The Americans* describes as “mundane scenes never thought to be caught on film” (*The Americans*). In capturing this quotidian space in between a before and after, the

photographs capture a time that resists to be reduced, or fixed into a determined teleological or historical linear reading.

The photographs capture a time that is in in constant movement, within the now that has no beginning and no end- from dancing villagers throwing candy mid-air in the carnival that celebrates the return to the land to boys captured mid-run in the annual marathon (Figures 4.9-4.10). The images suspended mid action signal to that inability to apprehend a fixed totality- of representation, of the past, of time itself. It echoes Walter Benjamin's appreciation for the potential of photography as one that captures and reveals microscopic moments that could not be apprehended any other way. Moments and movements contained within a fraction of a second (Benjamin, 1931).



Figure 4.9 Franz Krajnik, *Uchuraccay*, 2018



Figure 4.10 Franz Krajnik, *Uchuraccay*, 2018

The photographs also display those moments before a decisive instant, a band ready to come out of rehearsal and play for the anniversary celebrations (Figure 4.11), a father and son getting ready to be photographed (Figure 4.12), two young girls running out of their house to play hide and seek (Figure 4.4). By capturing these suspended moments, the photographs create a sense of an open-ended time that is not determined by the particular unfolding of an event but that instead underscores the temporal possibility of past, present, and future in dialogue with one another.

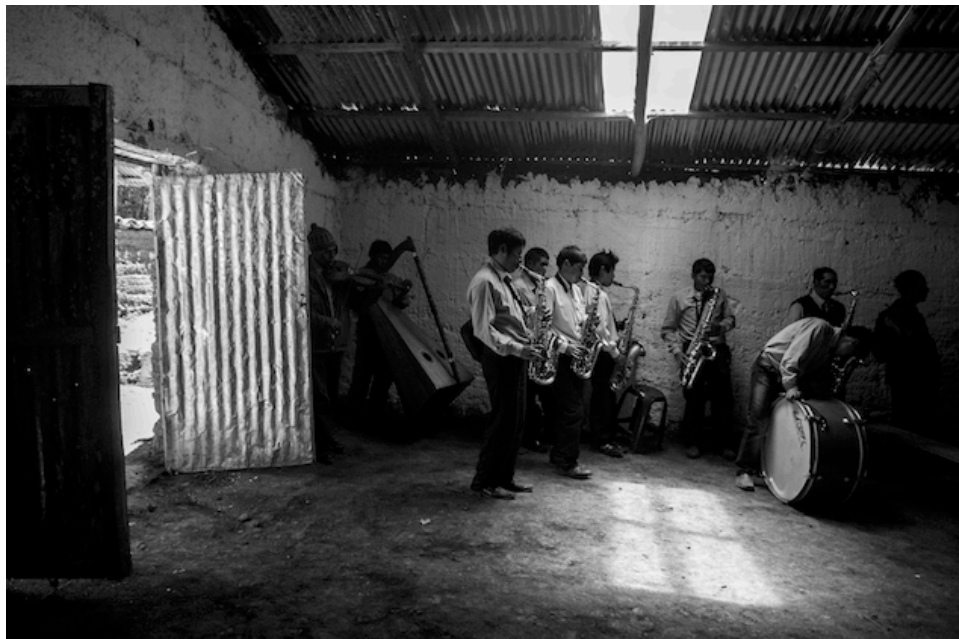


Figure 4.11 Franz Krajnik, *Ucchuraccay*, 2018



Figure 4.12 Franz Krajnik, *Ucchuraccay*, 2018

The photographs exhibit the porous boundaries between past and present, and suggest new alternative possibilities to rethink memorial strategies and commemoration other than those presented by hegemonic discourses that fix the past into a static place and a distant time. This gesture allows for the possibility to break with the national imaginary that keep the Andean subject victims in separation of the nation that remembers (*A las víctimas, al Perú*). Those that remember can also be those that experienced the period of political, and that show alternative modes of being with the past. Furthermore, the collaboration with the community⁷⁹ also breaks the frames inherited by the colonial visual economy that fixes the Andean subject as a static visual icon. Crucially, it turns around that paternalistic notion of the Andean world being outside of space and time, marginal to the national imaginary.

⁷⁹ In a personal interview with the photographer (2018), Krajnik detailed how active and involved the community was in the photographic events. The community was bent in dispelling the conceptions given by the *Informe de Uchuraccay* and by multiple media representations, anthropological studies, etc. Similar to the dynamic between the activist mothers in Chile with the AFI, the members of the community in Uchuraccay, saw in Krajnik as a photographer a platform through which to represent themselves. The photographs represent that contract introduced in the last chapter- in which the members of the photograph event collaborate in the production of an image.

The dialogue between the photographer and the photographed subject allows a more playful and freer commentary on memory and national identity, as I mentioned, the Andean subject is not simply fixed as a passive icon of suffering, and instead is part of the photographic contract in its portrayal. One of the most striking photographs is one of a young boy, mimicking shooting the photographer with a makeshift rifle (Figure 4.9). The caption of the image states that the boy yells “*Mr. Terrorist?!*” to the photographer, in allusion to the tragic encounter of 1983. Both photographer and boy play their corresponding roles- Krajnik as the foreign intrusion and the child evoking the villager in high alert and ready for self-defense in case of the terrorist threat.



Figure 4.13 Franz Krajnik, *Ucchuraccay*, 2018.

The densely charged past is thus reenacted and re-signified by the ludic childhood gesture in this symbolic (re)encounter. It is interesting that among the art circuits, this is the image that made curators the most uncomfortable⁸⁰.

Krajnik's monochromatic images show the photographed subjects not as stoic or passive subjects, but instead as ones that have agency and recognize the medium of photography as one in which they can create their own images of themselves. Krajnik's photographs are beautiful, but they are not silent, nor are they subsumed to the photographer's own imposed narrative. The images are a product of negotiations with the photographed subjects that are able to transcend a fixed visual imaginary.

As I mentioned in the introduction, the publication of *Uchuraccay* garnered well-deserved attention from the social and cultural realm, signaling an evolution in the way memory can be integrated in the national imaginary. In the presentation of the book in Lima in February of 2018, Krajnik invited the local members of the community, who, as I mentioned, were integral in the collaboration of the photographs. Shortly after, Krajnik also traveled back to Uchuraccay to present the book to the community of New Uchuraccay (Figures 4.14-4.16). Just as in Lima, the book generated countless of panels and roundtables, in Uchuraccay, the presentation of the book also led to a panel discussion in where the own members of the community discussed the work not only as portrayed subjects but also as a project where they were actively contributing to the vision presented. Both the audience in the capital, and the community in Ayacucho recognized the important value of the book as an object of memory that is also alive and that persists in the present as a mobilizing tense that informs both present and future.

⁸⁰ Personal interview with Franz Krajnik (March 2017)

In framing the project as a learning experience propelled by his own search to understand loss, Krajnik's project does not duplicate vertical relations of domination between the photographer as the all-knowing creator and authority of knowledge or the photographed subject as static and passive. In the collaboration with the photographed subjects, this memory project is able to bypass the asymmetrical relations that have mediated the narratives of the past in cultural memory practices, as well as the blind spots in the creation of a collective memory that will supposedly unify the nation.

The photographic project might not aim to produce a totalizing explanation or a visual narrative of the past, but it does present a more faithful portrayal of a community whose image has been long fixed and stigmatized within the national imaginary. By showcasing the ways in which the community integrates the past in the present, the photographic project also expands the possibilities to think about time and our relationship with the past beyond its mournful citation. The photographs closely reflect the lives of the community, who see themselves within the images because they had an active role in their creation, providing an active production of the social life of memory that goes beyond historical pedagogy or official or institutional efforts that supposedly "safeguard the past". *Uchuraccay* opens up a potential to reaffirm citizenry, national belonging, and a commitment to the past.



Figure 4.14 Presentation of *Uchuraccay* in Uchuraccay, 2018



Figure 4.15 Presentation of *Uchuraccay* in Uchuraccay, 2018



Figure 4.16 Presentation of *Uchuraccay* in Uchuraccay, 2018

PART TWO: TEXTS

Metamemory as antidote to the fear of displacement in postmemory

In an interview with BOMB magazine, Chilean author Alejandro Zambra states the following “Our generation finds in the idea that history had happened to our parents [...] we weren’t the owners of history, or the ones that had to tell that history, but those who had to hear it. *We had that generalized feeling of always being secondary characters*⁸¹” (2005). This feeling illustrates with a poignant clarity the postmemorial fear of displacement and general anxiety of being part of history but only in a tangential way. The texts discussed in *Part Two: Texts* deal with two main existential questions: How to revisit a past that doesn’t seem to fully belong to one? And how to free oneself from the inheritances that have determined part of my place within the cultural memory realm by being a “Son” or a “Daughter” or an inheritor of those considered the protagonists of history?

This second part of the dissertation focuses on texts that are woven by individual memories, particularly that of those born during the dictatorships and periods of violence, and the weight of the past they have inherited and carry in different ways. If *Part One: Images* analyzed the way photography and its paradigms captured memory in a collective and public level, *Part Two: Texts* is invested in the various narrative investments and aesthetic strategies used in creative re-framings of (an incomplete) past from the lens of the present.

My hypothesis is that these narratives, in their self-reflexive and meta-fictional quality, in their awareness as subjects and of the objects they are creating, are able to undertake one of the main preoccupations of postmemorial work: the fear of displacement and of being eclipsed by the stories of the generation that came before, those who lived through History, who were the

⁸¹ My emphasis

protagonist of history. Thus, the texts analyzed here are not so much about the past not experienced, instead, they are about the relationship of the creator-subject with the past as they represent it and transform it in the present.

The three main novels I will discuss in *Part Two* have all been written in the second decade of the 2000s: *Diario de una princesa montonera. 110% Verdad* by Argentinian author Mariana Eva Perez (2012), *Formas de volver a casa* (2011) by Chilean writer Alejandro Zambra and *Persona* (2017) by the Peruvian author José Carlos Agüero (2017). All three texts navigate the autobiographical and subjective experience and approach the paradoxes of memory and of writing and remembering from the present through different creative strategies. In embedding the self and the act of writing within the works, they can be read as meta-memory texts, in the sense that, they are not only commenting on the past, but also by commenting on the politics (and tensions) of memory in the present, they are commenting on their own status as literary artifacts and memory productions. In that sense, these texts signal a new turn after the memory boom, commenting on the very attention and possible exhaustion of memory through distinct literary strategies. Moreover, by integrating the past within the moment of creation in the present, these authors forge new ways to approach the memory of the past in innovate and dynamic ways.

If the prefix *post* in postmemory connotes, as Hirsch mentions, an uneasy oscillation between continuity and rupture, a positioning that mirrors a lineal order that inscribes a distance, and keeps a generational order, the prefix *meta* in metamemory connotes an aperture in simultaneously indicating different directions- “with, across, and after”. That is, *meta* indicates the multiple directions the treatment of the past can take. In its approach to the past, metamemory includes the presence of the present by including a self-reflection not only of the subject(s) who are the “secondary characters of history” and their experience with the past, but

also of the object itself (the text) as a product of memory within an already established cultural memory market- with its demands, guidelines, and conventions. Through their self-reflexivity, the capacity for recall and imaginative investments is heightened, underscoring the potential forces to think about memory- presenting a reverse inheritance in the postmemorial process: a creative investment that flows from the present to the past.

In short, the works analyzed here are not so much about the memory of a past not experiences, instead, they are works that reflect on identity, the writing process, and also about the process of memory itself. Specifically, these texts are about the interplay of both processes: that of remembering and that of creating from a specific subjective position with their specific demands and performative imperatives.

These narratives are proper of the subjective turn that characterizes the present time, an ideological and conceptual reordering of the past that focuses on the subjective. In *Tiempo pasado: cultura de la memoria y giro subjetivo* (2005) Beatriz Sarlo detects as the imposition of the subjective in present time, especially present in literary, artistic, mediatic and the cinematographic sphere. In contrast with the historical narratives of mass circulation that produced a lineal, ordered organization of the past, an objective and official memory of consensus, the subjective turn (*giro subjetivo*) signals a moment in time that explores the fissures of a past granting value in the voice of a first person experience.

Even though the subjective turn signals an opening and democratization of the memory and protagonists of the past, Sarlo herself is both suspicious and critical of the subjective turn and its ability to conjure the past successfully. In her study, she concludes that it is literature and fiction (and not in the testimonial or autobiographical) what gets closer to touching the core of the violent past in evocative and important ways.

Among the criticism of the works that are part of the subjective turn, is the idea that the “mere exhibition and spectacle of the (vain) self can produce a self-indulgent discourse that is more concerned with (the emotions of) the authors than with the political dimensions (and implications) of the violent past. (Blejmar, *Playful Memories* 32) This is also a particular concern of the contemporary, postmodern, and digital times, which can stimulate and heighten an “hypertrophy of the self”⁸². The concern is that these narratives- in their self-awareness, in their subjective positioning and specific narrowed point of view, run the risk of trivializing the past. Though I understand this criticism, I am more in line with Jordana Blejmar’s thesis, who identifies in the autofictional and playful accounts of the past an opening to areas previously unexplored from history that through their ludic self-reflexivity, can allow us “better understand the relations between documentary evidence, recall, and investments that are common to all forms of memory” (*Playful Memories* 4). My thesis builds on this, and sees this use of the self-reflexive and the ludic as something that is not exclusive only of Argentina, but that can also be detected in Chile and Peru as well. Furthermore, I argue that it is not only the interplay between the historical past and the ludic or playful reinvestments and recalls, but also that this specific turn is influenced by the anchoring and production of knowledge surrounding memory that anchor aesthetic, curatorial, and cultural discourses in each nation.

The authors discussed in *Part II* are conscious of the imperatives and critical discourses surrounding memory, and incorporate this awareness into their work. It is not accidental that all of them- Peruvian Jose Carlos Agüero, Argentinian Mariana Eva Perez, and Chilean Alejandro Zambra-, are all academics invested in both of the literary form and of memory. Agüero and

⁸² Sibila, Paula. *La intimidación como espectáculo*. Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2008.

Perez specifically research memory, and Zambra is a Doctor in Hispanic Literature. Agüero studied history and researches political violence, historical memory, and human rights. He worked for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Peru gathering testimonies from the zones that were mostly affected by the Peruvian Armed Conflict in Ayacucho. He is also an important figure in the cultural memory realm- contributing to the conceptual framework of the LUM (2015) as well as various other memory projects, like the photographic exhibition *Desaparecidos* by Rodrigo Abd (2006), discussed in Chapter One. Mariana Eva Perez is a playwright, writer, and has a Doctorate from the Universität Konstanz in Germany. Her dissertation focused on memory, theatre, and narratives of terror and disappearance. Alejandro Zambra is a Doctor in Hispanic Literature from the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile and has researched and written about memory and dictatorship in the past. This intellectual familiarity with memory paradigms and its critical discourses enriches their work, showcasing texts that are simultaneously creative, playful, but also profoundly critical and aware of their place within existent cultural memory realms in a post-memory boom moment in time.

In addition to their academic background and knowledge of both memory and literature, all three authors have a personal connection with the past- José Carlos Agüero is son of two PCP-SL militants killed during the armed conflict, Mariana Eva Perez is daughter of two disappeared political militants in Argentina. In contrast, Alejandro Zambra does not have a familiar connection of loss with the Chilean dictatorship, yet this lack of connection is reworked and tackled within his fiction, constituting also an important voice.

Reassessing the Death of the Author: Barthes in light of (auto/meta) fictions

One of the risks of interpretation is to conflate the author and the work, attributing to the texts interpretations that are more informed by the biographical aspects of the author's life than

of the material present in the work. According to Barthes in his famous text “Death of the Author” (1968) the risk of focusing the attention of a text in the author is that it imposes a limit on that text, furnishing it with a teleological meaning that gives a closure to the writing and an all-powering authority to the Writer as the maker of meaning.

Barthes mentions that the text is not just contingent on a single theological meaning -the message of the Author-God- but a multidimensional space in which a variety of writings clash. He writes: “The text as a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centers of culture” (Barthes, “Death of the Author”). Thus, it is futile to approach literary texts and the meaning of their work in an explanation through the personal.

What to do then with testimonial, autofictional and metafictional texts, where the presence of the author is inscribed within the narrative itself? Testimonial texts are defined as first person narratives that assert the identity of the speaker and a contract of truth with the audience (Sarlo, *Tiempo Pasado*). In autofiction, a term coined by Serge Doubrovsky regarding his 1977 novel *Fils*, we encounter a genre that blurs the lines between autobiography and fiction and the work benefits itself from the porosity between genres. In autofiction there is a tacit understanding of the fallibility of memory and the impossibility of truthfully recounting a past history. Thus, the only way to access truthfulness is through the possibilities of fiction. Along similar lines, the genre of metafiction could be thought of in relation to autofiction. The difference between both genres is that while autofiction incorporates the autobiographical within the fiction, metafiction incorporates the fiction itself- metafiction is a fiction about the fiction- that is, fiction that includes within itself a commentary on its own narrative or linguistic identity (Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox* 1990). In all three cases, as there

is an awareness if not of the author, of the literary or testimonial object itself, and this introspective awareness enriches the texts.

Though I agree with Barthes that it is futile to solely interpret a text through the intention or life of the writer, confronted with these genres, we have to rescue the author from oblivion. Considering the porous boundaries that exist in these genres between art and life, biography and writing, writing and its process in making, it would be disingenuous to completely ignore the presence of the author (especially when, in one way or another, it is inscribed within the texts). We can resuscitate the author by taking into consideration the place of enunciation of the author as writer and as a culturally constructed subject, as these places inform the texts and their unfolding.

Against the Barthesian dissolution of the self into language, we must consider the concept of subjectivity not as a limiting, but, as Patricia Waugh mentions “as contextual, fluid, relational, constituted and annihilated through language” (*Metafiction* 65). Thus, in examining these texts that blur the lines between reality and fiction, it is important to think about the subjective struggles of the author and place of enunciation not as a monolithic or enclosed fixed space, but as one that is able to transit through multiple spaces- as the prefix in metamemory suggests- inhabiting simultaneously “with, across, after”.

Just as the text is “a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centers of culture” (Barthes, “Death of the Author”), the author is also a construction informed by different realms: the author as self is simultaneously a mediated, social, cultural, and linguistic construction. The place of enunciation and the texts that emerge are informed by the author’s cultural and performative imperatives, intellectual discourses, intertextual and intermedial references, and subjective experiences. Therefore, my readings of the texts will, necessarily, take into

consideration also the place of the authors as subjects, precisely because there is a productive tension between their subjective voice and memory and the official or collective memory that is crucial to explore.

Furthermore, I consider and read the authors not only as creators of a particular text, but also as figures whose specific position and writing responds to specific and contemporary cultural memory paradoxes, bringing a float the symptomatic tensions within the particular national contexts and the cultural memory realm they are inscribed in, as we shall see in every chapter.

Each of the novels discussed not only tackle memory from a subjective place, but also constitute a larger reflection of the tensions of memory in the present. In *Diario de una princesa montonera*, Mariana Eva Perez reworks the existential anxiety and performative imperatives of being a “Daughter of” a disappeared and searches for a new language to anchor her own autobiographical and fictional narrative. Zambra comments on the dual process of writing and remembering and of being “double” secondary characters- not only for not being part of the generation that came after those who fully experienced the violence of the military dictatorship, but also by being part of a family without familial losses or tragedy. Finally, Jose Carlos Agüero’s *Persona* (2017) comments on the limits of aesthetic, political, and academic discourses and reflects on what persists of the violent past and what transcends it, a return to a stripped materiality. In all three cases, the authors experiment with different literary genres and strategies, showcasing an innovation both in the work of memory and in the literary form.

CHAPTER FIVE, PART TWO

The Rebel Daughter(s) – Parody, Identity, and the Search for a Language in *Diario de una princesa montonera 110% Verdad* by Mariana Eva Pérez (2012)

The Wounded Family and the National Imaginary

In the first pages of the book *Identidades Desaparecidas. Peleas por el sentido en el mundo de la desaparición forzada* (2011), sociologist Gabriel Gatti announces that the study that unfolds is one that is written *desde las entrañas*- from the guts. This is because he is both expert subject and object of his own study- a sociologist writing about the tensions of identity within the world of forced disappearances in the Southern Cone who is also the son, brother, and cousin of family members who have been disappeared by the military regime in Uruguay.

Gatti describes the presence of those absences as one that he inhabits, as one that is constant and that constitute his very own place of enunciation. He states that both identity and language are directly affected by forced disappearances, because it is a catastrophe that decimates language and the possibility of representation. Thus, his very own place of enunciation is one that is constituted by loss- familiar loss and loss of language. It is not only that parents and family members are disappeared, but that words also disappeared with them. In his exhaustive study, he speaks of the challenges of doing sociology from this particular place, more specifically- the struggle of using academic language to speak of something that has no words that could equate its dimensions, something incommensurable and impossible to rationalize.

How do artists and writers represent the unrepresentable and the impossibility to represent it? Gatti mentions that the inheritors of forced disappearances inhabit a space of loss, of absence of meaning. But that doesn't mean that space is not a fertile territory. Despite the

insufficiencies of language, it is possible to inhabit that space, to create *from* that place. “The space of loss produced by forced disappearances is livable and narrable. It is sometimes enjoyable. It can also be explained in different ways” (Gatti, *Identidades Desaparecidas* 8)⁸³. Thus, this space of loss can be thought of as a productive space, one that is not only crafted by a need to make sense out of loss but also a space that is self-reflexive- not of the generation that was subject to disappearances and political repression, but of the identity of those who experience the loss of those disappeared, the history they have inherited that both constitutes and marks them. To inhabit the place of absence is to be conscious of the constructed character of identity, and the symbolic mechanisms that sustain these collective identities bonded by loss.

If the politics of memory during the first decades of the post-dictatorships had the specific aim to produce a strong demand to remember as constitutive for the construction of a historical truth that could reinforce a weak democratic culture in Argentina, the decade of the 2000s saw an important shift both within cultural memory and State politics⁸⁴. The Kirchner era (2003-2015) brought an overdue implementation of strong politics of memory, as well as a condemnation of previous neoliberal politics of oblivion and dictums to “move forward” and “pass the page” present in both in the rhetoric and laws passed during the Alfonsín and Menem regimes⁸⁵. There were also a series of symbolic gestures and actions that carved an important place not only for the victims of State repression, but also for those that were family and

⁸³ My translation. The original quote is the following: “El vacío de la catástrofe que la desaparición forzada produce es habitable y narrable. Y a veces agradable. Y que además puede ser contado de manera distinta” (Gatti, *Identidades Desaparecidas* 8).

⁸⁴ This decade began with one of the most intense economic crisis experienced in Argentina. Known as “El 2001” this moment brought political upheaval, protests, repression, rupture of bonds and a general impoverishment of society. The crisis began with the Kirchner era.

⁸⁵ The 1986 Ley de Punto Final and the 1987 Ley de Obediencia Debida, passed by the democratic government of Raúl Alfonsín, as well as the official pardons given to military leaders by Carlos Menem in 1990 which called for “forgiveness and reconciliation”.

survivors of the desaparecidos. The sense of urgency of those first decades, particularly of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo and the Abuelas, to make the desaparecidos visible as subjects, had been partly effective. Insofar as the desaparecidos now occupied an hegemonic and visible place within the national imaginary, a spectral presence that was recognized by all and whose loss was one framed not only as a national, but also as a familiar loss.

Indeed, within the human rights discourse, family ties guides the structure of the different human rights movements that are built within the field of the search for the desaparecidos. There is, as I mentioned in Chapter Two, a familial inscription of the process of loss in Argentina's post-dictatorship, forming a particular entanglement between kinship ties and victims within the 'wounded family' (*Madres, Abuelas, H.I.J.O.S, Herman@s*). The wounded family is a constitutive part of the national family and the national imaginary.

In his inaugural speech before the United Nations, Nestor Kirchner not only recognized the debt to the Argentine wounded family, but he also inscribed himself within it, stating "*We are the sons and daughters of the Mothers and Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo*"⁸⁶. Indeed, the Kirchner era not only publicly recognized the debt to the victims and the extended family of loss, but also, implemented public policies that cemented the institutionalization of memory and of remembrance as a *national duty*⁸⁷. Among these policies, it stands out the creation of spaces of memory, the recognition and dialogue with human rights organizations, and the incentives within the cultural industries to give a platform to works that integrate the remembrance of the past.

⁸⁶ My emphasis.

⁸⁷ As I mentioned above, the attention to memory and human rights were a central policy of the State during the Kirchner Era. The current administration of Mauricio Macri (2015-Current) has gone backwards in terms of memory issues- showing indifference towards human rights groups (such as the Madres de Plaza de Mayo) and ambivalence towards pro-military revisionism. This evidences that even when massive progress towards a recognition of the past is made, there is always the possibility of going backwards. Ultimately, what this shows is that the politics of memory are always vulnerable to the ups and downs of specific political agendas.

Thus, memory and mourning became a national commitment that extended beyond the familial connections to loss, now with a place carved not only in the political but also in the cultural realm. Within the wounded family there is a sense of responsibility, a duty and a national imperative to that familial inscription that marks them as subjects and constitutes the Argentine nation. Memorial imperatives of the wounded family are inscribed by a certain duty of memory- one that is activated through political actions, acts of commemoration, and in aesthetic creations and practices within the cultural memory realm.

The wounded family human rights groups reinforce identity in its filial connections. They function as a primary identity-giving group, as a reference collectivity that can produce a sense of belonging and support. However, as comforting as belonging might be, this blanket generalization can produce also produce a certain tension within individual subjects- since having a role within the wounded family runs the risk of eclipsing the individuality of the subject and the need to be defined as more than a “Son of”, “Daughter of”, or merely in terms of the relational vital connections with loss and the desaparecidos.

What are the limits of being marked by this belonging -not only of the primary family where loss was constituted but of this second (wounded) family that regroups those affected by loss?- Can one go beyond this familial inscription since it also seeps into cultural, social, and political realms that surround and constitute the sense of self? The anxiety of effacement by the imperatives of being part of the wounded family is tackled in cultural productions that will be discussed in the following pages.

An illustrative example can be found in the documentary *Los Rubios* by Albertina Carri (2003). *Los Rubios* is a documemoir, a visual narrative that follows the director and her film crew as she tries to reconstruction of the memory of her disappeared parents, two prominent

leftist intellectuals disappeared in 1978. Much has been written about *Los Rubios*⁸⁸ and many coincide in see it as a precursor of this new wave of playful narratives and artistic memorial creations that centers the past in the exploration of the self and asks for a distance to the past as they explore it, that demands an autonomy in creation. These new artistic explorations of the past, explore the epic narratives, the testimonies, the documents, and find them insufficient. In this encounter they recognize the fragility both of memory and of the narratives that make the history of the past. It is precisely because of this lack of fulfillment that this new wave of narratives and artistic creations becomes less a search for the past and more a search of a new community of memory in the present. *Los Rubios* is not only a cultural memory aesthetic production, but it is a documentary about the making of the documentary- a meta-visual-narrative that allows the viewer to see the process of its making- it foregrounds both the director as a character and the filmmaker's process and the tensions within the making of the documentary.

One particular scene illustrates this tension perfectly. In it we see the production crew of the documentary, Carri, and the actress who plays her, Analia Couycero read an official letter sent by the INCAA (Institute Nacional de Cine y Artes Audiovisuales). The letter states that though the Committee of grants recognizes the value of the project, they see it as incomplete and asks for more interviews of those who knew the parents as prominent and committed leftist intellectuals. The production, Couycero, and Carri sit around a small dimly lighted room, re-reading and passing each other the letter. Ultimately, what the INCAA is saying is a veiled threat to take away their funding if they don't produce the movie they want to see, the movie they need

⁸⁸ Check Nouzelles, Gabriela "Postmemory Cinema and the Future of the Past in Albertina Carri's *Los Rubios*" in *Travesia. Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies*. Vol.14 Issue 3, 2005, Blejmar, Jordana. *Playful Memories. The Autofictional Turn in Post-dictatorship Argentina*. Palgrave MacMillan Memory Studies, 2016. Sosa, Cecilia. *Queering Acts of Mourning in the Aftermath of Argentina's Dictatorship. The Performances of Blood*. Tamesis, 2014, among others.

as a generation: one that exalts the epic of the fallen intellectual militants. The real Albertina Carri states: “I understand this need. But this is a movie someone else need to make. Not me. It is not my place to make this movie, and I don’t want to make that movie.”⁸⁹”

Ultimately, the meta-fictional reflection in *Los Rubios* reveals the “*I-now*”⁹⁰ self that emerges from the act of creating as it unfolds. The truth that emerges through the familial exploration and its failed and fictional reconstructions ultimately is a reflection of the creating subject and the sense of autonomy and knowledge gained when the moment of creation and the epiphany of the impossibility of a total representation coincide. Like Gatti and his sociological study, *Los Rubios* is also a profoundly personal project- a narrative of absence and of loss of meaning that inhabits that loss. In inhabiting that space it strives to create a new ludic language to talk differently about what has already been fossilized and set in stone by institutional and official discourses.

More than this: The Post-orphan rebellion against memory imperatives

Los Rubios by Albertina Carri (2003) and the auto-fictional novel *Diario de Una Princesa Montonera 110% Verdad* by Mariana Eva Perez (2012) tackle the fragility and *performativity* of memory, both authors, daughters of the wounded family, find creative ways through their own mediums- film documentary and autofictional narrative- to question the memory duties that inscribe and assign their roles as “Daughters of”. In an interview with the

⁸⁹ My translation, the original quote is “Ellos quieren esa película y yo lo entiendo, esa necesidad. Pero esa película la tiene que hacer otra persona, no yo. No es mi lugar hacer esa película, y no quiero hacer esa película” (Carri, *Los Rubios*)

⁹⁰ I borrow this neologism from an article by Kate J. Waites that examines the 2013 documemoir *Stories We Tell* by the Canadian film-maker Sarah Polley. In the documentary, Polley sets out to document her personal journey as she tries to reconstruct her parents, and particularly, her mother’s past. Like *Los Rubios*, it soon becomes more of an exploration of the self as she navigates the muddled waters of her inherited past. In her article, Waites examines how Polley stretches the boundaries of the memoir genre by incorporating the meta-twist to the documentary film and thus is able to explore the tensions in self-representation and in performing the self to others. (Waites, J. Kate. Sarah Polley’s Documemoir “Stories We Tell”: The Refracted Subject” in *Biography*, Vol.38, No.4 (Fall 2015).

newspaper *Página 12*, Carri states: “I am not interested in producing an advocate perspective [of H.I.J.O.S in the documentary]. The name H.I.J.O.S scares me. I do not want to be a “daughter” all my life. I want to be other things”⁹¹

In speaking about both the imperatives of memory and the insufficiency of language to fully navigate the sacred zones of memory politics, and in their search for a new language and new forms of kinship in remembrance, both Carri and Perez reframe the past from the present in inventive and evocative ways that exceed their own identity as members of the wounded family. Their works highlights a search and desire for an artistic and subjective autonomy to create a language that can, in its own way, recognize and give a place to the memory of the past.

Both *Diario de Una Princesa Montonera 110% Verdad* and *Los Rubios* exhibits the tension as artists and reluctant inheritors as this part of their identity seeps into every other sphere -social, intellectual, artistic- of their lives. These narratives also update the way the past has been approached and evolved in literature. From the testimonies of the 1980s and 1990s, to the writers who engaged with the relationship between literature and reality (Jorge Asís, Osvaldo Soriano, Sergio Chejfec among others), to the use of allegory in the fiction of Ricardo Piglia and Juan José Saer. This particular moment in time is focused on the memorialization of the dictatorial past and its effect on the present through the combination of autobiography and history. This incorporation of the fictional, the biographical, and the historical reality seem to respond also to a particular postmodern moment where the lines between reality and fiction have been intentionally blurred, in other words, where the frontiers between genres, fiction, and reality have become particularly porous.

⁹¹ ‘No me interesaba la mirada reivindicativa y me daba impresión el nombre [H.I.J.O.S] Yo no quiero ser hija toda la vida. Quiero ser otras cosas’ (Translation Cecilia Sosa) See María Moreno ‘Esa rubia debilidad’ *Página 12*, 23 October 2003, <http://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/suplementos/radar/9-1001-2003-10-23.html> [accessed February 25th, 2019].

The reluctance of these artists to fully adhere to the imperatives within their roles as members of the wounded family brings them close to what Gatti has coined as *post-orphans*-contemporary artists and writers, mostly children of disappeared parents in Argentina and Uruguay who “show a willingness to objectify their own identity, to mark it with the signs of the special, to construct a very generationally based account, bordering on the irreverent, sometimes verging on the parodic, not towards the generation before them but *towards themselves*⁹², towards their own history, and above all, towards the mechanism that constitute them (Gatti, *Identidades Desaparecidas* 140).

The parodic orphan is determined by loss but also steps outside of it, creating a distance from where to observe this loss. In their work, the Rebel Daughters -Albertina Carri and Mariana Eva Perez- reflect and critically engage with the discourses of memory and the imperatives of remembrance that come with that loss. In fact, it is a work of memory that frequently turns to and consciously (re)produces its own blind-spots, which is only possible by blurring the distances between self-representation and fiction. By inhabiting that place of impossibility and absence of meaning described by Gatti, both works critically comment on the possibilities and frontiers of creating from this highly specific (and conflicted) place of enunciation.

Rebel, Rebel: A word on Princesses

The production of cultural memory work by these “Post-orphan” artists (Gatti, *Identidades Desaparecidas* 140) in Argentina is particularly vast with notable literary works by Félix Bruzzone, Laura Alcoba, Patricio Pron, Nicolás Prividera among others, all of them sons and daughters of desaparecidos. I have chosen to focus on Albertina Carri and Mariana Eva Perez, both women and creators, because I find in their work a necessary confrontation- one that

⁹² My emphasis.

is unapologetic about the message of their work even when it means being at odds with the wounded family and the cultural memory imperatives they are subject to. Both of their works challenge traditional national paradigms but also what is expected from them as women creators- In the case of Carri, there is a refusal to comply to a docility in her role as a director, the expectation that she will ultimately tell the story the INCAA, or the epic heroic story militant friends of her parents want her to tell. Her refusal to do so is bold and important- it opens the path for a creative aperture for the artists to be uncompromising in their vision and in their work, despite how charged the expectations to “honor” the past may be. In the case of Mariana Eva Perez, I will show how this is evident in the creative investment and aesthetic experimentation present in *Diario de una princesa montonera 110% verdad* (2011).

In fairy tales, the role of the princess is at once crucial and devastatingly passive. Princesses in fairy tales are there as the motor of action for the knight in shining armor- Princesses are to be rescued from towers (Rapunzel), woken up from slumber (Snow White, Sleeping Beauty), saved from the exploitation and subjugation of evil step mothers (Cinderella). The Princesa Montonera however, is not a damsel in distress- she is suspicious of ready-made happy endings and confronts them in her own search, a search for a language but also of autonomy and creative control in determining her own fairy-tale unfolding.

The Killjoy turns into a Rebel Princess: literary negotiations between genres

Mariana Eva Perez is a reluctant member of the wounded family. She is a daughter of two desaparecidos and was an active member of the *Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo* organization. For years she worked closely with the *Abuelas* in the *Abuela's Archivo Biográfico Familiar* (Familial Biographical Archive) in search of her missing brother, who was abducted and raised by a family

complicit with the military regime. After years of searching, Perez's brother, Gustavo, was eventually found, their familial link confirmed through DNA testing.

The encounter between the siblings, however, did not lead to a close relationship between them, even with the confirmed vital link proven by their blood ties. Despite the familial inscription within the wounded family and the unwritten script that implicitly suggests that every reencounter signals a triumph, a kind of guaranteed "happy ending" that will reaffirm the purpose of the wounded family and confirm a symbolic and healing union that would also be one for the collective wounded family as a whole, Perez and her brother did not develop a relationship, or constitute a happily ever after, or become an example of the restored a sense of justice and meaning these family reunions mean to the movements of the wounded family.

Perez captures her ambivalent feelings towards her brother and the reencounter between them in *Instrucciones para un coleccionista de mariposas (Instructions for a Butterfly Collector, 2005)*, a play staged as a part of a series *Teatro por la Identidad (Theatre for Identity)* sponsored by the *Abuelas*: "I hate what your appropriators have made of you. I hate to see the grandmothers suffering for your fault [...] I hate you because you are so strange and so different from me that I cannot stand the idea that in this life you are the one who resembles me the most"⁹³.

Abuelas disapproved of the theatre piece, and not long after its premiere, Perez was expelled from the organization. This case is an exemplary instance that can help us understand the paradoxes of belonging to the wounded family and the pressure and imperatives that fall on the relatives whose bond is sustained by the strong linkage between truth and blood. The moment 'the rebel sister' made public her ambivalent feelings toward her brother, she threatened the security of the happy narrative discourse of reunion that regulates the life of the *Abuelas*

⁹³ "Odio lo que tus apropiadores hicieron de vos. Odio ver a las abuelas sufrir por tu culpa... Te odio porque me resultás tan extraño y tan diferente de mí que no soporto la idea de que seas lo que más se me parece en la vida'. Quoted in and translated in (Sosa, *Queering Acts of Mourning* 45)

organization. Perez, then, as Cecilia Sosa notes, became a *killjoy*⁹⁴, both of the *Abuelas* but also of the wounded family as a whole (22).

The falling out experience with the *Abuelas* and the tensions within the wounded family is addressed by Perez in *Diario de una princesa Montonera. 110% verdad*⁹⁵, a book that gathers the materials published in the author's personal blog which bears the same name.⁹⁶ Following the format of the electronic blog, the book is composed of episodic titled entries that record the experience of the Princesa Montonera, the daughter of two disappeared Montonero militants.

It is important to note however that, unlike the blog, these entries are not time-stamped. This allows a literary reframing, entries transform from being episodic and dated, to become vignettes that record particular experiences suspended in time. While in the blog the entries had an effect of immediacy in which what was recounted coincided more or less with the date in which it was posted, in the book the entries are transformed into a series of episodic glimpses that do follow a narrative path. Much like *Los Rubios*, the narrative is not a memory of her parents- though they do appear, spectrally, through dreams and in the photographs she ludically intervenes in the book. More crucially, the maternal and paternal figures are always symbolically present and are at the core of the Princesa's cultural, social, intellectual sphere, orbiting around it. But even with this spectral centrality, it is mostly a narrative that conveys the main protagonist as she navigates the tensions of the wounded family, the cultural memory realm imperatives, and the need to carve her own path within and beyond it. It is a narrative that questions, as Ahmed

⁹⁴ The term feminist killjoy was coined by theorist Sara Ahmed- in her book *The Promise of Happiness* (2010), she introduces this cultural trope as one that problematizes the Western obsession with acquiring and maintaining happiness, often eluding the tensions that lie underneath it. It is used to refer to those whose experience interrupts the happy narratives. "To kill joy is to open a life, to make room for life, to make room for a possibility, for chance".

⁹⁵ Referred to as *Diario* from now on.

⁹⁶ The online blog is still active and has been updated since the publication of the book, with its latest entry marked in 2018. <http://princesamontonera.blogspot.com/>

suggests when describing the killjoy, the imperatives and the happy endings that are inscribed to the wounded family, finding them insufficient. Thus, the narrative voice searches to reframe the happy ending imposed and its performative callings, in order to find a new language to write it with, a search that unfolds simultaneously as it is being written, a search for new ways of speaking of the past and to a possible future beyond the imposing narratives that anchor her identity as “Daughter of the disappeared”.

Blejmar notes that *Diario* negotiates three genres- the fairy tale, the online diary, and the autofictional novel. This triad allows Perez to testify to her memory without falling into the constraints of cold analysis and testimony, epic narrative, or sentimental therapeutic and utopic evocations of the past (Blejmar, *Playful Memories* 75). In fact, the playful way in which the three genres coexist and feed off of each other allows for the narrative to be- as in the case of Carri and her ludic reconstructions of the past using Playmobil toys- not only the memory or the confessional of a “Daughter of”, but also, an introspective reflection on the act of writing itself and the interplay and negotiation between fantasy, narrative, and memory.

Indeed, for a narration that in a way deals with so many retrospective dis-enchanting moments (of the wounded family organizations, of politics, of academic discourse), the use of fairy tale tropes is particularly acute to re-signify a different meaning to a *happily ever after* in the XXIst century when loss of faith in every discourse is paramount.

Public Intimacy in Cyberspace

Though the word “Diario” signal to an intimate and confessional writing, the writing in both mediums- the book and online journal- affirm a public reach and circulation. This is not contradictory or a betrayal of intimate writing such as the personal diary- as James Olney

mentions in his study on autobiographical writing⁹⁷ - the fact that a diary contains legible handwriting signals the unconscious or conscious desire for the author that the intimate writing contained within the diary pages will eventually find a reader. And even with the most personal and intimate of writings, Olney suggest, the writer *has* a reader in mind. In the case of the online blog, the presence of the eventual reader is explicit and immediate, and can actually constitute a dialogic community that intervenes as the publications unfold.

According to Josefina Ludmer (2010), the immediacy of cyberspace has allowed the crafting of a new mundane spatio-temporality: “A public-intimate temporality that is fragmented, interrupted, and that flows in the time of the present” (*Aquí, América Latina* 151) where the boundaries between reality and fiction becomes porous. In that sense, literature can achieve a kind of new autonomy from the genres that once anchored it, constituting what Ludmer calls *post-autonomous literature*⁹⁸. The online journal provides a platform not only to free from the constraints that would delay or frame the confessional writing in a diary (that must be found, edited, and then published) and is able to act as a stage where the author can rehearse the meta-fictional or specular dimension of an “I-now” that is in the process of construction.

The book *Diario de una Princesa Montonera. 110% Verdad* is an edited version of the blog⁹⁹, the pace of the text is conversationalist, fragmented into episodic titles that giving the sense of a continuous dialogue within a virtual community. Perez refers to her readers, but in the edited and finished transformation of the blog into the book, the narrative voice in *Diario* uses a retrospective distance to comments on the posts, and the effects they cause. In the entry titled

⁹⁷ Olney, James. *Metaphors of Self: The Meaning of Autobiography*. Princeton UP, 1982, c1972.

⁹⁸ For Ludmer, Post-autonomous literatures are those that are able to transverse the frontiers of literature and enter a new material reality that oscillates between the real and the virtual, where there are no boundaries that distinguish an inside (fiction) from an outside (reality). These writings, according to Ludmer enter the reality of the everyday; the reality of TV, the media, the blogs, internet. Their politics is to create a present with the everyday reality as their material. (2010:151).

⁹⁹ Commonly referred to as “blooks”, a fusion of blog and books. Sibila, Paula. *La intimidad como espectáculo*.

“Temita Familiar” the narrator notes, for example, how whenever she posts about her brother, (electronic) silence ensues. “When I curse out Gustavo in the blog, no one comments”¹⁰⁰. The tensions of the wounded family and of the narrator and author as a killjoy can also be crystalized in cyberspace. But despite it, the blog also forms part of a cyber network of “children of”, a community *linked*¹⁰¹ in the literal sense of the word. I underscore the meaning of the word “linked” to its literal sense since it is not only that the blog refers to other artists and creators that are part of this post-generation community, but also because the sidebar of the blog- and of the blogs and virtual places of the other artists and creators as well- also link back to Perez’s online journal. Thus, this community is not only linked by a common bond in their experience of loss, in their struggles as part of the wounded family, and in the challenges of representing their experiences, they are also electronically linked together within their own virtual platforms of creations. The blog is then part of an open community that transcends the hierarchy of the wounded family and finds a freedom of expression and of solidarity.

Autofiction and cyber-representations constitute a particular fertile and symbiotic terrain- the medium itself is one that pushes for the “spectacularization of the self” (*espectacularización del yo*), as identities are constituted by avatars, confessional platforms, and aggregate content that shapes into a consistent cyber-literary character and autofictional creation- a digital performance of the self not unlike the one everyone navigates and performs daily in both reality and cyberspace. The added complexity is that, this subjective persona is also marked by her “role” as part of the national wounded family. The tension between the assertive spectacularization of the

¹⁰⁰ My translation. The original quote is “Cuando puteo a Gustavo en el blog, nadie comenta” (95).

¹⁰¹ The links between blogs of the community of Sons and Daughters of is furthered explored in Blejmar, 2016.

self with the performative imperatives (the acting the part of as a Daughter within the wounded family) becomes the crux that holds the narrative of *Diario* together.

The Multiple Princesa(s) – A tragic ‘pedigree’ to hold

Throughout *Diario*, the Princesa Montonera disseminates information that the reader could easily connect to Perez- her initials- MP- Mariana Perez are flipped to PM- Princesa Montonera- like the actress that plays Albertina Carri, we can read PM as an attempt to destabilize the public persona as daughter of the disappeared. The double mirror image of her public self. The blurred boundaries between the real life activities, photographs, and past described collapse the frontiers between author and narrative identity that reinforce that *ambiguous pact* characteristic of the autofictional genre. By renouncing the straightforward identification between the author and the reader of the autobiography, the autofictional pact allows the possibility of a more inventive creation that transcends the boundaries of the straightforward testimony and the literariness of the memoir. Autofiction is a genre that deconstructs the autobiographical *I*, it playfully overlaps both voices but also keeps them apart. This allows the writer a creative freedom to step outside of her own biography and testimony and examine what is recounted with a critical distance and self-reflection that can comment on the performative and constructed dimension of identity and also the various narrative strategies through which memory and identity are created and negotiated.

The writing in *Diario* often oscillates between 1st person and 3rd person, to remind the reader that the Princess is, above all, a character the reader is rooting for: “How to extract the institutional prose that became flesh? Can the young Princesa Montonera twist her destiny as a *militonta* and become a Writer? (46).”¹⁰² The answer of this novelistic, telenovela cliffhanger is

¹⁰² My translation. The original quote is the following “¿Cómo extraerme la prosa institucional que se me hizo carne [...] ¿Podrá la la joven princesa montonera torcer su destino de militonta y devenir Escritora?” (46).

contained by the material object itself that holds those words- the book we are now reading. We know that the auto-fictional character does transcend the imperative identity that anchors her as part of the wounded family, both the narration in the book and the reality that feeds the narrative, is a testament of it, even though it is never confirmed that both the Princesa Montonera and the author Mariana Eva Perez are the same person.

The Princesa Montonera has many names. “Princess in the Disneyland of Human Rights”, “Dumbmilitant¹⁰³”, “Ex-Orphan Superstar”, “Youngest Expert in ESMAology”, “Exile from the Ghetto of Human Rights” and mainly the “Princesa Montonera”. The multiple names the Princesa uses exhibit the underlying tension that exists between the multiple identities the Princesa has to assume in different social settings and the desire for creative autonomy¹⁰⁴. A desire that overlaps both the author and the Princesa Montonera narrator, thus reinforcing that ambiguous pact of the text.

Most members of H.I.J.O.S are united in being sons and daughters of disappeared parents, but there is a question of pedigree within the organization itself. During her fieldwork with H.I.J.O.S, Cecilia Sosa discusses the internal hierarchy of lineage that exists inside the group. In her interview with Pisoni- one of the members of H.I.J.O.S who had lost both parents during the dictatorship- explained that if before there was a time when descendants were afraid of the stigma of their condition, the idea of ‘pedigree’ worked as a contestation of the experience of individual shame on the part of the descendants. This internal hierarchy based on the extent each member had been affected by state violence, is approached with a sense of irony and black humor.

¹⁰³ A play on the Spanish word “militante”- “militonta” signals a superfluous reinscription of the political commitment of the daughter.

¹⁰⁴ These multiple names are also a provocation towards the humanistic politics in the context of the Human Rights discourse.

These multiple dislocations and re-namings of the Princesa Montonera mainly underscore the fluid and performative imperatives of identity within a national context and cultural memory realm that change according to the social context, audience, and expected interactions. In the commemorative events of the disappeared Montoneros and among the surviving “compañeros” of her parents, she is the “Princesa Militonta”. When the Princesa Montonera’s father is called in the roll-call list of the fallen Montoneros heroes “The Princess, her daughter, the one that looks so much like him, yells *Presente!* And forms the V of Victory with her fingers” (70). In an academic context, the Princesa turns into the “Youngest Expert on Esmatology” exerting the authority of her personal closeness to the subject and granting her, like Gabriel Gatti, a place of knowledge to write, *desde las entrañas*, as both “subject and object in the study of memory”. Given her falling out with the *Abuelas* she is also the “Ex-Orphan Superstar”, simultaneous highlighting her expulsion of the organization for being a killjoy and the protagonism she once held within it.

The creative invention of these names plays a part in the use of black humor by the H.I.J.O.S, showcasing a deep irony, one that unsettles the official discourses around loss. The oxymoronic conjunctions present in being “the Youngest Expert of Esmatology” or “the “Ex-Orphan Superstar” evidences a ludic approach towards memory discourses and those that are within it- to be an “Expert” in the ins and outs of Argentina’s most infamous torture and detention center, or a “Superstar” among those who have lost both parents is a devastating and unlikely honor- but it touches upon the existing hierarchies that do exist between groups such as H.I.J.O.S.

These hierarchies are mostly related to how each member has been affected by state violence. Whether your parents have been disappeared, exiled, and how many disappeared family members one has. It constitutes a dark equivalency- the more one member was affected by violence, the more ‘privilege’ or ‘pedigree’ one had within the organization. Sosa points out that the use of these internal categories and slang owning these names is a way of appropriating a discourse that could seem eclipsing and all-encompassing, using black humor to confront their tragic history.

The title “Princesa Montonera” signals the protagonist’s familial legacy and inheritance, but also choosing a name that irreverently highlights the idea that she does in fact have that “pedigree”, in the “hierarchy of blood” within the wounded family¹⁰⁵, since within the hierarchy, having two parents disappeared would put her in the “highest realm” of that pedigree. Perhaps most importantly the adoption of the moniker *Princesa* allows both the author and the narrative identity of the book and blog to displace the heaviness of the legacy of being solely a “Daughter of” to the possibility, as Carri suggests in her interview, of being “other things”, of allowing more autonomy in the negotiations of identity and the self.

In other words, the auto-fictional voice and multiple names the Princesa Montonera adopts enables a greater creative freedom and engagement that what an autobiographical or testimonial narrative would allow. Moreover, it separates identity from the monolithic roles that is inscribed in being a “Daughter of”. The parodic renaming of the Princesa Montonera illustrates Judith Butler’s notion of identity as a set of reinterpretations and performances, each name illustrates a distinct performative imperative the autofictional character assumes and

¹⁰⁵ Sosa points out how black humor is used by the H.I.J.O.S to treat that idea of pedigree- how within the organization they jokingly see a hierarchy within them depending on how many family members they have lost (Sosa 2014). Having both parents disappeared would put Mariana Eva Perez within the “highest” realm of that pedigree.

simultaneously questions. Parody, according to Butler (2001) is used to “subtly question the legitimacy of the mandate”¹⁰⁶, it is, a mechanism in which reflective narratives about oneself and others can be made.

Echoing Butler, if all identity is fiction, if all identity is, to an extent, a performance, parody in a way highlights that constructed essence of identity, and also the collective consensus through which it is constructed and affirmed. The ironic undertones of the writing desacralize the assumed hierarchy of the author’s voice as part of the national wounded family, and the elegiac or somber authority her testimonial voice *should* assume. Like the double Albertina Carri in *Los Rubios*, the many names of the Montonera Princess highlights the very clear performative quality of identity within the cultural memory realm in Argentina, and within the collective of the wounded family in particular.

Collective Princesas and the Family Romance Fantasy

Yet as much as the Princesa Montonera identity is marked by the wounded family, she is also part of a collective of other Daughters. In fact, she is not the only Princesa. She affirms “All the Guerrilla Princesses are named the same: Victoria, Clarisa, María, Eva, María Eva [...] Princesses of the wrong fairytale [...]

They grew up,
The princesses.
They are surely older than Antígona and Hamlet.
They survived,
They already dye their hair and put on creams.
And they are still orphan princesses
of the revolution and of defeat.
In the eternal exile of childhood.” (20).

In this passage, Perez juxtaposes the familiar fairy-tale figure of the orphan and its cultural imaginations- Bambi, Annie, Heidi, suffering Cinderellas, lucid Jane Eyres,- with the

¹⁰⁶ Butler, J. *El género en disputa. El feminismo y la subversión de la identidad*. México DF: Paidós, 2001. (Quoted in Gatti 2011:177)

particular tale they have inherited, which collectivize them and makes them interchangeable- their names as an amalgam that represents all of them, that hold the ideals of their militant parents. And even though each Princesa physically grows older (dyes their hairs, wear creams), they will always remain marked by being “little orphan princesses” in exile because they are permanently waiting for an impossible return.

Perez points out that they remain in a constant state of childhood, perhaps because the innocence of that childhood was broken *during* childhood. The assuming persona of being a princess can be found in the Freudian notion of “family romance”- the belief that the child has been displaced from their own family and their own destiny. It is as Hirsch describes “a shared individual fantasy of mythic origin: the child’s dream of parental omnipotence and infallibility which, when shattered becomes the fantasy of replacing the father with a different, a richer more noble king or emperor”. The family romance is primarily a narrative structure (Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory* 52). This is a pervasive fantasy the child uses when they are disappointed that their own parents do not live up to their exalted expectations. As a way to confront this, they fantasize of replacing them by a set of imaginary parents who can transport them to a magical place where they themselves become fantasies- Prince and Princesses in a fantastical unfolding.

In the case of the children of disappeared, the family romance acquires a different and deeper complexity, since the parents are in fact disappeared. The fantasy then is not one that necessary implies a replacement of the lost parents but one that awaits for the real life return of their disappeared parents within a fantasy setting. Daydreams of reunions and arrivals in dream-like scenarios and utopic fairytale surroundings and happy endings. Since this childhood fantasy

never arrives, the subject needs to find ways of transforming these daydreams. In *Diario*, it is up to the Princesa to build her own idea of a happy ending.

The search for the happy ending is, in the end, a search that is contained within the narrative itself, that is, a search for language. From where can the narrator write about a truth that is not a testimonial truth or an emotional confessional memoir-like truth? What language can be used to be aware of the limitations and performances of the language that has for such a long time defined the Princesa? It is telling that this search is done through the autofictional genre in which the genre itself includes the fictional- that which distances itself from the truth.

The truth of the Princesa Montonera is one that detaches itself from testimonial truth, not because it is insufficient but because- in a very meta-fictional¹⁰⁷ way- traverses it, goes beyond it, and even comments on it- also with an ironic and parodic distance: “There are some things that need to be told. The testimonial duty calls me. Primo Levy, here I come! (12).¹⁰⁸ And later with endearing closeness “I think that Primo or Hannah would be beautiful names for children”, the Princesa muses (122). The truth of the Princesa is complex because it includes the uneasiness that comes with the imperatives of her identity, the ambivalent material of dreams and fantasies, fairy-tale world of princesses and enemies, the intellectual knowledge on memory, testimony, and its inner workings, and the desire to transform the past into her own language that has no place in the confines of the testimony.

The *110% Verdad* in the title is not only a playful nod to testimonial truth- or, , a promise to the reader that this will be a more truthful account than the “pure” truth of testimony. Equally, the title might suggest that the book and blog are 100% imagination and 10% truth (Blejmar,

¹⁰⁷ As mentioned in the introduction, the greek prefix “Meta” simultaneously connotes “with, across, after”.

¹⁰⁸ My translation. Original quote “Hay cosas que quieren ser contadas. El deber testimonial me llama. Primo Levy, allá voy!” (17).

Playful Memories 81). That added 10% can also signal something that overflows, all that testimony itself cannot contain, which escapes the confines or imperatives of how to narrate the past and deals with how the past and present *feels*: the gravitational pull of the present and the tensions within it.

The exhaustion of the scripts to follow

We follow the Princesa Montonera, in her self-deprecating humor the reader can feel a sense of complicit closeness- the intimacy in her sharing of how her everyday actions made her feel. The journey of the book follows as the Princesa meets her duties as a daughter of. In this particular passage the narrative turns into the third person, not only imposing a distance but also to assert a certain generality or commonness to her actions. Like the names of the other interchangeable princesses, the actions she describes could be done by any other member of the wounded family expected to perform memorial duties. In performing to the memorial gaze and imperatives, the Princesa loses the assertive first person and becomes a collective voice:

“The Princesa Montonera complied with everything indicated in the protocol. In childhood, she revered the word to her absent and noble parents [...]. In adolescence, she cried her unhappy luck and hated the military. At twenty, she devoted himself to the search for companions of militancy, captivity, friends, ex-boyfriends. She met those who were in Buenos Aires and corresponded with the exiles [...] Blood was drawn to identify the remains of their parents. She knew the corridors of Comodoro Py and had dealings with lawyers, judges and secretaries [...]. She declared as a witness and presented a brief in her own right and without legal patronage. She went to so many tributes of the compañeros-detenedos-desaparecidos that she cannot even count them (28-29).¹⁰⁹.

In fact, in looking back the Princesa Montonera demystifies her own experience as one that is not only shared by many, but that is also part of a larger spectacle in the public sphere: In

¹⁰⁹ My translation. The original quote is the following: La Princesa Montonera cumplió con todo lo que indica el protocolo. En la niñez reverencié de la palabra a sus nobles padres ausentes, mientras íntimamente y con culpa temía su regreso. En la adolescencia, lloré su suerte desdichada y odié a los milicos. A los veinte, se abocó a la búsqueda de compañeros de militancia, de cautiverio, amigos, ex novios. Se encontró con los que estaban en Buenos Aires y se carteó con los exiliados [...] Se sacó sangre para identificar los restos de sus padres. Conoció los pasillos de Comodoro Py y tuvo trato con abogados, jueces y secretarios [...] Fue a tantos homenajes a los compañeros-detenedos-desaparecidos-asesinados que ya no puede ni contarlos. Gritó presente cada vez que los oradores se lo requirieron.

the entry MARCA 2222 REALITY SHOW she describes these rites of passage of the Daughter of desaparecidos as a reality show,” “The reality for everyone where everyday there are unique events related to the *Temita*: oral audiences, homages, blood draws, law projects, attention to elder family members and general *militontismo*” By paralleling the memorial duties and framing them as a reality show, Perez is collapsing the spectacularization of the I with the public actions and responsibilities of the Daughter of.

Though there are genuine moments of kinship and belonging in the narrative of the Princesa evidenced in the tenderness used to describe the orphaned community, there is also a self-imposed distance- in the symbolic actions, the language, and the performances that form part of the militancy of her generation. All of the language and discourses -political, human rights organizations, academic- have become stifled and insufficient, hollowed out.

The narrative split between the Princesa Montonera and the author Mariana Eva Perez allows the Rebel Daughter to reframe that which could not be contained by mere testimony and transform it with a whimsical language and references of the fairy-tale and its tropes. Borrowing from the fantasy, the dialogic language of the blog, and the porous condition that negotiates reality and fiction in the autofictional genre allows the author to address that which seems impossible to represent: The stark reality of being a Daughter of desaparecidos, a Killjoy to the Abuelas, and the heartbreak of the exile and distance with the wounded family.

A house made out of words

The attention to words evidences this search for a language at a molecular level since for the wounded family many word have multiple dimensions: Innocent and normal words like “parrilla, centro, traslado” (125) have a sinister undertone and words like “Revolución, Comunismo, Socialismo” (133) bring comfort and echo the lost parents utopic ideals. Most

importantly, within the narrative, the Princesa invents a whole new playful lexicon “el temita” “militoncia”. These verbal interventions and resignifications transform the density of the original words and the diminutives can be read as lexical parodic intervention, also as an allusion to the internal slang that is present within the H.I.J.O.S organization. According to Linda Hutcheon, parody is repetition, but repetition that includes difference [...] it is imitation with critical ironic distance, whose irony can cut both ways. The words here are intervened in a way that reveals the interplay between what they directly signify but also allude to the exhaustion of those terms- the diminutive in “el temita” and “hijis” gives them an added layer- *temita* as the omnipresent subject of the reality of the past- an omnipresence that is all around the national territory, especially around the wounded family, unable to escape because it is constitutive to their being. Within the organization “Hijis” signals a generalized gender neutral term for H.I.J.O.S., it also holds a certain tenderness to it, its transformation strips away the organizational and bureaucratic side of the acronym and circles back to a word that emphasis a kind of sweet kinship, where they are able to take back the innocence that was taken away in childhood and cultivate it during the teenager and adult years, a making up of sort of the stolen childhood each was subject to. Hijis also speaks of an unbreakable bond, a common understanding and loyalty.

Though, as Blejmar, Sosa, and Gatti suggests, the work of the daughters/sons of disappeared replace the lexicon of terror with black humor and playful language, and Perez clearly does so throughout the narrative, this need to find the right language is constant, the guiding thread that holds the episodic entries together. “I told my analyst I have a vision. A house made out of words. Write myself a story that I can inhabit, maybe even that I like to inhabit” (77).¹¹⁰ During several instances in the text we see an exhaustion not only with the

¹¹⁰ My translation. The original quote is the following: “Le comenté a mi analista que tengo una imagen: una casa hecha de palabras. Escribir una historia que pueda habitar, quizás incluso que me guste habitar” (77).

political language of the wounded family, but also of the academic jargon that explains her own subjective position as both subject/object of study, paralleling the suspicion Gatti has about sociologic language in his study. Though theory tries to explain her truth there is something that remains inaccessible and insufficient about it. At one point, the Princesa Montera writes about herself in the third person: “Look at the resistances, she comments, subject and object of study at the same time. At any moment she will starts talking about herself in the third person as “the family member” (31).¹¹¹ The search for a house made out of words that she can inhabit means to be able to not compromise her own memory to an intellectual writing or a testimony that doesn’t allow a questioning of itself. In the end, the search for a house she can inhabit, a house made out of words, is contained in the book itself. Her writing becomes the metaphorical castle for her to enter into the ever after.

Though in several instances there is something utopic and comforting about being part of the community wounded family “we are orphans, but we dance”, meeting Kirchner and being filled with a sense of pride and joy, joining with the hijis brought together by the mourning of his death (which, contrary to the mourning of the parents, there is a body to lay down.) The hijis become double orphans, and the Princesa has a need to be with them. But this moment also exhausts itself as well as the imperative and the narrative that situates and that narrates her. The Princesa asserts “I have no more fantasies left to accomplish. I already ate with Mirtha Legrand, I found my brother, I slept with an hiji”¹¹². This is when the fairy tale reenters the narrative.

¹¹¹ My translation. The original quote is the following: “La Princesa Montonera interrumpe el relato de sus aventuras pasadas y futuras y corre al Teléfono, lo cual indica que se trata de una verdadera emergencia [...] Mirá lo que son las resistencias, comenta, sujeto y objeto de estudio al mismo tiempo. En cualquier momento empieza a hablar de sí misma en tercera persona como “el familiar” (31).

¹¹² No me quedan fantasias por cumplir. Ya comí con Mirtha Legrand, ya encontré a mi hermano, ya dormí con un hiji” (85).

When the one provided to her fails, Perez brings back the language of fantasy to reframe her own happy ending.

As I mentioned, in the Freudian fantasy of the family romance there is a shared narrative that constructs an ideal fantasy to reconcile the lost idealized versions of the parents, though in this case, the loss is physical, material, real, the princess like the hijis continue to live in that state of wait, with that absence of meaning left by loss. But Perez use of the fairytale narrative does not hinge upon a promise of a possible rescue to a whisked away castle and a family reunion, it is precisely in the simultaneous unfolding of the search for her own words that *is* the rescue. That is why the narrator oscillates between grammatical persons: she needs to in order to achieve a distance to reconcile being both subject/object.

The irony is that though the fairy tale trope is used in a sort of tongue-in-cheek parodic way throughout the diary, it is re-appropriated in the end as the narrative adopts the fairy-tale genre and its happy ending unfolding without irony or ludic undertones. The search for a language ends when she encounters that it *is possible* to write about memory from this close personal space. And how even that empty space shaped by the loss left by disappearances can be narrated and inhabited, and can “become even comforting, sometimes” (Gatti 163).

Once the Princesa knows that the impossibilities can be integrated into her own writing, that she can include an honest suspicion about the own discourses that shaped her, can the happy ending unfold. In *Diario*, la Princesa leaves Argentina to pursue a PhD in theatre and memory, she marries her partner, keeping true to the ubiquitous and typical fairy tale wedding ending.

When La Princesa decides to wear her mothers dress she notes: “And this is what I do with all of this, take what I like, make out of what I have inherited something that is

mine”(202)¹¹³ we can extrapolate this to the work Perez -as a daughter of desaparecidos, as a rebel sister, as killjoy- does with language, with writing. The narrative uses the fairy tale trope to reimagine the impossible reencounter of the parents, an idyllic scene where time has not passed:

Thirty-two years have passed, but they're still young parents. They have almost no wrinkles. He has grayish hair that is a little long, which gives him a bohemian air, and a slight belly disguised by his height and elegance. She dyes her hair but its her own natural color and is a little more chubby. She dresses well. Walks with heels as if she had been born with them. Wears too much make up but knows how to do it. She is beautiful. They come back and do not give too many explanations. It is not time. The important thing is that they are alive, that they returned and that they still love each other. The song [the Princesa] chose has already started playing. *Here comes the sun*. She nervously squeezes her father's arm and they move forward (205)¹¹⁴.

This idyllic ending evokes the fairy-tale tropes but also the strong neo-fantastic literature tradition in Argentina with writers like Borges and Cortázar. Similarly, the author incorporates the fantastical imagination into the ending as a matter-of-fact, with no indication that there is something out of the ordinary in her narrative. The fantastic is integrated into a realistic context with no narrative hint of its impossibility or absurdity. This simultaneous use of the codes of neo-fantastic literature and of a fairytale ending reaffirms the ambiguous pact in autofiction, the unspoken agreement that the material we are reading transits between both spheres of reality and fiction.

The rebellious refusal to adopt to either the formality and solemnity of the testimonial voice or the sentimental memoir, allows for the dream-like fantasy to enter the narrative, and

¹¹³ “Y eso es lo que hago con todo esto. Tomo lo que quiero y lo convierto en algo mio” (202).

¹¹⁴“Pasaron treinta y dos años, pero siguen siendo padres jóvenes. Casi no tienen arrugas. El tiene el pelo entrecano y un poco largo, lo que le da un aire bohemio y apenas algo de panza disimulada por la altura y elegancia. Ella se tiñe el pelo pero de su color y está un poco más gordita. Viste bien. Camina con tacos como si hubiera nacido con ellos. Se maquilla mucho pero sabe cómo hacerlo. Es hermosa. Vuelven y no dan demasiadas explicaciones. No es momento. Lo importante es que están vivos, que volvieron y que aún se aman [...] Ya suena la canción que ella eligió. *Here comes the sun*. Ella aprieta nerviosa el brazo de su padre y avanzan” (205).

allows a re-imagination and reframing of the past as a daydream of the present, collapsing both reality and fiction.

The use of fantasy in the last scene is precise and meaningful because it evokes the first form of fiction, of coping mechanism used by children and use of the family romance in the stories the hijis told themselves in their first inhabiting of that place of loss and absence. In the end, the exile from the wounded family is countered with the dream-like oniric reencounter with her disappeared parents at her wedding.

Diario de una Princesa Montonera -110% Verdad- navigates the loss of meaning, and finds in that space of contention between collective memory and subjective exploration a boundless territory to negotiate memory, identity, and the inheritances of the past. The skillful negotiation between the genres that constitute *Diario* allows it to become, like the cinematic work of Albertina Carri and the sociological study of Gabriel Gatti, a narrative that is commenting of its possibilities from within, as this double agent of subject and object of memory. Like Carri, it is not a narrative solely on the search of meaning or memory within the familial loss, but it is a search of the right language to inhabit and create *within* that loss. Though its use of fantasy tropes would signal otherwise, it is perhaps one that more closely reveals a truth and search for autonomy for the generation that carries the past but is always in search of a new happy ending perhaps in embracing the impossibility of it.

CHAPTER SIX, PART TWO

The Writer as Protagonist – Metafiction, Nostalgia, and Secondary Characters in Alejandro Zambra’s *Formas de Volver a Casa* (2011)

Seismic Movements and Metaphorical Displacements

Just a few days after the February 27th earthquake, in which unexpected movements resonated with aftershocks for days to come, Sebastian Piñera -a candidate of the political right- assumed the Presidency of Chile on March 11th of 2010. Piñera stood in the balcony of the Palacio de la Moneda and gave an inaugural speech that called for a collective effort to move towards a “national reconstruction” and a “transition towards development” now framed and justified in the context of the natural disaster emergency and the havoc caused by the earthquake.

In his speech, Piñera used the categories of “victims” and “desaparecidos” signaling those affected by the earthquake as “*los que siguen desaparecidos en el océano azul que no ha querido devolverlos, los vamos a seguir buscando.*” According to Nelly Richard, the cunning appropriation-expropriation of the terms “desaparecido” and “victim” by Piñera dislocates those categories from the field of human rights- traditionally mobilized by a sensibility of the left that does not forget those bodies thrown into the ocean by military operatives during the dictatorship- to the neutralized world of natural disasters, forging a clean slate for the political agenda of national rebuilding of the Alianza por Chile, the right coalition lead by Piñera (Richard, *Crítica de la memoria*).

The earthquake and the impetus for a “national reconstruction” emphasized a desire to “move forward” from the past, creating a rupture with the previous transitional governments. The reconstruction effort pushed forward a neo-liberal, forward-looking “transition towards

development” agenda that looked solely towards the future, conveniently leaving out the residues of memory (or ruins, the materiality of the bodies) behind.

The discursive somersault used by Piñera emptied the political and memorial meaning of these words, washing away from them the connections these categories had with the past and with the violence and losses caused by the military dictatorship. In her latest book, *Latencias y sobresaltos de la memoria inconclusa (Chile: 1990-2015)* Richard once again takes up this presidential discursive slip to argue that it should be taken as a warning sign that signals how the memory of the dictatorship is always vulnerable to being overturned and re-signified by current government agendas. At any moment, new governments in power can invest in reversing and manipulating a seemingly solid language, dislocating its anchored meanings from the politics of memory and human rights movements in order to make a clean break with the past.

Recent literature productions in the Southern Cone¹¹⁵, and Chile specifically, examine the residues of memory, the persistence and inheritance of the past, and the complex dynamic of memory when it is seen from the lens of childhood and coming of age narratives. In Chile, authors like Alejandra Costamagna, Nona Fernández, Diego Zúñiga and Alejandro Zambra, find in the return to childhood a locus for memory. The history of the coup, military dictatorship, and return to democracy coincide with their personal history(ies); tracing their coming of age into a moment of retrospective adulthood in their writings. In incorporating the childlike perspective, the authors are able to return to history with leading, protagonic roles.

In the following pages, I will analyze the literature of Alejandro Zambra- one of the main figures of this emerging generation of authors- whose writings have been critically acclaimed

¹¹⁵ In Argentina Mariana Enriquez, Martín Kohan, Patricio Pron, Selva Amada, Félix Bruzzone, Natalia Ginzburg, among others. In Uruguay Inés Bortagaray, Horacio Carvallo, among others.

both within the national and international literary sphere. Zambra's debut novel, *Bonsái*¹¹⁶ (2006), won the Novela del Año por la Crítica de Chile and the Consejo Nacional del Libro y la Lectura award, generating important attention in the press, the cultural mainstream, and literary criticism academic circles. The novel *Bonsái* foreshadows the ongoing postmodern experimentation that characterizes Zambra's literature. This literary experimentation is precisely what opens new possibilities and forms of expression for that generation born during the time of dictatorship.

Zambra has been published and translated to several languages and has enjoyed critical acclaim nationally and internationally. In a 2015 profile in *The New Yorker* he is described as "Latin America's New Literary Star"¹¹⁷. The freshness of his writing is found in his experimentation with genres and his attention to the literary form. This isn't gratuitous, and can be explained, in part, by the academic literary background of the author. As I mentioned in the Introduction of *Part Two*, Zambra is a Doctor in Hispanic Literatures by the University of Chile. Zambra's works denotes a familiarity with the plasticity and possibilities of fiction, literary criticism, and the many forms literature can take. His writing is simultaneously an exploration and experimentation of literature from a specific, autobiographic, and generational place. His

¹¹⁶ *Bonsái* is, at its core, a reflection on the act of writing, observing, and tending to a particular object that is being contemplated at the same time as it is being written. It is a novel that delicately tends to the branches and the connections possible in the act of writing. *Bonsái* tells the story of a young couple, Julio and Emilia, who are bonded by their love for literature. Together, they read a short by Macedonio Fernández about a couple who buys a small plant as a symbol of their love, but that, in realizing that in the possible death of the plant could foreshadow their relationship's demise, the couple decides to lose the plant with the multitude of identical plants. The foreshadowing in the story within the story is the plant itself, while in the novel, the foreshadowing is the own disintegrated love of Fernández characters, which anticipate the demise of Julio and Emilia's love. Emilia kills herself when she turns thirty, and Julio ends up working on a novel he eponymously titles *Bonsái*, which recounts the story of a couple that takes care of a bonsai tree: The novel is thus a requiem of love and loss, of literature as that which can both bring together and break apart. Zambra's debut novel is an astute love letter to literature both as the object and as the act itself, as writing. This brief novel evidences the way in which both aspects- the love for the object and the love for the writing (or of the object in the process of creation) fuse together. It is the love of literature what brings Julio and Emilia together, and it is the foreshadowing in the story they read what anticipates the loss of their love. Ultimately, the loss is reconciled through the act of writing by the fictional Julio, who, like the author, writes his novel, *Bonsái*.

¹¹⁷ Wood, James. Story of My Life. The fictions of Alejandro Zambra. *The New Yorker*, June 22, 2015.

attention to prose and the intricate weaving texture he constructs in his novels delve into the porous boundaries between fiction and reality, art and life, literature and criticism. The intertextual connections¹¹⁸ and references within his own work and literary universes creates a vertiginous effect and a complicit relation with the reader. At the same time, his literature reflects a profound distrust to any kind of all-encompassing or master narrative of -what he has called- the assertive or heroic *I*¹¹⁹.

Through a close analysis of his short story “My Documents” present in his collection of short stories *My Documents* (2016) and the novel *Formas de volver a casa* (2011), I argue that the metafictional strategies used by the author are able to counter the generational anxiety of displacement present in the generation of postmemory. The metafictional take on writing about the past introduces new protagonists of history that are firmly anchored in the present, creating new possibilities and temporal dynamics to engage with the historic past.

At the backseat of the car: the generation of secondary characters

In the eponymous opening story of the 2016 short story collection *My Documents*, the narrator -a writer- recalls the first time he ever saw a computer. Right away he points out it is not a “pure memory” and that he is probably mixing it with other memories of his multiple visits to his father’s office. Yet he remembers, as a child, instantly comparing the new technological device to the analogue technology of the typewriter, a now anachronistic artifact he associates with his mother: “I remember my mother working at the dining-room table, carefully inserting

¹¹⁸ In his second novel, *The private life of trees* (2010), the protagonist, Julián, improvises a bedtime story to his stepdaughter, which he calls “The private life of trees”. After he puts his stepdaughter to bed, Julián writes a book “about a young man tending to a bonsai” a gesture that echoes and brings the readers back to the ending of Zambra’s first novel.

¹¹⁹ In an interview he states “I always prefer a literature in which nobody is glorying themselves before others. I find heroic literature boring; I am not interested in an assertive I, but rather one that delves deep into its own uncertainty.” (BOMB Magazine 131, Spring 2015).

the carbon paper [...] She always typed very quickly, using all of her fingers” (12). The narrator affirms: “Maybe I can say it like this: my father was a computer and my mother was a typewriter” (12).

This assertion not only distinguishes both of the characters, but also signals a particular preoccupation for the writers, artists and creators that are part of the postgeneration: It is the parents, their generation, the ones to which history belongs to. It is their voices, immortalized in each of their writing artifacts, the ones that will echo with authority and resonate in the present in their direct first-person encounter with the past.

An image that is recurrent for several of this generation of Chilean writers is that of being a child and sitting in the backseat of a parent’s car- with no clear view of the direction the car is taking.¹²⁰ Zambra’s novel *Ways of Going Home* ends with that contemplation “I watch the cars, I count the cars. It’s overwhelming to think that in the backseats children are sleeping, and that every one of those children will remember, someday, the old car they rode in years before, with their parents” (2013: 139). In a way, sitting in the back of the cars is not only a shared memory of this “generation of secondary characters”, it is also a common trope between authors- literally and metaphorically, it succinctly describes a particular experience and position in time, a moment in history where the subject who is now writing had no control, no authority, and no clear view what could be unfolding in front of them.

I was a blank page and now I am a book

“My Documents” is an allusion to the familiar virtual folder one sees on the desktop of a personal computer. It simultaneously combines singular and plural entities since the My Documents folder is in every single computer, but the content of every “My documents” folder

¹²⁰ In her article “Formas de salir de casa, o cómo escapar del Ogro: relatos de filiación en la literatura chilena reciente” (2014), Lorena Amaro Castro signals how this particular image appears in the writings of Costamagna, Zuñiga, Fernandez.

varies depending on the owner. For Zambra, that file contains “A hodgepodge of autobiographical stuff, memories, fiction...”¹²¹ much like the content of the collection of short stories, where the lines between the autobiographical and the fiction are intentionally blurred.

The story is set like a series of recollections. Nothing really happens to the narrator in the present time-frame of the narrative, as it is composed by a recounting of the past by the nameless auto-diegetic narrator. These recollections trace a coming of age that coincides with the historical timeframe of the dictatorship: from childhood and the memory of his family, his falling in and out of love with the catholic faith, to adolescence and his time in school at the National Institute. The moments overlap with historical dates significant of the dictatorship. The end of the story concludes with the adult narrator and his beginnings as a writer with the purchase of his very own computer, the platform in which he is writing at the present time of the story:

Today is July 5, 2013.

“It is nighttime. It’s always nighttime when the text comes to an end. I re-read, rephrase sentences, specify names. *I try to remember better: more, and better* [My emphasis]. I cut and paste, change and enlarge the font, play with line spacing, think about closing this file and leaving it forever in the My Documents folder. But I’m going to publish it, I want to, even though it’s not finished, even though it is impossible to finish it.

My father was a computer, my mother a typewriter
I was a blank page, and now I am a book (33).

If we collapse the narrator’s voice with that of the author, we could signal the fact that we are reading these words in a book signals to that the narrator knows as he is typing in his “inmense Olidata computer” that the words reflected back on the screen in front of him will travel, transform, pass through editors and reviewers, and eventually become a material, tangible, object: *I was a blank page and now I am a book.*

¹²¹ BOMB Magazine 131, Spring 2015.

In contrast with the anthropomorphized description of his parents *My father was a computer, my mother a typewriter*, the narrator turns into a platform (*the blank page*) that can never become outdated or obsolete with time. The narrator becomes the canvas itself- full of potentiality where past (*I was a blank page*) present and future (*and now I am a book*) coincide. The writing does not only mirror into a tangible object in the present, but one that comes to its full realization through the readers.

The readers become an active mediating presence, the witnesses of the fictional literary unfolding described in the story: the transformation from blank page to book. The fact that this is the first story of the collection allows the reader the temptation to conflate the narrator with the author, taking the narrator's assertion at face-value as a starting point that frames the subsequent stories as the blank pages that *were* filled. If the reader collapses the frontiers between author and narrator, it is easy to imagine that the ending of this story and the subsequent stories that unfold are the ones that once lived in the "My Documents" folder of the author's computer, and now form part of the material physical object that holds these stories together; the book *My Documents*.

This blurring of the fictional narrator and the author of the text is facilitated by the simulacra of closeness provided by the first person narration, and by both the autobiographical concordances and ambiguity in the story¹²². In the story, the very thin line between reality and fiction, art and life, is constantly being blurred. This play on the autobiographical and the conflation of literary worlds has been a constant pattern in all of Alejandro Zambra's writing. His fictions (*Bonsai*, *The private life of trees*, the stories in *My Documents*) always circle around the act of writing and reading within different intimate relations and settings- It is not that it is just

¹²² Both the narrator and the author's historical timeframes coincide. Both went to the same school, studied literature at the University of Chile, and are now writers. This allows a conflation of voices given that there are no discernable differences between them.

that reality itself is fictionalized and becomes material for the writings, but also that fiction is constructed through constant allusions to reality and to the autobiographical.

I start this chapter on Zambra with this reflection of the story “My Documents” because I think we can take the anthropomorphized “My father was a computer. My mother a typewriter. I was a blank page and now I am a book” to assert how Zambra is able to displace the protagonism of their parents in history, and occupy, his own role as protagonist of history- as the one who remembers, imperfectly, impossibly, and thus becomes the literary object that contains both memory, the act of writing, and the re-imagination about the past.

The altering of the dialectic which effectively separates “art” and “life”, and “reality” from “fiction” is proper of metafiction- a genre that refers to fiction that is about fiction, fiction that includes within itself a commentary on its own narrative and/or linguistic identity¹²³. In the following pages, I will argue that Zambra’s third novel *Ways of Going Home* is an example of what I have named “Meta-memory”- a fiction that turns onto itself and contemplates not only the act of writing but also the very act of remembering and the interplay between both actions. Most importantly, it is a novel that delves deep into the process of how one (re)turns as adults to a past experienced in childhood which happened to coincide with the tumultuous years of the Chilean dictatorship. How does one return to the utopic and strange childhood home and memories if this experience coincides with a historical timeframe of so much trauma and repression?

The creative undertaking that is constant in Zambra’s narrative is one that reflects upon the dialectic between art and life as well as fiction and reality by the multiple self-mirroring

¹²³ The first use of the term ‘Metafiction’ is attributed to William Gass in the late 1960s, who wanted to describe fictionst that were somehow about fiction itself. As it was defined in the 1970’s, metafiction is a fiction with self-consciousness, self-awareness, and ironic self-distance. It is an experimental and elastic term that covers genre. a wide arrange of fictions. For more on metafiction check Alter, Robert. *Partial Magic. The novel as a self-conscious genre*. University of California Press, 1975, Waugh, Patricia. *Metafiction. The theory and practice of self-conscious Fiction*. Routledge, 1988. Hutcheon, Linda (ed). *Metafiction*. Longman Group, 1995. Hutcheon, Linda. *Narcissistic Narrative. The Metafictional Paradox*. Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2013.

within the narratives. In his treatment of the past, Zambra returns to his childhood memories with an influx of the present: creating the illusion that we are reading the narrative as it is being written. The act of remembering, writing, and reflecting on the insufficiencies and constructed character of memory turn into both the motor of action and the heart of the narrative. The novel examines how one makes sense of the past in the present, and how, eventually, *the act of remembering can turn into a narrative itself*. Memory work then is presented not as a flashback or a faithful return, but as an ongoing and imperfect process that illuminates both past and present through a revelation of its construction.

(Multiple) ways of going home

Ways of Going Home is a story of two virtually identical male first person nameless narrators that return to their hometown suburb of Maipú and childhood home on the outside of Santiago to revisit the memories of the past in order to write a novel about it. Both narrators access memory- and writing- through their shared intimacy with female protagonists whose stories largely differ from that of the narrators and which makes them reckon with their own unresolved feelings of guilt about the past, of a part of a family that remained indifferent of politics and unscathed by the violence of the dictatorship.

The structure of the novel, is framed by two earthquakes- it starts with the memory of the fictional narrator of the earthquake of 1985 and ends with the diary narrator experiencing in the present the earthquake in 2010 which coincides with the year of writing of the novel (as it was published in 2011). The novel is composed by three short chapters named after literary categories: -“Secondary characters”, The Literature of the Parents”, “The Literature of the Children” and a final coda entitled “We’re alright”. These titles evidence a structure that in a way comments on its own status as both a memory cultural production and a literary artifact.

The chapters intercalate two levels of fiction- one of the first narrator who begins the novel and that of a “Diary narrator” who is writing the story of the first narrator the reader first encounters in the novel¹²⁴. Both the fictional narrator and the diary narrator function as a *mise en abyme*¹²⁵ of the novel- a reduplication of the literary work itself, placing the fiction in a novel within the novel. The narrators not only mirror each other, but also produce a reflection of the author himself working on this novel.

The double-mirroring effect present in the novel’s *mise en abyme* adheres to the metafictional principle of creating a fiction to make a statement about the creation of that fiction. By laying bare the illusion of the fiction and revealing the process of its construction, it draws attention to the storytelling process and allows the novel to comment on the relationship between writing, memory, and the anxiety of the generation of “secondary characters” who are writing about a past that does not seem to belong to them completely, that was experienced only tangentially.

The story that begins the novel, that of the “fictional narrator” is jumpstarted by the memory of the 1985 earthquake experienced as a kid, which he describes as both a scary and thrilling experience: “The night of the Earthquake I was scared but I also, in a way, enjoyed what was happening” (5). The adults gathered outside and the kids joined together ruin in play. It is here that the eight-year old narrator meets Claudia, a girl a couple years older than him whose

¹²⁴ For clarity purposes- I will call the first narrator “Fictional narrator” and the second narrator “Diary Narrator”.

¹²⁵ *Mise en abyme* is a literary term coined by the French writer André Gide, supposedly from the language of heraldry, it is used to refer to an internal reduplication of a literary work or part of a work. Gide’s own novel *Les Faux-Monnayeurs* (*The Counterfeiters*, 1926) provides an illustrative example: In it, its central character, Edouard, is a novelist working on a novel called *Les Faux-Monnayeurs* which strongly resembles the very novel in which he himself is a character. (*Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (3rd Edition), Oxford University Press, 2008.) Other examples are the short story “Averroes Search” by Jorge Luis Borges and-of course- Zambra’s first novel *Bonsai* and, to an extent, the intertextual connections present in his second novel *The secret lives of trees* where a writer is both telling a story entitled “The secret lives of trees” and writing a novel called *Bonsai* at nights.

father is a leftist political activist in hiding¹²⁶. Her memory is linked to the violence experienced during the dictatorship since her family was directly persecuted by the military regime. Claudia leaves Chile in her teenage years and returns to Santiago twenty years later, which brings us to the present of the story when she and the fictional narrator meet again. Hearing her story makes the narrator reckon with his own situation as part of a middle class family that remained indifferent and unaffected by the political crisis in Chile.

The story of the fictional narrator is centered around this reencounter between Claudia and the fictional narrator. In contrast, the story of the diary narrator begins with a separation. The diary narrator has just separated from his partner, Eme, and is trying to reconnect to her through his writing. In both cases, the narrators- both the fictional narrator and the diary narrator, travel back to their parents home, a return to the past through browsing the familiarity of the space and the memories they evoke.

Nostalgic Returns of Secondary Characters

The fictional story that begins the book- that of Claudia and the nameless fictional narrator- is one that follows both protagonists as they walk through Santiago, through their old familiar streets of the suburbs and old homes. Claudia has returned to Chile after moving to the United States, trying to free herself from being just a “Daughter of” a political militant, as if that is all that she could be. She returns to Santiago “looking for a life of her own, a new park. A life where she was no longer anyone’s daughter” (95) to make the spaces left behind her own again. In reuniting with the narrator, she decides to tell him her story, to practice doing it swiftly “learning to tell her story as if it didn’t hurt” (80). The narrator and Claudia both using each other- he needs her to fill the gaps of history and Claudia needs the narrator as a captive audience

¹²⁶ Her father is a leftist political militant that uses the alias “Raul” and gives shelter to people that are being persecuted. He later exiles to Argentina before returning to Chile at old age.

that will receive and listen to her story. Claudia and the narrator walk around Santiago, and every space revisited gets imbued with a density, knowing that it once was the site of so much violence that them, as kids, were unaware of.

In this wandering, there is a shift in the familiarity of those places with the present knowledge of what transpired in them. There is a confrontation with the banality and innocence with which the past was experienced as children with the history of violence that past holds. The question that is traced through their walking is how to conciliate a genuine nostalgia for their innocent childhood memories those places evoke with the knowledge that those same places were hosts of violence, fear and repression. Both Claudia and the fictional narrator reckon with the impossibility to return to the pureness of that memory and the innocence with which they related to the space.

As the protagonists are walking through the urban streets of Santiago, the fictional narrator notes “We walk along Grecia Avenue past the College of Philosophy (...) We reach the National Stadium. The largest detention center in 1973 was always, for me, no more than a soccer field. My first memories of it are happy, sporty ones. I’m sure that I ate my first ice cream in the stadium’s stands” (98). The fictional narrator notes that for Claudia, her first memory of the stadium is also a happy one, a show by Chespirito, a popular Mexican comedian. Claudia, her sister, and her parents saw the show when she was four years old. While the memory of that day is one filled with joy, the fictional narrator notes “Many years later Claudia found out that for her parents that day had been torture. They had every moment thinking how absurd it was to see the stadium filled with laughing people. Throughout the entire show they had thought only, obsessively, about the dead” (98). Revisiting this space with the knowledge of how the past was experienced by her parents it was experienced past in the present creates a memorial *outburst* –

what Richard calls an “estallido de la memoria” (Richard, *Latencias y sobresaltos*) that brings to the surface all the wounded materiality of the unresolved past, creating a shock in trying to conciliate both memories- the psychic density and affective trace they carry.

There is a certain ambivalent guilt that comes with revisiting these otherwise mundane or innocent spaces with the historical knowledge of what they were a sight of: “We spend our days going over a long list of things that back then, when we were children, we didn’t know. It’s as if we had witnessed a crime. We didn’t commit it, we were one passing through the place, but we ran away because we knew that if they found us there we’d be blamed. We believe we are innocent, we believe we are guilty: we don’t know” (112). In revisiting the past there is an uncertainty of their own role in history, but there is also a *longing*, and this is precisely what brings the protagonists together- a desire to revisit a history that does not belong to them and a necessity to claim it as their own.

The title of the novel *Formas de Volver a Casa* (*Ways of Going Home* in its English translation) signals this nostalgic return. In fact, the title encapsulates the very meaning of the term nostalgia. Nostalgia is a word with faux-Greek roots that refers to the sentiment that originates from a desire to return to one’s home, one’s native land¹²⁷. The word is made up from the Greek roots *nostos*- which means return home and *algia*- which means longing. In her 2001 study *The Future of Nostalgia*, Svetlana Boym points out that the word specifically refers to a longing for a home that no longer exists or *has never existed*. It is a sentiment of loss and displacement but also an infatuation with that impossible desire to return, the object of nostalgia is forever elusive.

¹²⁷ The word “Nostalgia” was coined by the Swiss doctor Johannes Hofer in his medical dissertation in 1688. Contrary to the belief that the word had poetic or literary origins, nostalgia came from medicine and was used to describe a medical condition, an ailment that was able to produce erroneous representations that caused the afflicted to lose touch with the present. (Boym, Svetlana. *The Future of Nostalgia* 3).

Nostalgia is a longing for a different time and space, or more specifically, a nostalgic desire that aims *to revisit time like space* (Boym xix). The reunion of Claudia and the fictional narrator and the brief affair they have in her return to Santiago is punctuated by long walks through the city, through parks, through suburban streets. Through their walks, the protagonists revisit their memories, trying to remap the past, in hopes that in inhabiting that space, time can also be accessed and reframed.

It is fitting that it is through walking, through wandering without a particular destination, that the intimate space of sharing can open. Walking side by side, Claudia and the fictional narrator create parallel lines, two parallel trajectories- shared but never fully touching or crossing each other. Claudia and the fictional narrator are together following their own shared longing (*algia*): “It isn’t love that unites us. Or it is love but of memory. We are united by a desire to regain the scenes of secondary characters” (99). Yet each one holds on to a different idea of what returning home (*nostos*) means. This difference is what keeps them apart, what creates an abyss between them.

The nostalgic desire is also one that conflates different temporalities together. A longing for a different time as a response to the unstoppable progress and linear irreversibility of a time that seems to slip from our fingers. It evokes Huyssen’s explanation that the renowned attention to memory is but a response to the dispersion and acceleration of the modern world. Nostalgia is an affective yearning for *a vital connection*, a community, united by the shared impossibility in longing for a homecoming to an impossible past. It is not only that the process of remembering is one that brings these two characters together, but that in that rescuing there is a vindication of *all the secondary characters* that experienced History from the sidelines of history. This nostalgic

return goes against the impetus to constantly move-forward towards a utopic progress of erasure and reconstruction, as seen at the beginning of this chapter with Piñera's speech.

Claudia's return home, and her memory of the past is one that is fused with the national history; the political persecution of her father, the feeling of danger, of trauma and recognizing the dead. In contrast, the narrator comes from a family that remained politically at the margins, indifferent to the polarizing political struggles that shaped Chile. The Chile of Claudia is very different than the one of the fictional narrator. In exchanging family stories the fictional narrator notes "I was the only one who came from a family with no dead, and that realization filled me with a strange bitterness (...) I come from a family with no dead, I thought as my classmates told their childhood stories. At that moment I had a strong memory of Claudia, but I didn't want to tell her story. It wasn't mine. I knew little, but at least I knew that: no one could speak for someone else. That although we might want to tell other people's stories, *we always end up telling our own* (85). [My emphasis].

This realization is important for several reasons- First, because it foreshadows the material of the novel itself, second, because it presents us with the following paradox: it is precisely the fictional narrator's feeling of exclusion what allows him to tell the story of his generation through the story of Claudia and his own contrasting experience. Claudia becomes what grants the narrator an access to the past but also what gives him the opportunity to make it his own which is, at we shall see, the function of the metafictional strategy that is present in the "Diary" chapters of the diary narrator that intercalate the novel. The statement "Although we might want to tell other people's stories, we always end up telling our own" echoes the desire and motivation present in the writing of the diary narrator, and of the entire novel as a whole.

The “Diary”: The illusion of the autobiographical

Because of the ambiguity of both narrators, the references to other writers within Zambra’s literary circle,¹²⁸ and the autobiographical concordances between them, the Diary chapters that intercalate the novel stage a dialectic between fiction and a grounded reality outside of the fictional heterocosmos of the novel. It would be easy to assume that the interruption of the narrative of the “fictional narrator” by the “Diary” is an autobiographical intrusion of the author himself¹²⁹. It is also easy to conflate the diary narrator and the author because the diary narrator echoes Zambra’s sentiment of feeling that history does not belong to “the generation of secondary characters.” The diary narrator states: “The novel belongs to our parents, I thought then, I think now. That’s what we grew up believing, that the novel belonged to our parents.” (41).

However, it is important to note that despite of the multiple concordances that connect fiction with reality, the diary narrator is *also* a part of fiction, and the writing process he describes are a part of the *fiction* of the novel as well. The duplicitous diegesis produced in the novel innovates both the metafictional genre and articulates another way to approach writing about memory in contemporary Chile.

The diary chapters opens up a temporal frame. In commenting of what he has written (and what the reader has just read in the previous chapters of the fictional narrator), and in revealing the struggles of writing, the diary narrator positions the reader in a *temporal now* similar to the one encountered at the end of the short story “My Documents” where different temporal tenses coexist and interact with one another “*Today* is July 5th, 2013. It is *nighttime*. It’s

¹²⁸ Natalia Ginzburg, Carla Guelfebbein, Alejandra Costamagna, among others.

¹²⁹ The novel *El Zorro de Arriba, El Zorro de Abajo* (1971) by Peruvian writer José María Arguedas comes to mind, where four diaries are intercalated with the fiction of the novel, and where the writer bears his difficulty writing and his contemplation of suicide.

always nighttime when the text comes to an end [...] I cut and paste, change and enlarge the font, play with line spacing, think about closing his file and leaving it forever in the My Documents folder. *But I am going to publish it.* I want to, even though it's not finished, even though it is impossible to finish it." The *now* of writing suspends time, *now* has no duration, its ontological status is there as a transition, "always divided between a *no longer and not yet*" (Dinshaw, *How Soon is Now* 2).

In the "Diary" of the novel, the reader is positioned in that temporal in-betweenness of that "now" moment that contemplates the stops and starts of the creation of the "fiction" of the novel, the story of the nameless fictional narrator and Claudia. The diary keeps the readers up to date to the status of the novel within the novel: "I'm advancing little by little in the novel" (37), "I am in that trap now, in the novel. Yesterday I wrote the reunion scene that takes place almost twenty years later" (46), "I try to keep writing, I don't know which direction to take" (48), "I move toward and away from the narrator. And I don't get anywhere. I'm not going to get anywhere. I change schemes. I delete a lot. Twenty, thirty pages. I forget about this book. I get drunk little by little, I fall asleep" (135).

In being privy to the writing development of the fictional story of Claudia and the fictional narrator, there is an illusion that the reader is being asked to participate in the artistic process by bearing witness to the novel's self-analyzing development present in the "Diary". This movement gives the illusion that this diary narrator is actually the novelist himself, who has entered his own novel, drawing his reader into a fictional universe with multiple layers- including his own authorial self-awareness, which fools the reader into thinking it can transverse the fictional world of the novel and exist beyond the text, entering reality.

This metafictional deconstruction provides the readers a better understanding of the fundamental structure of the novel- also present in the very structural organization of the chapters, as their literary titles suggest. But more crucially, the use of the metafictional strategies becomes a vehicle for the author to bypass the impasses of writing about the past from this marginal, fragmentary position as a “secondary character”. In this fictional contemplation and reexamination of the fictional form, it provides the author an alternative route to address the dilemmas and fear of displacement inherent in postmemorial creations. More accurately, by circulating on its very construction, the role of memory, and the role of the writer, it turns the narrative into a platform for the (albeit fictional) “narrators” to place the present work of memory and writing at the center stage of the revisitation of the past.

This literary reconfiguration can be seen in one of the first scenes of the “Diary” with Eme. As I mentioned earlier, the function of Eme is diametrically opposite to that of Claudia. While Claudia tells her story for the fictional narrator to be the audience, throughout the “Diary” Eme is the reluctant audience of the diary narrator- at first refusing to read the novel he is writing and working on, and later reading and approving it, though with reservations¹³⁰. But Eme is *also* the inspiration for the fictional novel within the novel, for the protagonist- the diary narrator confesses to her: “I’m writing about you, the protagonist [Claudia] is a lot like you” (47). Eme is simultaneously audience, inspiration, and, most importantly- the very engine that jumpstarts the fiction: “It’s thanks to her that I found the story for the novel. We were still in bed at noon and we were telling anecdotes from our childhoods, as lovers do who want to know everything, who casts about for old stories to exchange with other person, who also searches to find themselves in that illusion of control, of surrender” (40). The nostalgia there is not one of the historical past,

¹³⁰ ““You told my story” she said “and I ought to thank you, but no, I’d prefer it if no one told that story” I explained that it wasn’t exactly her life, and that I had only taken some images, some memories we had shared.” (133).

but one that lingers within that intimate space of shared remembering, that which produces that vital affective connection between characters.

Eme remembers a scene when she was seven or eight years old, playing hide and seek with other children. They had been outside for a long time, and when Eme realizes that the adults were not looking for them, she searches for her parents and finds them inside, worried “listening to the news on the radio. A voice talking about a raid. It talked about the dead, about more dead” (40). This particular recollection and its many repetitions (“that happened so many times” (40).) leads Eme to an important realization: “We kids understood, all of a sudden, that we weren’t so important. That there were unfathomable and serious things that we couldn’t know or understand” (41). In that shared intimate space the diary narrator realizes that:

The novel belongs to our parents, I thought then, *I think now*. That’s what we grew up believing, that the novel belonged to our parents. *We cursed them, and also took refuge in their shadows, relieved*. While the adults killed or were killed, we drew pictures in a corner. While the country was falling to pieces, we were learning to talk, to walk, to fold napkins in the shape of boats, of airplanes. *While the novel was happening*, we played hide-and-seek, we played at *disappearing* (41). [My emphasis]

The juxtaposition of the historical crisis -in which history is configured as a novel that happens to the parents- with the fundamental experiences of coming of age and childhood - learning how to walk and talk, playing different games- reaffirms the belief that while history is unfolding, the post-generation is permanently positioned in the background, in the backseat of cars, *disappearing* not only as they played hide-and-seek, but also as they took refuge “in the shadows of our parents”. Having this tangential position is at once a relief and a burden.

It is important to note that while in this recollection, the act of disappearing is framed within the playful scenario of the childhood game of hide-and-seek, the violent resonance the term holds also gets activated. The act of erasure is recreated in the context of a game, but it is

also tinted with the violence of the historical past and the meaning of the word “*desaparecer*” and “*desaparecidos*” in the historical context of the dictatorship, giving them the resonance that we saw was erased in Piñera’s inaugural speech.

Inhabiting the time of the book

Though the diary gives the illusion of a lineal progression in the writing of the “fictional novel” it also creates a radical temporal interruption that cuts and reconfigures the time and space of the novel. The “diary” creates a fictional aperture that suspends time and gives space for important and meaningful meta-reflections about both the narrative act and the act of remembering that mirror the novel. This suspended time is registered by the diary narrator by situating himself in that procrastinating *now* that delays the act of creation, the “not yet” of writing, “taking one’s sweet time outside of the normative conceptions that organize time” (Dinshaw, *How Soon is Now* 5). In the case of traditional narratives in a novelistic framework, the fiction here stops and starts the normally lineal progression in which novels unfold. The disruption and delay in the writing, gives the feeling that the novel as a whole is profoundly asynchronous- holding within it different temporal systems that collided in that suspended moment of *now* presented by the fictional “diary”.

The diary narrator delays and stretches the action of writing. When Eme suggested the diary narrator to write the novel all at once, he responds: “The thing is, Eme—I think now, a little drunk -- I’m waiting for a voice. A voice that isn’t mine. An old voice, novelistic and solid” (39). Immediately after he reflects: “Or maybe it’s just that I like *working* on the book. *That I prefer writing to having written*. I’d rather stay there, *inhabit the time of the book*, cohabit with those years, chase the distant images at length and then carefully go over them again. See them badly, but see them. *To just stay there, looking.*” (39) [My emphasis]. The crafting of this time is

also a nostalgic time, described by Boym as a *time-out-of-time*, the time of daydreaming and longing that jeopardizes one's time-tables and work ethic constantly directed to a forward moving progression and production.

To inhabit this suspended time, when one is still working on the book, when the act of writing is still incomplete, produces a nostalgic time that seduces the writer, making him inhabit the past and thus delaying that impossible return home. The inclusion (and interruption- as it intercalates with the first level of "fiction" of the novel) of the "diary" chapters then functions as a meta-fictional tool that affords- as the prefix "meta" promises- a freedom of direction that simultaneously goes "with, across, and after", providing a wider space of creation and introspection that can touch upon different time tenses.

We can connect the possibility of the "meta" with the nostalgic gaze described by Boym as one that is directed "not only backwards but sideways" (Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* 13) The nostalgic gaze of the writer not only looks backwards but *lingers* in the present time, daydreaming while inhabiting the "time of the book". The past of the "diary narrator" thus is accessed and recomposed with fragments, recollections, imaginations, and introspective delays that comment on the act of remembering and on the act of writing itself. Thus, memory is not configured in a lineal way, but in a way that allows a rummaging through the surroundings and multiple resonances present when the active thinking/writing and remembering of the past is occurring in the "Diary". This speaks of the very nature of memory, how it is recomposed imperfectly, through fragments, through mediations, through creative reconstructions, through *outbursts* (estallidos de la memoria) that interrupt linear time. The diary narrator admits this:

I tried to keep writing, I don't know which direction to take. I don't want to talk about innocence or guilt; I want nothing more than *to illuminate some corners, the corners where we were*. But I'm not sure I can do it well. I feel too close to what I'm telling. I've abused some memories, I've sacked my memory, and also, in a certain way, I've made up

too much. I'm starting from scratch again, *like a caricature of a writer staring impatiently at the screen* (48). [My emphasis].

The "diary" then not only presents a fictional self-introspective awareness of the act of writing but also of the act of memory- of how imperfectly one remembers, of the impossibility to capture a totality, on how we abuse memory in our attempt to capture- and to write- about the past. This contemplation brings the reader to the present time "I'm starting from scratch again, like a caricature of a writer staring impatiently at the screen" (48) the deconstruction of both of these processes together- the act of writing and the act of remembering- turn the novel into a meta-memory artifact, that contemplates not only the status of the past, but the place of enunciation in the present of writing.

Mise en abyme and literary clues

The very nature of memory work is a fragmented reconstruction that is also cinematic. We don't remember in a linear way, we remember moments, gestures, pointed scenes, and these scenes are composed and reimagined as if they were a film we are replaying in our heads. Memory is not only accessed literally, but also *visually*. The cinematic image of the past is one that reconstructs past moments incorporating and superimposing the framings, the tints of the desires of the present (as the diary narrator writes "I've chased the distance images [of the past] at length"), where both tenses overlap and feed off each other in its reconstruction.

The diary narrator both remembers and writes with this cinematic lens. He desires to inhabit the time of the book "to stay there *looking*" (34) "to *illuminate* the corners where we were"¹³¹(38) "to remember *the images fully*, no unnecessary *scenes*" (135). [My emphasis] This longing for a certain visual economy and composition illustrates the process of remembering, of rewinding the past from a particular lens that is able to cinematically reconstruct the past.

¹³¹ This desire is particularly meaningful if we recall how the diary narrator describes his generation as the one that lived and took shelter in the shadows of their parents.

This cinematic approach to memory is also present through the metafictional strategies used in the writing, which emphasize a certain ludic playfulness inside the text that creates a complicit relationship between the reader and the author. This can be paralleled to the cinematic technique of “breaking the fourth wall”- a phenomenon where a character steps out of their fictional universe to talk directly or acknowledge the audience. In fact, the entire novel is filled with literary and cinematic clues and reference that highlight the role of the reader as a player that connects the clues that exist beyond the fictional world and that mirror, replicate, and evoke the intention of the novel as a whole.

The narrative incorporates intertextual references to rescue the subject of writing- that of secondary characters, and that of the form of writing and remembering. The multiple literary “cameos” of fellow contemporary writers in real life who interact with the diary narrator in the novel (Alejandra Costamagna, Rodrigo Olavarría, Diego Zuñiga) or appear through the literary references of their novels(Natalia Ginzburg and Carla Guelfenbeing) creates a delicate interwoven link- a network of that community of sons and daughters who are also writers and who share that general feeling of being in “the backseat as history was unfolding”.

When the diary narrator recalls reading *Madame Bovary* at the National Institute, he remembers that it was important for students to memorize those characters that were secondary to the plot “It was important to know that the errand boy with a limp was named Hipólito and the maide was Félicité and that the name of Emma’s daughter was Berta Bovary. There was a certain beauty in the act, because back then we were exactly that: secondary characters” (42). As a writer, the diary narrator resorts to literary references to echo a kind of self-reflexive inscription of the novel he is writing.

These literary allusions justify the diary narrator's own enterprise, in a way- reflecting on how to remember and how to write. When talking to Rodrigo Olivarría about those memories that you write and the memories that you make up he recalls a phrase by Tim O'Brien "What sticks to memory, often, are those odd little fragments that have no beginning and no end" I keep thinking about that. It's true. We remember the sound of the images [...] we ought to simply describe those sounds, those stains on memory. That arbitrary selection, nothing more. That's why we lie so much, in the end. That's why the book is always the opposite of another immense and strange book." The intertextual references of the literary reflections on memory speak of the very essence of the novel itself. The novel's narcissistic literary strategy is to make the act of remembering and writing the main core and protagonist of the novel, what binds both narrators together. The attention to "the making of" this act of writing and remembering thus displaces the centrality of the parents- making *them* into the secondary characters, and making the female counterparts as interlocutors for the narrator to remember.

Perhaps one of the most clever details of these multiple clues, is when the diary narrator encounters "A faded reproduction of *Las Meninas*" One that "has been in the house forever and that my father still proudly shows visitors: "This is the painter Velásquez; the painter painted himself" he says (61). We could argue that in the novel, the author has written himself within it, like the Velásquez that appears in the left corner of the painting, behind his easel. "*This is the writer Zambra, the writer wrote (his fictional self) himself in the novel*". Though, as mentioned in the beginning, the novel operates within the fictional, the narrative voices present in the novel make a somewhat composite identity where both the narrator, the critic, and the author, collapse onto each other.

The representation of self-inscriptive narrative acts reveal the nature of writing to the readers: the act of narration is and will ultimately always be an act of self-inscription. This is illustrated by the creation of these two levels of narration that bear striking and inescapable resemblances to one another and that is illustrated by repetition of fictional scenes, conversations, and relational dynamics between characters of both fictional planes.

After having read a scene in which the diary narrator dialogues with his mother, we see the same scene rewritten in the fictional narrator world. The reader then is witness to how experience is translated into writing, and is able to identify the manipulations of the diary narrator as a writer, in how he adds and deletes significant details in the fictional interaction of the fictional narrator. This narrative forces the reader to have an active role in connecting the literary clues left throughout the writing, showcasing a very postmodern pleasure that derives from “making one’s way through continually shifting levels of fiction” (Baron “The Player’s Parody” 22).

Ultimately, the metafictional deconstruction offers an extremely accurate model for understanding the contemporary world as a construction, an artifice, a web of independent semiotic systems (Waugh, *Metafiction* 34). This recalls the Barthesian description of the authorial voice of the novel as one being constructed as a multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is indeed “a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture.” (Barthes, “Death of the Author”).

The reconstruction of the past indulges in experiences the past from this double place of lack- not only as generational secondary characters, but also as a subject that was not directly affected by the violence of the military regime. In contrast to Mariana Eva Perez, Albertina Carri, José Carlos Agüero, and Renato Cisneros, Zambra is not defined as being a “Son of”. This

is in some ways a release, but also another place of lack. In incorporating the multiple voices, the self-conscious construction of the narrative and the reflections imbedded in the fiction read more as an autobiographical confessionals. The novel playfully navigates between reality and fiction, creating a radiography of the act of writing itself, circling around breaking a fourth wall though never admitting to it or fully breaking it.

We can identify a relationship based on a mirroring of the actual process in which the writer can be engaged at the moment he starts typing and rearranging the text in his computer- the process of bringing to life the fictive worlds that intercross in his imagination. When the diary narrator erases and deletes he strives “to find a genuine music [...] I experiment with erasing everything to allow that rhythm, those words, to prevail” (136). The diary narrator is not only mirroring the function of the author, but also of the reader in deciphering the novelistic code that is crafted “Like the musician deciphering the symbolic code of musical notation, the reader is here involved in a creative, interpretative process (Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative* 139). In that novel this unfolds by disruption and discontinuity in the interplay within the two fictive levels that unsettles the comfortable habits of reading and of traditional lineal narrative time proper of the novelistic framework.

Thus, the metafictional strategies throughout the novel evidence how it is commenting on its own status: as a novel that is about writing and remembering by laying bare the process of both actions. The novel is both a process unveiled as well as the finished product- the “Ways of going home” (and the impossibility to do so) is not only captured in the fictional levels, but also in the book itself as a metamemory work.

The two earthquakes

As I mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, the novel is framed by two earthquakes- the 1985 earthquake remembered and experienced by the fictional narrator as a child, and the 2010 earthquake experienced by the diary narrator as an adult, which ends the novel. The 2010 earthquake also situates the time of the writing, as the last sentence of the novel reads as a dated signature “*Santiago, Febrero de 2010*”¹³² (*Formas de volver a casa* 139). I quote the Spanish edition of the novel, since in *Ways of Going Home*, the English translation by Megan McDowell, this final sentence doesn’t appear. This seems to me as a major oversight, because the dated quote is very much part of the fictional frame given by Zambra and not a paratextual element outside of the text. The detail of the final date in the novel is important insofar as it creates the effect of temporal immediacy, setting the ending of the novel within a specific spatio-temporal frame where history and fiction coincide. It also situates the ending of the novel within the political time of the beginning of the Piñera presidency, this moment of forward-looking reconstruction that makes clean break with the past.

Similar to the ending in “My Documents”, the novel ends with the writer at nighttime- the night of the 2010 earthquake- immersed in the present act of writing as an ongoing and unfinished action:

It’s late. I’m writing. The city is convalescing, but little by little the sounds of any other end-of-summer night are resuming. I think naively, intensely, about suffering. *About the people who died today, in the south. About yesterday’s dead, and tomorrow’s. And about this profession, this strange, humble, and arrogant, necessary and insufficient trade: to spend life watching, writing* (138). [My emphasis]

The framing of the two earthquakes allows for a metaphorical displacement that connects the past to its outburst and repetitions in the present. The way that as much as history can be

¹³²Zambra, Alejandro. *Formas de volver a casa*. Barcelona: Editorial Anagrama, 2011.

thought of as occupying a distant past, its echoes and returns in multiple resonances that find their way into the present, despite the possible attempts of erasure. In contrast to Piñera's inaugural speech that seemed to replace and reframe the category of victims and desaparecidos, The diary narrator's reaction to the earthquake jolt him to the past, rescue the past and connects the lives lost in the present to those lost by the dictatorship, and to those that will be lost in the future.

By ending the novel within this specific historical event, the novel again blurs the porous boundary between fiction and reality. It brings to the surface, and connects to the present the traces of the past, but also self-consciously commenting on the limits of rescuing the past through writing, the fragility of memories, and the autobiographical place through which one remembers.

The narrative voice that concludes the novel could be that of the diary narrator, a work of fiction, but it can also reflect that of the fictional narrator, and also that of the author himself. Most importantly, the voice and experience that transcends is that of those that were considered, and considered themselves the secondary characters of history. Remembering in the novel means going through these halls of mirrors in which fiction and reality bounce back and forth, creating a space in which the writer can finally become the protagonist.

CHAPTER SEVEN, PART TWO

The Mourning Sons: Redemptive Mourning in Renato Cisneros's *La distancia que nos separa* (2015) and the stripped materiality of Jose Carlos Agüero's *Persona* (2017)

The year 2015 saw the publication of two fundamental books about memory and the period of political violence written by two mourning “sons of” in Peru. The autofictional novel *La distancia que nos separa* by Renato Cisneros- son of a controversial ex military general and Minister of the Interior Luis Cisneros Vizquerr- and *Los Rendidos. Sobre el Don de Perdonar*, a collection of personal reflections by Jose Carlos Agüero- son of two members of the terrorist organization PCP-SL¹³³. Both works, and the subsequent text by Agüero, *Persona* (2017), are works that take the paternal loss as a starting point. They are also works that open up the inheritance left in their personal history and from there rework it in a way that it enters into a collective reflection of memory, or – more precisely- of the impasses of memory in contemporary Peru.

Fifteen years after the period of political violence ended, the discourse of cultural memory was carving a place and setting within institutional spaces. In December of 2015, the Lugar de la Memoria, la Tolerancia y la Inclusión Social (LUM) was inaugurated in the capital of Lima. Yet, the memory of the past in Peru is still a highly contentious subject, pulled in opposite directions. After the publication of the Truth Commission and the photographic exhibit *Yuyanapaq: Para no olvidar* (2002), Peru was experiencing a necessary cultural reckoning with the years of political violence. At the opposite side of that spectrum, however, there seemed to be

¹³³ Renato Cisneros father- Luis Cisneros Vizquerra was a public person in Peru, known as “El Gaucho Cisneros” since he did his military training in Argentina. During the period of political violence, he had a key political position both within the army and in the political realm. He was infamously known for being authoritative and often made controversial remarks in the media regarding how to eradicate the Shining Path. In contrast, Agüero’s father and mother are described by the author as anonymous members of the forces of the terrorist violence, “Senderistas del montón, sin notoriedad.” (2015:35).

an understanding that the promise of “moving forward” as a nation was often encrypted as one dependent on the power of forgetting- as the possible return of the Fujimori regime during the 2016 elections attest.

Indeed, the nation was divided into those that saw a need for memory and for cultural memory artifacts, spaces, and creations that attested to recognize the traumatic past, and those to which the past was still a difficult subject that brought to the surface deeply rooted antagonisms within the nation. In contrast to the thirty years of distance between the military dictatorship past in the Southern Cone, the past is relatively still fresh in Peru, a wound that has not yet completely healed and that threatens to reopen at any moment.

Even after the work of the Truth Commission and Reconciliation report was published, memory as a discourse- though extremely present in the academic field (especially in sociology, anthropology and literature)- had not yet entered the mainstream public sphere and discussion as strongly. The reconciliation efforts implemented a series of necessary symbolic gestures, but it did not generate a consensus in crafting an official narrative regarding the past, and the social fragmentations that are still prevalent within society as a whole.

In the artistic realms, however, the attention to memory had begun to bear important fruits since the early 2000s. In the literary and artistic fields, memory had become a fecund topic for creation in every discipline- from novels, short stories, to films, art installations, theatre and performance work. The multiple artistic creations regarding the political violence of the past gathered significant national and international recognition¹³⁴.

¹³⁴ Among them, literary works *La Hora Azul* by Alonso Cueto (2005), *Abril Rojo* (2006) by Santiago Roncagliolo, *La Sangre de la Aurora* (2013) by Claudia Salazar and the short story anthology on political violence *Toda la sangre*, published in 2006. Theatre work by the collective *Yuyachkani*, and films like *La Teta Asustada* (2009) by Claudia Llosa (Winner of the Golden Bear at the Berlinale in 2009 and nominated for an Academy Award for Best Foreign Film the same year), *Paloma de Papel* directed by Fabrizio Aguilar (2003), *NN* directed by Héctor Aguilar (2014), and *Magallanes* directed by Salvador del Solar (2015) to name a few.

Yet, absent from these cultural productions, were literary works that approach memory from a personal testimonial or autobiographical place besides *Memorias de un soldado desconocido. Autobiografía y antropología de la violencia* by Sergio Lurgio¹³⁵ published in 2014. In contrast with Argentina- where the connections to violence and loss are inscribed as a familiar network of interconnected communities and is central to the national imaginary, in Peru the past has an ambiguous and contradictory place within the national imaginary. Although the memory of the violent past has become institutionalized by works like *Yuyanapaq: Para Recordar* (2003) and spaces like the Lugar de la Memoria and the Museo de la Memoria in Ayacucho, there is still a search for a space to think about loss and the past from a deeply rooted (and conflicted) personal place, voiced by those who directly inherited the legacies of the past.

The texts by Agüero and Cisneros present the reworking of memory from this complicated personal and familiar place. In both cases, the authors confront the parental loss and access the past history of the parents in order to make sense of their legacy, to untangle the complicated inheritance and weight left by those who preceded them; the figures who were, as mentioned in the introduction, the protagonists of history.

In the following pages, I will briefly examine how mourning manifests itself in the novel *La distancia que nos separa* by Cisneros, positing that it is the use of the autofictional genre what facilitates a fictional absolution of the father and also a resolution of mourning for the author. This brief reflection will be put in dialogue and contrast with Agüero's work published the same year *Los Rendidos. Sobre el don de perdonar* and constitute the necessary bridge to the main text I will close-read, Agüero latest work, *Persona* (2017). This text, in contrast to the novel by Cisneros, offers no resolution to loss, but takes an innovative and productive approach

¹³⁵ This testimony is extremely poignant, Sergio Lurgio was part of the Shining Path and then part of the military in Peru, his sober, meticulous and hard testimony is perhaps one of the most important documents of memory in Peru.

to both personal and national history through the interplay of visual and literary forms. Additionally, it directly touches upon the impasses of cultural memory and representation, as well as the limitations of discourses, and the languages that explain and try to make sense of the past.

The reason I decided to focus on *Persona* is precisely because of the space that it fills, and how important and necessary it is for cultural memory practices to include voices that would otherwise be silent, simply because they represent the legacy and stigma of the perpetrator, one that carries a convoluted and dark presence in history. Though different artistic practices have represented memory, too many times the most glaring omission is the first person voice or even the mention of the PCP-SL and its members¹³⁶. In a way, this is understandable, with the past still so recent and the PCP-SL being the indisputable insurgent force that caused so much damage and destruction in the nation¹³⁷. Because of this, the PCP-SL is a charged mention, there is an unspeakable dimension and a heavily guarded approach towards any multidimensional or humanizing discourse surrounding it.

¹³⁶ A notable example is the exhibition of *Yuyanapaq*. According to the curator Mayu Mohanna, the decision not to include family images or images of fallen PCP-SL members was made so as to “not generate antagonisms or empathy with terrorists” (2016). Another example is the theatre project *Proyecto 1980-2000. El pasado que herede* (2012), a theatre play heavily influenced by Lola Arias biodramas *Mi Vida Después* (2009) and *El año que nací* (2012). *Proyecto* gathered seven performers born during the years of political violence in Peru in a collective exercise to reconstruct the historical timeline of the nation with their own personal histories. Every performer had a direct familiar connection with the period of violence- a daughter of an important journalist, the son of a corrupt politician, the sister of a victim. More significant that the omission within the cast to include someone related to the history of the PCP-SL, the most glaring absence was any mention of the PCP-SL during a play that tackled the period of political violence and its lasting effects in the present.

¹³⁷In the final report of the CVR (Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación) it is stated that the immediate cause of the internal armed conflict in Peru was the PCP-SL decision to start the armed struggle against the Peruvian State. The Truth Commission reports that PCP-SL was the main perpetrator of crimes, human rights violations, deaths and disappearances. It was responsible for 54 percent of the fatal victims of the conflict. The military intervention was also responsible for many human rights violations, rapes, extra-judicial executions and disappearances. “Conclusiones Generales del Informe General de la CVR” in *Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación* (2003).

As we saw in *Part One* of the dissertation, one of the main problems of cultural production is the distance between those who experienced or directly inherited the violence history of the past and those who mediate that history and representation within the cultural realms. The work of Agüero offers a glimpse, a guarded closeness, bridging the gap between those who control cultural production and the subject represented. Like Gabriel Gatti's work, this text is also written *desde las entrañas*- from the guts.

Persona is a complicated text, a testimony of a conflicted memory where personal history, History, and the way it has been represented through different memory discourses clash. It is also a text that speaks about the impossibility of representation, of language, of testimony itself. It is a text that, as the author mentions in the introduction, challenges the very condition of the Subject, of the "I" that remembers, that creates and exists. He states: "Los sujetos se deshacen." (Subjects fall apart). In order to create from the place of impossibility, Agüero turns to very materiality of the subject- the deteriorating body and what it leaves behind once it has been stripped of all the discourses that explain us.

The Redemptive Mourning in Renato Cisnero's *La distancia que nos separa*; The impossibility of Mourning in Jose Carlos Agüero's *Los Rendidos*

In its Freudian definition¹³⁸ mourning designates the process of overcoming loss of a loved one or ideal. Freud indicates that the work of mourning the subject comes to term with the reality of the loss of a loved one through a process that prolongs the psychic existence of the lost object in crucial ways. A gradual process which eventual completion promises the ego to become free and uninhibited again. For Freud -and following in line also with Julia Kristeva¹³⁹'s work on

¹³⁸ Freud, Sigmund. "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917) in The Standard Edition of *The Complete Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachley, 23 vols. Hogarth, 1953-1974.

¹³⁹ Kristeva, Julia. *Black Sun. Depression and Melancholia*. Columbia UP, 1989.

melancholy and depression-, art and literature constitute a privileged medium of manifesting that working through of loss and bereavement. Yet, language can posit itself as insufficient to replace the lost object, and the mourner can also resist its substitution or metaphorical transaction.

In *The Untimely Present: Postdictatorial Fiction and the Task of Mourning* (1999), Idelber Avelar signals how important the use of storytelling is to the work of mourning. Yet he warns that the use of language and the construction of a narrative also poses an inescapable paradox- it offers restitution of the loss object while knowing all too well that all restitution is impossible (*The Untimely Present* 124).

Cisneros's *La distancia que nos separa*¹⁴⁰ uses the autofictional genre and strategies to reconstruct the past of the father, and to -in a way- redeem this conflicted historical figure by way of the object itself. In the novel, the death of the father produces the birth of the writer. The story held within the pages are born out of the necessity to defend and reframe the controversial figure, cleansing it through the eyes of the narrative protagonist, the conflicted son.

The use of autofiction allows the author to create a lineal sequence that unfolds producing a redemptive resolution, a kind of narrative closure, albeit a fictional one. Towards the end of the novel the narrator states: "I did not want to do a profile, or a biography, or a documentary, I needed to fill the blank spaces with the imagination because my father was made up of all that I imagined him to be" (346). The ambiguity of autofiction- the porous borders through which it transits between reality and fiction, history and imagination, allows the narrative to fill the gaps and contradictions surrounding the historical past.

¹⁴⁰ The autofictional novel by Renato Cisneros *La distancia que nos separa* follows the narrator as he sets to search who his father was in the past, and what role he occupied during the period of political violence in Peru. This search, however, is marked by the memories of the own narrator and his own conflicted relationship in trying to conciliate the controversial man his father was in public with the image of his father within the family sphere: "There we waited [my siblings and I] every night the arrival of the father, the uniformed man who appeared on television and that every morning after kissing us goodbye and barely crossing through the door became a popular villain" (2015:166).

In the end, the novel presents mourning work that ends up with a meta-fictional resolution that is proven by the book itself. By this I mean that throughout the novel, the reader is reminded that the goal of the fictional narrator Cisneros's to reconstruct his father's life is driven by the loss and bereavement his death has caused. Yet, this bereavement is transformed once the narrator realizes that it is thanks to the father's death that he can now become a writer, as the novel we are reading attests.

Though the narrator recognizes the authoritarian and aggressive presence of the father, there is also a hint of admiration in his virility, in the way el Gaucho Cisneros commanded a room. His importance filled the narrator with both admiration and dread. In turning to his own childhood, the narrator shares a guilt for his insular childhood and coming-of-age years, confessing how his idyllic memories happened simultaneously as the nation was undergoing their most turbulent and violent years in history¹⁴¹. Both the narrator's guilt and the loss of the father become necessary in configuring the end-goal of the storytelling- the act of writing the novel. The loss is transformed and reworked at the end of the novel- it is the book, the ability to write the story what, as the Freudian mourning work signals, replaces and sublimates the paternal loss.

The novel ends with the death of the father. The narrator explains "If your dead choose you, if they follow you, it is because they are seeking for you to give them a voice, to fill in the gaps and cracks; that you write down, organize, and share their lies and their truth that, deep down, are not so different than your own. Perhaps writing is just that: inviting the dead to speak

¹⁴¹ "[When I was a kid] I invented those make-believe wars while the country was experiencing a real war. A war that I did not feel at all inside of our bunker house in Monterrico. My father and his workers took care that our illusory capsule had no cracks through which hatred could be filtered, hatred against the political class, against inequality, against repression. My father was able to make that the worst years of Peru were also the best years of my life, years in which I felt- as Nabokov says- that "everything was as it should be, that nothing would ever change, that no one would ever die" (266).

through one” (355). Mourning takes the form of a literary redemption. The autofictional operates in a way that it absolves the authoritarian excess of the father as a controversial public figure by framing his story as one where he is but a vehicle for the narrator to find his literary voice.

The thin line between the fictional and the real and the redemptive effect of the novel can go beyond Cisneros himself and caters to a discourse of memory we have previously addressed regarding cultural memory in Peru: the promise that in coming in contact with the past, there is a possibility of a cleansing and healing experience. Perhaps this is why this novel was so successful in entering the mainstream, occupying many end of the year “Best of” and “Best selling” literary lists. By offering a reworking of the conflictive inheritance of past resolved into a tightly packaged personal redemption, the narrative offers a kind of absolution that can be extrapolated to represent the way memory work can be consumed by upper and middle class society from the capital- engaging with memory work insofar in hopes that through the process of witnessing, it can absolve the national indifference that was pervasive in the capital when the armed conflict unfolded.

Jose Carlos Agüero’s text *Los Rendidos. Sobre el don de perdonar* resist any kind of genre classification¹⁴². Through the reflections included, it exhibits a sustained mourning for both parents, one that finds no possible place to work that loss, he states “I have lived for a long time looking for a legitimate place from where to write” (91).¹⁴³ While Cisneros finds in autofiction a vehicle through which to fill the gaps of his history and reframe the loss of the father, in *Los Rendidos*, Agüero finds no place or solace in any kind of discourse. Similar to

¹⁴² *Los Rendidos. Sobre el don de perdonar* is a text that gathers pointed memories, reflections of both his present and his past as well as the lives of his PCP-SL militant parents. It has a fragmentary structure since, like *Diario de una Princesa Montonera*, it is constituted by a series of texts published on the author’s online blog: NegroAguero <http://negroaguero.blogspot.com/>

¹⁴³ The translation is mine. The original quote is “He vivido, si, largo tiempo buscando un lugar legítimo para escribir” (91).

Diario de una princesa montonera, Agüero, as both subject/object, exhibits a critical distance and signals an exhaustion of the discourses that have been used (and he himself has used) to explain and shape his and the historical past¹⁴⁴. The text demystifies the productions of knowledge that have explained and represented him, and the voice that emerges is one that resists to be subsumed as an object of study, though Agüero recognizes being both a subject of stigma and also a researcher well versed on how memory is be framed, examined, and discussed. It is a testimonial text that resists and critically questions testimony itself by making use of the same intellectual armor as those that speak for him.

Ultimately, while *La Distancia* offers in the autofictional voice a narrative that resolves both guilt and loss into a fictional literary redemption, *Los Rendidos* does not produce any type of closure. The subjective turn of his writing points to the fact that what is unrepresentable about the past takes place precisely *in* the place of representation, in the writing itself.

At the end of the text, the complicated inheritance left by his parents is configured in the very space of the abandoned house of his childhood to which he returns: "I have known for a long time that the house that my parents left me, that cursed house, would never leave me, because it is the house that inhabits me"¹⁴⁵(135). The loss in this text is internalized in such a way where the author also becomes the tomb that contains that loss. Even though *La distancia* and *Los Rendidos* coincide chronologically, they exhibit diametrically opposite strategies regarding how to transform both the parental loss and the inheritance of the past.

¹⁴⁴ Particularly the cultural memory and the academic discourse. In it the author detects an indulgent complacency, an exploration of the past "so the humanist can better understand the process to write about them, or so that civil society can look at itself better and elaborate civic lessons." (2015:99). This critical stance will be furthered explored with the text *Persona*.

¹⁴⁵ Hace tiempo que supe que la casa que me dejaron mis padres, la muy maldita, no me abandonaría jamás. Porque es la casa la que me habita" (135).

The inherent duality in *Persona*

Persona is a book but it also stands as an aesthetic object¹⁴⁶. Its materiality signals a careful attention, opening itself for an exploration in reading that transits between different medias. In *Persona*, the interplay between forms effectively creates a new and inventive lexicon for memory that critically encounters hegemonic discourses of memory in Peru and finds them insufficient.

The book combines Agüero's personal written reflections with different media: maps, illustrations of childhood objects, photographs, curatorial reproductions, and drawings. In it, the composite of both the text and the visual mutually complement each and reinforce each other, filling each others limits- the visual conveys what language cannot, and the text gives the images added richness and unseen dimensions. Though sober, and at times distant, it conveys a complicated history and intimacy. Simultaneously, though most of the reflections stem from a profoundly personal and conflicted past and identity, the text is also able to transmit crucial reflections on the places and discourses of memory, on familiar inheritance and its legacies, and on those unresolved residues left by the violent past.

The book is not a work of fiction, it is a fragmented text that transits between essays, testimonial, autobiographical writing, and that by not fully adhering to any genre in particular it escapes its possible constraints or limitations. The impasses the writer confronts in balancing his own individual memory with the collective memory and testimonial discourse and limits of the language is reworked through his engagement with the visual medium. In fact, the book is an example of an "imagetext" what W.J.T Mitchel describes as a composite, synthetic work that

¹⁴⁶ *Persona* was highly regarded by both cultural and literary circles. Upon its publication it won the prestigious Premio Nacional de Literatura in 2018.

combines image and text, and hones into the inextricable connection of non-discursive language to discursive language (Mitchell, "Introduction" in *The Future of Text and Image 2*).

From his position as the son of two militants of the PCP-SL, his condition as orphan, and his complicated relationship with the academic/artistic discourses, Agüero's postmemorial imagination mines history as a source both of art and of critical questioning. The book engages with the past and the familial loss that constitutes the author, but it also simultaneously interrogates his own place of enunciation, language, art, and the status of cultural memory practices.

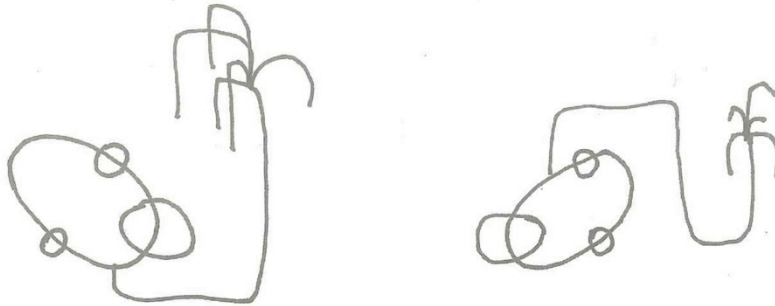
Agüero both uses and critiques language, using the visual medium in order to best illustrate a sharp and acute critique from his particular position as subject/object of memory. The exhaustion of several discourses leads the text to a contemplation- a return and special attention to a stripped materiality of life, the impossibility of permanence and the destruction of the body. In *Persona*, Agüero he turns his attention to the materiality of remains- the calcium of bones, the humid (and fertile) dirt on the ground, ashes, buried clothes, residues. The title *Persona* ponders on the uncertainty and emptiness of the body and the subject once it has been destroyed, devoid of meaning and discourses that explain it.

Persona ends with a series of hand-drawn illustrations that shows two barely assembled stick figures as remnants talking to each other. The first illustration (Figure 7.1) shows the stick-figures having the following dialogue:

-I once gave my testimony.

-Don't you know that the subaltern cannot speak?

- A professor just explained that to me
- Where?
- In a book about my testimony.



- Una vez di mi testimonio
- ¿No sabías que no puede hablar el subalterno?
- Una profesora recién me lo explicó
- ¿Dónde?
- En un libro sobre mi testimonio...

Figure 7.1 Jose Carlos Agüero, *Persona*, 2017

This ironic exchange encapsulates one of the main tensions present in the work- one that continually revises the potential and limits of memory, knowledge production, and cultural representation within different social spheres: cultural, political and intellectual. In *Persona*, Agüero evidences the traps of discourses in trying to fix memory and the traumatic past. The drawing of the speaking figures are composed by concentric circles that are barely standing a float against the simple empty background of the page. The caption of the drawing is also handwritten. The fact that one of these stick figures learns s/he cannot speak through a book of an expert that speaks (for) about the subject's unspeakability ironically and succinctly captures that asymmetrical production and mediation that exist both within the academic, artistic, and literary world. The decision to have the caption of the stick figures handwritten highlights the

informality of the exchange, one that stands in contrast to any official document or book written by an expert trying to explain them, where the text would certainly be typed.

Persona uses illustration of common childhood memorabilia, national symbols, photographs, curatorial texts, maps, and hand-drawn illustrations. All of which are intervened by the author in ironic, and sometimes haunting ways- juxtaposing the violence of the past with the seeming innocence those materials evoke.

In contrast with all the other literary works that are included in *Part Two*, Agüero does not use or rework fiction, in fact, against the subjective centrality present both in Perez and in Zambra, which are so centered in crating a space and protagonic role to counter the postmemorial angst and fear of displacement, Agüero deconstructs the idea of the subject and its possible protagonism. While both Perez and Zambra use the memory overload and production of knowledge on memory to enrich their narratives, Agüero is suspicious of its function, finding in the materiality of loss and violence something that resists every possible explanation that gives an order of the past. It is at once a testimonial text that resists and questions the label of testimony. This is particular important, given that Agüero worked with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission- both as a giver of testimony and as interlocutor and facilitator of others giving their testimonies to the TRC. Thus, the author is familiar with how testimonies are given and also how testimonies have been framed.

Even though the place of enunciation is anchored in the first person, and does include pointed memories about his past and his parents, the text transcends the personal voice and memory and amplifies into a much wider reflection that dives into more existential territories. Agüero's text does not follow a narrative unfolding, or have a straight forward and anchored subjective voice as with *Los Rendidos*, charged with the urgency to set the record straight and

find a place of enunciation to work the loss of his father and mother beyond the stigma that marks their identities as “terrorists”.

In the foreword of *Persona*, the author notes: “When I published *Los Rendidos. Sobre el don de perdonar* (2015) I used some family memories to reflect on the subjective world of post-conflict [Peru]. Although I resorted to the past, it was not a historical text or a testimony. I proposed it as a tool to investigate the way in which we share social and ethical dilemmas in a present born of so much violence.”¹⁴⁷ While *Los Rendidos* is firmly anchored within the subjective, the text in *Persona* detaches from the subjective space and the anchors that describe and situate him by constantly returning to the precarious condition of the subject as a body that will eventually deteriorate in time. In fact, beyond the multiple subjective positions and performative imperatives that one can adopt, what binds us together is our own eventual disintegration, without recognizing “la necropolis que compartimos” (“the necropolis we all share”) (Agüero, *Persona*). This untangling from the subjective allows for a freer voice that is able to oscillate between individual memories of the past, general reflections of the present of memory, and a critical distance from the production of knowledge that explains and captures both the subject and the past itself.

Thus, the title of the text, *Persona*, can be read in a dual way. The etymology of the word “Persona” derives from the Greek and in its literal sense refers to a theatrical mask. In its common use, “Persona” has performative connotations as it refers to social roles, or characters played by an actor, which can be transposed to everyday dynamics within the social, cultural and familiar realm of an individual subject. I can see how this first meaning of the world could

¹⁴⁷ “Cuando publiqué *Los Rendidos. Sobre el don de perdonar* (IEP 2015) usé algunos recuerdos familiares para reflexionar sobre el mundo subjetivo del posconflicto. Aunque yo recurría al pasado, no era un texto de historia ni un testimonio. Lo propuse como una herramienta para indagar sobre el modo en que compartimos dilemas sociales y éticos en un presente nacido de tanta violencia.” (Agüero, *Persona*)

capture something essential about the text- if we think of the multiple subjective positions or different roles Agüero is constantly balancing: Agüero as a Son of two fallen PCP-SL militants, Agüero as an orphan, as a witness, as a testimonial subject, Agüero as an intellectual, as a researcher, as a voice and presence within the cultural memory realm.

Another way to read the word *Persona*, however, stands diametrically opposite to the first interpretation. If we reflect on the word “*Persona*” in its literal Spanish meaning –the equivalent of the word “*Person*” in English- we could read the title as a gesture of the author to strip himself bare from all of these different labels, roles, and performative imperatives that situate and over determines his identity. “*Persona*”, in this literal sense, can allude to the human core that dissolves the differences between subjects, the discourses that explain us, classify us, separates us. “*Persona*” as the stripped bareness that remains when all those social roles played and places of enunciation previously inhabited are dismantled. “*Persona*” as a wounded materiality- as flesh and bones subject to time, to deterioration, decomposition. As I will show in the following pages, the text negotiates and reworks both meanings of the word, and in stripping bare from the way different discourses explain the subject and the past, “*Persona*” unravels an essential and transcendental core, an essence of the human condition that persists and resists a symbolic anchoring.

Toying with the Past

Whereas *La distancia* turns to the past retrospectively and historically to offer a teleological narrative of fictional redemption of the father figure via the birth of the author and the novel, *Persona* treatment of to the past offers no teleological possibilities or messianic promises. In an almost inverse movement, *Persona* installs itself in the present now and from

this present rescues the symbols and imaginaries of the past, through the interplay between mediums and material interventions included in the imagetexts present in the book.

The imagery and symbolic artifacts of childhood are retrospectively intervened, reimagined, and reconstructed with the knowledge of the brutal horrors of violence and its outcomes. This juxtaposition of innocent and disturbing imagery can have an unsettling effect, creating a productive tension within the text that speaks of that unspeakability previously mentioned. Following a typical illustration of dressing up a doll (Figure 7.2) is a drawing of a doll where the instructions to assemble them allude both the dismemberment of those killed and disappeared and the present efforts by forensic groups to reconstruct their identities, but also to the interchangeability of those protagonists as the “Assemble your hero” (Figure 7.3) suggests. The doll can be dressed both as a military counterinsurgent force or as a PCP-SL member:



Figure 7.2 Jose Carlos Agüero, *Persona*, 2017

Figure 7.5 Jose Carlos Agüero, *Persona*, 2017

The first presentations of the map are as a ruler (Figure 7.4) and as the cover image of a school notebook (Figure 7.5). These reproductions are not intervened and can be easily identifiable- For many, these objects inscribed with the map can be related to the first introduction to the notion of national territory, the civic notion of belonging, and inhabiting a national space.

The second reproduction of the map, the one where the map appears in the cover of the “Cuaderno Escolar” (school notebook) also evokes an ideal of the national space as one in which every citizen contributes to its construction- a collective building done in unity that transcends hierarchies, where everyone is collaborating in the process of assemblage. It signals an almost utopic ideal of civil society and civil duty as enacted in the national space.

These didactic transformations of the national territory can constitute a shared collective memory between individuals. School (along with church, family, neighborhood community) is one of the main sites where collective memory between individuals is formed. School is a particularly important since it is an essential part of the formative experience of the individual and it is where the subject learns about the national territory and the rights and responsibilities inherent in belonging to that national space.

These are the first maps that are introduced in *Persona*, the fact that they are not intervened signal a purity or an innocence pre-violence, as the text next to the map in the shape of ruler suggests (Figure 7.4): “Better not to look. Better to see the map clean. The lined notebook, the pages without spots. Better the fables about the nation, memory, its heroes and

morals” (38)¹⁴⁸. The ruler then represents an imagination of the country as a blank slate, a moment before the relationship between subject and nation was not as nuanced or complicated. A moment where there was still a utopic feeling associated to belonging to the national territory.

If the figure of the ruler map represents an uncomplicated blank slate, the map in the notebook gives the illusion of an utopic ideal of the nation and of civic society working in unison. Next to the image of the map in the notebook cover, Agüero describes the scene set on the cover and its protagonists who are working with the materials of the homeland: the worker who carries the cement and gives it to the police, who is set to cement the foundations of order. The peasant worker “raises a brick and hands it to the miner, in a virtuous alliance of the workers and the productive sectors (mining country, agricultural country, today it would perhaps also include a chef)” (40). At the end of the scaffolding stands a schoolgirl who completes the wall of bricks at the height of Tumbes. Behind the map emanates a light, giving the working figures “perspective and destination. [A] certain aura of a mission almost accomplished, of relevance. The map is almost ready. The country almost complete. The wall, almost finished” (40). Immediately after this reading however, Agüero reflects on the impossibility of the illustration, taking into account that the girl on top of the scaffolding would be an impossible sight- she would have be harassed, violated, men would look under her skirt.

If she was a sensitive and responsible school girl from a highland town during the war, she was maybe raped and her body ended up mixed with the cement, the police would have hidden her, and the characters that remain out of the illustration (the journalist, the prosecutor, the judge, the authorities) would have helped her remain hidden. Others who also don’t appear in the illustration would have sung songs of heroism (40).

The juxtaposition of the image together with this dark rereading of the utopic scene shows the underbelly and multiple ways in which violence was experienced, covered, and

¹⁴⁸ My translation. The original quote is the following: “Mejor no mirar. Mejor el mapa, limpio. El cuaderno forrado, las páginas sin manchas. Mejor las fábulas sobre la patria, la memoria, los héroes o la moral.” (38).

constructed in the national territory. If the illustration evokes a construction that denotes union and solidarity, the text dismantles this representation- it is not that the bricks are being hailed to complete the national territory- as Agüero darkly suggests: “The map rises to cover the crime. To cover the real country” (40). The interplay between the text and the image suggests a necessary confrontation the national subject needs to have, a confrontation between the ideal national imaginary and the somber and dismal reality of what the country turned into during the years of violence. The last sentences “The map rises to cover the crime. To cover the real country” hints at the complicity held by many who allowed the violence to continue through corruption, deception, or sheer indifference.

If these two first maps offer and deconstruct the national imaginary, the subsequent maps reproduced (Figure 7.6, 7.7) trace a highly localized and therefore more personal approximation and inscription to the national space. The following maps are zoomed-in Google earth images of the capital of Lima. In its original form, the Google map images constitute a common digital presentation of the national territory in the present. In the intervened maps, Agüero borrows conventional mapping imagery and includes at the bottom of the map a legend with different keys that decode what the symbols on the map stand for. These symbols constitute personal and familiar places, as well as locus and places of historical violence. Like the interventions with the childhood images, the seemingly neutral map is now populated and inscribed with personal, familiar, national history and memory: a haunting and personal cartography.

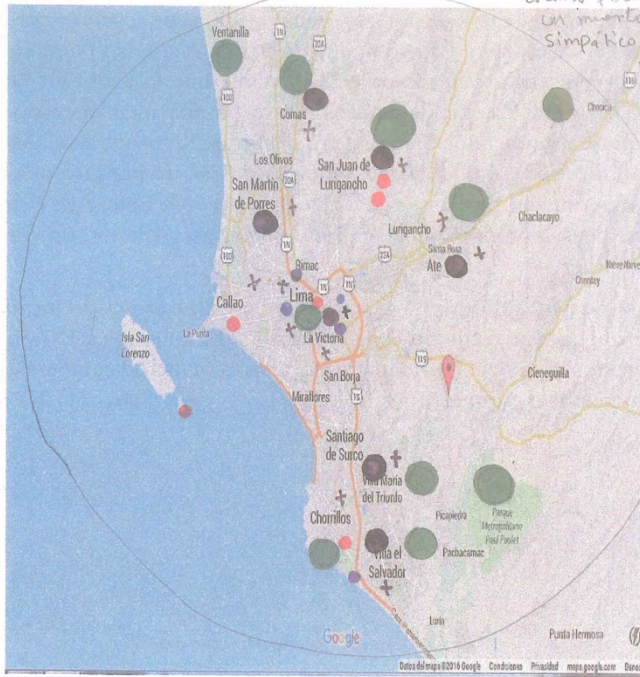
¿Cuál es el mapa de una vida?

Lima la horrible es una manera amable de decir que

Lima es sangrienta. Y su geografía brutal es invisible

¿Se puede recordar sin morcos de referencia?

¿O nos inventamos un pasado cómodo para caminar sin sentir que estamos pisando a un muerto o un simpático lugar de memoria



Desplazados forzados ●

Zonas rojas ●

Sitios de tortura ●

Cárceles ●

Desaparecidos +

○ Atentados terroristas

○ Víctimas mortales

○ Casas allanadas

○ Torturados

○ Sitios clandestinos de detención

○ Sitio de entreno clandestino

○ Víctimas de violación sexual

○ Colegios implementados por señores

○ Víctimas

○ Comisarias que torturaron

○ Víctimas

○ Casas de apoyo a SL/Mrta

○ Potenciales lugares de memoria

○ Potenciales lugares de memoria

Figure 7.6 Jose Carlos Agüero, *Persona*, 2017

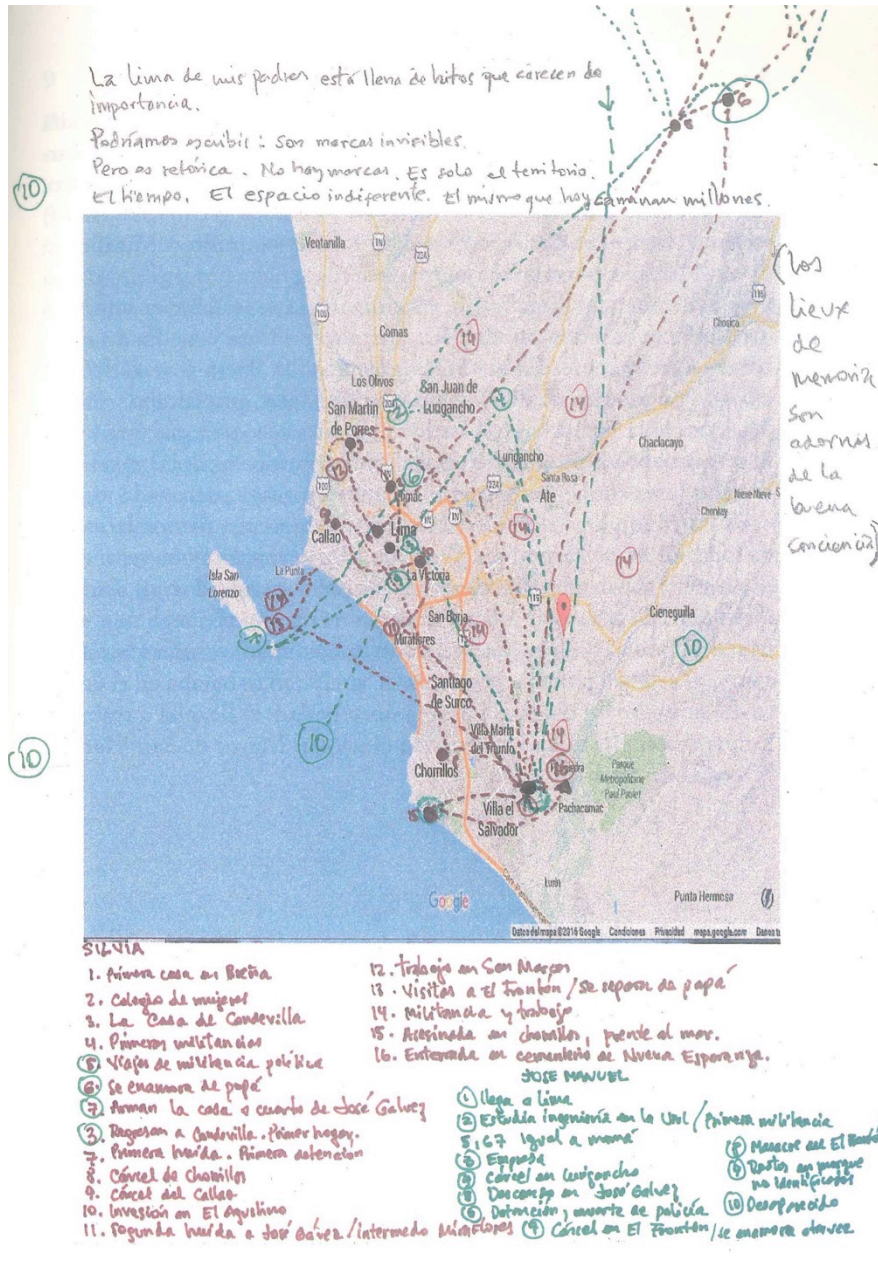


Figure 7.7 Jose Carlos Agüero, *Persona*, 2017

The intervened maps offer a deconstructed and more detailed inscription of the territory. The maps (figure 7.6, 7.7) are zoomed-in Google earth images of the capital of Lima. The digital map of Lima is inscribed by the author with manual inscriptions, turning the maps into illustrated memory topographies that track different trajectories, specific places and spaces, and pointed locations of specific events. In them, Agüero manually inscribes the digital image of the maps with historical events (Figure 7.6) and of the trajectory of both of parent: the father, Jose, in Red and the mother, Sylvia, in green (Figure 7.7). The interplay in both colors allows the reader to see the spaces they inhabited separately, the intersecting lines where their paths inevitably crossed, the places they subsequently occupied together, as well as the location where they died. The map then, is not only a symbolic image that represents a collective, but one that, through memory can transformed into a detailed platform that can trace intersecting paths and subsequent lives- like Agüero, who is the product of Sylvia and José's trajectories intersecting.

The series of inscribed maps brings to the surface the presence of violence, death in the territory, but along with it, it also includes symbols of life, movement, encounters, the mapping of a life. While the form follows conventional mapping techniques, the content of the maps evidence the charged complexity and history that the space holds and that can resurface with the work of memory.

The legend key of the first map (Figure 7.6) lists the brutal and invisible geography of violence that is present in Lima. The color key locates pointed places of torture, zones of displacement, centers of detentions around the territory. Around the territory, a pencil-drawn circles the entire territory. The legend indicates how the outline circle includes multiple forms of state and terrorist violence and death. This illustration configures the all-encompassing reach of the traumatic past, its violence and aftermath. It also dismantles the idea that violence did not

reach the capital, or that Lima was insular to the telluric forces and chaos of the civil armed conflict.

Seeing that modern reproduction of the territory now marked and inscribed by multiple histories, spaces, events and violence of the past, illustrates that the construction of specific “sites” of memory (*lugares de la memoria*) seems almost superfluous. As the all-encompassing penciled circle around the territory suggests, everywhere and every space has the potential to become a site of memory. All that is needed is to see the invisible marks of the past that are brought to the surface: the multiple histories within the History of a national territory, histories that once existed and that can be brought to the surface if someone remembers them.

Reframing Ruins: Inserting oneself into the landscape

As I have stated, mourning does not complete a lineal trajectory in *Persona* or offer, as with *La Distancia*, a redemptive narrative solution. It resists the imperative to mourn described as the post-dictatorial imperative par excellence. According to the Avelar, engaging in a mournful memory attempts to overcome trauma by looking back at the past pile of debris, ruins and defeats in an effort to redeem them, pushing forward the forces of “progress”, establishing a salvific relation with an object irrevocably lost.

Persona pushes back against this imperative, and the work of mourning takes an opposite direction that resists the idea of closure, resolution, or redemption. Not only because of the recognition of the impossibility of mourning, but also, as I suggest, because of the exhaustion of discourses of memory which Agüero has constantly encountered and that have framed his family and his past.

One of the most emblematic and charged sites of memory in Peru is the prison island El Frontón, located at the margins of the urban capital, off the coast of the port in el Callao. On June

18th, 1986, the PCP-SL led an orchestrated uprising in El Frontón as well as three other prisons. The counterinsurgent forces sent by the State, responded to the violence of the subversives with more violence, killing the majority of the prisoners, among them Jose Carlos Agüero's father. The prison was destroyed, the blue pavilion blown up with dynamite with prisoners still inside. The massacre of El Frontón is one of the most violent ones in the history of the civil armed conflict in Peru, and the justice of the massacre still remains unresolved.

The site also remains intact, suspended in the moment of destruction. What remains in the island is the ruins of the prison: Collapsed spaces and infrastructure, marks of fire, of machine guns, bombed walls and destroyed cells. The blue pavilion completely in rubble. Everything about this space emerges and stands (still) as a ruin, a traumatic core of unleashed violence.

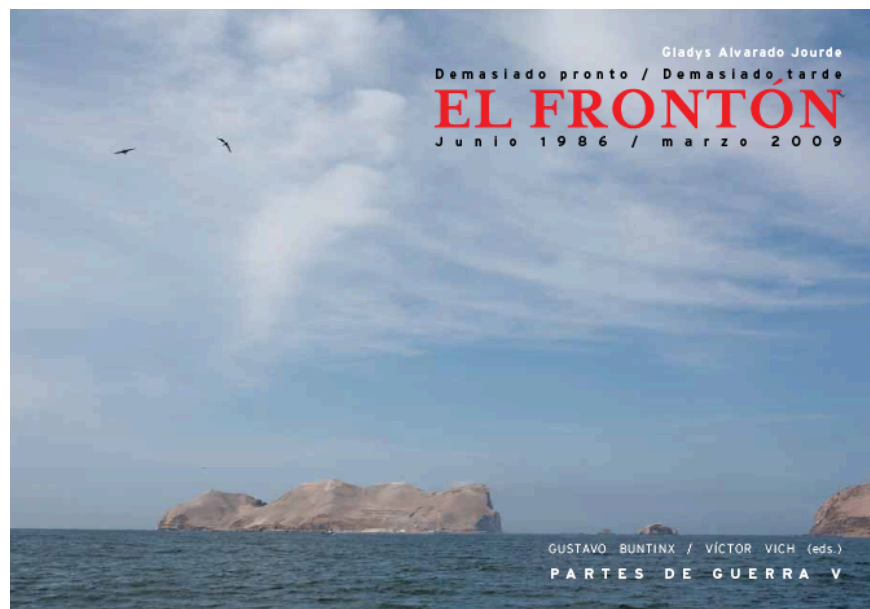


Figure 7.8. Front cover of the series of photographs *Demasiado pronto/ Demasiado Tarde El Frontón* by Gladys Alvarado Jourde. Edited by Gustavo Buntinx and Victor Vich (2014)

The photograph above (Figure 7.8) is part of a photographic series that capture the ruin of El Frontón immersed within the landscape, a series of photographs titled *Demasiado pronto/ Demasiado Tarde El Frontón* by Gladys Alvarado Jourde. Ruins in themselves are haunting and emblematic- they represent a collapse of remainders and reminders. For Benjamin, ruins provide an aperture to history (1999:476), one that is inseparable from the image of the present.

The fascination over ruins- its potential for signification- lies in its ability to host a multiplicity of temporalities: what remains of the past and the present that holds these remains. Several critics have addressed this contemporary fascination for ruins- Andreas Huyssen signals a “Ruin craze”, and Svetlana Boyd describes it as “Ruinophilia”- a fixation of ruins as physical embodiments of both nostalgia and modern paradoxes. Perhaps this popular fixation lies in the fact that the paradoxes ruins embody are not fixed or anchored, perhaps, as we shall see, it has to do with the fact that ruins can become a kind of empty signifier that gets imbued with meaning, with paradoxes from different and- even opposing- discourses.

The fascination for ruins, Boyd suggest, is sensual, it gives us a shock value of vanished materiality we still yearn, long for. Ruins do not only signal decay but also desire, and produce a certain idealized imaginary (even- or *because of*) their deteriorated dimension. Huyssen speaks of the paradox inherent in ruins- that which is allegedly present and transparent whenever authenticity is claimed is *present as an absence*: it is the imagined present of a past that can only be grasped in its decay. There is an absence at the center of a ruin, and that absence can be filled and charged with meaning.

In *Persona*, Agüero challenges the discourses and the inscriptions of meaning given to the ruins, the literal site of loss and personal grief. To whom do the ruins belong to? Agüero challenges both the narrative of mythical resistance given by the PCP-SL as well as how the

ruins have been represented and read within cultural memory: for instance, in how the photographs of Alvarado are read by the curatorial discourse.

Agüero describes how the day of the massacre is commemorated by the PCP-SL as “The Day of Heroism”, and the site of El Frontón and its ruins as the remains of a “luminous battle trench- A shining path” (127), the site of heroic and epic resistance, consolidated by the sacrificial deaths of the members of the PCP-SL, who were turned into martyrs. The destruction then it is framed by the failed resistance, by its possibility of emancipation. Agüero, as the “Son of” two fallen PCP-SL members, one of them who died at El Fronton, states that his parents, turned into dust, into a materiality that resists belonging to the narrative of resistance given by the discourse of the PCP-SL that wants to hail the deaths as heroic, the massacre as an epic moment in time, and the ruins as the physical reminders of a promised revolution that could-have-been. He writes: “The Shinning Path turns a massacre into a myth. The Day of Heroism.” The deaths feed this discourse, the “official history” of the PCP-SL. But Agüero focuses on the materiality of the massacre “There are no heroes. There are just people ripped apart.” He resists being reduced to being “the son of a martyr” the island and its ruins “have no legacy” he attests “*En esa isla no hay herencia.*” (“There is no inheritance in this island”) (150).

The re-inscription of the ruins is also done by the curatorial framings of the photographs *Demasiado pronto/ Demasiado tarde* by Gladys Alvarado. Agüero describes a feeling of estrangement at the exhibition and presentations of the photographs. The images circulate widely, they were published as a book (Figure 7.8) and exhibited in the Lugar de la Memoria, they were also used by the family members of fallen PCP-SL members in commemoration ceremonies and the construction of a Mausoleum for their fallen heroes.

The curatorial discourse coincides in seeing the potential of the absence left by the ruins. In his curatorial text, Victor Vich mentions that more than “representing” what happened, the photographs focus on the *pure presence of the remains* (56). That sensuous materiality Boyd describes. But the curatorial discourses do precisely what Vich says the images resist- represent the ruins, multiply their meaning- for Vich the ruins represented in the images “name the failure of the National State and makes visible the ruins of our memory of a past that persists”, for Jorge Villacorta the ruin is where the photographer can encounter her own self “by the light of a lost innocence” (*a la luz de una inocencia perdida*), the architectural structures “allow her to anchor her desire to see, which could probably be her desire to see herself” (bare in mind that Alvarado herself says she stumbled upon photographing the island almost as happenstance, as she had already started a series of prison photographs. Her initial intention in taking the photographs had no discourse surrounding the past in mind.) Yet, the photographer’s gaze is inscribed as “the tragic perspective of an unrest that can be felt by the entire nation” (2014: 65).

In the final curatorial essay present in the catalog of the exhibition Gustavo Buntinx says that what moves us about the images are not in fact the ruins but the gaze “the air that the photographs breathe and exude”. Alvarado herself recognizes the poetic potential of the ruins- even though her view is more conservative than those that curate her photographs- she sees the ruins of violence as a representation of terrorism as a whole- not as a “the failure of the state” but as an almost didactic materiality to teach her sons about “the history of violence in Peru”.

All of these multiple and contrasting meanings, draw us closer and further from the ruins, but what remains true is that the physical losses that occurred is a voice that remains silent. Something about history itself remains lost. What is revelatory about both of the interpretations

of the ruins of the island El Fronton is the plasticity that ruins can have and how easily they can be transformed to serve opposing memorial discourses.

Agüero does not offer his own interpretation of the ruins or what they might represent. But he does physically go to the island, to El Frontón. He notes how the photographs of Alvarado that circulated the most were not those where either the uprising or the massacre happened. The ruins photographed are mostly of the administrative buildings, the dining court, the place of common use for the prisoners. The area where the prisoners were killed, however, where they lived and died doesn't lend itself to representation.' Simply because there is nothing there. No ruins to interpret, to inscribe a meaning to. Agüero doesn't offer an explanation for the ruins, for the photographs, for the space. He simply includes in *Persona* a photograph of that empty space that resist signification, the locus of the violence, "the zone of my memories" and him at the center, walking towards the camera.



El ex hijo y el ex pabellón

Figure 7.9 Jose Carlos Agüero, *Persona*, 2017

The caption of the image simply states “El ex hijo y el ex pabellón” (Figure 7.9). The “ex” seems to suggest a disavowal of both his legacy and of the power of the ruins. Agüero uses the photographs to counter the overflowing meanings, the exhaustion of language surrounding the ruins. There is in dead an empty space surrounding the ruin, but it is not of the ruins themselves but of the languages that imbue the ruin with meaning. The feeling of estrangement felt at the presentation of Alvarado’s photographs is one that could be explained by his particular position both as “Son of” and also as part of the cultural memory realm – He does not subscribe to the heroic discourse of the “Day of Heroism” given by the PCP-SL narrative that hail his father as a fallen hero, but he is also not convinced by the sociological, intellectual, artistic

representations, and curatorial explanations of those who are unfamiliar with the material and physical loss that is held in that space. His own divided and tense subjectivity is what allows him to highlight the blind-spots in those discourses that have tried to explain him and (the places of) his memories.

Yet, Agüero sees himself as also guilty of constructing a discourse “Don’t I do the same thing? I use memories, I appropriate their [his father and mother’s] memories. I cannot justify myself. Betrayal is intrinsic to this whole exercise of representation” (148). The gathering of all of the multiple discourses surrounding the ruins, and his own awareness of how he also works memory, invites us to think about the tensions that exist in the representation of the past- is the exercise of representation of memory always a form of some kind of appropriation?

We know that the familiar parental loss for Agüero is inexorably linked to this site of memory, and yet not any of the discourses represented, not even his own, can really capture what the ruins (re) present. All he can do when language fails is to physically go to that space, to come in contact with the solidity of its materiality. Maybe physically being there, and taking a photograph (an indexical proof, a trace) there can actually convey a meaning where words fail to do so.

Ruins bring an awareness of framing, the device of representation; they are a site of memory that enters into a state of play with memory itself (Masiello, “Scribbling on the Wreck” 28). Agüero’s critical and also introspective exploration of the artistic, intellectual, sociological use of the ruins break the frames of memory, offering a personal and nuanced approximation to the ruins, one with no guarantees, no redemptive narrative, no resolution and no closure. The simplicity of the gesture seems to counter all the discourses surrounding the ruins.

Ashes to Ashes – The Cosmic Materiality in *Persona*

The final pages of *Persona* concludes not with a typed text but with the series of illustrations of the two stick figures I have previously discussed. The hand-drawn stick figures- who represent human remains, transit the art world, the museum, the sites of commemoration as both spectators and remnants that were subjects and turned into objects of memory. They see themselves reflected back in the works of art, they are the ones supposed to illustrate the past to those who haven't confronted the national history.

The satirical exchanges between the stick figures comment on that asymmetry previously discussed regarding cultural memory mediations in Peru. They stand in contrast to the solemnity of official discourses of memory. I interpret the decision to end *Persona* with this hand-drawn series as a gesture that signals two things: One is that it points to the insufficiency of an official written language to speak about these losses. The hand-written dialogues represent an informal and oral exchange that challenges the authority of knowledge production about memory, the past and its actors. The second thing is that these illustrations create an impossible scenario and encounter: one in which the victims of the historical past, as *restos* (*as remains*), can look back and point and comment at the ways in which they are framed for posterity. In the simplicity of the hand-drawn trace, the illustrations conveys that return to an essential and stripped essence- to what composes those remains- bones, ashes, dust, dirt, stars, but also what transcends and turns into a cosmic materiality.

These final illustration with the hand drawn contemplating a vast and open sky (Figure 7.10) remind us of the ending of Patricio Guzman's beautiful documentary *Nostalgia de la Luz* (2010), where an astronomer interviewed states that even though the search for the stars in the

sky of the Atacama desert and the search for human remains of the disappeared on the land of the dessert seem to be completely opposite, materially, they are searching for the same thing- Stars and bones are composed of the same matter, they are both made out of calcium. Against the discourses that explain and frame the remains, the personal losses, and the ruins, Agüero sketches these remains, giving them an impossible voice. To end with these images reinforces the intention throughout *Persona*, to strip the remains and ruins, from all the discourses that tether it to the earth.

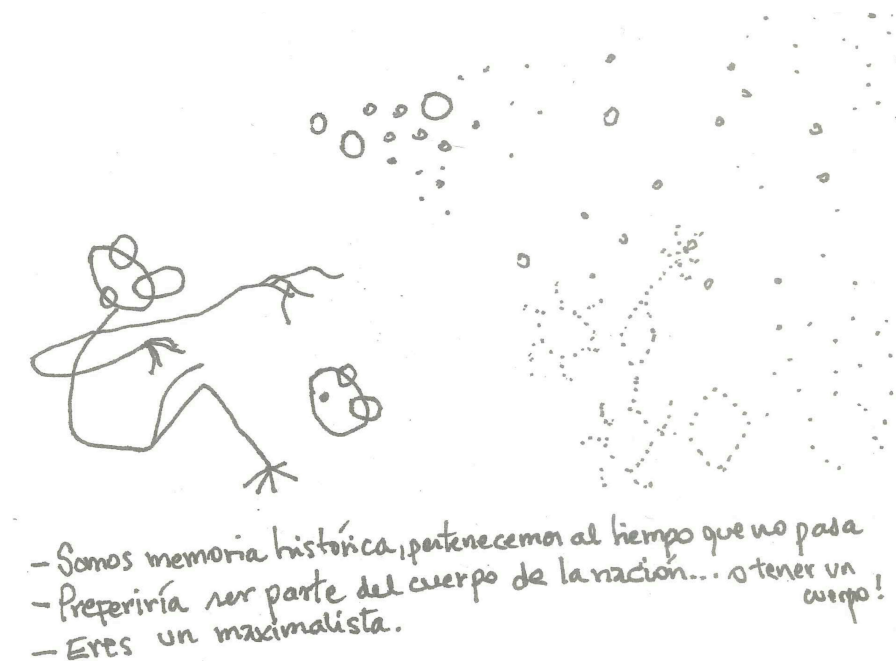


Figure 7.10 Jose Carlos Agüero, *Persona*, 2017

- We are historical memory, we belong to a time that doesn't end
- I would like to be part of the nation's body...or have a body!
- You are a maximalist.

CONCLUSION

There is something to say about memory in Latin America. In fact, there is a lot to say. Starting from the fact that the place of memory within Latin American contexts is always contingent upon the political comings and goings of the regimes in power. At any moment in time, new governments in power can invest in reversing and manipulating seemingly solid language, dislocating its anchored meanings from the politics of memory in order to make a clean break from the past.

As I write this dissertation today, I know how much the place and status of memory can change. In the process of writing alone, which began in 2016, I have witnessed the rollercoaster high and lows of memory in all three countries. In Argentina, I saw the radical change of memory status with the election of Mauricio Macri in 2016, which brought forth indifference towards human right groups and revisionist history downplaying the role of the military and the number of desaparecidos, a clear affront against memory. In Chile, the polarized political stands regarding the historical past seems to be playing in a never-ending cycle of contention, with the back-and-forth elections of Michelle Bachelet and Sebastián Piñera. The latter in power now, and advancing a rhetoric of progress and reconstruction that seems to leave the past behind. In Peru, memory has made big strides in finding a place within the cultural realm- the opening of the Lugar de la Memoria in 2015 officially marking its importance in the national imagination but the question of memory has been threatened time and time again with the close-call presidential candidacy of Keiko Fujimori in 2011, 2016, the eventual pardon (indulto) and re-incarceration of Alberto Fujimori, the almost comically Shakespearian rivalry between the

Fujimor siblings, Keiko and Kenji, and the threat of the return of old antagonisms through new insurgent organizations repackaged as democratic.

In all three countries, I have seen the co-optation of words like reconciliation, victims, forgiveness, from opposing discourses, which points more towards oblivion than towards memory. This signals how the work of memory needs to be constant- memory needs to be practiced, represented, thought of, discussed. There is always something new to say about memory because, for every time that the memory of the past is under risk of being co-opted or forgotten, new memory works emerge, new forms of resistance and vital acts of transfers, new connections, affiliations, actors and dialogue between generations.

Through out this dissertation, I have found multiple ways in which the past can seep into the present, or more precisely, how from the present we can travel to the past, rescue its hidden images, its shadows, multiply its meaning. I have reflected on photography and literature as mediums that are able to break the frames of a lineal temporality and also point to specific tensions within the national, social, and cultural frames these objects are inscribed in. I have discussed memory imperatives within national imaginaries, the risks of the past turning into a commodity within memory market, and the exhaustion of certain discourses and productions of knowledge around the past.

This work has also allowed me to think about ways to expand and dialogue with memory paradigms and find new ways to engage with them, taking into account the specificity of my research materials and the historical contexts that I work with. In so doing, I have applied a queer approach in close reading and engaging with new ways to rethink temporal frames and forms of being with the past, reflected on this possibilities present in each of the works discussed.

Through my analysis of different photographic projects, I have showed, for example, the way photography can be used in opposing ways, in ways that either affirms or unsettles official cultural memory discourses or paradigms of reconciliation and national belonging. I have thought about the edges and margins of images and the larger framings that contain them, about the demands of memory now when it has become part of a market, and detected how unstable these frames of transmissions can be when thinking about different national contexts and paradigms. I have also engaged with canonical and recent photocriticism in order to illuminate the plasticity of the medium and the way it can be used in memory works as a trace, as mirror, as a screen, and as contract.

Through my close readings of the texts by the ‘secondary characters of history’, I have dialogued with both the concept of postmemory and the subjective turn in order to elaborate the notion of *metamemory*- that which describes works that incorporate an introspective reflection and self-awareness in their positions as memory artifacts within a specific cultural memory realm. I have close read the literary strategies and use of the medium and extracted from it larger reflections on the memory impasses present in each historical context as well as the exhaustion of certain memorial, curatorial and critical discourses surrounding the past. Finally, in this dissertation I have not only thought of the complexity of memory but also of time and history, of how the past is not necessarily that which is behind us, but of what can be right in front of us, informing our moves into unknown futures.

Finally, on a personal level, this dissertation has also allowed me to rethink about my own memory of the past, as someone who was born and grew up in Lima during the period of political violence in Peru. Even though my family and I lived in the capital, and did not experienced the ferocity of the conflict, or the losses it caused, I do remember, even as a seven

year old, being aware that something was happening in the country. I remember small pointed details, walking quickly in front of cars that seemed suspicious, red graffiti markings on walls, how there was a heightened sense of tension that seemed almost palpable, that you could feel in the air. I knew of the presence of violence, even if I didn't fully understand where it came from, nor the causes or the deep social and cultural fractures it unveiled.

But out of everything, I remember the black outs that would happen often, every time the PCP-SL blew an electric tower in the city. It is from the experience of these blackouts that I understand the complexity of my own subjective memory- the juxtaposition of this scary, violent moment with the innocent way in which my twin sister and I lived and experienced those blackouts. In the dark, my sister and I ran and stumbled around as my mother searched for candles, we played hide-and-seek and hid from each other in the corners of my grandmother's house. From those corners, we didn't see the depth of that darkness, the fear it carried.

I think that this project has been a way for me to illuminate that darkness, those shadows, the ambivalence of my own memories. In thinking so much about the past, I revisited that place where the time of historical violence overlapped with such mundane moments of hiding and finding each other. Maybe Zambra is right, even when we write about others, other stories, other histories, other memories, we always end up writing about our own. Maybe this dissertation is, in a way, its own metamemory.

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