

## HISTORY AND MEMORY

*Afterlives of Confinement: Spatial Transitions in Postdictatorship Latin America.* By Susana Draper. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012. Pp. ix, 238. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$26.95 paper.

Susana Draper's *Afterlives of Confinement* is bound to become an instant classic: a key reference in the debate on Latin American postdictatorships as well as the field of memory studies at large. Such a feat was last achieved by Idelber Avelar's *The Untimely Present*, more than a decade ago. Just as did Avelar's work, Draper's reads across the national boundaries that still dominate much of Latin Americanist research, remapping these from a 'peripheral' vantage point. In Avelar, this point was the Brazilian experience of dictatorship; in Draper, it is the Uruguayan one. But *Afterlives of Confinement* goes further. Although she revisits Avelar's Benjaminian critique of discourses of 'democratic transition,' Draper also ventures beyond the confines of literature to look at the 'transitional architectonics' through which the spatial and temporal experience of 'the "post" of postdictatorship' (neoliberalism's closure of history becoming an open horizon of potentiality) has become inscribed in the social fabric.

Drawing on Benjamin's Arcades Project and its central notion of 'afterlife,' Draper takes Montevideo's prison-turned-mall Punta Carretas as her material as well as her critical paradigm: the 'Open Prison' is here the very embodiment, at once monumental and performative, of the space-time of postdictatorial transition. It is hard to overestimate the productivity of this figure: rather than reading the postdictatorship, as most of the critical literature on 'memorial sites' has done so far, *from* commemorative environments such as museums or former sites of atrocity 'recovered' for the erection of parks and monuments of memory—a perspective from which Punta Carretas would appear abnormal, a monstrous aberration), Draper takes as her point of departure an architectonics of oblivion and erasure. Thus, she productively combines two major strands of Latin American cultural critique in recent years: (1) the discussion about how to commemorate the dictatorship and the social utopianisms it violently repressed, and (2) discussions on the crisis and fragmentation of the city as a space of conviviality. If shopping malls have been a key *topos* of this second strand of critique (as in the work, say, of Tomás Moulian in Chile, Beatriz Sarlo and Adrián Gorelik in Argentina, or Hugo Achugar in Uruguay), the argument has generally run along the lines of a Habermasian defense of the public sphere against neoliberal consumerism or postmodern narcissism, without taking into account the politically charged nature of these time-spaces as model stagings of 'transitional subjectivities.'

Draper's study—brilliantly introduced through a pioneering critical reading of Argentine architect Juan Carlos López, who is the leading mall developer in Latin America today—has the rare virtue of being instantly plausible, and thus of opening up a whole new series of critical inroads. Her notion of 'afterlife' shows at one and the same time how erasure is always only partly achieved in the sites 'retrieved' from the past of the modern, disciplinary state's "carceral archipelago" (Foucault), *and* how spaces marked

out for commemoration (museums, monuments) cannot but fail in their attempts to craft an ‘outside’ of transitional space-time. Yet at the same time, ‘afterlife’ recovers for literature and for criticism a political and ethical task beyond the constraints of melancholic allegory: that of writing out the traces of historical experience that the ‘open prison’ dispositive fails to capture, and thus, rather than erasing them, reinstating them. Draper reads these ‘lines of flight’ both literally and figuratively, as escape narratives and as narrative escapes, thus challenging also the prevalent notion of postdictatorial literature as a past-centered (melancholic, baroque) narrative of historical defeat.

Eleuterio Fernández Huidobro, Diamela Eltit, and Roberto Bolaño are the writers whose narratives, as read by Draper, guide us through the ‘open prison’ labyrinth and toward the cracks, faults, and subterranean escapes beneath the plaster of an ambiguous oblivion that is always only partial with regard to the past of confinement—an ambiguity which, Draper suggests, literature and critical thought can still take hold of for interrupting the smooth expansion of the neoliberal chronotope.

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*Argentina's Partisan Past: Nationalism and the Politics of History.* By Michael Goebel. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011. Pp. xi, 284. Illustrations. Glossary. Bibliography. Index. \$95.00 cloth.

Michael Goebel's *Argentina's Partisan Past* is a real historian's book, a work that appeals to our scholarly impulses by tracing competing traditions of historical interpretation and modes of imagining the nation. This may sound like an effort to damn the book with praise, but Latin American specialists will appreciate the study's creativity, thoroughness, and scope. It offers a welcome guide through the twists and turns of twentieth-century Argentinean intellectual history by considering an impressive range of historical thinkers, institutions, and movements. At the same time, Goebel takes care to situate Argentinean examples within a theoretically informed discussion of nationalism as a global phenomenon. Non-specialists will be rewarded by the book's assessment of differing methodologies in the study of nationalism and its keen insights on the political uses of history.

The book examines the making of two broad “pantheons” of interpretation: the liberal school (also known as *Mitrismo*) and the *revisionismo histórico* school. The focus falls primarily on the origins and evolution of revisionism from the 1930s to the present. Although revisionists have occupied positions across the ideological spectrum, they share key historical claims in common, not the least of them an opposition to the “official” history promulgated by the state, the educational system, and dominant social sectors. For the revisionists, the problem began with the efforts of nineteenth-century liberals to impose Europeanizing models of progress, thereby turning their backs on the true nation. By contrast, revisionists celebrate the “authentic” Argentina associated with subjects such as Hispanic and Catholic identity, patriotic caudillos like Juan