

DIALOGUING ACROSS CATASTROPHES: CHILEAN POST-COUP AND POST-DICTATORSHIP CULTURAL PRODUCTION IN THE WORKS OF ROBERTO BOLAÑO AND RAÚL RUIZ

by

Andreea Marinescu

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Doctoral Committee:

Associate Professor Gareth Williams, Chair
Associate Professor Lawrence M. La Fountain-Stokes
Assistant Professor Katharine M. Jenckes
Associate Professor Catherine L. Benamou, University of California, Irvine

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	ii
Abstract	vi
Introduction	1
Chapter 1. The Surrealist Documentary of Return: Raúl Ruiz in Contrast with the Realism of Miguel Littín and Patricio Guzmán	16
Chapter 2. The Dream of Memory in Raúl Ruiz's <i>Memories of Appearances: Life is a Dream</i>	81
Chapter 3. Literary Reconfigurations: Representations of the Literary and the Political in Roberto Bolaño's <i>Estrella distante</i> and <i>Nocturno de Chile</i>	106
Chapter 4. Contemplating the Abyss: Motherhood, Bearing Witness, and the Role of Literature in Roberto Bolaño's <i>Amuleto</i>	158
Conclusion	217
Bibliography	222

Abstract

This dissertation examines how the works of Chilean diasporic artists, novelist Roberto Bolaño and Raúl Ruiz, question old forms of representation and their underlying assumptions in order to open new conceptual spaces from which to think the political in the wake of the 1973 military coup. The texts examined respond to the destructive effects of certain ways of thinking about art, politics, and history. Nonetheless, the process of witnessing opens up the possibility of new spaces for political critique. Firstly, the texts work to dismantle what is perceived as the fixed unity of the political subject. Secondly, these texts connect aesthetic innovation to political innovation. Thirdly, they engage with the systematic exclusion of the feminine element in Latin American political thought.

Chapter 1 analyzes Chilean exilic documentary and argues that, in contrast with Patricio Guzmán and Miguel Littín's realist style, Ruiz privileges surrealist documentary in order to illustrate the crisis in the dominant political paradigm and the conceptual difficulties of its representation. In Chapter 2, a close reading of Ruiz's *Life is a Dream* (1986), I establish that the film's critical intervention in the original Baroque play opens up a space for the subject's self-critique. I use Freudian theory to argue that Ruiz problematizes the concept of a transparent memory by exploiting the unconscious dimension of both memory and dreams.

Moving from cinematic form to literature, my third chapter expands the discussion on the interrelationship between art and politics by analyzing *Estrella Distante* (1996) and *Nocturno de Chile* (1999) in order to understand the epistemological underpinnings of Latin American fascist discourse. Using Walter Benjamin's theory of history, I argue that Bolaño sees fascist culture as desirous of autonomy from history or politics and he embarks on the discursive dismantling of that autonomy. My final chapter reads the maternal figure in *Amuleto* (1999) in order to show how Bolaño offers a feminist critique of the masculine underpinnings of Latin American revolutionary teleology. My reading reclaims an ignored maternal figure in order to reformulate a political practice of resistance informed by an ethics of care.

Introduction

This dissertation considers the work of two exiled artists, novelist Roberto Bolaño and filmmaker Raúl Ruiz, and engages critically with their artistic responses to the events surrounding the Chilean military coup on September 11, 1973. Bolaño and Ruiz have found themselves at the historical junction between the possibility of political emancipation opened by the Popular Unity government (1970-1973) and Chile's long tradition of militaristic antipolitics. I read their artistic productions as attempts to understand and think the social role of literature and film in the wake of the curtailment of the political project opened by Salvador Allende and in light of Latin America's long tradition of authoritarianism.

Latin America's long military tradition has established a broad disregard for political life as the basis for modernization and economic development (Loveman and Davies 3). The authoritarian streak that made possible many of the military regimes comes from an anti-political belief that politics is an obstacle to progress and stability in the region.

The Chilean coup of 1973 was justified by the military as a necessary intervention that sought to control the corruption and the "anarchy, stifling of liberties, moral and

economic chaos” provoked by the Allende government.¹ The Pinochet dictatorship claimed itself to be democratic insofar as democracy meant the preservation of national security through the intervention of the military (Loveman 270-271). Perversely, Pinochet’s decision to step down after the results of the plebiscite of 1988 (although he remained Commander of the Armed Forces) allowed him to claim that the military saved the country from Marxist dictatorship and restored democracy in Chile (299). In effect, with the continuation of the neoliberal policies initiated by Pinochet, the preservation of the essentials of the 1981 Constitution and the prevention of human rights trials, the new political phase that started with the presidency of Patricio Aylwin has more similarities with Pinochet’s regime than it has differences. Instead of signaling the triumph of democracy and the revival of political life, the transition period witnessed the consolidation of what Loveman and Davies call “antipolitics.” The formal end of the Latin American military regimes did not give way to fully civilian governments, but rather the frail democracies incorporated the military’s version of “the politics of antipolitics.” The military continues to have authority in the “protection of democracy,” claiming to keep the nation secure against the challenges of globalization, all the while protecting neoliberal economic policies (Loveman and Davies xi).

In Chile some of the reasons for the military dictatorship of 1973-1989 can be traced back all the way to the Chilean constitution of 1833, which concentrated executive authority in the president, promoted a hierarchical administration, and allowed for governance through states of siege (5-6). This period became a turning point where the liberal principles earlier invoked as motivation for the independence movements were repudiated and repressed through the censorship of the press and the delegitimizing of

¹ See Order of the Day No.5, 1973 titled “The reasons of the junta” in Loveman and Davies, 181-183.

active opposition. This consecration of the stability of order became an end in itself under Diego Portales, Arturo Alessandri, Carlos Ibáñez, and Augusto Pinochet. As a consequence, authoritarianism and government repression of civic and human rights came to be celebrated as patriotic values that held the society in check (Gabriel Salazar in Remedi-Rodríguez 35).

In light of this historical background, I draw on the work of Bolaño and Ruiz to respond to two seemingly opposed post-dictatorial political discourses: the neoliberal discourse of progress hailing the end of the dictatorship as the triumph of democracy, as well as the revolutionary teleology that saw the military coup as a mortal blow to political emancipation. Stepping outside of the redemptive framework that both of these positions assume, my dissertation explores how exilic post-coup narratives and cinema, by virtue of their transnational perspective, seek to integrate the historical moment within wider spatial and temporal coordinates. I examine how their work reflects the ever-present need to reevaluate categories of political thought in Latin America, in particular relation to exilic and gendered subjectivities, as well as to the limits of historical memory.

Raúl Ruiz

Born in 1941, Raúl Ruiz has become a central figure in the international film industry, due to his highly prolific career and his experimental style. Much of Ruiz's professional success is due to his willingness to embrace a panoply of genres and formats, from the television serial, to the CD-ROM and the art film, and to his skill in drawing effective performances from actors schooled in diverse methods. His first feature films, produced between 1968 and 1973, contributed to the efflorescence of

Chilean cinema, yet most of his films have been written and produced in exile. He has remained resolutely “Chilean” in his views of modernity and cultural identity, notwithstanding his decision to remain in France following the end of military rule.

Inside Chile, he is best remembered for his first feature, *Tres Tristes Tigres* (1968), a free-form exploration of social ritual involving unsympathetic characters in ordinary urban settings, and *La Colonia Penal* (1970). His activity as cinema advisor to President Salvador Allende prompted his exile prior to the aborted release of *Palomita Blanca* (1973). Upon resuming his career in France, Ruiz confronted the devastating effects of Pinochet’s dictatorship back home, and eventually found support in an unfamiliar, artistically saturated context, quickly garnering international respect. For example, the film journal *Cahiers du Cinema* dedicated a special issue to his work in March 1983.

Ruiz views traveling to Chile as a “cross he has to bear” (*The Clinic* interview), yet his involvement with the Chilean cultural scene has only intensified after the end of Pinochet’s regime.² Nonetheless, even after Chile’s transition to democracy, he has actively maintained his exilic status as a site from which to reflect on the Chilean condition, but with a view to explicate broader issues of citizenship and to reflect on the Latin American condition today. By still positioning himself as an exile many years after the end of the dictatorship, Ruiz has employed the concept of exile as a defining theoretical tool. He has often talked about exile as a generalized state that is not confined to the temporal boundaries of the dictatorship, nor to the spatial borders of the nation state.

²Ruiz has filmed various projects in Chile over the past years (*Cofralandes* (2002), *Días de campo* (2004), *La recta provincia* (2007)), has directed plays in Santiago by Chilean playwright Benjamin Galemiri, as well as composed and organized a radio show in 2008.

The necessity of translating for both sides of the Atlantic gave rise to a new, personal language that has enlarged the ideological and aesthetic parameters of his work beyond a strictly national and militantly political perspective. The sense of fragmentation that accompanies the experience of exile is transposed onto the visual medium, where the historical narrative is shattered into pieces and then put together by way of montage, interspersing new and seemingly unrelated scenes. Ruiz's filmmaking philosophy goes against conventional narrative cinema, finding its meaning in the fissures between scenes, thus putting special emphasis on juxtapositions as visual catalysts for the resurgence of memory (memory as the "glue" of a fractured temporality). Ruiz's conceptual technique challenges the traditional narratives of exile while putting into question the existence or relevance of a national historical project. The military dictatorships in the Southern Cone and the widespread exodus they produced, as well as the various avenues taken towards the transition to democracy, have produced a void of representation, as it becomes obvious that the concept of a linearly progressive National History is devoid of meaning. The very sense of *belonging* is lost as the individual cannot draw answers from the past since his/her ties to a common project are severed by past traumatic events.

Raúl Ruiz's filmic productions have the potential to transcend traditional forms of representation, using film as a medium that can exploit fragmentation and temporalities in order to induce and give meaning to new types of personal experiences that are relevant to the post-dictatorship societies in the Southern Cone.

Roberto Bolaño

Roberto Bolaño (1953-2003) was born in Santiago de Chile and lived most of his life in Chile, Mexico and Spain. As a teenager he moved to Mexico, where in collaboration with his friend Mario Santiago, he formed an experimental poetry group called *infrarrealistas*, which railed against the literary establishment. In 1973 he returned briefly to Chile, and, by his own account, reached Chile right before the military coup. There, he was imprisoned briefly and upon his release, returned to Mexico. In 1977 he moved to Spain, where he remained and wrote most of his narrative work until his death in 2003.

He achieved literary fame after winning the “Premio Rómulo Gallegos” for his novel, *Los detectives salvajes* (1998). In his acceptance speech he addresses the issue of his national identity in a way that destabilizes precisely that concept:

...pues a mí lo mismo me da que digan que soy chileno, aunque algunos colegas chilenos prefieran verme como mexicano, o que digan que soy mexicano, aunque algunos colegas mexicanos prefieren considerarme español, o, ya de plano, desaparecido en combate, e incluso lo mismo me da que me consideren español, aunque algunos colegas españoles pongan el grito en el cielo y a partir de ahora digan que soy venezolano, nacido en Caracas o Bogotá, cosa que tampoco me disgusta, más bien todo lo contrario. Lo cierto es que soy chileno y también soy muchas otras cosas. (*Entre Paréntesis* 36)

Rather than a concept of nationhood, Bolaño is more interested in a broader concept of belonging that is inevitably tied to his literary production. That literary production, in turn, is imagined in connection with its social role and how it can work to rethink concepts such as “the nation” or “the political” in light of Latin America’s history of political violence, both State sanctioned, as in the case of the Tlatelolco massacre in Mexico City in 1968 or the Southern Cone dictatorships of the 1970s and 1980s, as well

as more subtle forms of violence, as in the case of leftist revolutionary sacrificial ethics or violence against women.

While believing in the importance of literature to reflect on our geo-political conditions, Bolaño is also keenly aware of literature's complicity with institutionalized forms of violence, as well as what he considered its unethical relationship to the marketplace. It is not surprising then, that he generally saw himself in conflict with the literary establishment of post-dictatorship Chile, as well as with the Boom generation. Also, Bolaño was skeptical in regards to the possibility of a new generation of Latin American writers. For example, in "Sevilla me mata," a speech he wrote but never delivered because of his untimely death, Bolaño portrays the current literary situation as one where literature is produced under the sign of bourgeois respectability and fully entrenched into the logic of publishing house market gains, but which is ultimately prompted by fear—fear of being poor, fear of taking the risks necessary to engage with the potential of literature to unsettle our deep-seated prejudices.

A common critical project

I have chosen to read works of Bolaño and Ruiz together because I believe they share the critical project of opening a new space from which to think the political by questioning old forms of representation and their underlying assumptions. The texts I analyze are structured around first-person narratives of characters who grapple, in multiple ways, with the fact that they are bearing witness to the destructive effects of certain ways of thinking about art, politics, and history. Nonetheless, the process of witnessing opens up the possibility of new spaces for political critique. Firstly, through

the formal mechanisms employed, the texts I analyze work to dismantle what is perceived as the fixed unity of the political subject. Secondly, the texts analyzed grapple with the relationship between art and politics by exploring the negative consequences of thinking art as a domain completely separate from politics. I argue that these texts conceive of aesthetic innovation as political innovation. Thirdly, and this is present mainly in Bolaño, an integral component is the issue of the systematic exclusion of the feminine element in Latin American political thought. By critically engaging with gender exclusion, the texts analyzed seek to formulate a discourse based on an ethics of inter-subjectivity.

In the first chapter, titled “The Surrealist Documentary of Return: Raúl Ruiz in Contrast with the Realism of Miguel Littín and Patricio Guzmán”, I provide a critical analysis of documentaries produced by Chilean political exiles who returned to Chile during and after the dictatorship. My aim is to explore the trope of return from exile employed in these documentaries to discuss the relationship between realism and politics in the representation of the nation and of historical memory. These narratives of return seek to illustrate the first-hand experience of the filmmakers as they use this specific perspective to analyze the intricate relationships among history, memory, and forgetting. However, the documentaries differ drastically in their strategies of formal representation.

While Littín and Guzmán use the documentary form as a medium that harnesses legitimacy by using a realist mode of representation, Ruiz calls into question transparent forms of representation by using the documentary form in a surrealist manner. These different formal approaches have significant consequences on the filmmakers’ conceptualization of history and politics. I read Miguel Littín’s *Acta general de Chile*

and Patricio Guzmán's *Batalla de Chile*, *Obstinate Memory*, and *Salvador Allende* to show how their realist approaches hinder the possibility of imagining new forms of political representation. I argue that, in contrast with Littín and Guzmán, Ruiz employs surrealist techniques in *The Return of a Library Lover* and *Cofralandes* in order to access a dimension of political thought that questions the effectiveness of representation in light of one's experience of exile. This approach unsettles a teleological conception of history, opening a space for political innovation by rethinking the concept of the nation and the relationship between art and politics.

I draw from documentary film theory that discusses the relationship between documentary and fiction film to understand the appeal of documentary as a visual tool for social awareness and to show how documentary can also be infused with non-realist modes of representation. The difference between fiction film and documentary resides in the kind of relationship it purports to establish with the spectator. In contrast with the individual identification mechanism established by fiction film, I argue that documentary engages the viewer as a social actor. However, that does not mean that documentary need be a realist form. On the contrary, by challenging realist forms of representation, documentary can engage the social dimension of the spectator in innovative ways.

I follow the contribution of Third Cinema and New Latin American Cinema to this discussion by showing how Third Cinema had already blurred the distinction between fiction and documentary in favor of advancing social and political change. However, Third Cinema tended to privilege realism as the legitimate avenue to represent historical and national realities. While generally viewed as a NLAC filmmaker, Ruiz was generally skeptical of the major theoretical tendencies of the movement, which he saw as

dogmatic at times, using film for instrumental political purposes. Even before his exile to France in 1974 Ruiz had insisted on the need for artistic experimentation as a precursor to political innovation. I show how even after the advent of the dictatorship Ruiz's stance on artistic innovation had remained constant in the sense that he sought new aesthetic avenues to reflect on the experience of exile.

Next, I provide a critical analysis of Ruiz's documentary production that deals with the return to Chile to show how a surrealist approach to documentary work can uncover the importance of the unconscious in the production and rewriting of memory. In that sense, I argue for aligning Ruiz's documentary practice with a "documentary unconscious" that combines the contributions of Walter Benjamin and Luis Buñuel. I discuss theoretical work on surrealist film to show how its potential lies in exposing the fictive unity of the human subject, generally guaranteed as whole by classical narrative cinema. I also discuss the relationship between surrealism and documentary in order to examine how surrealist documentary challenges the possibility of a transparent representation of reality. In the case of Ruiz's films, surrealist documentary emphasizes the social potential of cinema, revealing memory as an ambiguous product of our collective unconscious. In the process of using surrealist techniques, such as non-synchronous sound and collage, the concept of the nation as a unified entity is challenged by the juxtaposition of disparate elements that have "Chile" as the common denominator.

Chapter 2, "The Dream of Memory in Raúl Ruiz's *Memories of Appearances: Life is a dream*" expands on the theoretical background laid out in the previous chapter to further explore the cinema's potential to access the "optical unconscious" and also to

destabilize the unity of the subject. Like the case of the aforementioned documentaries, *Life is a Dream* explores the connection between dreams and the process of memory.

In this chapter I argue that Ruiz problematizes the concept of a transparent memory by exploiting the unconscious dimension of both memory and dreams. I explore how, like dreams, memory-work is also conditioned by internal censorship mechanisms due to unconscious processes functioning within the subject. That is, Ruiz suggests that amnesia about the past is part of the subject's unconscious desire. Also, I show how by using the figure of the cinema screen conceptually, Ruiz suggests that memory-work can actually obstruct rather than reveal the sources of internal repressive mechanisms. By using psychoanalytic concepts on dream interpretation I demonstrate that the protagonist's actual wish is to forget, not to remember.

However, I suggest that Ruiz's criticism is meant to open new spaces for self-critique and the possibility of engaging with issues of responsibility. To that end, I read Ruiz's film as a critical intervention on the Spanish Baroque play, an intervention that refuses to offer the redemptive closure that reinstates sovereignty in the play. Instead, I argue that Ruiz's film seeks to de-suture the subject's wholeness by exposing rather than closing the gap in the subject's knowledge. In this way cinema offers a critical space from which to reconsider political options that take into account, rather than discount, the subject's internal censorship mechanisms and unconscious desires.

In Chapter 3 I transition from cinema to literature, while continuing to explore important theoretical concerns about the role of the subject in the post-dictatorship: the need to complement the issue of memory in the post-dictatorship with a self-critical

outlook that contemplates, albeit uncomfortably, the need to challenge the unity of the subject from both sides of the ideological divide in order to demystify political binaries.

Titled “Literary Reconfigurations: Representations of the Literary and the Political in Roberto Bolaño’s *Estrella distante* and *Nocturno de Chile*,” the third chapter reads together two novels by Bolaño in order to understand the epistemological underpinnings of Latin American fascist discourse. In particular I analyze how fascism is manifested at the level of discourse on culture, as well as the consequences that arise from that fact. I argue that Bolaño sees fascist culture as desirous of autonomy from history or politics and he embarks on the discursive dismantling of that autonomy. To the fascist discourse of purity that assigns a negative relationship to what it sees as “other”, Bolaño offers a form of literature that welcomes its contamination with history and politics. To that end, I discuss definitions of the term fascism, specifically in regards to how fascist discourse hyper-rigidifies borders against that which it perceives outside of itself. I continue by discussing the concept of fascism in the Chilean context and argue for the social role of literature to remember the fascist element of the military regime as well as its continuation in the transition to democracy. I argue that Bolaño seeks to challenge the fascist discourse based on mythical conceptions of time as well as the neoliberal discourse that gives the illusion of a perpetual present by presenting a discourse that embraces an alternative allegorical understanding of temporality. To that end, I argue that he employs various narrative strategies that underscore the historical dimension of language, such as constant rewriting, allegorical use of names, and detours from the main storyline. At the same time, he also problematizes the facile ideological binary that can be created in this process. By ending both novels with what I call

“recognition scenes,” Bolaño draws our attention to the fact that we are already engaged in an uncomfortable relationship with the fascist element. In this way we cannot dismiss fascism as an aberration within or a radical departure from the dominant Western political tradition.

Building on the considerations of gender in Bolaño’s critique of fascism in *Estrella Distante* and *Nocturno de Chile*, the fourth chapter, titled “Contemplating the Abyss: Motherhood, Bearing Witness, and the Role of Literature in Roberto Bolaño’s *Amuleto*” offers an analysis of the witnessing discourse produced by the mother figure in the short novel. I emphasize that by “mother” I do not mean a biological-reproductive entity, but rather the expression of a way to think inter-subjectively. Upon bearing witness to the political destruction of a whole generation, the mother seeks to recuperate what I call an affective dimension of history and propose a model for subjectivity formation that values inter-relationality. I suggest that the novel offers a new model for the social role of literature by narrating from the perspective of a mother who bears witness to the catastrophic political effects of patriarchal logic.

In my discussion I engage with a theoretical discussion on the ruinous status of what Rama had called “the lettered city,” the convergence of lettered culture and state power within the urban space. In direct discussion with the current status of Latin American literature, I engage with how and why *testimonio* has been theorized as having displaced the centrality of the “lettered city” in terms of its potential for social change. I discuss the critical debates surrounding *testimonio* to show how the dichotomy fiction/*testimonio* proposed by critics such as John Beverley, as well as the critical demands of *testimonio* to be an authentic discourse with access to Truth have actually

hindered a genuine engagement with both *testimonio* and fiction. Instead, I argue that Bolaño's novel functions as a critical engagement with *testimonio*, in the sense that it proposes a model for a non-identity-based affirmative work. Using *testimonio*-like strategies, such as a first-person narrative and the impetus for a communal purpose for the future, the novel also works to collapse what has been considered *testimonio*'s identity-based discourse. In its stead, I argue that the subject of this novel, the "non-authentic" non-reproductive mother who bears witness, is a subject defined inter-subjectively and inter-relationally.

In turn, the maternal perspective allows Bolaño to expose the systematic exclusion of the feminine structure in Latin American political thought, as well as its consequences on the literary tradition in Latin America and its relationship to power. I argue that Bolaño offers a feminist critique of the breakdown of social relations due to the abject status of the mother figure. I examine how the figure of the mother is defined in Freudian psychoanalysis in contrast with object-relations theory. In light of Bolaño's text, I side with object-relations theory to argue that we should see the mother figure not as a pre-linguistic stage to be overcome, but as a continuous and necessary presence beyond subject formation. In this way, the locus for a new subjectivity becomes the relationship (rather than the separation) between mother and infant, and more generally, inter-subjectivity.

By de-centering the masculine voice of enunciation, Bolaño invites us to think otherwise about discourse formation, engendering a language that strives to turn away from a sacrificial rhetoric that has characterized revolutionary discourse in Latin America during the past fifty years. I suggest that, aligning language production with the figure of

motherhood restructures the way the political is conceptualized. In this way, Bolaño emphasizes the social dimension of discourse (similarly to the documentary discourse discussed in Chapter 1) and formulates an ethics of inter-subjectivity that could reconfigure the social role of literature in the wake of recent historical events.

Chapter 1

The Surrealist Documentary of Return: Raúl Ruiz in Contrast with the Realism of Miguel Littín and Patricio Guzmán

This chapter examines how exiled filmmakers have used documentary to recount their return to Chile during and after the military dictatorship. I am interested in how their documentaries engage with the formal representations of memory and forgetting. In specific, three filmmakers, Patricio Guzmán, Miguel Littín, and Raúl Ruiz, have chosen to use the documentary form to chronicle their return to Chile. Their stylistic choice—reflexive, autobiographical documentaries—speaks to their common professional and personal trajectory as prominent filmmakers during the Allende government and as political exiles during the military dictatorship.³

All three filmmakers document and lament the collapse of the project of the Popular Unity government and the ensuing triumph of free-market capitalism established by the Pinochet regime. However, as we will see, the same commonalities give way to significant divergences with respect to their views on the social role of documentary in particular and of cinema in general. On the one hand, Guzmán and Littín's use of realist style leads them to romanticize the past and declare the dystopian end of history and of politics. In distinction, Ruiz's use of surrealist style, with its techniques of visually

³ Marxist president Salvador Allende, democratically elected in 1970, and the Popular Unity government were removed by the military coup d'état on September 11, 1973. The subsequent military dictatorship led by General Augusto Pinochet lasted until 1989.

representing contradictions and ambiguity, refuses to romanticize the past, but seeks to find new forms to represent the political (uses ambiguity, rejects transparency in favor of elliptical forms of representation, brushes reality against its own norms). I argue that the divergent formal choices adopted (realist versus surrealist documentary) give rise to different conceptions of political memory and national representation.

There has been very little in depth critical work dedicated to any of these filmmakers. Guzmán's work has received the most critical attention for his documentary work, especially for *The Battle of Chile*, which had garnered widespread international attention and galvanized the international resistance movement against the dictatorship.⁴ Critics generally recognize Guzmán as an important documentary filmmaker, while Littín and Ruiz's documentary productions have not received much critical attention.⁵ Additionally, due to the political urgency of the period, most critical work has been done during the dictatorship and critical output has diminished once the transition to democracy started. Furthermore, most published work has been in the form of interviews with the filmmakers.⁶ In general their political engagement was emphasized in favor of examining the political implications of their choice of aesthetic form. I will argue that these aesthetic choices have crucial implications in how the filmmakers perceive and shape the political space of the post-dictatorship.

⁴ See Pick and Lopez in *The Social Documentary in Latin America*.

⁵ Miguel Littín's filmic production has focused mainly on fiction film—*Acta* is his only documentary film. The documentary is important because it was a clandestine return and has also contributed much to attract international attention to the dictatorship. Also, García Márquez has written a book based on his interviews with the filmmaker, *La aventura de Miguel Littín, clandestino en Chile*, which has drawn further attention to Littín's gesture, but not so much to his specific use of the documentary form.

⁶ See for example *The Social Documentary in Latin America* (1990) edited by Julianne Burton and *The Cineaste Interviews* (1983) compiled by Dan Georgakas and Lenny Rubenstein.

In contrast with the 1970s and 1980s, where scholarly activity focused mainly on exiled filmmakers' production during the dictatorship because of the urgency of the political situation, there has been little film criticism on Latin American documentary in the post-dictatorship and the transition to democracy. There are no comparative studies of documentaries in Chilean film scholarship that analyze the exiles' perspective on the representation of the nation, during the dictatorship and how they understand the political processes at work in the post-dictatorship. For example, *Revista de Crítica Cultural*, the leading cultural magazine in Chile after the dictatorship, edited by Nelly Richard, has published essays mainly on Guzmán's documentary work. In spite of the journal's emphasis on approaches to memory and politics inspired by the neo-avant-garde, there is no mention of Ruiz's documentary work and very little on his other filmic productions; the magazine has only one article dedicated to Ruiz's book, *Poetics of Cinema*.⁷

The scarcity of scholarship on Ruiz's documentary production might be due to his experimental approach to the documentary form and his intermixing of fiction and documentary modes. Ruiz points to a permeating sense of exile from realism, that is, exile from an unproblematic relationship to representation, whether of the present or the past. By employing the trope of 'return from exile' in documentary film, I plan to develop a discussion on the relationship between *politics* and *realism*, especially in the function of national identity and historical memory.

In actual practice, their temporary return to the place they have been excluded from took on distinctive forms. Miguel Littín, initially exiled in Spain, returned clandestinely to Chile in 1985 and filmed the daily life during the military dictatorship in *Acta General de Chile* (1986). Produced with the support of the Spanish television

⁷ Sabrovsky, Eduardo. "Modernidad y mito: el 'cine negro' de Raúl Ruiz" p. 16 -20. N. 34

channel TVE (*Cine Latinoamericano I*, 278) and aired on BBC News in Britain, the film was intended to denounce the dictatorship abuses and to mobilize the international community. Patricio Guzmán returned to his native country in 1995, after more than 20 years of exile in Canada, to film *Chile: Obstinate Memory* (1995). ‘Armed’ with a copy of *The Battle of Chile* (1973-1979)—his documentary on the political events that took place in the last year of Allende’s government—he chronicled the reactions of a new generation of Chileans who saw those images for the first time. Later on Guzmán returned to film *The Pinochet Case* (2001) and *Salvador Allende* (2004), which sought to connect the political situation of present-day Chile with the Allende years and with the military dictatorship period. Also a political exile, Raúl Ruiz received official permission to return to Chile in 1983 and, in reaction to that event, produced a short documentary, titled *The Return of a Library Lover* (1983), on his memory of the day before the coup. Twenty years later, this time with the support of the Ministry of Education of the Concertación government, he produced *Cofralandes* (2002), a four-part documentary on the travels of a camera-witness that records idiosyncrasies among Chileans while appealing to a shared cultural legacy.

The filmmakers use the trope of the returning exile to legitimize their discourse and thus respond to the expectations of knowledge brought on by critics who challenge the exiles’ lack of direct experience of repression during the military regime. On the one hand, Littín and Guzmán use realism as a powerful tool in harnessing legitimacy for their accounts. Littín risked being imprisoned by going back during the dictatorship, but he considered the need to film the reality of the repression important enough for him to film clandestinely. The main motivating force behind the making of *Acta* was the necessity of

documenting the reality under Pinochet.⁸ In *Obstinate Memory* (1995) Guzmán invokes his direct relationship to national historical events through the use of footage from his earlier *Battle of Chile* and includes the participants from the earlier documentary into the new one, in order to establish a continuum in his work as documentarian of national reality. On the other hand, Ruiz uses the return motif ironically, in order to challenge the direct relationship between political memory and realism. He problematizes the realist framework of documentary in order to access a deeper dimension of political thought, one that questions the effectiveness of representation. Ruiz *assumes* his exilic position and uses it to expose how experience is not immediate, but is always already mediated (by one's circumstances). Experience—be it exilic or not—is always a story (“relato”). By interrogating the link between documentary and realism in the trope of the exilic return, he seeks to illustrate how we are all in exile from representation.

To underscore what is at stake in these different modes of documentary representation, I will introduce a theoretical discussion on the complex relationship between documentary and fiction film, as well as between documentary and realism in Latin American cinema. The next section will focus on a discussion of North American film critics' focus on the tension between documentary and narrative fiction film, as well as the theoretical differences between realism and surrealist form. In the subsequent section, I will analyze the contribution to this discussion of Latin American filmmakers and critics, in particular through Third Cinema's focus on the social dimension of film.

⁸ see Gabriel García Márquez's *Clandestine in Chile: The Adventures of Miguel Littín* for more in depth explanations from Littín as to his motivations.

Documentary and the lure of the real

In contrast to fiction film, documentary holds the (elusive) promise of a visual form that has a direct link, an indexical relationship, to the historical world.⁹ In documentary the indexical quality of the image allows for the image to serve an *evidentiary* function—the images *testify* by virtue of their indexical relationship to the historical world. Because of this purported characteristic of documentary, the documentary form has been seen as having direct political potential, contributing to social and political change. Thus, film scholars decried the marginalized and inferior status of the documentary in relationship to fiction film and sought to reveal it as a consciousness-raising visual form with the purpose of re(dis)covering the social value of the image. Bill Nichols, for example, contended that classical narrative cinema (especially Hollywood) fashioned a dream-world that isolated the spectator instead of raising his/her awareness in relationship to the world around us (*Representing Reality*, 15).

However, due to the use of fictional techniques and narrative strategies, fiction and documentary are invariably enmeshed at three levels: semiotics, narrativity, and performance.¹⁰ At the level of the sign, the difference lies not in the formal relations among signifier, signified, and referent, but rather in the historical status of the referent

⁹ A photographic image bears strict correspondence to what it represents, that is, it has an indexical relationship to its referent. In documentary the indexical relationship establishes the image as a representation of the historical world. Indexicality contributes strongly to the aesthetics of realism. (Nichols, *Engaging Cinema*, 106)

¹⁰ *Theorizing Documentary* (1993), Michael Renov (ed.)

meaning that fiction film is about *a* world, while documentary is about *the* world.¹¹ In addition to semiotics, many documentaries feature narrativity and narrative arcs, such as structures that induce suspense and heighten emotional impact, even though these are sometimes assumed to be the sole province of fictional forms. Generally the narrative arcs are centered on an argument that is developed through rhetorical principles, rather than through storytelling. Nonetheless, the argument is presented in the form of “storified news” (Grierson in Rosen, 64). Regarding the issue of performance in front of the camera, performance in documentary cannot be easily differentiated from performance in fiction film because not only are both types of subjects (and spectators) aware of the camera’s presence, but also that the subjects of documentary (Nichols calls them “social actors”) play themselves, albeit in a manner that may be influenced by dramatic conventions (Renov “Introduction” n5). Documentaries are performative acts, fluid and unstable, neither static nor spontaneous (Bruzzi 1).¹²

While documentary film shares many features with feature films, the difference lies with the *use* to which these cinematic forms are put. Also, in the Latin American filmmaking tradition there is an already infused relation between fiction and documentary, which in turn inflects the political sphere. My own working definition of documentary film draws from North American documentary film scholars, but is also informed by how the aforementioned Latin American filmmakers negotiate the border between documentary and fiction. I see documentary not as the fulfillment of realism in

¹¹ According to Saussure, there is an irreducible difference between the signified (the real-world object) and the signifier (the lexical term which refers to the object). In *Dictionary of Cultural and Critical Theory* p. 484

¹² see also Michael Chanan for a clear explanation of “performance” in front of camera in *Politics of Documentary*.

film, but rather in terms of the form's *intent* to engage the viewer as *social* actor. In this sense it diverges drastically from classical narrative cinema, which emphasizes the individual dimension, usually through identification.¹³

My focus on theorizing documentary in this chapter addresses how the social dimension is played out in the relationship between politics and poetics—its rhetorical and aesthetic function, respectively. Documentary references the world we live in, and it does that not by portraying “the world as it is,” but by incorporating rhetorical devices that reference the world indirectly. In that sense, documentary has the potential to challenge our own assumptions on what “the world” is by interrogating and redefining our own conceptions of the “outside” world.¹⁴ In terms of documentary's stance between the poles of “truth” and “fiction,” I adopt Renov's argument that we cannot overlook documentary's *fictive* elements—its appeal to the viewer's Imaginary, which invariably enters the terrain of fantasy and alternative logics (*Theorizing*, 3).¹⁵

Historically, the documentary form has been organized around two different conceptual threads, which amounted to competing genealogies: realism versus avant-garde. While we generally associate documentary with realism, we need to consider the contribution of the avant-garde documentary to the development of documentary. Our customary understanding of documentary comes from the work of British filmmaker and film theorist, John Grierson, who, in the 1930s defined it as “storified news” (Rosen 64), as a dramatization of reality. Grierson, deeply entrenched within an institutionalized,

¹³See Metz and others. Also, see Elsaesser and Hagener in *Film Theory: an introduction through the senses* primary and secondary identification p. 89-90.

¹⁴ “The outside world” implies a relationship of distance between the spectator and what lies outside of him/her. In fiction film this distance is bridged through identification.

¹⁵ Here Renov is alluding to Christian Metz's analysis of fiction film in *The Imaginary Signifier*.

state-sponsored, liberal mindset, saw documentary as a tool to be used by the elite (the informed filmmaker) in order to educate the masses (Rosen 80). This conception of documentary was adopted and transformed in the development of Latin American national film industries starting with the 1950s in order to activate social and political movements. Along Griersonian lines, generally, the spectator was defined as a terrain to be organized around meaning extracted from the real (by the filmmaker), which in turn generates the potential for *social struggle*. Even if the Griersonian documentary tradition has sought to harness authority by invoking realism, we can see how fiction and documentary have historically inhabited one another. In other words, since documentary film and fiction film share so many formal elements, there is a false dichotomy between the two filmic forms. One key difference that needs to be emphasized is documentary's overt purpose of raising social awareness through a constant negotiation of the form's relationship to the historical world.

However, scholars have sought to tease out and draw sharp lines between fiction and documentary because they believed that documentary's association with fictional film takes away from the social, and therefore political, force of documentary. Bill Nichols, one of the most important documentary film critics, believes that documentary's connection to fictional film is a disadvantage because it takes away from the **social** power of documentary:

...fiction attends to unconscious desires and latent meanings. It operates where the id lives. Documentary, on the other hand, attends to social issues of which we are consciously aware. It operates where the reality-attentive-ego and superego live. Fiction harbors echoes of dreams and daydreams, sharing structures of fantasy with them, whereas documentary mimics the canons of expository argument, the making of a case, and the call to public rather than private response... Essentially, documentary films appear as pale reflections of the dominant, instrumental discourses in

our society... Instead of directly confronting an issue or problem, the [documentary] discourse must ricochet off this image-based, illusionistic medium of entertainment. Documentary's alliance with the discourses of sobriety falls under attack due to the imaginistic company it keeps. (4)

The drastic binary that results from Nichols' description endows documentary with purely rationalistic features: argument, making a case, public relevance, consciousness. In contrast, fiction is relegated to the realm of the unconscious, individual, illusionistic. Documentary is presented as forward-looking discourse, while classic fiction film is deemed passive and self-indulgent. These premises are problematic because they are profoundly prescriptive. He seeks to redeem documentary at the expense of fiction film in order to show how documentary is social, fantasy-free, and rational—thus, in Nichols' view, I suspect, actively political.

Although Nichols recognizes that documentary does not have any “structure or purpose of its own entirely absent from fiction of narrative” and that formal strategies overlap, he seeks to tease apart the differences in context and implications (“A Fiction (Un)Like Any Other” 6). He seeks to identify formal mechanisms in order to “cleanse”/ “purge” documentaries of their sticky layer of representation as to uncover the historical reality they address (7). Paradoxically, Nichols seeks to distance documentary from its visual elements because of their potential for fantasy, but he recognizes that objectivity and claims to authenticity are fictions. Nonetheless, he insists on documentary realism, which seeks to make plausible an argument about the historical world (165). Through this distinction, Nichols seeks to integrate documentary within a larger framework of nonfictional structures, which he calls “discourses of sobriety” (3). These discourses of sobriety, such as science, economics, politics, foreign policy, education, religion, and welfare exert power over individuals and societies by virtue of their claim to bear a direct

relation to the real world. Nichols' desire is to give documentary its due by proving its kinship to the discourses of sobriety," and thus to activate the documentary's capacity to exert tangible, *real* influence over the social world, as he believes these other nonfictional discourses already do. Even though Nichols' insistence on making documentary into a "discourse of sobriety" is highly problematic for reasons discussed below, it is crucial to conserve his insistence that documentary's power rests on its relationship to the social dimension.

Michael Renov argues against Nichols' insistence to integrate the documentary form within a "discourse of sobriety" performed by "social actors." He contends that, despite Nichols' efforts to broaden the formal aspects of documentary (through his discussion of avant-garde, subjectivity, and reflexivity), Nichols is guided mainly by the desire to endow documentary with a greater power of mobilization (*The Subject of Documentary* 99-100). In other words, by focusing on *his* desire as critic, Nichols ultimately represses documentary's non-programmatic elements. Alternatively, Renov takes interest in the documentary's delirious side, its unconscious, and its non-programmatic elements, a claim based on Kristeva's notion of the cleavage of the subject (unconscious/conscious) and the resulting challenge to a "knowing subject". (*The Subject of Documentary*, 100) Thus, "the documentary image functions in relation to both knowledge and desire, evidence and lure, with neither term exerting exclusive control". (*The Subject of Documentary*, 101) Unlike Nichols, Renov does not believe that politics and "poetics" have to be mutually exclusive ("Towards a Poetics of Documentary" 19).¹⁶

¹⁶ For Renov the fundamental aim of poetics is "to submit aesthetic forms to rigorous investigation as to their composition, function, and effect." He proposes four fundamental tendencies of documentary that have rhetorical/aesthetic functions: to record, reveal, or preserve; to persuade or promote; to analyze or

To that end, Renov seeks to reveal the expressive capabilities of non-fiction forms and thus to emphasize rather than minimize documentary's aesthetic dimension. (5-6) He is also invested in the use of documentary (and documentary scholarship) for the purposes of political activism, but for him it is these aesthetic tendencies that make documentary an "active" artistic form and can incorporate documentary within the wider film culture from which it has been marginalized (21).

However, Renov, even as he proposes to investigate documentary's delirious self (*Theorizing*, 194n7), does not address the historical relationship between surrealism and documentary (in Luis Buñuel's *Las Hurdes*, for example).¹⁷ Instead, Renov focuses on the autobiographical dimension in documentary film, where he seeks to emphasize individual subjectivity. He calls for a shift from analyzing the subject *in* documentary to the subject *of* documentary (*The Subject of Documentary*, xxvi). Renov does intend to move away from Nichols' emphasis of the social in documentary, but, like him, still subsumes aesthetics to politics. This is problematic because Renov privileges the "poetics" of documentary over Nichols' "discourse of sobriety," but focuses on the individual's relationship to the social sphere, rather than focusing on how the documentary form constructs and reformulates the meaning of the social, and therefore of the political. Renov focuses on individual subjectivity, but this is an issue that surrealism puts into question: not only the divided subject, but the focus on the individual at the expense of the multiple. In surrealism the political is not an individual, single unconscious. The subject and the subject's memory is not the goal. In the surrealist

interrogate; to express. These functions operate as "modalities of desire," fueling documentary discourse. in "Towards a Poetics of Documentary." p. 19-21.

¹⁷ See Russell article in *F is for Phony*.

documentaries of Luis Buñuel and Raúl Ruiz we witness the move away from the subject and his/her unconsciousness or consciousness. Surrealism works against the dream of one individual.

Nichols and Renov do address avant-garde film and poetics, but do not discuss the surrealist documentary genealogy, which challenges precisely the idea of realism, rejecting a didactical journalistic approach in favor of dream-like images and unexpected juxtapositions that seek to show “the world” in new ways. For example, in regards to Luis Buñuel’s ethnographic surrealism, *Land without Bread*, it seeks not to make the unfamiliar comprehensible, but rather to attack the familiar, to make it strange (Clifford in Roberts, 93). The inverted logic of surrealist documentary seeks to jolt the spectator out of the comfort of the everyday, out of the comfortable position of passive spectator. Oftentimes, this inverted logic is manifested in the form of satire or parody of the realist mode of representation. But that move is far from renouncing its social role; the social relevance is focused on interrogating the notion of “real” (Rouff in Roberts 94).

There exists an alternative documentary tradition touched by a Surrealist viewpoint. For example, Michael Jennings, Dziga Vertov, or Chris Marker can be seen as documentary filmmakers with a surrealist edge due to their preference of juxtaposition of images and sound (across distinct social classes in Jennings’ case, for example) to the “detriment” of narration and interview (Roberts 96). The link between documentary and surrealism surges precisely because Surrealism is concerned with reconceptualizing the representation of the social sphere. Surrealism documents the unexpected aspects of contemporary life; challenges the ideology of realism; plays upon the problematic between reality and representation (Richardson, *Surrealism and Cinema* 77).

In contrast with filmmakers who pass documentary through a surrealist lens in order to challenge established meanings of the political through form and innovation, Nichols does not seek to reconceptualize the political, only to argue for the inclusion of documentary within an institutional discourse of power. Nichols' ultimate goal in formally analyzing documentary modes is to reintegrate documentary film within an institutional framework where it does work for political purposes because of its social relevance. However, Latin American criticism has warned against the dangers of a discourse such as Nichols' "discourse of sobriety." Nelly Richard, in her discussion of the Chilean post-dictatorship, has shown how an institutionalized discourse on "official memory" sterilizes and ossifies the relationship that a nation establishes with its past. In contrast, Richard argues for an engagement with the affective dimension of history, thus favoring 'vanguardismo' over social realism. Richard defends the need for artistic and philosophical-critical responses to repression, as opposed to privileging the social scientific discourse that came to represent leftist intellectual production ("Introduction" *Pensar en/la postdictadura 2*).

Documentary and the New Latin American Cinema

Nichols and Renov argue for documentary as political instrument, but devote minimal consideration to the Latin American tradition of social documentary. Latin America has had a tradition of socially committed filmmaking since the 1950s, both in fiction film and documentary. In fact, the distinction between fiction film and documentary film was often blurred in favor of advancing social change and political emancipation. Rather than focusing on teasing out fiction from non-fiction, the debate

revolved around the relationship between cinema and realism. Therefore, the heterogeneity within the movement was expressed around issues of realism. This heterogeneity will be illustrated by the different approaches taken by Littín, Guzmán, and Ruiz in their diverging conceptualizations of cinema's social role.

Growing as a component of the politically informed New Latin American Cinema (NLAC), documentary filmmaking was the visual expression of the continental struggle against North American domination in the economy and politics of the region.¹⁸ New Latin American Cinema belonged to a wider trend of global cinematic innovation that arose from a widespread desire to counteract the hegemonic influence of Hollywood and its cultural domination over so-called Third World countries. Third Cinema, as it was called, was centered on the anti-imperialist struggle against cultural domination and saw cinema as a potential avenue for the decolonization of culture (Armes 87-100).

While it has been generally understood that the motivation for Latin American social documentary has been a commitment to political transformation, not very much attention has been placed on *how* NLAC films test the documentary form's limits. Critics have argued that a central characteristic of NLAC is that it increasingly and intentionally confuses the traditional distinctions between documentary and fictional modes of production: "although the realistic commitment of the documentary remained central, it was increasingly juxtaposed to and mixed with fictional strategies in order to generate

¹⁸ The term "New Latin American Cinema" was coined in 1979, at the first edition of the Festival Internacional de Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano in La Habana, Cuba. It was further theorized in the 1990s by North American film scholars. See Martin, Michael T. (ed.) *New Latin American Cinema: Theory, Practices and Transcontinental Articulations*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1997; Pick, Zuzana M. *The New Latin American Cinema: A Continental Project*. 1st ed. University of Texas Press, 1993.

different modes of cinematic address more directly associated with social reality and its transformations” (López 408).

While considerations on the relationship between documentary and fiction were widely debated, a realist conception of documentary was prevalent:

From its inception in the mid-1950s, the New Latin American Cinema movement accorded to documentary privileged status. Socially committed filmmakers embraced documentary approaches as their primary tool in the search to discover and define the submerged, denied, devalued realities of an intricate palimpsest of cultures and castes... [...] *This documentary impulse, and the frequent aesthetic preference for a raw realism that replicated the compelling immediacy of certain techniques of reportage, has marked much of the fictional production throughout the region during the last three decades.* (Burton, “Toward a History of Social Documentary in Latin America” 6) [my emphasis]

Documentary directly influenced the conceptualization of fictional production. Feature films were characterized by a tendency to realism that appropriated fiction film in the service of portraying social realities. The type of documentary produced, even if it employed fictional techniques, was characterized by a “raw realism” that parted from the desire to “show things as they are,” without regard for the problematics of representation. There was a cross-fertilization of documentary and fictional forms of production. The employment of realism in the historical context of the times and in the political agenda of the NLAC movement in general sought to invert the dominance of Hollywood’s “dream factory”, seeking to portray the harsh realities and marginalization of large sectors of society. The counter-hegemonic discourse was embedded in the images themselves, serving as source of information and education, with a clear message for the urgency of social transformation.

Most prominent in the late 1960s, NLAC was inspired by the Cuban Revolution of 1959 and by Brazil's Cinema Novo movement.¹⁹ Stylistically, it drew on Italian neo-realism, the British social documentary (especially John Grierson), and Marxist aesthetics (Willemen, 4). Representative figures of the movement, such as Fernando Birri (Argentina), Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, and Julio García Espinoza (Cuba) had studied at the *Centro Sperimentale* in Rome, acquiring the technical skills necessary to produce low-cost artisanal cinema that was not dependent on state funding, but used a mixture of public and private funds.²⁰

Although NLAC took varied shapes across the continent, the movement's manifestoes insisted on a socially pertinent discourse based on flexibility, research, experimentation, and adaptation to the shifting dynamics of social struggles.²¹ Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino's manifesto, titled "Towards a Third Cinema: Notes and Experiences for the Development of a Cinema of Liberation in the Third World" published in *Tricontinental* (Havana, 1969), encapsulates the drive to use documentary as a revolutionary tool:

The cinema known as documentary, with all the vastness that the concept has today, from educational films to the reconstruction of a fact or a historical event, is perhaps, the main basis of revolutionary filmmaking. Every image that documents, bears witness to, refutes or deepens the truth

¹⁹ Cinema Novo was a populist and revolutionary cinema created in Brazil in the 1950's, highly influenced by Italian neo-realism. Central figures include Glauber Rocha, Nelson Pereira dos Santos, and Rui Guerra. See *Cinema Studies: the Key Concepts* by Susan Hayward and *Unthinking Eurocentrism* by Shohat and Stam.

²⁰ Fernando Birri was extremely influential on the young documentary filmmakers of Latin America of the 50's and 60's, being a pioneer for a "cinema of discovery" that will offer the 'true' image of Latin American reality (Armes 90).

²¹ See *New Latin American Cinema: Theory, Practices, and Transcontinental Articulations* (Vol. I) for cinema manifestoes by Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, Glauber Rocha, Jorge Sanjinés, Julio García Espinoza, Fernando Birri, and Tomás Gutiérrez Alea.

of a situation is something more than a film image or a purely artistic fact; it becomes something which the system finds indigestible. (276)

Documentary functions as visual evidence of economic injustice and disparity that cannot be reprovved and cannot be ignored. Solanas and Getino echo the Brechtian impulse to change the function of art as institution by producing “indigestible” images, images that cannot be assimilated and commodified within a capitalist system (Bürger 89). However, Brecht’s techniques are meant to disrupt the realism of the artistic production and to reveal inner workings of the construction of a social reality. The paradox is that the majority of New Latin American documentary production, as we have seen earlier, was infused with a strong dose of realism. Therefore, an important theoretical point revolves around *how* filmmakers negotiated the paradox of truly revolutionary filmmaking via a realist style (which was used because the overall goal was to portray national and political realities).

As revolutionary cinema, Third Cinema’s aim was to use the cinematic medium for the liberation of the socially and economically oppressed sectors of society. The concept of liberation is crucial in understanding what is at stake politically: not only economic freedom from exploitative capitalism, but also individual freedom from alienation. But liberation meant different things for different filmmakers. For the majority of NLAC filmmakers liberation meant portraying reality in ways that challenge the social status-quo, calling for a “cinema [that] has the capacity to recuperate national history that the bourgeoisie had deformed to serve its own interests” (Pick “Chilean Documentary” 43). They sought to counter a deformed bourgeois practice with images that blended a different historical narrative with elements of popular culture. For a

minority of filmmakers, including Ruiz, it meant challenging homogenizing practices, both aesthetic and political, such as realism in cinema.

Although the majority of filmmakers combined the urgency of militant political practice and the innovative use of cinematographic devices, the dangers of dogmatism became apparent, as is evident in the *Manifesto* of the filmmakers associated with ChileFilms, written in 1970 by Miguel Littín. For Littín, an official representative of ChileFilms, the main impetus for filmmaking was to document reality in an openly didactic and ideological manner, leading to the conscientization of the public. In an interview with the American film magazine *Cineaste* in the early 1970s, Miguel Littín, then already head of ChileFilms, stressed the importance of creating a cinema inspired by the realities of everyday life, which would connect directly with its public (Georgakas and Rubenstein 25). The interview illuminates the filmmaker's vision of cinema as a political tool that documents the social reality with a view to transform it. Littín's first feature film, *El Chacal de Nahueltoro* (1968), which he presented at the 1969 Viña del Mar film festival, has documentary-like qualities: based on real events that captivated the public opinion at the time, its sources were researched and investigated for accuracy. Regarding the regular activity of ChileFilms, Littín also emphasized the importance of the production of regular newsreels on marginalized social sectors (Mapuche Indians, peasants, miners, and women) to be distributed throughout the country (27). For Littín, who could have spoken on behalf of the majority of Chilean filmmakers at the time, the role of cinema was three-fold: to clarify the meaning of the ongoing revolutionary process at work in Chile, to be a "witness to reality," and to project future transformations (30). This vision, guided by a belief in the immediate possibility of

representing the real, was minimally concerned with the formal elements of the medium or with formal innovation beyond strictly utilitarian purposes. Formal innovation mattered insofar as it allowed for the proper images to be used in order to make the public understand “how imperialism affects their daily lives” (32).

Raúl Ruiz belonged to a small minority that expressed doubts about the risks inherent in not only a homogenization of militant artistic practice (see Middents for Ruiz’s comments in Viña del Mar), but also questioned the unproblematic relationship to representation in most filmic productions of the time (the faith in the possibility of achieving an unquestionable image of reality through cinematographic means)—because it risked simplifying the complexity and specificity of the political processes at work (1972 interview). In line with an avant-gardist perspective, Ruiz might have been reacting against what he saw as an institutionalization of art and questioned that type of political engagement in art.²²

By way of a comparison, there is a marked difference between Littín and Ruiz in terms of how they conceive of the linkage documentary-fiction in their early films. Littín’s *El Chacal de Nahueltoro*, albeit a fiction film, was inspired by real events and was produced in order to spark a national conversation regarding the economic basis of crime and violence. Ruiz presented his 1968 film, *Tres tristes tigres*, proposing a “radical rupture with what has been falsely called ‘popular cinema’ and with the narrative conventions established by the Mexican melodrama” (Pick 41). The film illustrates Ruiz’s concern with an unproblematic representation of a national identity. Even though *Tres Tristes Tigres* and *Chacal de Nahueltoro* are similar in their concern with the social

²² Bürger discusses how the historical avant-gardes revealed art as an institution and were an assault against art as an institution in *The Theory of the Avant-Garde* (86).

aspect, Littín's pedagogical aims differ drastically from Ruiz's refusal to make moral judgments and to offer programmatic solutions for urban alienation. Although Pick includes them in the same artistic/political drive, there are already significant differences between the two filmmakers.

Raúl Ruiz's relationship with the documentary film form has been a complex and problematic one. He initially attended Fernando Birri's Escuela de Santa Fe in Argentina, the first film school in Latin America.²³ However, he abandoned the program shortly thereafter because of the strong emphasis on documentary filmmaking at the expense of formal experimentation.²⁴ In fact, one of Ruiz's main points of contention was that documentary could very easily fall into political dogmatism precisely because of its purported intention of faithfully representing reality. An illustrative incident took place at the pan-Latin-American Film Festival in Viña del Mar in 1969, where the showing of *The Hour of the Furnaces* (Solanas and Getino, Argentina, 1965-1968) prompted public reactions of solidarity, but also spawned dissent against the formulation of a singular formula for political change modeled on the Cuban Revolution. Ruiz spoke on behalf of a minority of participants who argued against not only political dogmatism, but against the film festival's emphasis on militant politics with little consideration for cinema.²⁵

²³ For more information of Fernando Birri and The Documentary School of Santa Fe, see *The Social Documentary in Latin America* edited by Julianne Burton.

²⁴ See for example p. 119 in "Raúl Ruiz's 'lost' Chilean film: memory and multiplicity in *Palomita Blanca*" by Ignacio López-Vicuña for a discussion of why Ruiz parted ways with Fernando Birri.

²⁵ In Francia, Aldo. *Nuevo cine latinoamericano en Viña del Mar*. Santiago de Chile: CESOC Ediciones ChileAmérica, 1990.

An important member of ChileFilms until the military coup, he did produce a number of documentary shorts in support of Allende's government: *Ahora te vamos a llamar hermano* (1971), *Los minutereros* (1972), *La teoría y la práctica: poesía popular* (1972), *Palomilla brava* (1972) (unfinished), and *Abastecimiento* (1973).²⁶ These documentaries are unavailable, making it impossible to evaluate their form and content, as well as their impact in terms of distribution and exhibition.

Albeit actively involved, Ruiz was something of an outsider because his approach to cinema verged on the more avant-garde, experimental, and surrealist. In a 1971 interview with the Peruvian film journal *Hablemos de Cine*, Ruiz spoke against ChileFilms' uncritical imitation and application of the Cuban model of cinema, particularly the newsreels, with no regard to the Chilean reality and the specificity of the political moment. In the interview his position on documentary work is deeply entrenched within the militant stance that fuses together politics and aesthetics. However, his belief in the camera's capacity to not only record but to also *interpret* reality departs from the general line that saw film mainly as a political tool:

Lo que creo es que se nos da la posibilidad de anular definitivamente esta diferencia entre lo documental y lo argumental o de ficción, integrándolas en torno a esa capacidad de la cámara de indagar en sectores de la realidad y simultáneamente registrarlos e interpretarlos, darles contenido ideológico. Esto implicaría automáticamente la anulación de toda diferencia de géneros y plantearse una actividad en la que difícilmente se distinguiría el campo político del campo estético, que son una sola cosa, y es realmente así. (10)

I think that we have the possibility to definitively annul this difference between documentary and fiction film, integrating them around the camera's capacity to investigate parts of reality and simultaneously registering and interpreting them, giving them ideological content. This would automatically imply the annulment of all genre differences and

²⁶ *Los minutereros* (1972) and *La teoría y la práctica: poesía popular* (1972) were financed by the Editorial Quimantu in coproduction with Canal 7. See *Cine Latinoamericano I. Diccionario de realizadores*, p. 283.

establish an activity in which the political and aesthetic field would be almost indistinguishable, because they are one and the same thing. (*my translation*)

Ruiz was already critical of the documentary's claim to exclusively represent reality, but he was interested in cinema's political potential, espousing the argument that there is a reciprocal correspondence between innovative aesthetics and innovative politics. In other words, for Ruiz, *an engaged filmmaker contributes to political innovation through aesthetic innovation*.

Since, as we have seen, documentary was crucial to the development of Chilean national cinema, it comes as no surprise that all three filmmakers—Guzmán, Littín, and Ruiz—were trained in documentary and began producing documentaries and documentary-like films in the late 1960s. Littín and Ruiz, as well as Guzmán, but to a smaller extent, also produced feature films throughout their careers, which, in complement to their documentary productions, sought to analyze and critique their social reality.²⁷ In the late 1960s and early 1970s, before exile, the three played a prominent role in the development of the Chilean national film industry, being closely associated with the state-owned production company ChileFilms and with the New Chilean Cinema, a current closely connected to other efforts in the region to build independent national film industries to reflect the local and continental realities. The previous analysis of NLAC

²⁷ Patricio Guzmán, arguably the most important Chilean documentary filmmaker, was also an important participant in the political and artistic life of the UP. After studying cinematography at the Escuela Oficial de Cinematografía in Madrid, he returned to Chile in 1969, in time to lend his support to the newly elected Popular Unity government. Among his earliest documentary work was a synthesis of the first year of Allende's government, titled *Primer Año* (1970-1972) and *La respuesta de octubre* (1972), on the workers' support of Allende during a factory strike. At ChileFilms he taught documentary filmmaking, leading the institute's Taller de Cine Documental (1971). Although he is best known for his documentary work, Guzmán has also delved into fiction film, directing *La rosa de los vientos* (1983). [From *Cine Latinoamericano I. Diccionario de realizadores*. Kriger, Clara and Portela, Alejandra (eds.). Ediciones del Jilguero: Buenos Aires, 1997. p. 274-275] His most important documentary work on the importance of the Allende years, however, will be produced in exile.

helps us understand why all three Chilean directors have produced both documentaries and fiction films (even Guzmán, who is predominantly known for his documentary work, has explored fiction filmmaking) and how the exploration of those limits actually fulfills the spirit of the NLAC's constant challenging of dominant modes of thought. This does not mean to say that there were no debates or contrasting viewpoints; in fact the most important debates revolved around issues of representation: realism vs. modernism and form vs. content.

After the coup: the fate of documentary in exile

Chilean cinema flourished up to the early 1970s due to increased state funding and technical innovation, but its development was halted as a consequence of the military coup of 1973. Documentary production continued after the coup, albeit in a clandestine fashion. In exile, the exhibition of documentaries that denounced the violation of human rights was instrumental in raising international awareness of the abuses of Pinochet's military regime. The conceptual shift from a documentary of political emancipation to a denouncing documentary in the post-coup period gave way to an emphasis on political memory.

Most exilic documentaries shifted their focus from an overtly political voice engaged in community issues to a reflection on the diasporic experience and to the destabilization of national identity (Nichols, *Representing Reality*, 162-3). Chilean exilic films, such as Marilú Mallet's or Raúl Ruiz's, departed from the objective style of social documentary in order to seek new avenues of representation in the form of performative or reflexive documentary modes. Exilic documentaries contribute to what Nelly Richard has called an affective dimension of history, functioning as complements to what state-

sanctioned forms of commemoration or social-scientific discourses from the left have left behind.²⁸ Documentaries in exile continued to be relevant politically because they can continue to serve as “guardians of popular memory,” which is the role that Teshome H. Gabriel had argued for Third Cinema. In opposition to institutionalized historical memory that marginalizes and privileges the written word, popular memory views the past as a political issue and as a theme of struggle; it is “a look back to the future” (53). The role of documentaries in this context would be to give voice to collective and alternative versions of history by delving into the past to reconstruct and redeem what official history has overlooked.

In contrast with the pre-coup filmmaking activity, the social relevance of documentary in exile has to be negotiated, rather than taken for granted. Nonetheless, there are points of continuity between the pre-coup concern for social change and the post-coup, exilic concern for the relationship between the individual and the collective through the emphasis on popular memory. The autobiographical emphasis in exile films is inextricably connected to the filmmakers’ past, therefore allowing for a conceptual continuation of one of the NLAC tenets, which is using the historical as the basic intertext (López, 407). The documentaries function as memory-work to counter the dominant tendencies of censorship and amnesia during and after the dictatorship, respectively. However, there are diverging approaches to this work and different resulting conceptions of the political as a result.

²⁸ *In Residuos y metáforas* Nelly Richard refers to the post-dictatorship period and to the official discourse on “memory”, but her remarks can be extended to cultural productions before and after the transition to democracy.

The military coup in Chile and the dirty war in Argentina signaled a redefinition of the state, where “The nation as a political ensemble, then, is at once the lived experience of citizenship, country and government, and as well, a dynamic, systemic set of relations that, potentially, can eradicate all three” (Newman 244-245). Although some critics have suggested that the experience of exile has undermined the “nation” as focus of filmic production, I believe it is important to examine how the representation of the “nation” changes through the lens of memory and exile.²⁹ Dislocation has added complexity to the “national question” and has complicated the position that filmmakers and spectators take in regards to the nationality but has not obliterated the sense of the ‘national’ nor has it undermined the desire for specifically national themes in cinema. The ‘national’ in the social consciousness remains an ongoing concern and is illustrated by the fact that the majority of films produced in exile have a national subject matter, whether explicit or implicit. The representation of the national from the point of view of the exile remains a politically charged subject. In this new context, where the relationship between the personal and the collective is renegotiated, I seek to examine how documentaries understand and represent history and politics.

The next sections will provide a close reading of documentaries that narrate the exiled filmmakers’ temporary return to Chile, both during and after the dictatorship. I chose this focus on documentaries of return because it is at this spatio-temporal junction

²⁹ For example, Kathleen Newman states that the exilic condition has dislocated the nation as the base of filmic production: “In the case of national cinema in Latin America, there has been over the last thirty years a dislocation of filmmaker and nation. Specifically, exile in the case of nations under dictatorship, and (seemingly national) economic crises in the case of nations with elected governments, caused many Latin American intellectuals to lead transnational lives. [...] Thus, a nation, whether a filmmaker’s own or not, came to be no longer necessarily the base from which films are made and distributed, and a national audience no longer necessarily the primary addressee. (242-3)” in “National Cinema after Globalization” (1993).

where the re-encounter with the national takes place. The different modes of filmic representation signal different understandings of temporality and of political memory. The section will evaluate the different strategies of historical representation and examine the (political) implications of this particular form of cultural production. Between pre-coup and post-coup documentary productions there is both a continuity that manifests itself in the social aspect and the desire to represent the nation through its history, but also a radical shift in representation due to the experience of exile.

The return of the exile: modes of historical representation in documentary film

During and after the dictatorship, the return to Chile of exiles who had been actively involved in NLAC resulted in an increased production of films that dealt primarily with memory: of the Allende years, its tragic end, and the destructive effects of the dictatorship—repression and exile. These documentaries create spaces for remembrance and they shape the way we relate to a traumatic historical event. Through the trope of the temporal and spatial/cultural return, I seek to develop the relationship between politics and realism, especially in the function of national identity and historical memory.

Given that documentary film generally relies on the guarantee of the camera at the pro-filmic event, one of the ways in which exiled filmmakers can (re)gain access to the pro-filmic space is by returning to their homeland.³⁰ The filmmakers use the trope of the returning exile to legitimize their discourse and thus respond to the expectations of knowledge brought on by critics who challenge the exiles' lack of direct experience of

³⁰ See, for example Rosen's article on how documentary verisimilitude relies on the presence of the camera at the pro-filmic event in "Documenting Documentary" p. 72 in *Theorizing Documentary* edited by Michael Renov.

repression during the military regime. The cinematic medium has the capacity to act as the visual substitute for the spatial backdrop upon which the past is reconnected with the present. Cinema makes possible an engagement with space that overcomes the spatial limitations of the exilic perspective. In terms of style, the documentaries oscillate between expository and reflexive modes. In all documentaries examined, the first-person voice-over narrative lends a subjective aspect to the images, but they nonetheless seek to comment at a social and historical level.

Littín and Guzmán's films directly aim to uncover and reveal a hidden history. During the dictatorship, Littín seeks to unveil the hidden traces of resistance against the regime and to bring to the fore personal memories of Allende. In the post-dictatorship, Guzmán films to recover the lost history of the Allende period, to collect and paste together the "restos" that remain—hidden from view, but still present beneath the surface. Faced with the concept of a lost collective because of exile and military repression, the filmmakers turn Allende into a symbol of a collective dream. However, the realist style they use to construct an alternative historical narrative ends up idealizing the Allende period to a point where it becomes impossible to think beyond it, to think the possibility of the political after Allende. Because, in their realist stride to uncover, to reveal, to show that which is forgotten by official discourse, they do not examine the national contradictions that made possible the dictatorship and therefore find it hard to avoid a polarizing political dogmatism.

Nostalgia and Reconstruction: memory, history, and the neoliberal present

The four-hour documentary *Acta general de Chile* (1986) was filmed by a team led by Miguel Littín, who had decided to return clandestinely to Chile after an absence of

twelve years in exile in Europe. There is very little scholarship on this documentary, most likely because it has been conceptualized as a simple act of political resistance, intended for an international public.³¹ Nonetheless, I see it as an important contribution to the kind of work done by exiled filmmakers who were part of the New Chilean Cinema. The blending of the documentary form with fiction elements is a continuation of the NLAC style, but it is used to focus on issues of political memory.

Littín's documentary is important for my project because it is an example of the impetus of documenting the return of the exile, both spatial and temporal. It illustrates the drive to "document," to reveal how things were during the dictatorship, in order to raise international awareness to the political situation in Chile.³² That impetus of reporting, of producing a statement on the state of affairs in Chile is encapsulated in the title: *General Report from Chile*. The title resonates with the idea of proceedings, officialdom. The director envisions the role of the documentary through the sober aura of official proceedings, intending to give an objective account of life under the dictatorship. Nonetheless, there is a tension between the "discourse of sobriety" that the filmmaker desires to impersonate and the subjective nostalgia for the pre-coup past that stems from the personal story of return. In general, the film combines a realist style of filmmaking with a more personal and poetic voice over-narrative. While most interviews are filmed in a traditional manner (medium close-ups) and panning shots record the landscape, the first-person voice-over narrative uses a poetic language that tries to link the images he

³¹ See Pick's remarks in "Chilean documentary" p. 128. The emphasis is on Gabriel García Márquez's book, *Clandestino en Chile: las aventuras de Miguel Littín*. (1987).

³² The footage was intended as a document of life under the dictatorship and has been aired on BBC News in Britain.

films to his memories. Ángel Parra's music becomes a nostalgic accompaniment to the voice-over narration contemplating the loss that the country has suffered after the coup.

In addition to filming the reality under the dictatorship, the film intersperses a national historical narrative that underlines an endless struggle for representation. As we have seen in the discussion of NLAC before the coup, we also see here the presentation of an alternative history, one that is suppressed by official discourse. There is an important point made by revealing this forgotten history, both before and during the dictatorship: Littín's intention is to use film as a space where the silenced voices are allowed to speak. The documentary images are meant to fill the void left behind by the victims of the military regime. Reminiscent of Solanas and Getino's *The Hour of the Furnaces*, the historical narrative starts with Diego de Almagro's arrival in 1535, passes through the history of foreign ownership of the mines, traces the genealogy of the workers' union to the nationalization of the mines under Allende, stopping at the radical transformation of the region into a virtually fascist camp during the dictatorship. Military manifestations are contrasted with testimonies of internal exiles. In another fragment of the documentary, stories of the *desaparecidos* emerge: the families organize in groups to find out what happened to their loved ones. They emphasize the necessity to know and receive justice, but the most important element in their fight is to make these things known, so that it won't happen again. The film becomes a work of denunciation, integrating the testimonies into the national historical narrative. In line with his presentation of a forgotten history, he also seeks to reveal the unseen acts of resistance to the dictatorship, such as an interview with members of the guerrilla group Manuel

Rodríguez Popular Front and the failed attempts of exiles to cross the border from Argentina into Chile.

But the film opens, and ultimately closes, a parenthesis in the historical narrative—the years of the Allende presidency. By this operation, the UP government period can only be represented through a nostalgic lens, perhaps nostalgia for a history that did not have the chance to come into its own. The few moments of optimism recorded by the camera are neutralized by the filmmaker’s nostalgic voice-over commentary. While he films the independent committees formed in the ‘poblaciones’ in the capital, which secure access to discounted food provisions and programs such as “la olla común”, Littín wonders if Allende is still alive in the memory of the people. Littín assumes, but does not seek to prove or confirm, that this phenomenon is a mere imitation of the Popular Unity years. He thus undercuts the civic achievements of these organizations by ascribing their ideas and activity to the UP government. It also implicitly discredits the contribution of the popular masses to the political consciousness promoted by the UP government, ironically taking away their historical agency. In Littín’s view, the past can only be interpreted in negative relationship to a very specific past—the Allende years. This can also be seen in the last part of the documentary, dedicated to the memory of Allende.³³ A detailed account of the presidential palace’s history culminates in the bombardment of the building on September 11, 1973. The film ends abruptly with the death of Allende inside the presidential palace.

What does it mean to end the documentary with the day of the coup, after having portrayed the hardships endured under Pinochet and the seemingly inevitable end of the

³³ There are interviews with people who remember him and the crew visits La Moneda as a return to the place of tragedy. The soundtrack plays songs dedicated to him, while García Márquez, Fidel Castro, and his immediate relatives remember him fondly.

dictatorship? This temporal return to the coup at the end of the film obliterates the informal resistances to the dictatorship recorded by the camera in the earlier parts. He seems to imply that, along with Allende, the hope for a better future has also died. By contemplating the lost hope through the figure of Allende, the film downplays the daily struggle against the military regime, embodied in the student protests and the neighborhood organizations. By recalling Allende's death right at the end of the documentary, the film remains paralyzed while contemplating a loss too great to be articulated and remains focused on lamenting the injustice of history.

In his analysis of Third Cinema aesthetics, Teshome Gabriel describes *Acta general de Chile* as a representation of popular memory and as instance of popular memory itself since he reads the documentary as a "collective testimony" to the struggle against Pinochet. The notion of the collective is posed as a characteristic of Third Cinema: the organization is around 'collective' points of view and the blurring of identities, which constitutes a collective subject in a collective social space, following a non-hierarchical order (58-60). Surprisingly, given that the emphasis on the collective is so strong, Gabriel fails to analyze the focus of the fourth part on the singular and heroic figure of Allende as a potential contradiction to the emphasis on the collective or as a substitute for the lost collective. Instead, it seems that the film undercuts its own desire to give collective testimony and instead ends by bearing witness to the coup as an endless catastrophe.

By recurring to images of loss (of Allende and everything that he stood for) as an unexplainable act of absolute injustice, what is accomplished is not the redemption of Allende and his government, but rather that the accomplishments of the Popular Unity are

frozen into a-historical time, in the pre-history before the catastrophe, ironically stripping it of its historical agency and of any possibility of historical renovation. Maybe it is not exaggerated to say that there has been a conflation of cause and effect, which makes it impossible to talk about the 1970-1973 era as a political event in of itself, without the accompanying catastrophic images and effects of the coup. The mythification takes away from the message of the documentary—it seeks to legitimize itself through the past of 1970-1973, the loss of an imagined ideal. Also, because of this focus, Littín cannot account for the fact that the Santiago of the dictatorship, what he called “a Santiago without identity” at the beginning of the film, was charged with a permeating complicity that allowed for the dictatorship to continue.

In contrast to *Acta general de Chile*, Guzmán’s *The Battle of Chile* (1975-1979) emerged as one of the few documents that has assumed the risk to analyze the dynamic of the political events during the UP government, rather than abandoning itself to nostalgic remembrance that only decries the loss of a possibility for articulation both in the artistic and academic fields (Galende, *Revista de crítica cultural*, 63). *The Battle of Chile* shows a cinematographic maturity corresponding to the NLAC conception of “documentary as an instrument of political analysis” (Pick, “Chilean Documentary” 115). This complex political analysis of the Popular Unity government is unique in its soberness, examining the events *leading to* the coup, rather than treating the coup as an unexplainable catastrophe.³⁴ Pérez Villalobos sees *The Battle* as a valuable testimony to the thousand

³⁴ *La batalla de Chile: la lucha de un pueblo sin armas* was filmed in Chile from February to September 1973. Fully aware that the existing situation might lead to either a civil war or a coup d’état, the filming crew set out to provide a historical record of those unique events (López 274). After the coup, the footage was smuggled out of the country, edited abroad (mainly in Cuba), and released between 1975 and 1979. Widely awarded and commented, it has become part of the international canon of social documentary. “Interview with Patricio Guzmán” by Center for Social Media Director Pat Aufderheide (Oct. 25, 2002)

unrepeatable days during which the Chilean working class was, for the first time in history, the protagonist of its own history. The cameras that shot the footage witnessed the event where the working class became its own historical subject (184).

In keeping with the NLAC tenets, this dialectical analysis uses the narrative strategies of fiction as legitimizing device. *The Battle* uses fiction film recourses, such as sequence shots and long takes, to suggest (because of its use in fiction) and prevent (because it is a documentary) simple identification. The emphasis on conflict between social classes drives the narrative. Non-fiction techniques, such as the use of voice-over narration, structure the narrative and support the distancing effects of the sequence shots (López, “The Battle of Chile” 278-279). *The Battle* would most closely approach an expository mode, per Nichols’ categories of documentary modes: the narrator addresses the viewer directly and seeks to explain the events that led to the bombing of the Moneda

Four and a half hours long, the documentary is comprised of three discrete parts. Part I, The Insurgence of the Bourgeoisie begins with “the end”—images of the burning of the Moneda presidential palace on September 11th, 1973. The images of the burning building will remain with us as we witness the last months of the Allende government. The overall goal of the first part is to expose the erosion of democracy by the extreme right. The documentary states that the fundamental problem that impeded Chile’s progress as a nation is the fact that the upper classes did not accept the democratically elected government and boycotted its actions. This “rebellion” received foreign aid from abroad—especially from the Nixon government—and was a disrupting element among the popular forces, shown engaged in discussions over how to solve this problem. The first part shows the operating mechanism of the Right: its influence on various sectors of the bourgeoisie and of the military, the use of television, all of it financed by foreign sources. Sanctions on import-export sought to undermine the power of the popular government. The production of *Batalla de Chile* itself, as well as the overall proper functioning of ChileFilms, had been interrupted as a consequence of the scarcity of imported materials. General difficulties in the production of audio-visual material were directly related to the efforts of the Right to control the national mass media.

Part II, The Coup, reinforces the disagreement between the popular masses and the ‘fascist/imperialist’ bourgeoisie. It goes more in depth in its analysis of the antagonisms, but this time the focus is on the strategies of the popular masses that sometimes result in internal disagreements. The section culminates with the bombardment of La Moneda, the coup and the self-proclamation of the military Junta, filmed from television. Part III, Popular Power, evokes with affection the mass organizations that had supported the Popular Unity government. The goals of the organizations have been simple, yet practical: the distribution of provisions to the population, how to increase agricultural production, how to organize a popular store, how to form a production committee in each factory etc. The theoretical thought of the workers and of the peasants is shown to have developed calmly and reflexively. The images document the “toma de conciencia” of the Chilean people and the emerging reflections on the political, economic, and social future.

palace (the first images of the film). It presents itself as a discourse of sobriety and chronicles the historical events through the participation of social actors. The curious camera pans and zooms over public and private spaces, eager to capture interviews with people spanning the political spectrum. Footage from *The Battle* will play a crucial role in Guzmán's subsequent documentaries of return, but Guzmán's treatment of those images in subsequent films will become a point of contention for critics. It might be that Guzmán's particular use of *The Battle* to legitimize his other films will complicate the reception and problematize the message of those other documentaries.

Both Littín and Guzmán use realism as a powerful tool in harnessing legitimacy for their accounts. While Littín appealed to realism by returning clandestinely to capture on film images under the dictatorship, Guzmán juxtaposes his return during the transition to democracy with images filmed by him in Chile during the UP government. For example, in *Obstinate Memory* (1995) he invokes his direct relationship to national historical events through the use of footage from his earlier *Battle of Chile* and includes the participants from the earlier documentary in the new one, in order to establish a continuum in his work as documentarian of national reality. In contrast to *The Battle's* emphasis on expository mode, *Obstinate Memory* employs a reflexive mode, conveying Guzmán's perspective through the first person voice-over narrative. The stated intention of *Obstinate Memory* is to recover the lost history of the days surrounding the coup and to remember Salvador Allende through testimonies of those close to him. With footage from *The Battle*, the director identifies witnesses who recall the events surrounding the coup. In addition to these emotionally charged interviews, in the last minutes of the film

we witness contemporary reactions of a group of young Chilean students after seeing *The Battle* for the first time.

The critical reception of the work in Chile has brought to light a very important tension at work in the discourses on and of the post-dictatorship. Nelly Richard's comments on the film are illustrative: she applauds the documentary as fighting against "desmemoria", the amnesia that guarantees a smooth transition to democracy by forgetting both Allende *and* Pinochet.³⁵ However, she finds fault with the subjective and individual aspect of his film because it fails to seek a *social* inscription of the collective memory it produced. To use Nichols' term, Richard's point of contention is that in this film Guzmán does not allow for the participants in the documentary to become "social actors." Instead, according to Richard, their comments decontextualize them from the ongoing process of transition. They are relegated to commenting on Guzmán's documentary, rather than commenting on the current social and political situation (181).

In a very similar vein, another one of his documentaries, *Salvador Allende* (2004) employs the self-referential motif. As Pérez-Villalobos remarks, the documentary seeks to document the former president's life, but does so by analyzing the inscription left by Allende on Guzmán's *private* memory. Guzmán declares that the Pinochet dictatorship

³⁵ Writing in 1995, Nelly Richard recognizes the impact of the documentary's images as a resistance to the operation of "desmemoria" imparted by the official present of the transition to democracy. She identifies the interplay of two types of memory in the documentary: one is a memory-object, the memory of the day of the coup captured by archival images, and a memory-subject, the remembering act performed by the former (social) actors present in the same archival images. But, while Richard commends the documentary because it counteracts the official mandate to forget (which would guarantee, according to the official version, a smooth transition), she notices the lack of social context in which the images are filmed. In contrast to *Batalla*, which was fully integrated within the social life of the country, *Obstinate Memory* does not manage (or does not even try, would say Richard) to seek a social inscription of the collective memory that it produced. (180-181) The film does connect with the past through the interviews, but it connects with the past only using the images of the director's previous film. In that sense, Richard sees Guzmán as prisoner of his own memory (181). In this light, it would even seem that the last scenes, the screening of *The Batalla* and the debate that followed, also trapped the possibility for active discussion within this new film.

destroyed life and imposed the market as the only logic. Looking out into the city from an apartment building, he feels alienated both spatially and temporally. The film is composed of temporal and visual juxtapositions: historical visual footage from before the coup is presented alongside contemporary images of an indifferent Santiago. In one particular episode the use of montage illustrates the connection between the trauma of the coup and the present: a journalist, accompanying Guzmán for a tour of the presidential palace, looks out the window of Allende's former office and in the next scene we see black and white footage of the military tanks surrounding the building in 1973. It is as if we are in the presidential palace in the day of the coup and we witness it from Allende's point of view.

While Guzmán's return to Chile and use of footage from *The Battle* is used to harness legitimacy for his films, critics such as Galende, Richard, and Pérez Villalobos castigate him precisely for producing exilic documentaries that are reflexive and individual.³⁶ It seems that the desire for realism is present in both critics and filmmaker, but it lies in different temporal planes: in the political processes of the transition and in the UP government, respectively. Nonetheless, Guzmán's focus on the reflexive and the

³⁶ In contrast with *Batalla*, where the camera bears witness to the revolutionary process and the popular masses as historical protagonist, Pérez Villalobos asserts that *Allende* seeks to elucidate Guzmán's own individual experience with regards to the operation of forgetting. For Pérez Villalobos, the point of reference for *Salvador Allende* is the subject constructed in *La Batalla de Chile*—the latter documents the destruction and shipwreck of the popular subject constituted during Allende's presidency. Pérez Villalobos contends that Guzmán's work becomes self-referential—his last documentary refers to his first documentary as the standard for historical analysis. One criticism that both Pérez Villalobos and Galende impart is that for Guzmán there seems to be no outside of that framework. This self-referential perspective is one way to understand the meaning of Guzmán's accusations that there have been no texts or writing on the Popular Unity government period, whereas both Pérez Villalobos and Galende provide ample evidence to the contrary (see 185-186, 194-195). Galende denounces Guzmán's lack of interest in historical knowledge for someone who claims to be so interested in memory. Pérez Villalobos concludes that Guzmán's overall purpose—his poetics—is to connote the disappearance of life through the inescapability of forgetting. Instead of the political compromise of saving life from forgetting, he confirms and inscribes the act of forgetting on Allende's figure. In other words, it is as if what he is truly documenting is the certainty that Allende has been forgotten. Guzmán's melancholic gesture inscribes not the veneration of the lost object, but the poeticization of his impossible recuperation (188).

personal aspect of these historical events teaches us that history passes through the personal, that the collective is understood through the individual. So, even if Richard and Pérez Villalobos bemoan the lack of the social, it is present in Guzmán precisely through that difficult (and damaged) relationship to the individual.

However, my critique is of a different order. Like in the case of Littín, the kind of political space that Guzmán opens with *Obstinate Memory* and *Salvador Allende* creates a binary of temporalities, where the present can only be seen as the negative image of the pre-coup past. Combining this sense of the personal with this historical binarism contributes to a sense of political hopelessness that closes avenues for the future precisely because it seeks to re-construct (and revive) the past in/through the cinematic medium. Furthermore, it forecloses an analytical treatment of the Popular Unity government precisely by uncritically praising it. These representational strategies of remembering convert the figure of Allende into a myth, extricating him from History rather than inserting him into the historical consciousness of contemporary society. The political ramifications of this approach do not allow for a re-thinking of the national and of the social, but rather document the lost chance at “making history.” One particular scene illustrates the difficult relationship to history that Guzmán introduces in his films. In one scene towards the end of *The Pinochet Case*, the statue of Salvador Allende is being transported from the workshop where it was created and installed in front of the presidential palace La Moneda, alongside the monuments of the other former presidents of Chile. Guzmán gestures towards Allende’s symbolic integration into the political history of the country. However, the focus on the iconic figure of Allende in the whole corpus of his works detracts from that integrative gesture and instead becomes the

material embodiment of Allende's monumentalizing. The mistake in this is that, as Galende has suggested, this is political capitulation because it attributes to the coup the significance of an event.

Raúl Ruiz: documenting the fictional character of the return

Albeit problematic, the importance of Littín and Guzmán's documentaries lies in their insistence on the recuperation of political memory, as well as in their linking of the personal with the collective. Ruiz is also interested in political and historical memory, but his aesthetic practice opens different avenues for portraying the political. While Littín is interested to portray national history as an invisible struggle for representation and Guzmán in memory as a site of resistance to forgetting, Ruiz explores the impossibility of transparent historical representation. The problematic of Littín and Guzmán's documentaries does not reside in their negative representation of the dictatorship, but in the fact that their historical impetus, marked by a realist style, risks undercutting the historical significance of the pre-coup events—Allende the UP government.

Where I think Ruiz diverges drastically from Guzmán and Littín is in the formal representations of the intricacies of memory and forgetting. Even though he is using the documentary mode, his style is not realist. In fact, he brushes documentary realism against the grain. He uses the return trope to de-romanticize precisely the possibility of a full, complete return. The place he had left many years ago appears unreal. That is why, in his documentaries, the real is surreal. The penchant for surrealism in documentary comes from the realization that, in order to remain engaged (while in exile), one must keep reinventing—without repressing the past. In that sense, temporality is

conceptualized not only in terms of documenting the trauma of years of exile, but also as formal innovation.

In contrast with Littín and Guzmán, Ruiz uses the return motif ironically, in order to challenge the direct relationship between political memory and realism. He problematizes the realist framework of documentary in order to access a deeper dimension of political thought, one that questions the effectiveness of representation. Ruiz *assumes* his exilic position and uses it to expose how experience is not immediate, but is always already mediated (by one's circumstances). Experience—be it exilic or not—is always a story (“relato”). By interrogating the link between documentary and realism in the trope of the exilic return, he seeks to illustrate how we are all in exile from representation. In this sense, the idea of return (and of the voyage or the search in general) produces unexpected results and follows a non-programmatic line.

Even though Ruiz's work is well known in Chile and abroad, there is very little scholarship on Ruiz's films produced after 1980.³⁷ His documentary work in particular has elicited virtually no academic scholarship.³⁸ Nichols and Renov both mention Ruiz when exemplifying the reflexive documentary mode, but they only briefly allude to one documentary made in 1979 regarding local elections in France, *Of Great Events and Ordinary People*. The reasons for this are the difficulty of his films (perhaps due to his staunch rejection of film as entertainment), but also because he is not usually perceived as a documentarian—his films reject social realism and realism on the whole.

³⁷ Notable exceptions are the analyses of feature films by Cisneros (*Life is a Dream*), Jayamanne (*Three Crowns of the Sailor*), and, very recently, López-Vicuña (*Palomita Blanca*).

³⁸ There is an abundance of interviews with Ruiz, who seems to be very willing to offer them. The interviews work in a conceptual dialogue with his films, providing precious clues to the interpretation of his films and to his art's overall poetics. The interviews also function as a means of enabling him to be a public figure, a public intellectual, theorist and filmmaker.

Nonetheless, his experience with the documentary form is two-fold. Firstly, he produced documentary films both as part of ChileFilms and later as commissioned work for television in Europe. Secondly, although his films approach subjects of social relevance, it is hard to categorize Ruiz as a “documentary filmmaker” due to his playful and experimental approach to the documentary form. I am interested in examining the documentary impetus he shares with other exiled documentary filmmakers, since he has consistently engaged similar themes, such as documenting his return to Chile after years of exile, and representing the national from a perspective of an outsider who still retains an affective involvement with a place they cannot identify with anymore. The use of autobiographical elements lends the documentaries a subjective aspect that is acknowledged in some accounts and downplayed in others.

In exile Ruiz undertook a reexamination of film practice, exploring documentary’s “ludic possibilities” (Pick 123). This reexamination is consistent with his concern over the difficulties of representation, as well as with the previously discussed NLAC practice of blending documentary and fiction. Although he uses a first-person voice over narration, Ruiz goes beyond self-reflexive documentary because he questions the means by which reality is constructed (Pick 124). I would add that he questions not only external political reality, but also how the cinematic medium constructs its own reality. By using documentary conventions and at the same time challenging them, he performs a critique of traditional assumptions of documentary practice. In other words, he analyzes how cinema, especially documentary, can appear to give the illusion of reality. His efforts are directed at deconstructing that illusion in order to challenge the nature of (historical) representation. In line with Benjamin’s writing on the photographic

unconscious of surrealism, we can align Ruiz's documentary practice with the "documentary unconscious" critics have claimed for Buñuel's surrealist ethnographical work in *Las Hurdes* (Russell 99).

In the following section I explore how surrealist documentary plays a role in the recuperation and reformulation of memory during the dictatorship and the post-dictatorship, in the opening of an alternative political space that is based on aesthetic innovation. Surrealist documentary allows for experimentation with the objective aspect of reality, and also with the affective dimension afforded by personal experience and memory. The interplay between surrealism and documentary acknowledges and activates the role of the unconscious in the production/ re-writing of memory. In this point it diverges drastically from the kind of memory espoused by Littín and Guzmán. But, first of all, it is important to explain what I understand by surrealism in film and what "surrealist documentary" means, given the previous discussions of documentary and surrealism in film.

Surrealist film and surrealist documentary

In my understanding of surrealist film in general, I mainly follow Linda Williams' theorization, since her work most closely analyzes the use of the cinematic image in surrealism in relationship to identification and its treatment of (pre-filmic) reality. Fundamentally, surrealist film works against the model of spectator identification in classical cinema, which Christian Metz had theorized using psychoanalytic semiotics (xiii-xvi).³⁹ As opposed to classical or narrative cinema, which conceals the fundamental

³⁹ See Christian Metz's "The Imaginary Signifier" for a discussion on the subject's identification with the filmic image.

illusion of the film image by inducing spectator identification with a character, surrealism exposes and works against the inherent identification process of cinema.⁴⁰ Williams' main point on Surrealist cinema is that by exposing the fundamental illusory quality of the film image it reveals in turn the fictive unity of the human subject (guaranteed as "whole" by classical narrative cinema).

The drive in surrealism is to provoke an emotion not through identification, but through the creation of something new through the dialectical use of montage, that is, through the process of creating concrete juxtapositions. In the case of Ruiz's cinema in general and his documentary work in particular, this mechanism is used to juxtapose memory-images. This, in turn, creates a complex web of inter-relationships, where memories create images and images create or evoke other memories, for example when the contemplating photographs prompt memories of different events. Another attractive feature for surrealists is that juxtapositions of cinematic images can upset the natural laws of time and space, spawning from cinema's power to combine elements of concrete reality (5).⁴¹ This latter statement has implications for the possibility of combining documentary and surrealism, where the laws of space and time are broken at the same time as the images reference a pro-filmic reality. The cinematic image has the power to create an alternative reality, not only to imitate reality. Film need not be realist nor produce the illusion of reality. Thus, it can shift the dynamic of identification and representation—surrealist film can be conceptualized as a mirror that creates an image

⁴⁰ Instead, metaphoric/metonymic figures take precedence over diegesis or plot. (Williams 2)

⁴¹ and thus the potential to interact with memory in a non-linear, non-chronological fashion.

other than the object it reflects. Instead of representation, the focus is on revealing film as *construct*.

The deconstruction of time and space is similar to the use of space and time in the dream (we remember that, for Freud, dream is wish-fulfillment), so the language of film can be compared to the language of dream, but with an important caveat: not as a literal application of the dream model, but in the development of “systems of communication that differ in important ways from verbal language” (17).⁴² The intent is to cultivate not the *content* of unconscious desire, but its *form*. This gives way to a radical questioning of the supposed integrity of the subject and of the enigmatic relations between content and form.

Metaphoric or metonymic figures take precedence over diegesis or plot (which structure classical cinema). These figures express latent desires, which are the true subjects of the films. Desire, in this context is understood not as the pursuit of a love object, but the “psychic process of desire itself” (xvii). In the context of this chapter, this desire can be understood as the ever-elusive memory work performed by the documentary films analyzed. It is my assertion that the focal point of Ruiz’s films is the process of memory work, as well as the difficulties of fulfilling our desire for memory.

The pursuit of the desired object reveals the fundamental division and lack of the subject. When the desired object is historical or personal memory, we see (with cinematic eyes) the fundamental division and lack of the subject as historical subject. In our case, the spatial return of the exile is performed in order to move toward the desired object, which is memory. It is as if the recuperation of memory guarantees the wholeness

⁴² Remember Freud’s insistence that the dream is only manifest-content. The access to the latent content has to be decoded by external knowledge (the dreamer’s life and psychoanalytic modes of interpretation).

of the subject, but the realization that full recuperation is impossible threatens the subject's sense of unity.

In terms of memory, Williams follows Freud on his concept of "screen memories"—false recollections that mix with and condense childhood memories; reformulations of actual memories, they are supports for unconscious fantasies. A screen memory (like forgetting and amnesia) is a compromise between repressed elements and defense against them.⁴³ In the case of Ruiz's cinema, the concept of screen is literal: cinema can function as a screen that paradoxically both projects and censures traumatic recollections. This will help explain Ruiz's insistence on his childhood memories and how they relate to Chilean folkloric tales—the mythic dreams of a nation. In the case of Ruiz's documentaries there is a clear connection between dreams and the process of memory. The act of literally falling asleep while trying to remember connects the process and logic of memory with the logic of dreams. I understand dreams in Ruiz's work as an example of screen memories: a way for him to challenge the binary between memory and forgetting, to introduce a productive tension between the traumatic past, its memory, and its forgetting.

To illustrate this point, Ruiz makes the following commentary on the beginning scene of *Cofralandes*, which features a multitude of Santas in the courtyard of his childhood home:

At Christmastime in Chile, there are thousands of Santas. In the summer they walk about and, by sheer force of numbers, they become intimidating. That makes one think of the military. It's childish, but it's oppressive. It's above all the idea of translating, in the most indirect way possible, the trauma of sixteen years of dictatorship. That happens in an ambiguous

⁴³ For a more in-depth discussion, see "Screen Memory." *International Dictionary of Psychoanalysis*. Ed. Alain de Mijolla. Gale Cengage, 2005. [eNotes.com](http://www.enotes.com). 2006. 5 May, 2010
<<http://www.enotes.com/psychoanalysis-encyclopedia/screen-memory>>

manner. On the one side, we seek to forget, but on the other side, we seem to remember. Sometimes we only think of that; sometimes we forget. It's a little bit like someone who has cancer. He cannot think of his cancer all day, but from time to time he manages to forget. It is as if the whole country had some kind of terminal illness. Sometimes he jokes around, sometimes he forgets. Sometimes he surrenders to the evidence.

This fragment illustrates not only a complex historical network that meshes together the country's military and catholic heritage, and how the vicissitudes of memory and forgetting are profoundly connected to that tradition. It is also important to mention Ruiz's insistence on ambiguity and his insistence of dealing with these issues by "translating, in the most indirect way possible" because of his awareness of the direct relationship between artistic form and content.

Surrealism and documentary have been historically related cultural and artistic modes.⁴⁴ In fact, most surrealist special effects, both in feature and documentary, are at the pro-filmic level, achieved before the actual shooting of the film (Williams 49). We remember how Nichols attempted to endow documentary with a special status within film because of its claim to provide access to 'the world'. Surrealist documentary differs from general surrealist film in its *overt* play with indexicality. Whereas Nichols located that special status within the unique bond formed between reality and its representation on film, surrealist documentary complicates that claim. Hodsdon argues that surrealist documentary simultaneously challenges and appropriates that claim of access to 'the world' (1).

I would like to briefly look at the formal devices used by Buñuel in the first surrealist documentary film in order to synthesize the types of stylistic choices used to push representation to its absurd limits. I find that Ruiz's techniques and goals closely

⁴⁴ See Russell p. 99-100 in "Surrealist Ethnography" where she discusses the conjunction of ethnography and surrealism in the surrealist journal *Documents*.

approximate those of Buñuel. Ruiz's contribution to this "tradition" is that he adds a historical dimension to his documentaries, which is in line with his interest in exile and political memory. Luis Buñuel's *Las Hurdes, tierra sin pan* (1932), the first example of a surrealist documentary film, unsettles the truth claims of documentary representation by provoking the irruption of otherness (the Hurdanos) into the familiar and by refusing its incorporation (into the Spanish national landscape) (Russell 99). Voice-over narration that contradicts the images and contrapuntal use of sound are used to provide radical discursive juxtapositions (Russell 103). These techniques function to de-authorize the truth claims of documentary, but also to explode the seamlessness of the three discursive levels: music, image, and narration. This not only undermines the role of film as visible evidence, but also creates a gap between the information provided and the viewer's perception of herself as knowledgeable subject (or as subject in the process of acquiring knowledge). In other words, it refuses to perform the suturing process characteristic of narrative cinema's closed diegetic space. *Las Hurdes* resists a unified concept of the national (in this case the Spanish nation state) by refusing to subsume all cultural difference within a standard of "the same"—it proposes an otherness that cannot be recuperated (Russell 108). Its political and social relevance comes from the film's "absolute refusal to accommodate the Hurdanos into an aesthetic or ideological system of thought" by reducing cinematic representation to "a collision of competing discursive voices" (Russell 112). Thus, by challenging the concept of a unified diegetic space through formal techniques, one makes a political statement that resists being integrated into a homogeneous ideological framework.

The love of books, the search for memory

Ruiz received official permission to return to Chile for the first time in 1983 and produced a short documentary, titled *The Return of a Library Lover* (1983), on his memory of the day before the coup. Twenty years later, this time with the support of the Ministry of Education of the Concertación government, he produced *Cofralandes* (2002), a four-part documentary on the travels of a camera-witness that records Chilean idiosyncrasies while appealing to a shared cultural legacy. *The Return* prefigures the preoccupations that will be more fully explored in both *Cofralandes* (2002) and the feature film *Life is a Dream* (1986), such as the temporal and spatial return; the relationship between dreams and memory, the refusal to romanticize the past, and the surreal aspect of reality.

In the short film, he observes the things from his past through the eye of the camera. Using a reflexive voice-over commentary, the director-narrator travels to various destinations in Chile in an effort to remember the night before the coup.⁴⁵ Charles Tesson, writing for *Cahiers du Cinema*, compares the narrator with a sailor who returns after having survived a shipwreck, only to find that he does not recognize his country or his childhood home anymore.⁴⁶ What was once familiar is now perceived as strange. The narrator knows that he is expected to remember, but he finds himself unable to recall important events from his past. Forgetting seems to frustrate the expectations we have of the documentary mode, which would be the acquisition of knowledge through the

⁴⁵ Personal interview [Aberdeen]: the film was filmed in France, but the scenes are presented as from Chile. In terms of the representation of place, it seems to suggest that place is a mental process more than a spatial characteristic.

⁴⁶ *Théatres au cinéma: Raoul Ruiz*. No. 14. Bobigny, France: 2003. 132-133.

interpretative and authoritative voice of the narrator. This forgetting, however, is not the amnesia of the neoliberal present (we remember the quote about the cancer patient who oscillates uncomfortably between remembering and forgetting her ailment).

The Return mimics the classic documentary form by recording images of streets during the return, but the images are not of the actual place—some scenes were filmed in France, but they are presented as from Chile (personal communication).⁴⁷ The set-up (images filmed from a car in motion to signal the filmmaker documenting his return to Santiago) matches our formal expectations of documentary form, but challenges them through image and speech. The voice-over narrator interrogates, rather than reveals, our expectations of what is “real”. In another example of the mimicking of the traditional documentary form, the interview format is used in two scenes with former acquaintances—static camera, interviewees speak directly to the camera, medium close-up shots—but their statements do not help elucidate anything about the narrator’s missing memory. The set-up matches our formal expectations of documentary form, but challenges them through image and speech. Their interviews are testimony-like, but they do not testify directly. Furthermore, the lack of continuity between the scenes brings to the fore moments that would otherwise be lost within a continuous narrative.

Nonetheless, through the use of documentary form, Ruiz encourages us *not* to suspend disbelief because the filmic text, fictional or not, has a relationship to the historical world.

In his quest to remember the night before the coup, he heads for his personal library in his house in Chile, where he notices that a book with a pink cover is missing. He remarks that this is the color missing from the country, an allusion to the color of the

⁴⁷ I use the word “mimic” to approximate Linda Hutcheon’s concept of parody in *The Politics of Postmodernism*.

Socialist Party (Tesson 133). He knows that the pink book contains a secret, so he goes on a quest to identify the book. A connection is established between text (the book) and memory—the text carries the promise of memory in the form of a secret to be discovered. Since all book lovers had burned their books and left for Australia (an indirect way of referencing exile), the voice over narrator states that he tries the taverns. However, instead of a tavern, the next scene is in a house and the spectators are confused, but also ready for a documentary-style interview, where we expect to obtain information from a man, who is filmed in a traditional medium-close up frame. Our expectations are foiled again because the only piece of information we obtain is that the last person who had the book was Chico Leiva. The old friend's political affiliation is subtly suggested: his right arm is shaking uncontrollably because of too much drinking, but his left arm—“the one that matters”—is firm. The political is literally inscribed on his body: the right-wing repressive military regime has driven him to alcoholism, but his leftist convictions have remained intact and are the only important part of him. We read this information metonymically and, significantly, it does not bring us closer to the documentary's stated goal of remembering the day before the coup, but it is there as evidence of the repressive effects of the dictatorship.

Two days before leaving, a strange incident makes him return to the pink book. In a bar he sees his best friend, but the voice-over declares that his friend had been dead for at least ten years. The man says he had nothing to do with his friend, Chico Leiva. The inquiry remains suspended and there is no attempt to explain the strangeness of the situation. It remains a suspended question; nonetheless the narrator's misrecognition is important because it signals, without naming, the death of his friend following the coup

and the narrator's desire to see him alive. In this scene there is a clear discrepancy between what the camera shows and the voice-over commentary: the narrator looks at the same object, but he sees something different than the camera. Unlike the camera, which records the present dispassionately, he sees something else because his vision is informed by past experiences. This split within the cinematic apparatus (the voice-over reports something completely different than what the camera records) once again functions to de-suture and to question the camera's ability to record a reality that is comprised of various competing temporalities. Faced with the task of representing the *desaparecido*, the camera can only expose the gap in representation; the lack *of* the subject reveals the lack *in* the subject.

After the encounter, the voice-over informs us that he promptly fell asleep and, upon waking, he realizes he is sitting on the pink book. Given the established interplay between dream and memory-work, it is no surprise that the book "materializes" following the act of dreaming. The book is *Cantos a lo divino y a lo humano en Aculeo*, an anthology of folkloric poems collected by Juan Uribe-Echevarría.⁴⁸ Even if we do not get any more direct information about the relevance of the book of cantos other than its formal characteristic (its pink color), the materialization of the book suggests that his individual memory of the night of the coup is part of an ongoing, collective, and dynamic process of artistic adaptation and innovation, all the way back to the colonial period.

⁴⁸ A project of the 1960's this collection of traditional songs, it stems out of the effort to recuperate the national folklore. The appeal, I suspect, this has for Ruiz is that the ethnographic research reveals that these "traditionally Chilean" folkloric poems have a colonial legacy: brought over by the Spanish and adapted to the local reality. For example, paradoxically, these *cantos* were used as political vehicles during the fight for independence in the XIXth century. The complex use of the cantos illustrates art's capacity for innovation in the political sphere. This allows, perhaps, for an analogy between the cantos and cinema/poetics of cinema as political instrument in the present.

Following the discovery of the book, but without any logical correlation, the narrator seems to have been able to retrieve important information from the past. The voice-over states: “And here I found the key to what happened on that night of Pinochet’s coup.” Our expectations are foiled, however, when we hear: “The key to it all was a poem from my childhood, which I had never managed to learn by heart. That night I realized that I would never manage to memorize it.” The documentary ends with a different voice-over reciting the aforementioned poem, “Julio” by the Uruguayan poet Julio Herrera y Reissig. The fact that the documentary ends with the narrator’s remembering the impossibility of memorizing a childhood poem works against the pretense to knowledge that classic documentary has. If he is to remember something, it is that he remembers he has forgotten. The quest exposes, rather than fills, a lack.

It also displaces our attention to a different dimension of memory. Documentary here functions not as a tool for knowledge and rational understanding, but as a means of exploring the Benjaminian concept of “optical unconscious”. That is, by displacing our expectations of knowledge and by dampening our faith in the camera’s possibility to unveil the mystery of memory, we are challenged instead to access different spatio-temporal configurations.⁴⁹ The fact that Herrera y Reissig was an avid follower of French symbolism adds another level to the narrator’s statement that he will never manage to memorize the poem (Gicovate 942). Given that one of the characteristics of

⁴⁹ Walter Benjamin discusses the concept of “optical unconscious” in “Little History of Photography” and in “The Work of Art in the Age of its Technical Reproducibility” in *Selected Writings*. Ed. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland and Gary Smith. Trans. Edmund Jephott and Kingsley Shorter. Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999. It designates a new realm of experience that photography can open access to, similarly to how psychoanalysis aims to access the psychic unconscious. “It is another nature which speaks to the camera rather than to the eye” (Benjamin, “Little History” 510). See Ruiz’s take on Benjamin’s “optical unconscious” in *Poetics of Cinema*

the French symbolists was a disregard for the public function of art and a focus on the personal expression, the refusal to learn that poem speaks for his engagement with the social aspect of art.⁵⁰ We return to the social relevance of documentary, even if the “knowledge” that we acquire in the process does not serve to elucidate and offer a transparent memory. On the contrary, it integrates that ambiguous memory within a much broader historical and cultural context.

Since the narrator’s memory takes him from text to text, Ruiz establishes a relationship between memory and text: *memory as text*.⁵¹ Texts function as catalysts for memory by linking present and past in an ongoing and associative chain of signification. They also connect the realm of personal memory to that of public memory. Memory, even personal memory, is always already influenced by and inscribed in texts that circulate in the public Chilean sphere, a sort of cultural collective unconscious. When we read, we engage in a type of remembrance: when we look at texts we are in fact looking at a reification of memory, in the sense that it is a version of memory that has been captured (through writing) at one of many possible historical moments (Chang 109). Documentaries themselves risk the reification of memory, thus Ruiz’s tirelessness in performing continuous slippages of meaning. The discussion of memory as text, as well as its relationship to the nation, will also play a very important role in *Cofralandes*.

⁵⁰ In contrast to conventional criticism on Herrera y Reissig, Gwen Kirkpatrick characterizes the poet as late modernista (in the sense of emphasizing the failures of modernismo’s projects of “collecting” and “interiorization”) rather than only as related to French symbolism. In *The Dissonant Legacies of Modernismo* (1989).

⁵¹ See Chang for a discussion of memory as text in Umberto Eco.

***Cofralandes*: un-representing the nation**

In *Cofralandes*, Ruiz returns to Chile again, this time while the transition to democracy is well underway. Sponsored by the Ministry of Education of the Concertación government and produced by Ruiz's production company, *RR Producciones*, *Cofralandes* was intended as an educational piece on Chilean history, to be screened in schools and cultural centers. The film is a subjective representation that seeks to reach the public by evoking collective images and memories. The seven-hour, four part series blends Chilean folklore, regional linguistic analysis, and observations of a neoliberal Chile that seems to have forgotten its past. *Cofralandes* combines public spaces, such as the street and the museum, but also private spaces and childhood homes.

He undertakes the task of representing the nation, “lo chileno”, but he presents it not as an entity, but a collage of differences. *Cofralandes* emerges as a critique of cultural nationalism; he points to the things that don't fit, that can't be accounted for, which are displaced.⁵² Images come through the fore through a process that resembles dream-work: there are associations between scenes, but they defy a sense of chronology and appear prompted by obscure mechanisms, which intentionally disrupt narrative logic. He achieves these aims formally through a collage of disparate elements that have “Chile” as the common denominator: popular culture through folklore (reenactments of folkloric tales, recorded performances of “cantos a lo divino”), the popular and the political through references to the Popular Unity government, images of contemporary urban spaces, radio recordings of the bombing of the presidential palace, newspapers from the day of Chile's national day, September 18, 1973, a week after the military coup. In order to further destabilize a homogeneous national narrative, to introduce strangeness

⁵² This is also Richard's preoccupation: with the trace, the “restos” in *Residuos y metáforas*.

into the familiar national landscape, he introduces brief scenes from other countries, such as Japan, India, or Holland.

Ruiz destabilizes the presumptions and drives of traditional documentary, showing the intrinsic impossibility of documenting for the purpose of acquiring *knowledge* of the object of study. Disciplines such as journalism, painting, and social science are tools for understanding, but despite their efforts, full comprehension keeps evading the practitioners of these professions. Having arrived from France to Chile, the exilic narrator observes how three foreign travelers interpret the Chilean landscape. The French journalist writes travelogues about what he saw “understanding without understanding,” while the German traveler draws everything he sees and observes the others with curiosity. The English anthropologist had come to Chile with the intent to study an area where there was a high incidence of suicides, but his object of study keeps evading him: as he reached his destination, the suicides stopped only to flare up in other regions, from Concepción to Antofagasta. After spending three years chasing after his subject of study without ever reaching it, he decided to give up and settled in the village of Padre Hurtado. These three foreigners serve as figures for different modes of ethnographic research, recalling Eric Barnouw’s different modes of documenting. Even though film scholars have since challenged Barnouw’s clear-cut categories, *Cofralandes* makes a more fundamental critique of the impetus to document national reality through the “transparent” medium of ethnography.

The Englishman would be the “explorer” who seeks to uncover the secrets of the place by studying the rates of its suicidal tendencies. But Ruiz does poke fun at the absurdity of the Englishman’s search, both through the subject of study (the study of a

death phenomenon rather than live subjects), and by the fact that his intended object of study constantly eludes him—possibly a veiled reference to the dead bodies of the desaparecidos, which are impossible to locate. The Frenchman operates as “reporter” in Barnouw’s definition, attempting to faithfully observe and write news articles on the events that he is witnessing. The German illustrator can be likened to the “painter”, who portrays the landscape in order to try to decipher something about the psychology of the people inhabiting this place. The “painter” declares Chile a country of contradictions—“you can see it in the landscape”—while the camera contemplates a perfectly banal scenery comprised of shrubs and greenery.

As we have seen in *The Return*, for Ruiz the political eye is not just realist, but brushes reality against its own norms. He illustrates this idea by employing the documentary form but placing into question its capacity to access pure historical realities. Instead, all historical references are contaminated by other historical moments, giving way to an anachronistic collage of images and sounds, which point to the impossibility of a faithful reconstruction and recuperation of the past. For example, contemporary cityscapes are combined with the soundtrack of voices of soldiers during the Naval Battle of Iquique during the War of the Pacific (1879-1884) against Peru and Bolivia. The visual images of present-day Santiago continue while a woman’s voice interrupts the soldiers’ cheers. However, the phrase she repeats inviting her child to an afternoon snack—“La once está servida”—invokes uncanny memories of another more recent military intervention, the September 11th coup. The lack of an explicit image-sound relationship deconstructs the normative realism of chronologic historical narrative. Through the layering of non-synchronous sounds, the past asserts itself in the present.

Along with non-synchronicity, anachronism emerges as an additional formal concept in Ruiz's work: a conversation about Chile's independence between two 19th century characters is punctuated by references to local cuisine, as well as by periods of asynchronous sounds of motorized cars passing by. The use of anachronistic techniques rejects the mimetic conventions of traditional historical representation and challenges the conception of progressive temporality. The vignette titled "Dialogue between a Patriotic Priest and His Royalist Sister" continues the examination of the foundational values of the Chilean Nation-State through the discussion between two allegorical figures: a pro-independence priest and his royalist sister. This vignette illustrates the arguments for and against Chile's independence from the Spanish crown as advanced by the priest Camilo Henríquez (1769-1829), an intellectual promoter of the independence movement.⁵³ This allegory illustrates the fundamentally religious underpinnings of the nation-state, despite the claims to Enlightenment ideals in the transition from the colonial system to national independence.⁵⁴

What is most important to note about the vignette is the fact that it is punctuated by references to local cuisine, as well as by periods of asynchronous sounds of motorized cars passing by. This anachronism between sound and image forces the spectator to

⁵³ His political ideas, heavily influenced by the French Enlightenment but infused with Catholic values are best exemplified in the essay « Catecismo de los patriotas » in *Escritos políticos de Camilo Henríquez*.

⁵⁴ The sister castigates the Enlightenment ideas that had infiltrated Latin American thought as "doctrina de pseudo-filósofos que pretenden corromper a los hombres inspirándoles sentimientos impíos." She advocates for the right of the Spanish crown to govern the Americas, since she considers the continent to be tied to the king by a sacred vow. In contrast, the priest deems that this argument is based on injustice and lies. He views the use of the sacred vow by the local government as using the God's name to cover a foundational injustice. Instead, the priest proposes a religious argument about independence, based on the principles of justice and martyrdom. He claims that this obligation is imposed by divine right, and not the colonial rule. He ultimately manages to convince his sister, who admits that her concern had been to avoid eternal punishment. Also, see Williamson on a discussion of the Catholic Enlightenment in Latin America (*Penguin History of Latin America*, p. 162-164)

contemplate the relevance of the debate on the contemporary national imaginary.⁵⁵ At the same time, the scene eludes a fixed meaning. It allows for access to the “optic unconscious” via a multiplicity of relationships between images and signs, which exceeds the simple notion of representation. The collective meaning of the unconscious dimension lies in the relentless interplay between the private (the conversation) and the public dimension of the national history.

Other scenes tie in Ruiz’s own childhood memories with the historical life of the country. The “personal” childhood memories and the “historical” memories of the bombing of La Moneda are spatially and temporally brought together by the juxtaposition of private spaces and asynchronous sounds of radio transmissions during the day of the coup. For example, one of the beginning scenes depicts a group of Santas standing aligned in the filmmaker’s childhood backyard, with super-imposed historical audio footage of the bombing of the presidential palace. Sounds of gunshots and breaking glass are layered over images of the filmmaker’s house, filled with inert bodies covered by newspapers. Memories from his childhood are interspersed with the voices of Pinochet’s orders to bombard the palace, as well as the junta’s radio communication and discourse of cleansing the country of communists.

Even though they might seem innocuous, the Santas’ uniform-like attire and the oppressive character of their constant presence give them a threatening character because they remind one of the military, and thus, of military repression. (Ruiz, interview) The perceived threat does not only signal to the coup and the repression of the Pinochet dictatorship, but points to a deeper threat in the absolutism of advocating for one

⁵⁵ See a discussion of the use of anachronism in literature and a theory of time in *Re-forming the past* by A. Timothy Spaulding.

legitimate way of doing things or of seeing things, represented here by the Santas' uniform attire that echoes the military practice of rigid uniformity. Here the personal informs the historical, not unlike in Guzmán's case, but Ruiz makes a case against the Pinochet dictatorship as aberration. He takes a broader look at historical precedents to the military regime by looking at the functioning principles of the military, which might carry a desire for order and uniformity that transcends Pinochet's regime. He warns that desiring a uniform image of "the nation" is steeped in an authoritarian viewpoint and can only result in an authoritarian system. By advocating for multiplicity and formal innovation within the artistic sphere, he makes a meta-commentary on the politically destructive effects of sameness.

Another formal concept that structures *Cofralandes* is the exploration of the national heterogeneity through allusions to food. As a concept it gives coherence to the documentary, yet it does not follow a narrative arc. Plenitude and hunger function as two poles that divide and unite the nation. Food introduces a material dimension to the subject's conception of "nation" and that will be explored further in the documentary through allusions of hunger and plenitude in relationship to the representation of national history. The epigraph written at the beginning of the film, "Patria mía, cuya dulzura es arma que no perdona" by Pier Paolo Pasolini, enforces the ambiguous relationship between one's concept of 'patria' and the bitter-sweet taste it produces in the subject.

The title of the documentary is borrowed from Ángel Parra's poem about a utopian city where poor people live without poverty and can eat everything – even the houses. It uses regional language to describe a dream vision of an egalitarian Chile, not without its humorous twists. In the city of Cofralandes, nobody is hungry and the rivers

are made of wine or brandy (aguardiente); it is a place where one can eat everything, a perfect place—no hunger is the metaphor for a just society, in which nobody defines himself or herself in a negative relationship to lack (poverty or hunger). The song sets a tone of affective and even nostalgic remembering of the exilic observer—the “discourse of sobriety” is deconstructed through literal intoxication. The description of this ideal space resonates with Salvador Allende’s declaration that the Chilean Revolution will be with “empanadas y vino tinto”, which also uses regional gastronomic signifiers in order to appeal to national unifiers across class lines. “Cofralandes” as an ideal political space, as a concept for political plenitude, stands for a very modest yet radical proposal for social and economic equality.

Hunger structures Ruiz’s response to Augusto Pinochet’s arrest in London in October 1998. Upon hearing the news, the voice-over narrator goes to visit the Museum of History, “as always in these cases”.⁵⁶ The narrative voice-over is replaced by the radio transmission of the military junta declarations during the day of the coup. In typical Ruiz fashion, the narrator claims that the History Museum makes him hungry—seemingly a joke, but we can interpret his physical hunger to be parallel to a hunger for remembering the dictatorship, but also of integrating it into a wider historical framework.

But, there is also the sense that history alone leaves one hungry or that history opens one’s appetite for something else: it makes one want to “comer útil.” Ruiz’s formal techniques and his play with temporality prevent one from being content only

⁵⁶ Transcript from the voice-over narration : « Tiene que haber sido por entonces que detuvieron al General por allá, por Londres, y que tuvimos que volver a Santiago. Bernard se encerró a escribir sobre el cautivo lejano y yo, como hago siempre en estos casos, me fui a visitar el Museo Histórico. A mí casi todos los museos me dan miedo. Pero éste no. Éste me da más bien apetito. Pero no de comer cualquier cosa. De comer útil. Yo me digo en estos casos, “Hay que comer útil”. » (Raúl Ruiz, *Cofralandes, rapsodia chilena - Tercera parte: Museos y Clubes de la región antártica*)

with history. In the case of our documentaries and of the overall NLAC project, the representation of the historical moment of the UP is important, but does not seem to be sufficient. Whereas Guzmán and Littín tend to recuperate the Allende government as a safe haven, Ruiz's constant slippages of meaning do not allow us to become comfortable with that solution. Instead, there is a relentless, ongoing, and seemingly never-ending search for a, perhaps, impossible plenitude.

Guzmán and Ruiz coincide in their negative portrayal of the neoliberal present. Both show the marginalization of the individual in a consumer society: it is a different kind of marginalization than exile, but there is a certain relationship between the neoliberal subject and the exile through the common experience of marginalization. Ruiz does not need to use surrealist formal techniques in order to document the surreal aspect of neoliberal reality. The neoliberal present reveals its own absurdity. For example, while wandering the streets of Santiago, the camera focuses on a person who is having a heart attack, but the paramedics refuse to take him to a hospital before he writes them a blank check to cover his future hospital expenses. We notice that the person's bank is Citibank (a transnational corporation with headquarters in New York), serving as a reminder of the ever-present flow of global capital. This scene compels the spectator to contemplate that an individual without the same financial means could not survive a similar incident. The absurdity of the situation of daily neoliberal life prompts one to question the concept of reality itself. In other scenes, people stand in lines without knowing why they are standing in lines. The neoliberal life is also documented by filming directly the newspaper headlines at commercial stands: Chileans are becoming poorer everyday, there is an alarming increase in the number of psychiatric diseases, etc.

Although Ruiz's filmic techniques document the absurdity of neoliberalism, without Guzmán's representation of those subjects who perform acts of civil resistance we would not get a glimpse of those resisting the neoliberal tide. In *Salvador Allende* Guzmán bemoans the present isolation and alienation and, even though he sees only destruction in the wake of the dictatorship, he performs the indispensable operation of unearthing evidence for those traces that still resist the takeover of the amnesiac present. He gives voice and image to those who still remember the UP dream and to the material traces that have survived the erasure of the dictatorship. He accomplishes this task through the use of various media, such as photographs, wall art, and newspapers.

While both Ruiz and Guzmán use different media and juxtapositions to blend different temporalities, Ruiz's scope is broader than Guzmán's, who uses them mainly in relationship to the UP period. This could be a point for critique both for Ruiz and Guzmán. Guzmán uses these formal innovations exclusively to gain access to memory traces from the UP period, while Ruiz insists on being as indirect as possible about the trauma of the coup and shows only disaffection and disorientation. Nonetheless, if Ruiz depicts the "national" as a collage of differences, as previously established, Guzmán's work seems to function as one important piece in that conceptual collage.

As established in *The Return*, Ruiz broadens the scope of his historical exploration and uses folklore and literary texts to access distinct aspects of collective memory. *Cofralandes* integrates a formal reinvention of Blest Gana's novel, *Martín Rivas*. After describing his visit to Rotterdam, making associations between a rainy day and a photograph immersed in water that sparks the memory of a tragedy in Valparaíso due to a fire sometime around 1950, the voice-over narrator remembers a novel by Blest

Gana, but is unsure whether it was *Martín Rivas* or not. However, he does remember that it was required reading in schools. Critics have indicated how this novel, “requisite reading in the education of Chileans as Chileans,” plays a key part in the national imagination (Concha xiii). The narrator tries to summarize the story but keeps forgetting and inventing characters’ names and the relationships between them. On screen, we see an adaptation of the novel, with static characters in period costumes. Influenced by nineteenth century Romanticism, *Martín Rivas* functions as national allegory: fulfilled love as the allegory for conciliation between antagonistic regional and class interests (see Concha and Franco). The film’s act of reworking the *Martín Rivas* novel by reinventing names and relationships destabilizes the story’s reading as national allegory. Instead, by using it here as intertext – the concept of history is created through this play with intertext.

While the details of the narrative and the characters’ descriptions seem to have no importance, the narrator places emphasis on the historical event that is portrayed in the book: the first Liberal attempt to challenge the autocratic and oligarchic tendencies of the Chilean political system guaranteed by the 1833 constitution.⁵⁷ This event, the first Chilean Liberal revolution of 1851, is experienced as a break—“y una mañana... revolución”—indicating a moment of interruption in the representation of the novel. While the images of the characters appear frozen in time, the narrative voice gives life to a new way of seeing the novel. The emphasis on this moment of interruption contrasts

⁵⁷ Influenced by the values of the French Revolution of 1848, a new politically progressive movement called the Society of Equality (Sociedad de la Igualdad) challenged what they considered an autocratic form of government and opposed Manuel Montt’s presidency. The movement was swiftly repressed and many leaders of the government went into exile. See Loveman, Brian. *Chile: the Legacy of Hispanic Capitalism*, p.140-141. For the importance of this event in *Martín Rivas*, see literary critic Jaime Concha’s “Introduction”.

with the novel's overall plot, which gives an optimistic representation of Chilean nationhood. Thus, while the novel has traditionally been interpreted to culturally reinforce nationalism, the documentary's focus on the rupture of the political fabric (the reformist Liberal rebellion) underscores a history of differences and divergent positions that traverse/interrupt the construction of national hegemonic discourse. This reinterpretation of the novel helps contextualize the political project of the UP government within the latent presence of previously suppressed alternative political paths. In this way he connects the Allende period to earlier historical episodes, while also extending the importance of a political project of emancipation beyond the UP government.

Conclusion

Ruiz's documentaries create a deliberately surreal version of reality, pushing the boundaries of representation through formal means. Unlike Littín and Guzmán, this gesture of reinterpretation is a creative political act, not a nostalgic one. For Ruiz, Allende was an important channel of a particular political project, but the reason why he can continue his political and artistic innovation is because it is not the only way of maintaining that political project. The turn to surrealism embodies the ideals of the UP without referencing directly Allende and the UP. For him, the political motivation remains alive through his political aesthetic.

The discussion of realism and representation in documentary ultimately is about the debate between how to create and capture the sense of the political in relationship to Chile's historical past. The three filmmakers use the documentary mode with the intent to raise awareness and to engage the viewer's social dimension, but these goals can be

achieved in different ways. The strength of surrealist documentary resides in the fact that it insists on the *social aspect* of reality (and this is where the documentary form is crucial), but it also recognizes the always already imagined aspect of that reality.

Chapter 2

The Dream of Memory in Raúl Ruiz's *Memories of Appearances: Life is a Dream*

As analyzed in the previous chapter, narratives of return structure exilic films while engaging in vastly varied ways of representing that return. For most exiled filmmakers, the return from exile is perceived as a dream that has the potential to bring closure to the uprooted subject (Nafici 229). However, as we have seen in Ruiz's documentaries, that potential is questioned through cinema's refusal to represent it. As with the documentaries discussed earlier, Ruiz's feature film *Memories of Appearances: Life is a Dream* (1986) is structured around the return of the protagonist, yet it problematizes the possibility of both spatial (return to Chile) and temporal return by exposing mechanisms of censorship bound up with the process of memory-work.

The filmic image has been described as a privileged space for mourning during the Chilean post-dictatorship (Cisneros 61). In his analysis of post-dictatorial mourning strategies in *Life is a Dream* (1986), James Cisneros focuses on the film's capacity to do memory-work by means of subscribing to a non-linear conception of history. Cisneros notes that today's media floods viewers with an endless stream of extraneous information, which promotes amnesia, not only of the Socialist past but also of the dictatorship's abuses and forced disappearances (59). Against this tendency, he argues, there are two strategies to engage with the non-material yet persistent presence of the

desaparecidos on the contemporary Chilean landscape. The first one seeks to simply “recover the past’s lost or hidden information” in order to come to terms with what the dictatorship sought to erase and censor. The second strategy, adopted by Raúl Ruiz and Patricio Guzmán among others, includes those who “have adopted the discontinuity [the past] imposes as a constitutive element of their own historicity . . . forging a memory strategy that projects images to make visible a perpetual absence and to show the screen that hides” (59).

In his view of history as discontinuous, Cisneros borrows from Nelly Richard’s discussion in *The Insubordination of Signs* on ‘the figure of memory,’ who in turn traces Walter Benjamin’s thought: the “figure maintains a concrete historicity, where past events announce things to come, hence resting on a temporal structure where events do not relate in terms of an unbroken, historical process but where, torn apart, separated in time, the events relate instead in terms of something not yet present, of an event yet to come” (60). In the context of memory in the post-dictatorship Richard speaks about an unresolved tension between recollection and forgetting or revelation and concealment regarding the dictatorship’s legacy of human rights abuses (Richard 1; 18-19). She argues for the need to explore oblique forms of representation that avoid rigid dichotomies (such as victim/victimizer, harm/reparation, etc.) in favor of exploring those elements that inhabit the margins of those binaries: blind spots, interrupted sequences, inconclusive fragments (21).

Cisneros adopts Richard’s viewpoint and seeks to supplement her reading of other cultural productions (painting, poetry, narrative, theater, photography) by analyzing the unique potential of the cinematic form to resist the “amnesia of speed and censorship”

because of cinema's structural capacity to capture time's disjointed nature (61). Cisneros argues that, by manipulating cinema's formal dimensions, *Life is a Dream* manages to create what he calls "fictions of memory" to show, in the absence of irretrievable substance, the *desaparecidos*'s vanishing (65). The cinema and the screen become modes of visibility that permit the work of mourning because, in projecting images of those disappeared, they give a spectral body over which to hold vigil (70).

While I wholeheartedly agree that Ruiz's filmic production engages the issue of memory and exploits cinema's capacity of presenting disjointed time, a closer analysis of the mechanisms of memory-work in the film *Life is a Dream* will offer a more complex view of the tension between memory and forgetting. By investigating Ruiz's treatment of the unconscious, I will explore how censorship mechanisms are not only external (such as state repression during the dictatorship or amnesia-inducing images in the transition to democracy), but are also internal, due to unconscious processes at work in the self. That is, amnesia about the past is not simply an externally produced and imposed discourse, but it is also part of the subject's unconscious desire.

Furthermore, by showing us a subject in a successive pattern of forgetting and remembering, Ruiz indicates that memory-work can become an obstruction, displacing other concerns about the nature of one's subjectivity. Ruiz's radical suggestion about memory-work is that it can function as a kind of obstacle that prevents us from uncovering the grounds and sources of repressive mechanisms that are at play within the political subject.

In other words, *Life is a Dream* seeks to uncover the reasons for the conditions that have produced the need for memory-work in the first place. I am not trying to

discount the importance of memory-work (we have seen the importance of memory at work in the previous analysis of Guzmán and Ruiz), but rather to suggest that sometimes memory can act as a screen that takes us away from asking more difficult questions about what is deeply responsible of the destructive circumstances of the dictatorship. So, Ruiz explores the internal factors for forgetting as a means to understand the internal factors for the existence of state-sanctioned, political repression.

To that end, as we shall see, the film's overt association of the absolute monarchy of the Spanish Golden Age with the military Chilean dictatorship integrate it within wider spatial and temporal coordinates to reflect on the political subject's unconscious desire for order. So, while I agree with Cisneros' point on cinema's capacity to reveal time's fragmentation, it seems important not to overlook the fact that the film also seeks to explore connections between different historical moments. In other words, cinema's structural capacity not only illustrates temporal discontinuities, but also signals historical continuities (or discontinuous repetitions).

Life is a Dream: the film

The film *Life is a Dream* was produced in 1986 and is based loosely on the Golden Age play with the same name written by the Spanish monk Pedro Calderón de la Barca around 1636. The film begins with a voice-over narration about how the protagonist, Ignacio Vega, a Spanish literature teacher, was able to memorize the names of 15,000 anti-junta members in only one week in April of 1974, eight months after Pinochet's coup. In order to be able to memorize the names, he used a mnemonic method and associated the names of the persons with the verses of the Spanish play, *Life is a*

Dream, which he knew by heart ever since he was a teenager. A few months afterwards he was caught and had to forget so as not to jeopardize the identity of the group members involved in the underground resistance to the dictatorship. Since the years 1973-1974 were times of major repression by Pinochet's military junta, we can infer that Ignacio Vega was a participant in the resistance movement and was forced to forget in order not to cede under interrogation. The voice-over narrator announces that the story begins ten years afterwards, during the summer of 1984, when Ignacio is summoned to retrieve the forgotten information and recreate the resistance network. The majority of the film is taken up by Ignacio's efforts to remember the lines of the play in order to reconstruct the lost network.

After various bouts of amnesia, Ignacio manages to remember the first two acts of the play. With one act left to recall, his contact informs him that all of his efforts at remembering were in vain, since all participants in the resistance movement are dead. Ignacio is shot at and, in a moment of suspension, before the bullet hits him, has a brief encounter with his brother. After the fatal bullet strikes, we see Ignacio, with bloodied face, somewhere on a beach. Unbeknownst to us, Ignacio had been dead from the very beginning, having dreamt that he was alive. That is, the majority of the film is actually Ignacio's dream sequence, within which he had remembered the two acts of the play while watching its filmic representation.⁵⁸ The last minutes of the film show Ignacio upon waking, on a beach contemplating a nuclear war in Europe alongside the other

⁵⁸ The clearly stated year in Ignacio's dream alludes to George Orwell's dystopian novel, *1984*. The critical difference between the novel and *Life is a Dream* is that Ruiz situates the repressive regime inside the protagonist's unconscious self.

characters he had dreamt. The film closes with Ignacio's brother reciting the closing lines of the baroque play.

Before exploring the significance of the dream-sequence, however, I would like to examine how the film operates as a critical intervention on the baroque play, specifically challenging its conception of redemption. In that sense, the film does not "create" a world (as would be the case in classical narrative cinema) but transforms the way we see the already existent one. The director is not a creative genius, but a part of a process of changing the way we see the world. Formal intervention into the baroque play stands for a political process that, in surrealist fashion, makes strange that which we have become accustomed to regard as familiar.⁵⁹

The film as an intervention on the play

Ruiz situates Calderón's play within the context of life under the Chilean dictatorship, integrating it in the form of an inter-textual citation.⁶⁰ The film is not an adaptation of the play, but rather an *intervention* on the play because Ruiz radically alters not only the message of the play, but also radically transforms its treatment of the dream concept. While there is a parallel between the two works through the figure of exile, Ruiz's focus on dream-work and memory introduces a new dimension, that of unconscious desire.

⁵⁹ The surrealist process of defamiliarization has been discussed in the first chapter in relationship to Buñuel's films.

⁶⁰ Through the inter-textual use of the play Ruiz juxtaposes the Spanish Golden Age period with dictatorial Chile, but, as we will see, it is a critical intervention on the play. The film becomes a denunciation of the repressive nature of the autocratic military regime, but it will also reveal itself as a political critique of Popular Unity's dream.

In Act I of Calderón's play, Basilio, the king of Poland, has imprisoned his son Segismundo in a tower since birth because the astrological signs predicted that Segismundo would be a cruel monarch. Once the moment of succession to the throne arrives, Basilio has a change of heart and wants to try to test Segismundo's leadership potential by bringing him into the public world of the palace before naming him official heir.

Act II opens with Segismundo waking up in the palace, where Clotaldo informs him that he is the king's son. Instead of fulfilling Basilio's hope of acting as a noble prince, he threatens the king and attacks others physically and verbally. Segismundo is drugged and returned to the tower for having acted recklessly, that is, according to his instincts.⁶¹ Clotaldo, his guard, convinces him that he had been dreaming about being a prince in the palace. Believing Clotaldo, Segismundo learns not to trust his own senses: "porque si ha sido soñado/lo que vi palpable y cierto,/lo que veo será incierto;/y no es mucho que, rendido,/pues veo estando dormido,/que sueñe estando despierto" (l. 2102-2107). After this experience, Segismundo reaches the conclusion that dreams are the only domain where one can understand one's true self: "la experiencia me enseña/ que el hombre que vive sueña/ lo que es hasta despertar" (l. 2155-2157). He reflects on the consequences of his actions and decides that what is really important seems to be to "act well" or "do good"—'obrar bien.' Segismundo decides to act as if he were in a dream, as if "todo el poder es prestado" (l. 2360-2370).

⁶¹ Segismundo is accused of acting according to his instincts, but it is clear that his lifelong mistreatment and imprisonment in the tower are to blame for his « inappropriate » development and behavior.

In Act III the kingdom's subjects find out about Segismundo's existence and urge him to rebel against his father, who wants to crown a foreign prince, Astolfo.⁶² Remembering his unfortunate past experience in the palace, Segismundo is not very thrilled at the prospect of a life of power, considering it an illusion. Nevertheless, he decides to join the rebels, while bearing in mind that power is not intrinsic to the sovereign, but is surrendered to him through an agreement between the leader and his subjects: "Y con esta prevención/de que, cuando fuese cierto,/es todo el poder prestado/y ha de volverse a su dueño,/atrevámonos a todo" (2368-2372). Realizing that power itself is a "dream," Segismundo decides to "act well": "Que estoy soñando y que quiero/obrar bien; pues no se pierde/obrar bien, aun entre sueños" (2399-2401). Unlike power, "acting well" is the only thing that cannot be taken away from him, although his decisions are informed by the fact that he thinks he is dreaming. Segismundo actively and consciously performs his good will; it is not intrinsic to his power position. With this realization in mind, he behaves "appropriately" once he is victorious: he pardons his father and Astolfo and represses his violent tendencies, becoming a "true sovereign".

The screen of the theater is thematized as a semi-permeable membrane, where spectators play acting roles in the intradiegetic filmic representation of the play: Ignacio plays Astolfo; Ignacio's brother is Segismundo; the inspectors are Basilio and Clotaldo; Bonitas (the woman with wrist scars) plays Rosaura. It is important to note though that Ignacio does not play Segismundo's character in the intradiegetic film, thus refusing an interpretation that would make an analogy between Ignacio and the imprisoned prince.

⁶² Basilio's decision is put into question because the subjects want to remain loyal to the "natural" order of things, not because of Basilio's ban on Segismundo. In other words, the sovereign's ban is not questioned, the motivation for the rebellion is the rebels' own sense of duty to maintain the natural order.

For Walter Benjamin, Calderón's play is one example of the *Trauerspiel*, the Baroque mourning play (*Origin* 81).⁶³ Historically, the *Trauerspiel* is a product of the seventeenth century, where a new concept of sovereignty arises as a result of the theocratic doctrine of the State. Based on the "state of emergency" the ruler obtains dictatorial power, but is haunted by the fear of tyrannicide and usurpation (*Origin* 67).

Anthony J. Cascardi employs Benjamin's theorization of the *Trauerspiel* and situates the baroque as the historical period when transcendence is penetrated by the secular realm, signaling the emergence of subjective self-consciousness ("Allegories of Power" 15-16). For Benjamin, the *Trauerspiel* is the mystery play where the sovereign suffers a tragic-like deconsecration, representing the moment when *mythos* is displaced by *logos* and reveals the breakdown of direct signification. Deciphering the meaning of the world becomes a "hermeneutical task"—experience becomes the subject of interpretation (Cascardi 17). In the play Segismundo does just that—he interprets the nature of power based on his own experience. According to Cascardi, Calderón's play points to a crisis in the dominant paradigm of authority, where "traces of history show up through power's ineradicable effects (24). Cascardi explains that, even if in the end of the play the "natural law" of succession to the throne is restored, Segismundo's predicament has already irrevocably challenged the absolute condition of "natural law". Segismundo's crisis has made it historical—absolute sovereign power has been revealed as an illusion, thus *it has been rendered historical*, even if Segismundo eventually assumes the line of sovereignty. According to Cascardi, Segismundo's capacity of self-

⁶³ The *Trauerspiel* will be discussed more in depth in Chapter 3.

critique is what makes him historical, unlike Basilio. For Segismundo, the experience of power-as-illusion provokes his self-critique.

However, after the successful rebellion of Act III, Segismundo also realizes that, in order to rule, he has to conceal his discovery of power as illusion. Since power is not intrinsic to his being, it must be performed in order to be maintained. That is why only the readers of the play have privileged access to his thoughts, but not his future subjects. The speech, which he gives to his subjects as crowned king, contradicts his thoughts. This theatricality is a powerful strategy put in place to conceal the short glimpse into the historical nature of power. Cascardi argues that the allegory of power is theatrically sustained, that sovereign power is maintained through a series of “theatrical effects” (24). Theatricality becomes a means for power to portray itself as a-historical.

As we have seen, Segismundo’s private insight into the historical nature of power is quickly concealed when he assumes the throne. It is thus significant that, in the film, Ignacio never manages to remember the third act of the play. Peter Szondi’s reading of Calderón can help us understand the significance of the fact that Ignacio gets stuck at act two. Szondi explores the implications of the play’s reworking of the Oedipus myth from Greek tragedy, calling it a “Christian Oedipus play” (64). Calderón’s play is rescued from the tragic end of *Oedipus Rex* by the redemptive actions in the third act. Basilio’s attempt to test Segismundo had resulted in the subjects rebelling against Basilio and in Segismundo being installed as rightful heir to the throne. Szondi continues:

At this point, where Calderón’s piece could end as tragedy, the downfall to which salvation seems to lead changes, for its part, into its opposite, and becomes salvation. [...] For Basilio, the test that began as salvation and turned into disaster ultimately swings back to salvation. (68-69)

The fact that Ignacio's remembering is curtailed at the third act is significant not only because he does not manage to reconstruct the network, but also because, in this way, the film refuses to offer a redemptive closure that would reinstate the subject's wholeness (or sovereignty, as in the case of Calderón's play) at the end of the film. In other words, the film refuses the suture that would be offered by the subject acquiring knowledge in the process.⁶⁴ Instead, Ignacio finds out that the remembering was part of a plot to make him incriminate himself. The implications of not including Act III into Ignacio's dream indicate Ruiz's stance on the need for self-critique (a critique of militant revolutionary subjectivity) and the suspension of any redemptive outcome that might stem from that self-critique. Ruiz's intervention on the play transforms Calderón's work, compelling us to examine it anew in a contemporary historical context.

Nevertheless, alongside reading the film as an intervention, it remains important to examine the consequences of this intervention being framed in the form of a dream, since the act of memory-work and its vicissitudes is part of Ignacio's dream. In other words, it is a reflection of his unconscious desires. It is the nature of this particular dreamer – Ignacio, literature professor and member of the resistance movement against the dictatorship—that produces this particular dream.⁶⁵ In other words, the content of the dream is a product of this particular subject's unconscious desires.

⁶⁴ For a discussion of suture see previous chapter (47), as well as Elsaesser and Hagener's *Film Theory*, pp. 89-93.

⁶⁵ Because of his background, it is not be too far fetched to see Ignacio as a representative and supporter of the Unidad Popular. This identification might even lead us to guess that Ruiz might see himself in Ignacio.

The dream-space and the nature of wish-fulfilment in Ignacio's dream

Since the majority of the film is clearly demarcated as a dream, it is important to treat it as such and read the film through the lens of psychoanalytic interpretations of dreams. Before proceeding with the dream analysis in the film *Life is a Dream*, I would like to revisit the close relationship between cinema and Freudian concepts, such as screen memories, dream, memory-work, displacement, and the unconscious.

The frequent comparison between dreams and cinema comes from Freud's remark that dreams construct situations out of images (*Interpretation of Dreams* 82-83). While waking-life thinking takes place in concepts, dreaming takes place predominantly in visual images. Dream-images appear incoherent because they are juxtapositions of seemingly unrelated images (87).

In a manner analogous to how dreams open access to the unconscious, the visual image has the potential to access new realms of experience. Walter Benjamin makes a clear parallel between how psychoanalysis discovers the instinctual unconscious and photography's ability to discover the existence of the optical unconscious ("Little history" 512). As we remember, Benjamin's concept of 'optical unconscious' helps explain the importance of the cinematographic camera as a tool for accessing different spatio-temporal configurations: "For it is another nature which speaks to the camera rather than to the eye: 'other' above all in the sense that a space informed by human consciousness gives way to a space informed by the unconscious" (510).⁶⁶ For example,

⁶⁶ Walter Benjamin discusses the concept of "optical unconscious" in "Little History of Photography." (*Selected Writings*. Vol. 2. Ed. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland and Gary Smith. Trans. Edmund Jephott and Kingsley Shorter. Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999. 507-530). It designates a new realm of experience that photography can open access to, similarly to how psychoanalysis aims to access the psychic unconscious. "It is another nature which speaks to the camera rather than to the eye" (Benjamin, "Little History" 510). See Ruiz's take on Benjamin's "optical unconscious" in *Poetics of Cinema*. (the note is a repeat from chapter 1)

the significance of surrealist photography can be found in the exploration of the estrangement between man and his surroundings, rather than commercial photography's impulse to integrate man into them ("Little history" 519). Extending the discussion to cinema, in the case of *Life is a Dream*, the camera not only offers a space informed by the unconscious, but also unmistakably presents it as a dream, where those unconscious desires are manifested.

The sources of dreams are events that we have already lived, but which we might not remember having lived or experienced. Dreams and memory are deeply intermeshed elements of our psychic life. Dreams are not inventions since they recall events from our past that have been forgotten or repressed. They are not new images even if they might *appear* as new due to various distortion mechanisms.⁶⁷ By having "at their command memories which are inaccessible in waking life," dreams give us privileged access to our memories (*The Interpretation of Dreams* 46). Through dreams we have the opportunity to recollect and relive forgotten experiences. Freud writes: "It might perhaps occur to us that the phenomenon of dreaming could be reduced entirely to that of memory: dreams, it might be supposed, are a manifestation of reproductive activity which is at work even in the night and which is an end in itself" (54). However, it is important to not simply equate dreams with memories. Dreams do not simply reproduce experiences, rather they yield fragments of reproductions, altering experiences and thus creating the need for interpretation.

⁶⁷ Dreams appear as « new » because of our forgetting them, but they are not. In the film's title, « Memory of appearances » we find a parallel for this idea: since the film is a dream, it appears as a new experience, but it is an illusion of newness. This might imply that Ignacio's dream, that is, the experience of oppression, is a repetition of other moments of oppression.

In order to attempt interpretation of dreams, we need to identify their particular sources. To that end, Freud finds the sources of dreams in childhood memories, experiences from the last few days before they were dreamt, as well as external and/or internal sensory stimuli while we sleep (49). Understanding the content of a dream occurs through the method of “free association”, where the meaning of the dream emerges from the associations of images, thoughts and memories (Quinodoz 39).

For Freud the importance of dreams lies in their function: they are wish fulfillments (123; 151; 154; 167). That is, they fulfill wishes that have been repressed during waking life. The motive for a dream is a wish and the content of the dream is the fulfillment of that wish. To that end, interpreting dreams can help assign a meaning to them and understand the importance of those wishes that we do not recognize as such in waking life. The interpretative method takes into account the content of the dream as well as the character and the circumstances of the dreamer, so that the same dream-element has different meanings for different subjects (131).⁶⁸

Freud differentiates between the “latent-content” of a dream and its “manifest-content” (168). While the manifest content represents the dream as reported by the dreamer and is usually based on recent experiences, latent content is based on childhood experiences and represents the meaning of the dream, deciphered from the associations created during the work of interpretation. It helps to think of manifest content as the translation of an original, which is the latent content of the dream (311). They have the same subject matter, but employ two different languages. This difference is achieved

⁶⁸ This is a very important parallel to Ruiz’s conception of cinema, where meaning in cinema is extracted from the interaction of the spectator with the film: that is, meaning depends on the spectator’s interaction with the film and thus it is unique for each viewer. See *Poetics of Cinema*.

through distortion. Those elements of the latent content must escape the censorship imposed by resistance in order to make their way into the dream, that is, its manifest content (344). In other words, the manifest content is a distorted version of the latent content, achieved through a mental process called “dream-work”. Dream interpretation seeks to reverse the operation, “translating” the manifest content of the dream into its latent content, thus identifying the nature of the dream’s wish-fulfilment.

In sum, a dream is a (disguised) fulfillment of a (suppressed or repressed) wish. Dreams are formed because, in sleep, the self-censorship is weakened. Censorship is a concept closely associated with the superego, which controls what can move between the unconscious, the pre-conscious, and the conscious (Quinodoz 43). During sleep, this control is less severe, allowing for repressed memories/wishes to re-emerge in the form of dreams. Because the wish is suppressed, distortion is always present in a dream as an act of self-censorship.

The process of distortion, called dream-work, employs various mechanisms to disguise the nature of wish-fulfilment, acting as defenses against the wish: condensation, displacement, representability, and secondary revision of dream content (Quinodoz 41). Condensation brings together several disparate elements, such as images or thoughts, into a single unit (Quinodoz 40). Thus, interpretation seeks to disentangle the unit and recognize its disparate elements. The work of displacement substitutes incidental thoughts for the latent content, thus the crucial content of the dream is perceived as insignificant (Quinodoz 40; Freud 343). Representability links concepts or thoughts through visual images. Logical connections are reproduced by simultaneity in time. Freud gives the example of the painting of School of Athens, where all philosophers are

shown to be in the same place, even if they were never assembled in the same space. They form a conceptual group, thus they are depicted together (Freud 349). This process has a clear analogy in cinema, where disparate visual elements can be juxtaposed based on conceptual affinity, either within the same frame or between two shots. Causal relations can be represented by two different dreams in a temporal sequence or by transforming one image into another in the same dream (349-351). Another means of representation used for purposes of distortion is the reversal of two elements: turning one thing into another or chronological inversion, such as the conclusion placed at the beginning of the dream (362-363). Secondary revision of dream-content takes place as one tries to recollect the dream and report it. In order to make it more coherent, there is an inevitable distortion of the dream content (Quinodoz 41). Another form of censorship alongside distortions of the dream-content is the forgetting of dreams, which happens after we wake up. In other words, forgetting is another expression of resistance to the process of analytic work (Freud 555).

The space of the dream: the manifest content of Ignacio's dream

The complete title of the film, *Mémoires des apparences: La vie est un songe* (*Memories of Appearances: Life is a Dream*) works to strengthen the idea of obstruction or distortion within the film. The word 'apparence' in French refers to the physical appearance or look of something, denoting an idea of disguise, facade, exterior or surface-level of things. In other words, 'mémoires des apparences' conveys the need to remember that in dreams images are a cover up for something else; they are surfaces that

hide a different thing altogether. That is, the title itself points to the need to keep in mind the difference between the manifest-content of Ignacio's dream and its latent content.

In the film the space of the dream allows for an imagined return from exile. For Ruiz cinema is a point of access to a reality that he has been banned from because of political exile, a way of dealing with the trauma of exile. The return seems to be the exile's wish. Ignacio dreams himself alive, that is, in Chile. But the dream structure, while acting as a substitute for the return, also opens the door to the dreamer's unconscious to reveal internal repressive tendencies. We can say that Ignacio's return and his attempts to remember are part of the manifest content; however, the latent content will indicate that Ignacio desires to forget, rather than remember.

Within his dream, Ignacio moves between his hotel room in Valparaiso and the art-house cinema he used to frequent as a young man. The military regime's repressive presence pervades the environment. It is not a localized repression, but rather a diffused one, expressing itself in indirect ways. For example, conversations between Ignacio and his contact center on deaths from cirrhosis, although we suspect that it displaces talking about state-sanctioned killings.

After the voice-over narration recounts Ignacio's background, noting that he had come back after an absence of ten years, the camera contemplates Ignacio resting in his room in the Hotel Paradise in Valparaiso, after a "trustworthy contact" had asked him to reconstruct the lost network. Unable to remember the lines of the play, he goes to the movie theater of his childhood, which is showing the same movie as twenty years ago—a film adaptation of Calderón de la Barca's play, *Life is a Dream*.

Our expectations of a movie theater are of a segregated place, an enclosed space with little communication to the life outside and very little interaction with the other spectators. However, aside from the very few spectators watching the film, others move indifferently around the theater. A spectator rides a bike, men come in and out of the lateral doors, and someone gets beaten up while a toy train moves under the seats, denoting a dream temporality, where the mechanism of condensation is at work. As we become accustomed to the theater, we notice that it is permeated with traces of repression: it is hard to distinguish whether the screams we hear come from on-screen or off-screen, while some characters are being pushed in and out of lateral doors. However, Ignacio tends to remain focused on watching the intradiegetic screen, thus choosing to ignore/repress the other “distractions” that are happening alongside him. Since this dream-space is the manifest content, a product of Ignacio’s own unconscious, it seems to be setup to keep him distracted from the regime’s abuses.

Ignacio’s hotel room is another dream-space where Ignacio tries to perform memory-work, but is prevented from doing so. The inspector, who has a key to Ignacio’s hotel room, makes unannounced visits in an effort to obstruct his recollection by using intimidation strategies resembling those of the secret service, such as intrusion in one’s privacy, direct threats (“stay out of the movies, go to church!”), and threatening irony (“you’re healthy like a dead man”). Read through a Freudian prism, the inspector acts the part of a distortion mechanism, obstructing Ignacio’s efforts to remember and our efforts to understand the nature of Ignacio’s wish.

In contrast to classical narrative cinema, which separates the viewer from his or her social context, effectively enveloping the viewer into a dream-world, Ruiz’s film uses

the space of the dream to reintegrate his characters within a historical framework.⁶⁹

Ruiz's intradiegetic dream becomes a porous space, where elements of history cannot help but bubble up in spite of mechanisms that seek to repress them, producing a tear in the smooth fabric of the filmic image.

As we have seen earlier, Ignacio's focus on remembering by watching the film competes with the other events taking place in the theater. Nonetheless, at one point, while watching Segismundo scream on the intradiegetic screen, Ignacio realizes that he has an uncanny feeling that someone is being beaten. He then discovers that the screen hides a police station where the screams are coming from. He realizes that the presence of the police station behind the screen is the reason for why he had had an uncomfortable feeling all along. But, in order to access this dimension, Ignacio must suspend his efforts at remembering the play. In other words, he must forget. We can begin to see how, in this case, memory-work itself acts as a screen that keeps him from seeing what is happening behind the screen. The screen reveals, but it also hides.

As discussed previously, Freud's concept of "screen memories" is crucial in understanding the mechanisms at play in surrealist cinema. Screen memories are false recollections that mix with and condense childhood memories. As reformulations of actual memories, they are supports for unconscious fantasies. Screen memories are vivid, yet insignificant memories that displace other important memories, but also point to them (because of being linked to them). Screen memory is a compromise between repressed elements and the defense against them (Laplanche and Pontalis 410-411).

Not only some, but all of what is essential from childhood has been retained in these memories. It is simply a question of knowing how to

⁶⁹ For example see Nichols' discussion on the fiction film as a "centrifugal pull" away from historical referents in favor of plot and story in *Representing Reality* (115-116).

extract it out of them by analysis. They represent the forgotten years of childhood as adequately as the manifest content of a dream represents the dream-thoughts. (Freud in Laplanche and Pontalis 411)

In our film we have a literal illustration of this Freudian concept, where the screen that projects art films is both an enabler for some memories (Ignacio watches the screen in order to remember the lines of the play) and acts as a censor to other memories, such as those of beatings and repression.

In addition to the space of the theater as porous, now we can see how the cinematic screen can also act as a threshold that both hides and reveals. Cinema has been theorized as a door, as a threshold between dream and another reality (the passage from one world to another). This assumes the co-presence of two worlds, separated as well as connected by a threshold (Elsaesser 35). The material border between spectator and film is the screen. This concept is clearly evidenced/exploited in the movie in a meta-conceptual way by the presence of the screen in the film's diegetic space: Ignacio is watching a screening of a film while trying to remember forgotten information.

In psychoanalytic terms, the screen alludes to the idea of censorship in dreams; it is the "gate" between waking life and the unconscious. In our film, the concept of threshold is illustrated diegetically by the blurred divisions between disparate spaces: the theater screen—his memory aid—acts as a cover-up for the existence of the police station behind it. This state of affairs becomes part of the string of interruptions (the inspector's threats, distractions within the theater) that prevent Ignacio from remembering.

Moreover, later on, as Ignacio watches the begging of Act III, his contact reveals to him that the information Ignacio was trying to remember is irrelevant because the anti-junta group had been destroyed a long time ago. Asking him to remember the play was

only an absurd trap to give them a reason for killing him. His friend tells him that their intention was to make him *forget*, not remember. Having been part of the secret services all along, the contact informs him he is the group's last survivor and starts shooting at him, marking the end of the dream.

In other words, in the manifest content of his dream, Ignacio is constantly obstructed from remembering. Thus, since dreams are the fulfillment of the dreamer's repressed wish, it becomes apparent that Ignacio's unconscious wish is not to remember, but rather to forget.

Ignacio's wish

While Ignacio's dream is motivated by a visible duty to remember, distortion mechanisms actually hide his wish to forget. This forgetting has two consequences, possibly contradictory, but which have to be taken into account together: forgetting feeds into the regime's repressive mechanisms, but it also opens up a space for self-critique due to the timing of the film's intervention in the play. These two polarizing tendencies coexist albeit uncomfortably, offering both a critique of the political subject's unconscious repression, and a critical intervention into the political field.

The first consequence exposes that there is something about the subject who unconsciously desires that his memory-work be interrupted, that he forget. Amnesia is not only an external force that is imposed on the subject, as Cisneros had suggested. The subject is also responsible for the amnesia that conditions and maintains the hold of the

dictatorship.⁷⁰ The film's meaning is reinforced by Ruiz's observations on his return to Chile after ten years of exile. In two recent interviews, the filmmaker explains:

El primer shock que tuve cuando volví a Chile el año 82, después de casi diez años de exilio, fue darme cuenta de ... que el país había sido siempre así, que los militares no habían hecho nada más que hacer evidente una cosa que ya estaba antes. (in Penjean "Chile me hace cosquillas")

Pero el shock no me vino de ahí (...), vino de darme cuenta que el gobierno militar era como el lógico desenlace, querido por todos los chilenos... Que Pinochet, llamémoslo desde un punto de vista freudiano, psicoanalítico, era deseado, había sido deseado. Yo desde chico oí hablar que Chile necesitaba una dictadura. Algunos decían necesita una guerra, eso era más o menos lo que estaba entre los fantasmas de la clase media, de la pequeña burguesía, que no era ni siquiera fascista; ellos lo decían por decirlo de repente, pero decían Chile necesita una dictadura, y de repente nos encontramos con que allí estaba el dictador. También decían, este país necesita una mano firme... "[Chile es un país de llorones](#)", entrevista de Luis Cerpa Orellana (2005).⁷¹

The implication, a severe critique of Chilean citizens in general, and of the UP members in particular, is that the national subject is partly the source of the social repressive mechanisms at play. For Ruiz, Pinochet and the military dictatorship of 1973-1989 seem to be a mere symptomatic manifestation of much deeper historical-social issues. In this light the dictatorship becomes the manifest content of a dream whose latent

⁷⁰ This discussion stands, whether referring to the time during the dictatorship or after the regime's formal end. If anything, it questions not only the existence of the dictatorship into the present (as theorized by Moulian or Levinson), but also the existence of the dictatorship prior to the coup of 1973.

⁷¹ [...] when I returned, it was shocking... it was very odd, that Chile of 1983[...] I realized that the military government was like the logical outcome desired by all Chileans [...] When I was a boy, I heard talk that Chile needed a dictatorship. Some said it needs a war [...] the petit bourgeoisie [...] They also said this country needs a firm hand[...] If Allende fell, it was less as a result of his socialist measures than his inability to impose order. The military reproached him for that [...] Chile, not so much in terms of votes or rational opinions but, profoundly, was a country which adhered to the way a military government functions, that the military government spoke to a good number of Chileans [...] All Chilean Presidents have to play the soldier... to speak of imposing order, because in the mind of the Chilean there is a soldier in every part. We really like military marches; the military parade lasts longer than any high-quality cultural show [...] (Ruiz in Cerpa Orellana 2005, translated by Rodríguez-Remedi)

content seems to be the wish for a political system that prizes order or authoritarianism at the expense of a difficult, but necessary introspective awareness.

Complementing the revolutionary discourse of memory (such as Patricio Guzmán's for example), Ruiz is indicating the need to engage with the question of responsibility. Memory is important, but it can obstruct the examination of one's responsibility. These issues will be discussed further in the following chapters, in an analysis of the Janus-faced character of the political subject in Roberto Bolaño's narrative.

The second consequence of the dream-analysis might be a step in the direction of formulating an intervention into the problematic state of things indicated by the previous analysis. Besides the unconscious wish to forget, it is significant that the dream is interrupted as Ignacio reaches the play's third act. In other words, in the dream, he is prevented from remembering precisely the section that provides a redemptive closure to the play. Through the film's (and the dream's) intervention in the play, cinema opens up the space for the possibility of critical intervention allowing for the enactment of self-critique (in a manner analogous to Segismundo's self critique at the end of Act II).

A position of undecidability

As explained earlier, curbing the unfolding of the play at this point amounts to the refusal of suturing the political subject into a redemptive wholeness. After Ignacio is shot at by his contact, he enters a threshold space, in between dream and reality. In this space he has a brief encounter with his brother, who raises the question of Ignacio's ideological position. Ignacio chooses *not* to choose between the two ideological positions that are

offered to him, situating his political position in an area of undecidability. Ruiz's film situates itself in that space of refusal of suturing, suspended in the moment of undecidability that cannot be eluded in the search for a position of political emancipation.

While awaiting the fatal bullet, Ignacio's brother suggests that he read something. He gives Ignacio the option to choose between an issue of *OK!* Magazine and Lenin's *State and Revolution*.⁷² He replies that it is too late for *OK!* and too early for Lenin. A choice in the favor of *OK!* would imply perusing celebrity news and gossip, fashion advice, etc. It is safe to assume that this is late capitalism at its best—functioning in the same a-historical way as the democracy's amnesia-inducing media, which Cisneros and Richard had warned about. Furthermore, it is a commentary on the expansion of neoliberal economic policies and globalizing tendencies under the military dictatorship. Inversely, opting for *State and Revolution*, written shortly before the Russian Revolution of 1917, would mean allowing for Lenin's proposed trajectory from capitalism to communism. Lenin theorizes a path from capitalism to the dictatorship of the proletariat (the dictatorship of the majority versus the dictatorship of the minority elites) to the eventual withering of the state.

Both positions assume a teleological linear history, but in opposite directions: while late capitalism in the case of Chile replaces Allende's socialist government with free-market policies, a Leninist ideological position assumes the possibility of reversing course in the other direction. Both positions are based on the belief in the "right time," the right historical conditions for political transformation. Theoretically, the end of history seems to be the horizon for both outlooks, once the political aim is achieved.

⁷² *OK! Magazine*, a celebrity news outlet, is part of a London-based company that began publishing in the early 1980s. See <http://www.okmagazine.com/about/>.

Ignacio rejects the stable temporality that is the premise for both political systems. Too late for capitalism and too early for a socialist revolution means that Ignacio does not embrace either option. Ignacio's position is located outside of these alternatives and embraces self-critique as a political position that would precede any engagement with Lenin's text. There is a need to reconsider the premises of leftist thought in the light of the military coup and the dictatorship. The moment of suspension while waiting for the bullet is an opportunity to undertake a process of political reevaluation that incorporates an analysis of the subject's unconscious desires and internal mechanisms of censorship.

Conclusion

The moment of undecidability works in order to produce and provide the space for a self-critique that locates itself in the interstices of the dualisms of memory and forgetting, that recognizes repression as both an internal and external force. This position of undecidability is exploited by the capacity of the cinematic screen to both hide and reveal. It indicates the need to situate oneself in such a way as to see both what the screen reveals, as well as what it hides.

Chapter 3

Literary Reconfigurations: Representations of the Literary and the Political in Roberto Bolaño's *Estrella distante* and *Nocturno de Chile*

--- "Je est un autre." Arthur Rimbaud

Roberto Bolaño seeks to understand the nature of Chilean fascism in his two novels *Estrella distante* (1996) and *Nocturno de Chile* (2000), which work to complement each other in illustrating Chilean authoritarian manifestations. *Nocturno de Chile* is a first-person narrative of Sebastián Urrutia-Lacroix, an Opus-Dei priest and literary critic. It is a reluctant autobiography on his deathbed, prompted by a character called "el joven envejecido," who slanders Urrutia and forces him to explain his actions, particularly his complicity with the Pinochet military regime. The priest "confesses" in an effort to exonerate himself and escape responsibility. Nonetheless, the final scene, where he recognizes himself as his accuser, complicates his efforts at self-exoneration. *Estrella distante* is a novel that details the search for a former pilot in the Chilean Air Forces, Carlos Wieder, who had committed many murders of female poets during the dictatorship. Wieder's most salient characteristic is his ambition of re-inventing Chilean art, one of these efforts being the visual representation of the murders. Many years later, Romero, a private detective, enlists Belano, an exiled writer who had known Wieder before the coup, in the task of identifying and killing him.

The two main characters in the two novels converge in the image of the fascist ‘warrior-priest’ or ‘soldier-priest,’ theorized by historian Brian Loveman in *For la Patria* (1999).⁷³ The image of the Latin American soldier as ‘soldier-priest’ or ‘warrior-priest’ has its roots in the Spanish *reconquista*, fusing together military conquest, religious subordination, and political authoritarianism (Loveman, *For la patria*, 1). The image of the “warrior priest” strengthens Loveman’s general argument that the fascist element in the Chilean military is not an exceptional moment, but rather forms part of military culture. If Wieder’s character might run the risk of being interpreted and dismissed as an “aberration” by both pro-Pinochet and anti-Pinochet camps, Urrutia is a representative character of indirect involvement with the regime. That is precisely why Bolaño insists on seeing him as inseparable from the figure of Wieder.

Bolaño’s unique approach is that he analyzes these figures in their relationship to art, in particular their relationship to art as an institution. Wieder has ambitions to construct “el nuevo arte de Chile” (93) and Urrutia is the most visible literary critic of the conservative national newspaper *El Mercurio*.⁷⁴ Furthermore, Bolaño makes an explicit connection between the two characters in *Estrella*, when he recounts how Wieder’s poetry was highly praised by the priest-critic.⁷⁵ However, while it is clear that Urrutia is

⁷³ Wieder’s “transgressive” act is to “translate” that culture into an “artistic” manifestation, to poeticize fascism. An important connection point here is Ruiz’s interview about Cofralandes, where he refers to the Santos’ costumes as reminiscent of military uniforms; as a memory of the oppressive character of Chilean society, which lies in the tendency to uniformity.

⁷⁴ His character is modeled on the real-life José-Miguel Ibáñez Langlois, a prominent Catholic priest. (see Dove 153 n.4)

⁷⁵ “Ibacache, en la soledad de su estudio, intenta fijar la imagen de Wieder. Intenta comprender, en un *tour de forcé* de su memoria, la voz, el espíritu de Wieder, su rostro entrevisto en una larga noche de charla telefónica, pero fracasa, y el fracaso además es estrepitoso y se hace notar en sus apuntes, en su prosa que de pizpireta pasa a doctoral (algo común en los articulistas latinoamericanos) y de doctoral a melancólica, perpleja [. . .] El fragmento referido a las lecturas «del prometedor poeta Carlos Wieder» se interrumpe de pronto, como si Ibacache se diera repentina cuenta de que está caminando en el

a character built on a real-life individual, Wieder stands in for the (discursive) limit of the military regime. Wieder carries out the logic of the military regime to its extremes, just as Nazism carries out the logic of Western civilization to its extremes (see Jenckes 102). The two characters are different poles of the relationship to fascism: while Wieder tests the limits of Nazism and places himself outside of history through his foundational discourse, Urrutia tries to portray himself as one who did not participate in the military repression, representing himself as outside of politics, but his own account reveals his tacit complicity with the regime. His actions do not directly result in deaths or tortures of the regime's victims, but his "contribution" to the regime comes through his institutional affiliation with the literary establishment.

Bolaño's study of Latin American fascist tendencies and articulations is unique because of his discussion of fascism in a way that both underscores its specific manifestations during the Chilean dictatorship and also goes beyond it to show it is a phenomenon that we all uncomfortably live next to. He connects Latin America to European fascisms in order to show that their commonalities should be read through a shared tendency to hyper-rigidify borders: national, temporal, and individual. Like in the case of European fascisms, the Pinochet military dictatorship cannot be conceived as an aberration that has been overcome with Chile's transition to democracy, but rather is a continuation (or at most a limit-case) of certain aspects of Western history and thought. To understand the conditions of possibility of the dictatorship one cannot ignore the militaristic and fascistic tradition that Chile has and which, oftentimes has been coupled

vacío" (*Estrella Distante* 114).

with the approval (both tacit and explicit) of right wing conservative religious groups, such as Opus Dei.⁷⁶

Instead, Bolaño's discussion illuminates not only the historical conditions for the dictatorship, but also how the epistemological foundations of the dictatorship and the way they are manifested in everyday life is what ultimately allowed for the dictatorship and its legacy to take place. The fascist element goes further than the dictatorship as institutionalized totalitarianism. According to Deleuze and Guattari, fascism can be expressed through a force that does not need the state and is instead a proliferation of molecular forces that functions at the micropolitical level (*A Thousand Plateaus* 214). That is, they signal to fascistic tendencies that permeate the everyday; it is the fascist predisposition that we all have within ourselves.

In particular, Bolaño is interested specifically in how fascism is manifested at the level of discourse, that is the fascist discourse on culture. Even if Bolaño's description of fascist characters is at times somewhat imprecise or commonplace, it is necessary to follow him in his efforts at demystifying the aura of literature, to examine how theories and forms of literature serve to justify authoritarian politics. Bolaño argues that a certain attitude to culture, one that sees culture as pure, as autonomous, as removed from history or politics, ultimately leads to a fascist worldview. Bolaño is constantly engaged in

⁷⁶ The historical evidence of Chile's strong military tradition allows one to see the Pinochet regime as one of the many manifestations of Latin America's longstanding tradition of regimes of exception. With its 19th century Prussian roots, the Chilean military has been part of what Loveman calls "the politics of anti-politics". Furthermore, the 1930's in Chile have also seen the rise of Chilean Nazism, a movement that sought to emulate German Nazism. The movement did not survive, but it is worth mentioning because it stands as evidence of the presence of fascist ideology within Chile (see Sznadger). See also Jaime Antonio Etchepare and Hamish I. Stewart on Nazism in Chile (the 1930s), as well as Marcus Klein on Chilean fascism and the Popular Front (the 1930s).

demystifying the purported purity of the fascist discourse by advocating for a form of literature that is intentionally contaminated by history and politics.

The fascist discourse of purity is constructed by assigning a negative relationship to what it considers as its “Other.” The “other” is oftentimes and emblematically the “feminine” social element. The “feminine” does not stand for an essentialized gender category, but for that which fascism seeks to obliterate. As we shall see, this is clearly illustrated in the fact that Wieder only kills women, particularly women who write. Against the fascist anti-historical and foundational vanguard, Bolaño offers a feminine writing, which is full of traces of history, repetitions, and affective language. I cannot stress enough how the concept of the “feminine” cannot do justice to what Bolaño is trying to do or maybe even exposes a limit to our and Bolaño’s language, but it is a category that can help open a space for a historical language that counters the mythical discourse of the dictatorship. It is a linguistic device, maybe not the best, but it is one of the few available to us in the effort of understanding and surpassing the logic of fascism.

The role of literature in shaping fascist discourse—what David Carroll calls “literary fascism”—has not been emphasized in most post-dictatorship cultural productions.⁷⁷ In contrast, Bolaño analyzes the complicity of language and the complicity of literature as an institution in creating and maintaining the conditions of possibility of

⁷⁷ Post-dictatorship narrative and literary criticism have focused on *testimonio* narratives and the experience of repression, but few writers and critics have sought to analyze the fascist elements of the Chilean dictatorship in relationship to other forms of fascism. Narrative focus has been on the resistance to the dictatorship (Pedro Lemebel or Ariel Dorfman for example) and on detective novels that mention connections between the *desaparecidos* and German Nazi collaborators in the south of Chile (such as Ramón Díaz-Eterovic’s Heredia series). Hernán Vidal is one of the few critics who have engaged with analyzing the manifestation of the fascist elements present in the Pinochet regime. Nonetheless, Vidal focuses on the State as fascist State and not so much on the idea of molecular fascism that goes beyond the state. His main focus is on the figure of Pinochet and thus risks converting it into an exceptional case.

the dictatorship. Bolaño's specific style seeks to elucidate the epistemological structures of fascism and their prevalence even in the post-dictatorship period.

In the context of critics' focus on the memory of the dictatorship's repression, Bolaño works against a different kind of forgetting: the forgetting of *the fascist element* and its continuation into the post-dictatorship. One clear illustration of this is in *Estrella distante*, where Carlos Wieder is promptly forgotten in the transition to democracy. The act of remembering fascism and its presence in the form of microfascism needs to complement the act of remembering the victims of the dictatorship. In the same spirit, Tomás Moulian has insisted on the need to understand Chile's neoliberal present as the continuation of the dictatorship into the post-dictatorship. Moulian's analysis of the continuation of neoliberal policies into the present complements Bolaño's analysis of the continuation of the fascist element.⁷⁸ Bolaño's insistence on this is especially important in light of the current official democratic discourse, where the image of the Pinochet regime is being successively "cleaned up".⁷⁹ The post-dictatorship is "a time when all social antagonisms and ideological conflict have been banished from the national stage" (Dove 148). Bolaño tries to invoke a "conciencia del horror" by working against the cleansing discourse of the dictatorship.⁸⁰ Against these cleansing efforts, he offers a contaminated picture, a picture contaminated with history. But also a picture where we

⁷⁸ In Moulian, Tomás. *Chile actual: anatomía de un mito*. Lom Ediciones, 2002. Even though Moulian is skeptical about the usefulness of the concept of "fascism" as employed in the political discourse of the post-dictatorship, my own usage is not so much historical as conceptual, in the sense that it refers to an internal structure beyond the State. That is, while historical fascism is always a way to identify an enemy, a conceptual understanding of fascism complicates the facile and self-congratulatory rhetoric that fascism is always somewhere else or someone else.

⁷⁹ Symptomatic of this "cleansing" effort is the fact that the only charges brought against Pinochet in Chile were in relationship to corruption, not violations of human rights.

⁸⁰ The term "conciencia del horror" is borrowed from the documentary "La ciudad de los fotógrafos."

are all contaminated with fascism.

Emerging from a close reading of the two novels, my perspective of fascism in Chile goes beyond the historical limits of the dictatorship to a broader understanding of fascism. I argue that Bolaño describes Wieder and Urrutia's actions as attempts to impose conceptual and physical borders in an effort to exert power over others. In order to understand and ultimately challenge those borders, Bolaño examines how these characters relate to categories that they perceive as threats to their conceptual borders, in particular women and history.

1. 1 General discussion on fascism

The term 'fascism' resists a unified designation, but my interest is to see it not as a limited historical period, but as an ideology that is deeply concerned with establishing a mythical conception of time geared towards the production of an endless war against that which it interprets as outside of itself.⁸¹ Fascism emerges as a process of hyper-rigidifying boundaries, an attempt at containment. In the theoretical discussion of fascism, three broad themes emerge. Firstly, fascism relates to temporality as an attempt at creating temporal borders in reaction to the perceived threat of being absorbed into the flow of history. Secondly, the issue of relationships between self and other is mediated by fear of being absorbed into the other and results in defining the self in negative relationship to the other. This is manifested in particular in the masculine fear of being absorbed into the feminine (not only as a question of gender difference, but an endowment of other with feminine elements). Thirdly, fascist literary discourse presents

⁸¹ This is important because it is something that persists in the post-dictatorship, albeit actively forgotten. Bolaño writes about Wieder: "Chile lo olvida" (120). Thus, part of the social function of literature is to remember the fascist element of the military regime.

art as a sphere completely separate from politics and history, thus promoting a conception of autonomy of art that seeks to cover its violent politics (Carroll 249).

The most widely cited definition is that given by historian Roger Griffith:

“Fascism is a genus or political ideology whose mythic core in its various permutations is a palingenetic form of populist ultranationalism” (26). Even in this most compressed and simplified form, the term “palingenetic” clearly indicates that temporality is a key concern: “palin (again, new) and genesis (creation, birth)” (33). Thus, fascism combines both a linear and cyclical (primordial) vision of time, incorporating a very rigid notion of geographical borders. Furthermore, it is important to note that in Griffith’s definition fascism need not depend on the State for its existence and proliferation.

Like Griffith, Walter Benjamin mentions that the state need not play a role in the fascist mystical theory of war (319). Benjamin remarks that, in the rise of German fascism, technology is used to produce and sustain an endless war (“Theories of German Fascism” (1930) 314).⁸² Benjamin describes this cult of war as “nothing other than an uninhibited translation of the principles of *l’art pour l’art* to war itself” (Theories, 314). Like *art pour l’art*, war for war’s sake is the production of war as an end in itself—it has no use-value (Bürger 28).⁸³ War thus becomes not a means to an end (the kind of violence sanctioned by the modern State), but rather an end in itself. For Benjamin this phenomenon signals the desire for an exit from history through the eternal presence of war.

⁸² He explains the presence of a cult of war as a consequence of Germany’s loss in the First World War. As an attempt to make essence out of loss, defeat is perverted into an inner victory by means of confessions of guilt, which were hysterically elevated to the universally human (315).

⁸³ Bürger seems to disagree with Benjamin’s account of *l’art pour art* as a desacralization of art and he actually suggests that it was in fact a *re-sacralization* of art, (28) but this discussion seems beyond the scope of my argument.

For Benjamin the only possibility to avoid the destructive effects of fascism is by correcting the “incapacity of peoples to order their relationships to one another in accord with the relationship they possess to nature through their technology” (320). Ultimately, Benjamin is advocating changing the relationship we have with nature and with technology—not as a means to war and death, but as a means to happiness and life.

In his preface to *Anti-Oedipus*, Foucault identifies and discusses a kind of fascism that is within us all and part of our everyday behavior: “the fascism that causes us to love power, to desire the very thing that dominates and exploits us” (xiii). Within this framework, we must be concerned with *how* to avoid being fascist, how to develop the art of living a non-fascist life. In order to overturn the established order and to envision a different way of doing politics, Deleuze and Guattari seek to analyze the relationship of desire to reality (xii). Foucault uses Deleuze and Guattari’s ideas to create a short list of principles to follow in an attempt to modify our own behaviour:

- Free political action from all unitary and totalizing paranoia.
- Develop action, thought, and desires by proliferation, juxtaposition, and disjunction, and not by subdivision and pyramidal hierarchization.
- Withdraw allegiance from the old categories of the Negative (law, limit, castration, lack, lacuna), which Western thought has so long held sacred as a form of power and an access to reality. Prefer what is positive and multiple, difference over uniformity, flows over unities, mobile arrangements over systems. Believe that what is productive is not sedentary but nomadic.
- Do not think that one has to be sad in order to be militant, even though the thing one is fighting is abominable. It is the connection of desire to reality (and not its retreat into the forms of representation) that possesses revolutionary force.
- Do not use thought to ground a political practice in Truth; nor political action to discredit, as mere speculation, a line of thought. Use political practice as an intensifier of thought, and analysis as a multiplier of the forms and domains for the intervention of political action.
- Do not demand of politics that it restore the “rights” of the individual, as philosophy has defined them. The individual is the product of power. What is needed is to “de-individualize” by means of multiplication and displacement,

diverse combinations. The group must not be the organic bond uniting hierarchized individuals, but a constant generator of de-individualization.

- Do not become enamored of power. (xiii-xiv)

In the context of Bolaño's work, it will become important to examine how literature can function according to these principles, structurally. That is, how the type of language and the kind of narrative style adopted can seek to perform these principles.

Another important component to Bolaño's writing is his approach to social relations, in particular in relationship to women. To that end, I think Klaus Theweleit's analysis of the fascist attitude in relationship to women will be useful. Deeply influenced by *Anti-Oedipus*, he seeks to combine Deleuze and Guattari's ideas with a radical feminist approach in order to understand how protofascist German soldiers rationalize the act of murder. Theweleit frames this issue in terms of individual actors that define themselves in negative relationship to women. I find value in Theweleit's exploration of how social relations are conceived: how the dread of being engulfed by the "other" produces monstrous results (xv).

Theweleit analyzes the ideological development of the *Freikorps*, which later became part of Hitler's Army. Formed after the formal end of the First World War, they were initially soldiers hired to quell social unrest, but eventually became autonomous armies. They fought for pay, but also for revenge, claiming that the communists, with their internationalist ideology, backstabbed Germany. For them, the period of 1914-1945 was a continuous period of uninterrupted war. Theweleit's study sets up to understand their psychology (x). Theweleit, echoing Benjamin's "Theory of Fascism", sees them as living for perpetual war. War and death are for them a way of life (xii).

Upon analyzing letters, fiction, and propaganda created by members of the *Freikorps*, Theweleit interprets the *Freikorps*' actions as prompted by the hatred of women, specifically the hatred of women's bodies and sexuality. This hatred, Theweleit reveals, is provoked by the dread of the soldier's dissolution, of being engulfed by women's bodies. The fascist fantasy is ultimately the dread of engulfment by the "other," emblemized by concepts such as mother, sea, or love. Theweleit makes a connection between the dread of women and how it transforms into the hatred of communism and the rebellious working class. As a promise, communism was seen as promiscuous mingling, a breaking down of old barriers, as something wild and disorderly. In more specific terms, it was seen as a threat to national borders, through its internationalist discourse, as well as a threat to the individual borders of the self—a threat to bourgeois morality.

In the writings of the *Freikorps* soldiers, the figure of woman fades out of sight as the contours of the male sharpen (35). Woman becomes the uncanny in the fascist imaginary (63). There are three types of women that permeate fascist writing: absent women (wives or fiancées left behind), "white nurses" (chaste and upper-class women), and "red women" (working class women, class enemies who threaten and deceive them). In the fascist imaginary, the mother—always seen from the perspective of a small child—is a split figure, who both protects and suffers stoically. (100) The mother protects, she is an angel, a home. But she also suffers in silence. The child admires this suffering, and wishes the mother to eventually die in order for him to admire her sacrifice (106). In this way, the mother is killed off by idealization and symbolic 'devivification'—she becomes a martyred angel (112).

As an important distinction between the kinds of women, “terror against a woman who isn’t identified with the mother/sister image is essentially self-defense” (183).

Therefore, the killing of a woman is interpreted and justified as self-defense.

While “normal” social relations have clearly defined physical and mental boundaries (names, for example), the fascist relations with women produce a conflictive, simultaneous *desire for* and *fear of* fusion with the other. Fascist language, contends Theweleit, is incapable of forming object-relations.⁸⁴ Instead, it appropriates and transforms reality (215).

1.2 On Chilean Fascisms

Many critics have insisted on the use of the term ‘fascism’ to describe the ideological bent of the Pinochet dictatorship. The Chilean dictatorship was not strictly fascist, but had strong connections to fascist ideology. Pinochet’s discourse, observes critic Hernán Vidal, reproduces the blood-purifying Reconquista rhetoric, while proposing a “national project” that will result in the development of capitalism and the modernization of Chile (quoted in McClennen 75). This fascist temporality combines a premodern use of time (member of the society are subjects of the state and leaders function as absolute sovereigns not to be questioned) with a modern use of time, which seeks to integrate the country into the global capitalist market: “Fascism relies on premodern myths of regeneration and a return to origins as well as on modern notions of citizen participation in nation-building” (McClennen 74).

⁸⁴ In object-relations theory, before ego-formation, the child is not yet able to feel or perceive its own boundaries as distinct from immediate caregivers; the ego differentiates itself out of the mother-child symbiosis (assuming the mother is the primary caregiver) and orients itself toward the social arena. Unlike Freud’s indirect orientation of desire towards the social sphere because of incest prohibition, desire orients itself directly toward the formation of social relations. See Melanie Klein’s work.

Also, historians have clearly traced an authoritarian tradition that combines Spanish imperialist reason, the Chilean constitution of 1833 under Diego Portales, and Prussian army training. The armed forces, which act to defend the nation against external threats and to maintain the internal security, “base their mission on a presumed natural law: despite efforts to achieve peace, there will always be war” (Loveman, *For la patria* 229). Therefore the presumption of “eternal war,” as previously discussed by Benjamin and Theweleit in their analyses of European fascism, is also the foundational discourse of the Latin American military *raison d’être*.

Loveman demonstrates how the 1973 golpe by Augusto Pinochet merely followed a long tradition of regimes of exception beginning early nineteenth century. In a sense, the military coup needed only to insert itself into a national institutional and legal tradition. Nonetheless, Pinochet exalts a radical nationalism and a foundational narrative. In one of Pinochet’s discourses he describes the September 11th coup as a foundational moment for a new nation, where the land was irrigated with the blood of sacrificed soldiers:

Y cuando acudiendo al llamado angustioso de nuestra ciudadanía, las Fuerzas Armadas y de Orden, decidieron actuar el 11 de septiembre de 1973, nuevamente nuestra tierra fue regada por la sangre de muchos de nuestros hombres, que cayeron luchando por la liberación de Chile. Quedaba de este modo en evidencia que el temple de nuestra raza y la fibra de nuestra nacionalidad para defender la dignidad o la soberanía de nuestra patria no habían muerto ni podrían morir jamás, porque son valores morales que se anidan en el alma misma de la chilenidad.⁸⁵

Pinochet’s rhetoric employs a mythical discourse, claiming an ethical imperative in the “sacrifice” for the country.

⁸⁵ “Discurso del general Augusto Pinochet en Cerro Chacarillas con ocasión del Día de la Juventud, el nueve de julio de 1977.” Web. <http://www.librosintinta.com/busca/discursos-augusto-pinochet/pdf/>. Accessed July, 1st, 2010.

In the same discourse Pinochet advocates for a new type of political regime, which needs to be completely re-created and taking its roots from an “authentic ... national tradition”:

... el 11 de septiembre no significó sólo el derrocamiento de un Gobierno ilegítimo y fracasado, sino que representó el término de un régimen político-institucional definitivamente agotado, y el consiguiente imperativo de construir uno nuevo. No se trata pues de una tarea de mera restauración sino de una obra eminentemente creadora, sin perjuicio de que dicha creación para ser fecunda debe enraizarse en los signos profundos de nuestra auténtica y mejor tradición nacional.

It is crucial to observe the use of the concept of ‘creation’ in regards to the envisioning of a new political regime, as well as the closed concept of nationhood, which is based on a very strict notion of geographical borders in a negative relationship to “foreign elements” that threaten national integrity, such as the ideological attacks of Marxism-Leninism. Theweleit, as we recall, had made the same observations regarding the proto-fascist soldiers and their repulsion of the communist floods that threaten the Prussian national integrity.⁸⁶

Historically, the military has seen communism as a threat to the patriotic values of “chilenidad” and this view has affected the civil-military relations in Chile, especially after 1940 (Loveman, *For la patria* 128). In other words, the social contract that the military saw itself as having with the civil society was the preservation of the ideological borders created by nationalism. Anticommunism was equal to patriotism. In this context, the election of Salvador Allende as president prompted the military to act according to

⁸⁶ “Quienes pretenden doblegarnos con **presiones o amenazas foráneas**, se equivocan rotundamente, y sólo verán crecer una cohesión interna que siempre se agiganta ante la adversidad. Quienes, por su parte pretenden desde el interior aliarse con estos **desbordes internacionales** que parecieran revivir formas de imperialismo que creíamos ya superadas en el Occidente, sólo logran retratarse mejor en sus ambiciones sin freno, y hacerse acreedores al justo desprecio del pueblo chileno.” [my emphasis] (Pinochet discourse 1977)

the political duty of safeguarding the constitutional order that Allende allegedly violated with the promise of a “Chilean road to socialism” (Loveman, *For la patria* 130).

Although Pinochet’s discourse is characterized by ultra-nationalistic values, it is well known that the military government introduced neoliberal policies. Nevertheless, the institution of free-market policies after the toppling of the Popular Unity government is aligned with the dictatorships’ foundational narrative because it acts in complete disregard to previous economic measures. It also strengthens the ideological bent of a foundational temporality while at the same time annihilating any sense of historicity.

Brett Levinson writes:

The *coup* or *golpe* did not occur in 1973 but is taking place today. To be sure, the *golpe de estado* happened in 1973, continued throughout the dictatorship, and insidiously exercised its force during the first phases of transition. But it did not *make a direct hit*, a real *golpe*, until now, as Chile experiences a kind of mass concussion to which, in the end—because of the stunned state of the people and the stunned people of the state—nobody can testify. And *that* is the *golpe*: the impossibility of testimony, and through testimony (true or false), of *knowledge* of the event that is now striking. (98-99)

Levinson’s observation on the continuation of the dictatorship into the present strengthens the case of a mythic temporality. Fascist values seep unquestioned into the neoliberal present, forming part of the post-dictatorial amnesia.

Thus, part of the social function of literature is to remember the fascist element of the military regime. It is for that reason that Bolaño insists on the fact that Wieder, the pilot in the Air Force who specializes in killing female poets, is forgotten about in the transition to democracy: “Chile lo olvida” (120). “Forgetting” Wieder in the post-dictatorship allows for viewing the transition to democracy as a break, not as the continuation of the dictatorship. The concept of mythic time is used for the

implementation and persistence of free market policies. That is why it is important to not forget Wieder, but also to see Wieder as an agent operating before, during, and after the dictatorship. Wieder's character embodies the foundational and ultra-nationalistic rhetoric espoused by Pinochet, but he also goes beyond it. He is an officer in the Chilean Air Force, aligned institutionally with the dictatorship, but he is also a free agent, operating beyond and above (literally) the totalitarian State. Benjamin's observation on the German *Freikorps* could not be more fitting for Wieder, who uses a military plane to write on the sky cryptic indications about the identity of the women he had murdered:

In the person of the pilot of a single airplane full of gas bombs, such leadership embodies all the absolute power which, in peacetime, is distributed among thousands of office managers—power to cut off a citizen's light, air and life. This simple bomber-pilot in his lofty solitude, alone with himself and his God, has power of attorney for his seriously stricken superior, the state; and wherever he puts his signature, the grass will cease to grow—and this is the “imperial” leader the authors have in mind (“Theories of Fascism” 320).

2. Bolaño's discursive unmaking of fascism: a language other

Bolaño's texts present an alternative use of temporality that actively seeks to challenge the fascist discourse based on mythical conceptions of time as well as the neoliberal discourse that sustains itself by giving the illusion of a perpetual present. Bolaño's play with temporality and his insistence on making connections among historical events in Europe and Latin America creates multi-faceted, multi-temporal versions of the nation. He also shows how literature and language can become complicit in the fascist operation, but he counterposes this with a different kind of language, one that conceptualizes history not as redemptive, but as an amalgam of temporalities. His critique of fascism employs a combination of allegorical writing (based on Benjamin's

theory of allegory) with what I call a “feminine writing.” It is ultimately a practice of writing that emphasizes the historicity of literature in general and of language in particular.

Bolaño’s fascists exhibit a dread of contamination in relationship to literature, in relationship to writing. For example, Wieder’s murder of the poetesses stands in for the attempt to eradicate the discourse produced by alternative, feminine voices. Also, in spite of Wieder’s efforts to erase history from art, his “art,” although presented as “new,” is a plagiarism of other works (either as a sinister reversal of vanguard art or as Biblical excerpts). In contrast, Bolaño’s writing asserts the idea of impurity, of contamination. His writing is full of traces of other works, inter-textual references, and allusions to other writers. It functions not to establish a tradition, a kind of artistic lineage, but rather to illustrate the idea of the body of text as always already impure knowledge.

Theweleit suggests the metaphor of the “flood” for conceptualizing a kind of writing that emphasizes its historicity. Theweleit argues that the *Freikorps* soldiers were driven by a fear of dissolving borders, a reactive need to affirm the body’s hardness and invulnerability (230-234). The unbounded flows are associated with the maternal, the sexual, the feminine, as well as with history. Against the fascist dread of contamination, Bolaño superposes a kind of writing that allows for the opening up of the floodgates of history. Writing itself becomes a flood—of unconnected stories, of detours, and repetitions. In this way, writing and reading become practices that help us overcome our fear of being tainted or contaminated by history.

Nevertheless, this is not simply an inversion of the fascist discourse—rather it is an attempt at transgressing it, in the Foucauldian sense. Transgression, as conceptualized

by Foucault is an operation constantly involved with the limit (72). Non-fascist discourse, in other words, cannot exist without fascist discourse. It is not about installing a non-fascist language instead of a fascist one through the elimination of the borders of language. It is an interrogation of the limit and the questioning of language by language (85). “The experience of the limit . . . is realized in language and in the movement where it says what cannot be said” (86). Derrida has called this kind of writing “feminine writing”, an aspect of writing which “opens language to its own beyond” (in Jenckes, 56). A feminine element of writing emphasizes the limits of such language, interrupting and undermining a masculine form of representation through identity-affirming language (Jenckes, 56-57).

Thinking the limit means living uncomfortably next to the limit. The feminine element of writing in Bolaño is expressing this paradox through the use of a language that lends itself to historical contamination, while at the same time thinking its relationship to the fascist element. This will also be articulated in the recognition scenes that take place at the end of both novels, where Belano recognizes himself as Wieder’s “horrendous Siamese twin” (152) and when Urrutia recognizes the “joven envejecido” as himself (149).

2.1 Bolaño’s use of language to highlight and problematize the fascist element

I am using the concepts extrapolated from Benjamin’s work on the seventeenth century German tragic drama, *Trauerspiel*, because Benjamin’s analysis is ultimately concerned with the political implications of the use of different concepts of temporality in artworks. The connection between Benjamin’s work and the cultural productions during

the Latin American post-dictatorship has been clearly established by critics, especially by Idelber Avelar.

Avelar argues that post-1973, that is, post-Boom, literature has lost its capacity to maintain a meaningful dialogue with its corresponding societal sphere and can, from then on, only function as allegory (22). While the Boom and its foundational fantasy functioned as an “imaginary resolution of the underdevelopment in other areas” (23), where economics played a symbolic role, the post-dictatorship scene has essentially destroyed the symbolic capacity of literature. The symbol has been transformed into a “becoming-allegory”—the old symbols have become corpses, ruins of what they once were. Avelar’s conceptualization of the post-dictatorship is intrinsically related to the idea of catastrophe; for him post-dictatorship is not a historical moment, but rather the moment in which the “defeat” is accepted as irreducible determinant of Southern Cone literary production:

...el giro hacia la alegoría equivale a una transmutación epocal, paralela y coextensiva a la imposibilidad de representarse el fundamento último: derrota constitutiva de la productividad de lo literario, instalación, en fin, de su objeto de representación en cuanto objeto perdido. (27)

Thus, Avelar maintains that the literary is in crisis. Not only does it not *produce* anymore (symbolic imaginaries etc.), it only functions as indicator of the impossibility to represent its own “defeat”. Avelar describes post-dictatorial cultural production as “allegories of defeat,” in keeping with Benjamin’s understanding of allegory and the baroque mourning play, the *Trauerspiel*.

Benjamin makes a clear distinction between tragedy and *Trauerspiel*—literally ‘mourning-play.’ While tragedy is grounded in myth, *Trauerspiel* is rooted in historical

events and temporality. Historicity generates both its content and its style. The *Trauerspiel*, a “ceremony of grief”, is haunted by the idea of catastrophe (*The Origin* 66). In my reading of Benjamin’s allegory I follow the work of Gilloch and Jenckes to discuss the revolutionary potential of allegory in terms of its linguistic specificities and conceptualization of history.

Allegory, *Trauerspiel*’s main literary trope, is a way of looking at things, as well as a rhetorical mode. In Benjamin’s study, allegory is a strange combination between nature and history, where the connection between meaning and sign is obscured (*The Origin* 167-173). The allegorical image is arbitrary: one image or object can stand for another or a plethora of others (Gilloch 58). Since the image and the object might not have any relationship, then any allegory can be used. That is, there is no “natural” relationship between object and sign (for example, with national literature/allegory, where the private is presumed to represent the national as a natural resonance). The function of allegory is to fill the gap between essence and manifestation, while it has the capacity to demystify through its arbitrariness and extreme character. Allegory has a demystifying force because it shifts the focus onto the things as things, naked of other significance, especially symbolic. This is its revolutionary force.

Because allegory is rooted in history, it allows for an appreciation of the transience of things. “Allegories are in the realm of thoughts what ruins are in the realm of things” (178). The language of the mourning-play is directly related to its historical context, initially the ruin of the absolute state. It is characterized by lamentation and has a tendency towards the excessive, ostentatious, and verbose (Gilloch 59). While for Benjamin the historical context was the violence of the First World War and the political

chaos foreshadowing the Second World War, a similar linguistic form, I argue, is present in Bolaño's post-dictatorial narrative.

Allegory points to a form of historicity that can never be fully represented: "allegory breaks up naturalized concepts of history and life, creating discontinuities through which other times and histories can emerge" (Jenckes xiii).⁸⁷ Jenckes asserts that "Benjamin's conception of allegory is a radical alternative to the false dilemma of progression and regression (72)." A non-redemptive concept of allegory opens a space for "representing history without the idealization of a redemptive wholeness characteristic of ideology. It would intervene in such historical representations by opening them up to their constitutive distortion, to what they tend to exclude" (77).

Bolaño's language offers a possible, yet non-redemptive, vision of how literature needs to rethink its social function in light of its uncomfortable proximity and complicity to microfascism. Even if (or perhaps because) Bolaño is suspicious of the critical projects of both the vanguard and the Boom, he presents his work as a constant rewriting of other literary productions, with the difference that his writing is integrated within the historical context in which he writes. Within the texts, we will see that a close reading will illuminate repetitions (in passages that employ a heavy use of polysyndeton and hypotactic style, for example) and very specific use of verb tenses. Additionally, the narrative defies a linear temporality by taking frequent detours as Bolaño brings to the

⁸⁷ Jenckes distinguishes between two kinds of allegory: national allegory and Benjaminian allegory (68). For Benjamin allegory represented the possibility of a new kind of historical understanding outside of paradigm of Judeo-Christian teleology (75). However, Baroque allegory fails to remain open to difference and Benjamin indicates that it becomes even more ideological once it returns to an ontoteological structure. After contemplating and denying the abyss of temporality, Baroque allegory returns to a transcendental vision of history, which will pave the way for the formation of the modern state (76). However, Jenckes argues for salvaging the type of non-redemptive allegory found in Benjamin's "Epistemo-Critical Prologue" instead of the redemptive kind of Baroque allegory found at the end of the *Origin of German Tragic Drama*.

fore other stories that have been repressed by the foundational discourse of the dictatorship. All of these examples represent formal attempts to use language and image in order to play with temporality (slow down time, mold time, morph time, etc.) as an attempt to rethink time (beyond and besides the neoliberal time; the end of history; the perpetual present etc.)

In the case of the novels analyzed here, an allegorical reading of the actions and statements of Wieder and Urruria would literally pry-open and unravel their redemptive discourse, allowing us to read the erasures upon which fascist discourse is constructed. Their foundational or teleological conception of history is contrasted with a historicity that can never fully be represented. For example, some of Bolaño's formal techniques are an insistence on artificiality, exaggeration, and even the use of blatantly obvious names in order to challenge easy and transparent interpretations.

Rewriting and contamination

Bolaño's concern for the conception of history and temporality is manifested in his relationship to literary tradition and his constant inter-textual references. In terms of authorship and association to his literary predecessors, one can trace a language that invites contamination by other authors, in particular Borges, Marcel Schwob and Dante.⁸⁸ This approach confounds notions of national literature, since it references and is contaminated by non-Chilean histories and literatures. For example, references to characters from Dante's *Divine Comedy* are present in all of Bolaño's texts, specifically Sordello in *Nocturno de Chile*, Virgil in *Amuleto*, and Dante himself throughout as the

⁸⁸ The references to Dante and their clear historical grounding work as a counterpoint to Zurita's *Anteparaiso*, who uses references to Dante in order to universalize and mystify his poetry-performance.

eternal exile.⁸⁹ In the case of *Estrella distante*, the novel is the rewriting and expansion of a previous episode encountered in *Literatura nazi*. *Literatura nazi* itself is modeled on Borges' *Historia universal de la infamia*, which in turn takes its inspiration from Marcel Schwob's *Vidas imaginarias*. Similarly, Bolaño's novel *Amuleto* is a rewriting of a short episode in *Detectives Salvajes*, one that also takes its impetus from another one of Marcel Schwob's works, *La cruzada de los niños*.⁹⁰

This genealogy of writing accentuates the historical context of the works. The works are engaged in an intimate association with each other, but are also integrated into their specific historical context. In a sense one can argue that the individual authority of the author is elided, while the connection among the works is preserved precisely through their historical difference. This is clearly a rejection of the ideological desire to break with the past by creating something "new," as well as a political stand that challenges the ahistoricity of fascist discourse. The desire to be contaminated by other works (as well as to contaminate other works) modifies the writer's relationship to his work—it stops being one's creation and instead becomes a process, something to be contextualized and recontextualized.

The opening pages of *Estrella distante* offer a closer look at Bolaño's conceptual understanding of the act of rewriting. They are presented as a continuation of the last chapter in the previous *Nazi Literature in America* (1996). The novel narrates the story of Ramírez Hoffman, an official in the Chilean Air Forces during the military dictatorship. In this gesture of re-writing the story, Bolaño establishes a continuum

⁸⁹ Sordello is a reference to the false patriot who Dante encounters, and is a name constantly invoked by Urrutia, but is not acknowledged as such by him. Rather Urrutia asks himself repeatedly who he is without ever answering his own question.

⁹⁰ This will be discussed more in depth in Chapter 4 on *Amuleto*.

between his works, an exploration in the possibilities of telling-retelling-exploring-exploding for reworking our understanding of the traumatic past. The prologue introduces the novel in the following terms:

En el último capítulo de mi novela La literatura nazi en América se narraba tal vez demasiado esquemáticamente (no pasaba de las veinte páginas) la historia del teniente Ramírez Hoffman, de la FACH. Esta historia me la contó mi compatriota Arturo B, veterano de las guerras floridas y suicida en África, quien no quedó satisfecho del resultado final. El último capítulo de La literatura nazi servía como contrapunto, acaso como anticlímax del grotesco literario que lo precedía, y Arturo deseaba una historia más larga, no espejo ni explosión de otras historias sino espejo y explosión en sí misma. Así pues, nos encerramos durante un mes y medio en mi casa de Blanes y con el último capítulo en mano y al dictado de sus sueños y pesadillas compusimos la novela que el lector tiene ahora ante sí. Mi función se redujo a preparar bebidas, consultar algunos libros, y discutir, con él y con el fantasma cada día más vivo de Pierre Menard, la validez de muchos párrafos repetidos. (11) [original emphasis]

The process of writing is envisioned as a constant re-writing, a never-ending retelling of the same story, but with differences that embed language into history, that give it a renewed historical relevance. The process of “reworking” itself introduces history in the narrative fabric.

The allusion to the ghost of Pierre Menard keeps the reader attentive to the importance of historical specificity and the particularities of positioning oneself within the historical context (11). Pierre Menard’s “invisible work” has been to re-write the *Quixote* exactly as Cervantes had written it. The impossible task would be to reach the exact same result but through a different process that actively takes into account the changes brought upon by the passing of time, arriving at a point of convergence in the text per-se, but departing from different destinations. The *Quijote* written by Menard is concurrently an-other and the same, allowing for an “actualization” of the text in the sense that the writing of the exact same passage produces radically different

interpretations. The act of re-writing gives renewed relevance to the text while at the same time recognizing that this action is a historically conditioned inversion of the original text. That is, the text is structurally the same, but its interpretation is historically construed in such a way that Pierre Menard's *Quixote* is the *anti-Quixote*. In this process, though, the text itself is a product of interpretation and even if it "looks" the same, it reads as its negative/inverse. The relationship between text and its anti-text (which *is* the text) is mediated by history and the texts are different not because of their content, but because of the context in which they are written.

The narrator is Arturo B., "veterano de las guerras flóridas y suicida en África": an already dead alter-ego of Bolaño, the autor. Arturo B. is one of the characters in a later novel of Bolaño's, *Los detectives salvajes*, functioning as a bridge between the texts. This narrative strategy reinforces the continuity between distinct texts, giving the impression of constant rewriting. The first person narrative indicates a personal, thus subjective and incomplete, historical interpretation but it also emphasizes an *affective investment* in the narrative production, endowing the process of re-writing with an affective dimension.

The historical dimension of language

Bolaño underscores Wieder's attempts to present himself as outside of history by using language in a very particular way. As we will see, it is as if Wieder does not acknowledge that the object of his discourse has a history. In contrast, Bolaño seeks to counteract these mythical dimensions of Wieder's fascist language by exploring the relationship between language and temporality. By changing tense and mood when

describing traumatic events, Bolaño calls into salience their historical dimension. Bolaño underscores time and time again the historical dimension of language.

Estrella distante begins by providing a clear historical framework. It anticipates the catastrophe of the coup through the use of the imperfect tense: “1971 o tal vez en 1972, cuando Salvador Allende era presidente de Chile” (13).⁹¹ The novel introduces the figure of Alberto Ruiz-Tagle, who will later be known as Carlos Wieder (Ramírez Hoffman in *Literatura nazi*) as an enigmatic participant in two literary circles (*talleres*). Ruiz-Tagle’s language is ahistorical and antithetical to the politically charged discourse of the Allende years. His speech is hard to pin down, individual, and out-of-time. Belano remarks, “hablaba como un autodidacta... hablaba como supongo que hablamos ahora todos nosotros, los que estamos vivos (hablaba como si viviera en medio de una nube)” (14).⁹² Ruiz-Tagle’s formal Spanish—“Ese español de ciertos lugares de Chile (lugares más mentales que físicos) en donde el tiempo parece no transcurrir” (16) contrasts sharply with the “Marxist-mandrakist” slang that served to create a sense of community and solidarity among the other literary circle participants.

Specifically, in terms of artistic production, the narrator noted that Ruiz-Tagle’s poems were written with “distance and coldness” (21), another indication that language had a particularly insignificant, immaterial function in the formation of the discourse

⁹¹ Among the other participants in the circles were Arturo Belano, his friend Bibiano O’Ryan, the Garmendia sisters, Verónica y Angélica, the *stars* of the taller (15), Juan Stein, Diego Soto, Carmen Villagrán, and Marta (Gorda) Posadas. Each of the characters is to play a specific role in the *search* for Carlos Wieder. To sketch a short list, which of course does not do them justice, but frames the action: Belano as storyteller; Bibiano as collector of evidence against Wieder; the Garmendia sisters as unique, star-like, incriminating material proof of Wieder’s guilt; Marta Posadas as witness; and Stein and Soto as necessary deviations from a linear search. Bibiano’s work as collector, investigator and detective is complemented by Belano’s function as storyteller, together shaping the content and the form of the search.

⁹² The fact that “we all now have the same kind of speech” is a critical reflection on the a-historical dimension of the post-dictatorship and of the continuity of repression symbolized by Wieder into the transition to democracy.

proposed by Ruiz-Tagle/Wieder. Nonetheless, Marta (la Gorda), one of the participants in the literary circles, is convinced that Alberto will revolutionize Chilean poetry (24). In her words, the new poetry will not be written (*escrita*) but made (*hecha*). “Hacer poesía” implies the idea of creation of something concrete and material, which supersedes and replaces language.

The void that is present in the atemporality of Wieder’s language encounters an additional dimension in the spaces inhabited by the character. Wieder’s apartment was characterized by a *lack of something that could not be named* but which was present, tangible. As Bibiano observed after an inopportune visit to Wieder’s apartment, “aquella casa desnuda y sangrante” reflects the presence of a void. Wieder’s need for a “filler” for his lack [of meaning] becomes exemplified by the murder of the Garmendia sisters shortly after the coup.

During the dictatorship it becomes clear to Belano and his friend Bibiano that Carlos Wieder is a military pilot and they begin suspecting that he is also the person responsible for various murders of female poets. One of the many performances that Wieder gives, in which he uses his plane to write in the sky, mentions the names of some disappeared female poets, giving subtle indications that they were not alive anymore. It is symptomatic that Wieder’s attacks are directed almost exclusively towards females, female poets in particular. As Theweleit had argued, fascist male identity is shaped by dread and revulsion towards what women represent.⁹³ By destroying the young poetesses, Wieder takes away their historical presence, thus rendering them nature, inserting them into mythical time. Also, by writing their names in the sky with smoke, he goes one step

⁹³ The issue of the dread against women will be explained in detail in Chapter 4.

further, by turning their names into air. It is as if he is openly performing an act of *hacer desaparecer*, but on women who are already *desaparecidas*.

Belano and Bibiano's suspicions about Wieder's assassinations are confirmed when, in the post-dictatorship, Wieder is tentatively accused of the murder of the Garmendia sisters, former participants in the literary circles. The murder of the two female poets, unlike the rest of the narrative, is described in the *present tense*, with a fast-paced, dynamic language, which endows the story with a current urgency and relevance. It is recounted not unlike a piece of documentary footage, but which is based on conjectural information (29), a *testimonio* twice removed.⁹⁴ The historical time of the action had been clearly established; however the tense in which the passage is related visibly reduces the temporal and affective distance of the murder. The conclusion to the passage seeks to restore a particular sense of justice, through the material resurgence of a body that had been made to disappear:

Y nunca se encontrarán los cadáveres, o sí, hay *un* cadáver, un solo cadáver que aparecerá años después en una fosa común, el de Angélica Garmendía, mi adorable, mi incomparable Angélica Garmendía, pero únicamente ése, como para probar que Carlos Wieder es un hombre y no un dios. (33) [original emphasis]

The verbal tense switches momentarily to the future, as if sealing the destiny of the female poets. However, the "o sí" follows and reverses the temporal thrust of the previous statement. Now the present tense is used: "*hay un cadaver.*" The discovery of the body has a profound significance that permits us to envision the possibility of demystifying the totalizing and timeless discourse of the dictatorship. It exposes the

⁹⁴ Similarly to Ruiz's documentary work there is the attempt to represent and the necessity of representing, albeit knowing it is impossible. In chapter 4, the novel will function in a similar fashion, through its relationship to *testimonio*.

inherent blemishes of a discourse built around cleaning, of purging the nation of its unwanted elements. The corpse bears witness to the human (and not superhuman) nature of the killer—it is the *physical evidence* of his failure at perfection (his failure to raise himself above historical time). It shatters Wieder’s superhuman self-image through its material presence, reinserting him into the narrative of a temporality that he has fought so hard to conquer. Bolaño tirelessly connects Wieder’s attempts to transcend history by linking his artistic performances, which are literally made up of air, with their material and very historical counterpart on the ground, the buried bodies.

Another foundational attempt, this time in the realm of “poetry”, is also reinterpreted by Bolaño’s language. Shortly after the coup, the narrator observes Wieder’s first “poetical act”—the writing in the sky of the opening lines of the Genesis:

IN PRINCIPIO ...CREAVIT DEUS...COELUM ET TERRAM
TERRA AUTEM ERAT INANIS... ET VACUA... ET TENEBRAE
ERRANT... SUPER FACIEM ABYSSI... ET SPIRITUS DEI...
FEREBATUR SUPER AQUAS...
DIXITQUE DEUS... FIAT LUX... ET FACTA LUX... ET FACTA EST
LUX
ET VIDIT DEUS... LUCEM QUOD... ESSET BONA...ET DIVISIT...
1LUCEM A TENEBRIS (36-37)

He describes the witnessing of the writing as if he were asleep—as if Wieder’s performative act had a hypnotizing power over the observers. The act has a mentally paralyzing and relativizing effect: “todo me pareció inmerso en un color gris transparente, como si el Centro La Peña estuviera *desapareciendo en el tiempo*” (36; my emphasis). As the fighter plane disappears, the narrator becomes aware of the nightmare-like sensation that the act produces: “como si todo aquello no fuera sino un *espejismo o una pesadilla*” (38; my emphasis). The act is experienced as a nightmare with no materiality of its own: it’s a mirror image of an object that does not exist. Wieder

attempts to found a certain art through a religiously tinged act. However, this attempt is also derided by Bolaño, who emphasizes the irony of writing a foundational statement with air, which quickly vanishes without a trace.

Wieder's creative impetus is also slighted by the fact that his gesture is quickly interpreted as an imitation of earlier historical events in Europe. Norberto, who is imprisoned in the same penitentiary as Belano and is rumored to be going crazy, recognizes the type of plane: Messerschmitt 109 Luftwaffe, a fighter plane tested at Guernica during the Spanish Civil War and used by the German Nazi Army starting 1940. Norberto, a veteran of WWII, shouts that the Second World War is returning, returning, returning... and that he is witnessing the rebirth of the Blitzkrieg⁹⁵—the Lightning War—, a military combat strategy characterized by speed and the element of surprise. The spectral return of an element from WWII stands in, of course, as a metaphor for fascism, and also for the return of a specific type of operation: the solitary agent, who uses discrete, fast, and quick attacks, not unlike electric pulses reminiscent of the electric shocks received by the torture victims of the Chilean dictatorship.

The mythic fascist temporality that Wieder wants to introduce is disturbed. What Wieder presents as foundational act is just another repetition of other fascist acts. Thus, Wieder himself does repeat other gestures—the difference being that in this case the repetition is erased. However, despite Wieder's attempts at erasing the doubling, the erasure is exposed by Norberto's recognition of the repetition. However, as Marx has observed in the "The Eighteenth Brumaire", the return is itself a parody, not less harmful however. The second coming is a farce—Wieder's performative act of writing in the air

⁹⁵ Strategically, the ideal was to swiftly produce an adversary's collapse through a short campaign fought by a small, professional army. Operationally, its goal was to use indirect means, such as, mobility and shock, to render an adversary's plans irrelevant or impractical. (Wikipedia)

is a parody of the attack on Guernica and the German Blitzkrieg. These connections shed light on the historical parallels between the Spanish Republic and the Allende government, the Civil War and the coup d'état, and the subsequent dictatorships.

Before the end of his performance, Wieder writes a final word: “APRENDAN” (39). In this command Wieder positions himself as the God of the Old Testament. The desire to found the world through a performative act is both reactionary—it demands a certain return to the origins of humankind, a pre-history—and empty, since the isolated command in the sky has no material referent on the ground. In the Old Testament the act of divine Creation is understood as a linguistic one, in which God calls things into being: “God spoke – and there was” (Benjamin *One Way Street*, 114). Thus, God guarantees the absolute relationship between object (signified) and name (signifier). (Gilloch 61)

Wieder, in other words, poses himself as God, as outside history, and he does it through language. However, Wieder’s language, in contrast to the act of Creation, can only point to the fact that he is *not* God; his command cannot and does not create a world. His command can only point to the fact that it is unclear what he wants his spectators to learn.

In relation to Wieder’s objectless command, Gareth Williams writes:

In contrast to Zurita’s ‘La Vida Nueva’, and in contrast to the neo-avant-garde Chilean *avanzada*’s insistence on the insubordination of signs and the dismantling of Chile’s representational processes, Roberto Bolaño uncovers not the possibility of historical transcendence or the openings of new critical languages, but what Giorgio Agamben calls ‘the limit concept of State power’: the fundamental structure of a pure command without the mediation of representation. (137)

While I agree that Bolaño explores ‘the limit concept of State power’, we need to recognize that in the exploration of that limit is where a language-other can be formed. Precisely by recognizing the emptiness of that gesture, as well as historicizing it, is where

we can make attempts at a dislocation of sovereignty.

The allegorical use of names

Bolaño's deliberate use of allegorical language, in the sense discussed previously, is illustrated in the names of his characters. When attempting to understand the names' meaning, it is not so much a question of interpreting the "meaning" of the names because their meanings are intentionally transparent. They become a parody on the idea of naming as a symbol of something. There is a double play of incredibly obvious meaning—the association of some characters with the dictatorship and capitalism, for example—as well as the rupture of the symbolic value of a name. In this way Bolaño attempts to point to the failure of the symbolic operation (the failure of the symbol to represent anything), while at the same time restructuring relationships within language (between the name and the object named). It is an allegorical operation in the Benjaminian sense of the word, which lays bare the arbitrariness of meaning. "Whereas the meaning of allegory depends upon an oscillation between two discrete terms, the power of a symbol resides in the unity and immediacy with which it expresses an idea" (Gilloch 80). Benjaminian allegory introduces a historical element to language because it is not total and immediate, like symbol is, and it introduces a proliferation of meanings.

In the case of Sebastián Urrutia-Lacroix's name, Urrutia is an originally Basque name, which usually denotes an upper class provenance in Chile, while Lacroix is the French name for 'cross', clearly indicating his religious profession. The two capitalist agents of fascism, who approach Urrutia-Lacroix regarding teaching Marxism classes to the military junta, are named ODEIM and OIDO. Their inverted names spell MIEDO

and ODIO (74). The linguistic mirror-image is a very thinly veiled strategy of establishing the relationship of the characters with their profession. In this case, the capitalist agents of the dictatorship disseminate fear and hate. Additionally, Urrutia's literary father figure has two names: the real-life literary critic "Alone" is converted in the novel in "Farewell." His "real" name is "Señor González Lamarca" – he is literally a brand. Thus, 'Alone' or 'Farewell' or 'Lamarca' can mean both solitude and capitalism and a waving goodbye and so on and so forth... Like allegory, names are signifiers that can allude to a multitude of meanings and interpretations, but they can also be read as pointing to nothing at all, thus thwarting our efforts at signification.

The main character in *Estrella distante* is called, at various points, Carlos Ramírez Hoffman (in *Literatura Nazi*), Alberto Ruiz-Tagle during the Allende years, Carlos Wieder during the dictatorship, and even R.P. English after leaving Chile for Europe. Gareth Williams has established how "in the relation of immediacy between Ruiz-Tagle and Wieder the name of neoliberal democracy (Ruiz-Tagle) is in fact the monstrous and violent inscription of the military coup of 1973 (Wieder) and vice-versa, without any form of mediating the relation between the two" (135-136).⁹⁶ Without taking away from the connection established between the dictatorship and the neoliberal transition to democracy, another possible link can be made, which strengthens my case for the figure of the "priest-warrior" discussed above. The real-life priest Alfredo Ruiz-Tagle, maternal uncle of Eduardo Frei Ruiz-Tagle, and staunch anti-Marxist, could have inspired the

⁹⁶ Williams in referring to Eduardo Frei Ruiz-Tagle, who was president of Chile from 1994 to 2000.

name of Ruiz-Tagle.⁹⁷ This connection adds to the historical link between the neoliberal social order and the military regime, pointing to an even earlier, right wing, connection.

Also it is important to note that the symbolic meaning of the name Wieder, its etymology, indicates a connection with the word “again,” which is related with the imminent threat of fascism: “*Wieder*, según Bibiano nos contó, quería decir «otra vez», «de nuevo», «nuevamente», «por segunda vez», «de vuelta», en algunos contextos «una y otra vez», «la próxima vez» en frases que apuntan al futuro” (50). It can also stand in for the mythic, foundational temporality of fascism.

The search for meaning attached to names, assumes that there must be something essential and unique about him that we can decipher. However, the name could also point to a multitude of other meanings. This thwarts our desires and expectations to know something about Wieder’s character through his name. Bibiano’s research in the etymology of the word “Wieder” presents us with a disconnected enumeration of possible meanings, which does nothing to establish a connection between name and actions, but rather it opens the field to an infinite number of speculations:

E incluso, ya entrado en materia, decía que *Weide* significaba «sauce llorón», y que *Weiden* quería decir «pastar», «apacentar», «cuidar animales que pastan», lo que lo llevaba a pensar en el poema de Silva Acevedo, *Lobos y Ovejas*, y en el carácter profético que algunos pretendían observar en él. E incluso *Weiden* también quería decir regodearse morbosamente en la contemplación de un objeto que excita nuestra sexualidad y/o nuestras tendencias sádicas. [. . .] . . . y apuntaba la posibilidad de que el abuelo del piloto Wieder se hubiera llamado Weider y que en las oficinas de emigración de principios de siglo una errata

⁹⁷ See Ruiz-Tagle, Alfredo. *¡Arauco la Bronca!* Andres Bello, 1983. Print. Also see his obituary: *El Mercurio S. A.P.* “Alfredo Ruiz-Tagle, fundador de Mi Casa.” Web. 9 July 2010.

hubiera convertido a Weider en Wieder. Eso si no se llamaba *Bieder*, «probo», «modoso», habida cuenta que la labidental W y la bidental B confunden fácilmente al oído. Y también recordaba que el sustantivo *Widder* significa «carnero» y «aries», y aquí uno podía sacar todas las conclusiones que quisiera. (50-51).

In other words, the intent to find logic behind Wieder's actions through the symbolic meaning of his name is unproductive. Bibiano's research points to the failure of certainty about accessing any kind of insight into Wieder. What is being signified is irrelevant, in an analogous way to how allegory reveals the lack of connection between sign and meaning. The attempt to interpret or understand Wieder through his name gives us a false sense of knowledge, sending us on a false search. Similarly to how a transparent representation is questioned in Ruiz's cinema, Bolaño uses names to unsettle the false sense of security we get from transparent forms of representational knowledge.

The detours

In the middle of the novel and with no explanation, Bolaño narrates three seemingly unrelated episodes about three male artists, which seem to distract us from the main goal of the novel, the search for Wieder's whereabouts in the post-dictatorship. However, the episodes acquire certain significance in relationship to the search itself. They work to destabilize the narrative borders of the search for Wieder in order to weaken his character's hold on the narrative. It is both a gesture of solidarity with the destinies of three exiles, as well as an act of displacement. The search for the element of terror in *Estrella Distante* opens up, in a sinister fashion, the narrative space to remember and retell the stories of those who have been its victims, and whose destinies are tied together by this monstrous thread. In a Benjaminian fashion, discrete fragments come to

the fore, like elements of a constellation. This detour illustrates the need for a non-hierarchical constellation of historical moments, putting the reader in contact with the destinies of the two leaders of the literary circles.

The first one, the poet Juan Stein, was born in 1945 and was the leader of one of the literary circles frequented by Belano. (56) Among his literary influences were Nicanor Parra, Ernesto Cardenal, Enrique Lihn, and Jorge Teillier. The biographical description resembles a “narrativized” account of a standard author’s biography that one usually encounters in a collection of poems. The purpose here is manifold: to recognize Belano’s friend and mentor as poet in his own right by appropriating a standard form of biographical presentation, while challenging the standard by modifying its form to include a highly personal rendition of his interests and obsessions. In this way, Bolaño questions the manner in which poets are represented by the literary institution (critics, editors, publishers) and institutionalized through formal rituals that reduce them to years, influences, and works published.

Among Stein’s greatest non-literary influences was a general in the Red Army, Ivan Cherniakovski. His mother’s cousin, Cherniakovski is Stein’s familial and historical link to a combative yet heroic past of anti-fascist resistance during WWII. After the coup, Stein disappears (65). Later on, Bibiano “discovers” him in a journal on “Chilean terrorists” and the Sandinista Front in Nicaragua. Stein becomes the global Latin American revolutionary, fighting in Nicaragua, Angola, Paraguay (is part of a conspiracy to assassinate Somoza), and Colombia, among others. Various sources portray Stein as a Che-like figure, half military, half intellectual, redefining his Ukranian uncle’s trajectory to the Latin American context. Later on, Bibiano’s investigations lead him to believe that

an alternative possibility to Stein's destiny was that Stein had simply returned to his mother's house and died there. Even though we never find out which version is the correct one, the two possibilities are presented as equally viable. The disorientation produces a narrative that challenges a monolithic version of a destiny. It exposes the inherent difficulties of detective work while presenting the search for evidence as a process rather than a goal. The search stirs memories, keeping the process active and preventing historical fossilization (which is why Bibiano never finds Stein's grave).

The murder of an exiled poet by a group of European neo-Nazis strengthens the case that Bolaño makes for the continuation of fascism in the present and the uneasy relationship between Latin America and Europe. Diego Soto, a close friend of Stein's, an indigenous poet who translates French texts, goes into exile in East Germany and later France. He leads a happy family life until he is stabbed to death while trying to rescue a woman from being beaten by group of neo-Nazis (80). The account is described using a mixture of facts (forensic analysis, witness version), desires (he insulted the skinheads in the Spanish speech of Southern Chile), and affective language.

The verbal tense changes abruptly from the past tense to the present tense when describing the scene of Soto's death (80). The switch to the present tense is emblematic of a desire to make present the story, to reinvent—not the circumstances, which are well documented, but to *redefine the terms in which the story is told*: the tenderness, the actuality, the tender pain, the admiration in a certain sense, become primary. The facts are present and well documented, but secondary. As we recall, the present tense was also used to tell the story of the assassination of the Garmendia sisters. The very specific use of verb tenses, which change from the past to the present when narrating the fascist-

motivated crimes, bring the deaths into the present. The consistent change of tenses at these moments connects the stories of the murders, reinforcing the historical parallels between Wieder and (neo-) Nazi sentiment as well as the similarities between Chilean and European forms of fascism.

2.2 Fascism, vanguard, and the autonomy of art

In line with the previously discussed fascist operation of hyper-rigidifying borders, it is not surprising that art is seen as a separate domain from politics and history. Wieder and Urrutia's acts can be seen as attempts at severing art from its political and historical context. Nonetheless, Bolaño shows us over and over again that this operation has monstrous consequences. For instance, Wieder's photographic rendering of his crimes is nothing else than the expression of the myth of national regeneration through art: it is a sinister fulfillment of the political violence through representation. But before going in depth, a short discussion of "literary fascism" is in order.

The aesthetic basis of totalitarian political vision has been approached most notably by Walter Benjamin, who saw fascism as the aestheticizing of politics and communism as the politicization of aesthetics: "This is the situation of politics which Fascism is rendering aesthetic. Communism responds by politicizing art" ("The Work of Art" 1936). Starting from the first half of Benjamin's thesis, David Carroll sought to analyze the role played by art and literature in fascism.⁹⁸ The heart of his argument resides in suggesting that literary fascism asserts the autonomy of literature from history and politics. Yet, Carroll counters, this culturalist attitude towards literature has drastic

⁹⁸ While Carroll seeks to understand what he calls "literary fascists"—nationalist extremist pre-WWII French writers and intellectuals—his analysis is useful because it examines particularly fascist rhetoric in relationship to a particular conception of culture.

and inescapable consequences in the political realm. By insisting on the totalized, organic unity of the artwork, literary fascism transforms the idea of integral national culture into a political ideology:

In a sense, literary fascism exploits the totalizing tendencies implicit in literature itself and constitutes a technique or a mode of fabrication, a form of fictionalizing or aestheticizing not just of literature but of politics as well, and the transformation of the disparate elements of each into organic, totalized *works of art*. (7, original emphasis)

Peter Bürger had shown how the concept of the autonomy of art detaches art from the praxis of life while at the same time obscures the historical conditions of this process of detachment (41). In a sense, there is no such a thing as “art for art’s sake,” since that concept in itself seeks to take us to the idea of “autonomy of art”, which is absolutely political even if its political alignment is obscured and is ideologically aligned with bourgeois society (Bürger 35). The sphere that this opens up for art is itself ideologized.

However, Bürger insists that there must be a double play at work. He considers it crucial to have a *relative* freedom of art vis-à-vis the praxis of life because otherwise art loses its capacity to criticize it (Bürger 50). As we will see later, Bolaño engages in this double play by confronting the Janus-faced character of art and politics and their oftentimes uncomfortable cohabiting.

Wieder and Urrutia view literature as a foundational act separate from history and politics. Wieder is particularly obsessed with erasing history, while Urrutia is very much concerned with erasing politics from his life and the life of the country. Bolaño, however, tirelessly seeks to link back their actions and discourse with their historical and political contexts. In this way he seeks to contaminate their language with history.

Urrutia-Lacroix conceives literature as a space that allows one's escape from the world, especially from political events. However, the priest's repeated and compulsive attempts to isolate himself from the life of the country are undermined when he is faced with the constant irruption of public life into the autonomous literary space he strives to create and maintain. For example, when his mentor Farewell invites him to his *fundo*, he is content to have found a "literary refuge" (22). Having set up this space as a refuge, he is disturbed by what he comes across when he ventures outside of the house. The various encounters with the *peones* produce negative physical reactions: he priest feels "miedo y asco" (20) or he feels sick to his stomach (29). Patrick Dove has observed how, for Urrutia, the *campesinos* reside in a historical temporality that is radically different than the priest's (148). Furthermore, there is a clear gender component to the encounter: even if the group was composed of three men and two women, the priest focuses on the women's externality. He speculates that they had come from a different *fundo*, had transgressed spatial borders, in order to make demands of the priest and are delaying the priest's return to the house, where he is expected to converse with Neruda:

Y allí estaba yo. Y ellas me vieron y yo las vi. ¿Y qué fue lo que vi?
Ojeras. Labios partidos. Pómulos brillantes. Una paciencia que no me
pareció resignación cristiana. Una paciencia como venida de otras
latitudes. Una paciencia que no era chilena aunque aquellas mujeres
fueran chilenas. Una paciencia que no se había gestado en nuestro país ni
en América y que ni siquiera era una paciencia europea, ni asiática ni
africana (aunque estas dos últimas culturas me son prácticamente
desconocidas). Una paciencia como venida del espacio exterior. Y esa
paciencia a punto estuvo de colmar mi paciencia. (31-32)

Not fully Chilean, thus not part of Urrutia's nationalistic discourse, they are marked as absolute difference in relationship to the priest's spatial and temporal borders. In other words, the female parishioners particularly exist to define the outer limits of his spatial

and temporal universe. His “impaciencia” comes from the fact that these women, who have been reduced to the status of “nature” (even their speech makes Urrutia laugh), stand in the way of “culture,” that is, his meeting with Neruda in Farewell’s house.

Later, during the Allende government he locks himself into his own house, reading the Ancient Greeks. (96-97). While the country goes through political turmoil, he remains a detached observer, reporting some key political events alongside names of Greek philosophers. By sharply separating spatially the act of reading from public life, he creates a false opposition between literature and history.⁹⁹ During the dictatorship, a third house acts as a safe haven during the curfews: the house of Maria Canales, a woman with literary ambitions, who appears to offer a space for open intellectual discussions with members of the Chilean vanguard. However, the priest finds out that in the basement of that same house, at the same time as the dissident intellectual meetings were taking space, the host’s husband was leading torture sessions for the Chilean intelligence. The priest claims not to have seen or not to have known “until it was too late,” the implication being that he would have done something (142). This is “another instance of disavowed responsibility” (Dove 149). Furthermore, it is a disavowal of the clear connection between literature and politics. So, while this might seem as a clear paradox to us (the fact that Urrutia knew and yet he thought there was nothing he could do even if it is suggested that he found out *during* the dictatorship), Urrutia’s non-action logically follows from his conception that culture and politics are two distinct realms that cannot or should not touch each other. The spatial juxtaposition between “culture” on the ground

⁹⁹ Dove invites us to read this episode with and against Urrutia’s self-interpretation of retreat: “real insight into the way things are today can only come through interrogation of the history of the present, which is to say both the ways in which the past silently persists or returns in the present, as well as the sense in which the present always already rests on a certain interpretation of the past” (147).

floor and political terror in the basement is a clear spatial metaphor for Urrutia's demarcation between literature and politics. What shocks Urrutia is not that tortures happen, but that they happen *in the same house* as the *tertulias*—the suggestion that these two spheres could come in contact.¹⁰⁰

Complementing his activity as literary critic, Urrutia has also poetic ambitions that echo his convictions about the autonomy of art. His objectives resemble those of Wieder in the sense that he plans and envisions a kind of poetry that had never been practiced in Chile. Says Urrutia about his plans:

. . . planeaba una obra poética para el futuro, una obra de ambición canónica que iba a cristalizar únicamente con el paso de los años, en una métrica que ya nadie en Chile practicaba, ¡qué digo!, que nunca nadie jamás había practicado en Chile... (37)

Thus, his literary projects have the same foundational and nationalistic impetus as Wieder's. However, the priest undercuts his own narrative of purity in the next lines, when he connects the idea of "purity" with a story about a German writer, "uno de los hombre más puros" (37). We soon find out, however, that the man he is describing as "pure" is Ernst Jünger, a German novelist and essayist, the leading voice of the intellectual radical right of the Weimar Republic.¹⁰¹ Ironically, we meet Jünger in the house of a Guatemalan artist exiled in Paris during the Second World War. These juxtapositions allow us to see Urrutia's vanguardist ambitions as already tainted by a fascist narrative tradition. Whereas he sees himself surrounded and inspired by "pureza,"

¹⁰⁰ The act has been often read as a jab at the Chilean vanguard, exposing it as being complicit with the dictatorship and with being fully integrated within an institutionalized framework (Dove 150).

¹⁰¹ Jünger is precisely the fascist writer that Benjamin had written against in his "Theory of Fascism" (see Selected Writings, vol. 2 p. 321) and was the ideological inspiration of the Freikorps analyzed by Theweleit.

he is in fact deeply entrenched into a historical narrative that is a mere repetition of other “foundational” gestures.

While Urrutia is very much concerned with erasing politics from his life and the life of the country, Wieder is particularly obsessed with erasing history and founding a new concept of the nation modeled on his artistic acts. Wieder’s version of art is the sinister extreme of the creating genius of German Idealism and the sinister inversion of the Chilean vanguard.

In addition to his other air shows, Wieder performs another art-exhibit in Santiago, writing from the periphery of the city towards the center, a movement that spatially concentrates discursive power into a core occupied by military spectators. (86) Here it is important to note that there is a rift in the comprehension of the “poetic act” between the military officials, who only see it as an exhibition, and Wieder, who sees it as the ultimate poetical expression, a transformative act, which converts action into art. This time he writes a poem, which reads:

La muerte es amistad.
La muerte es Chile.
La muerte es responsabilidad. [sobre La Moneda]
La muerte es amor.
La muerte es crecimiento.
La muerte es comunión.
La muerte es limpieza.
La muerte es mi corazón.
Toma mi corazón.
Carlos Wieder.
La muerte es resurrección.

The gesture references Raúl Zurita’s project in *La vida nueva* (1994). By mainly replacing Zurita’s “vida” with “muerte”, the vanguard logic is inverted here, to a sinister

effect.¹⁰² The choice to parody Zurita by paralleling the poet's writing on the New York sky in 1982 with Wieder's performative act illustrates Bolaño's criticism of Zurita in particular and the *escena de avanzada* as neo-vanguard in general. Bolaño signals "las secretas conexiones que hay entre el proyecto literario de la nueva poesía como expresión de una nueva época—el maridaje entre vanguardia política y vanguardia estética—con la emergencia de la dictadura como realización siniestra de este sueño revolucionario transformado en pesadilla distópica" (Martín-Cabrera, 228). Once again, the foundational impetus of the vanguard is pushed to its discursive limits to reveal its complicity with a desire to supersede its historical conditions. After the coup,

... [A]ny avant-garde response to history in which art is viewed as overcoming, superseding or resisting the limits imposed by its historical or institutional conditions is grounded in a basic misconception of post-coup temporality. [...] The *avanzada's* claim to newness in representation is therefore derivative, and symptomatic, of the sovereign ban in which life and military law, outside and inside, become indistinguishable (Williams 134-5).

Wieder's attempts to fuse art and politics into a transcendental act are undercut by the weather conditions (it's foggy, it starts to rain), as well as by technical difficulties (he runs out of smoke). Thus, his attempts at founding a new mythical language are undercut precisely by the historical conditions within which he is operating.

Following this passage Bolaño will describe another exhibit organized by Wieder, this time a photography exhibit of Wieder's murder victims. There are clearly marked differences in the way Bolaño describes the two "artistic" acts performed by Wieder. The passage describing the act of writing in the sky uses tentative language—"puede que", "tal vez" (92), giving possible alternatives to the story, possible speculations on

¹⁰² Here I am assuming that Zurita equates God and life in a transcendental sense. Wieder replaces "God" with "death", maybe in the sense of a cult of death.

how the events occurred, pointing to the impossibility of total representation of the facts. Bolaño, however, makes a deliberate contrast between the way that story is told and the way the story of the murdered women will be told. In contrast to the tentative language of the aerial show, the exhibit displaying photographs of his murdered victims “ocurrió tal y como a continuación se explica,” (92) thus acquiring the value of fact, of historical document. Also, the changes in narrative verb tenses define the discrepancy between the immaterial and atemporal aspect of the writing on the sky and the materiality of the photographs as evidence of murder. The change in tense and mood reinserts the episode into temporality, into history.

The photography exhibit, the monstrous complement to the writing in the sky, started at midnight: “Uno por uno, señores, el arte de Chile no admite aglomeraciones” (93). Wieder’s choice of time, at the beginning of a new day, indicates his desire to break with the past and to originate something new through his act to art gesture. By exhibiting his art at midnight, Wieder seeks to employ art in the service of foundational fascist discourse. However, as we know, midnight is the opening of time in the *Trauerspiel*, the moment of repetition, where history repeating itself is obvious and it becomes evident that newness is an illusory form of repetition (Benjamin 135). Thus, Wieder’s desire for newness is exposed as a mere illusory form of repetition.

The reactions to the exhibit were physical (vomit, cries), while Wieder’s father attempted to minimize the impact by recurring to a discourse that alludes to “transcendental” militaristic values such as honor, camaraderie, the need to keep the secret.¹⁰³ Much later in the evening, a team of DINA agents arrive, and after a long

¹⁰³ Part of the story is based on a published autobiography of a military official, Muñoz Cano, *Con la soga al cuello*. It is fiction within fiction, since the autobiography does not exist.

conversation leave and take with them the photographs, erasing all visual traces of the incident. Wieder comes out in the living room and is perfectly calm, with a drink in his hand. Avoiding an arrest because of transcendental moral values, Wieder disappears and reports about him are contradictory and confusing. While there is a clear difference between the discourse of the dictatorship and Wieder's, the secret services collect and carry out the incriminating evidence, allowing Wieder to disappear without being punished. The totalitarian state, even if not strictly fascist, does actively cover the actions of the fascist element within its midst.

Through the art as act performance, Wieder is theorizing the limits of humanity, taking the Nazi rhetoric one step further than the limits sanctioned by the totalitarian State. In particular, he is turning the women he has killed into nature, turning them into representational art (What we call in English "still life" is in Spanish "naturaleza muerta"). He is the subject and they are the objects to be manipulated conceptually by him.

2.3 The identification scenes: the Janus-faced character of history

As discussed earlier, in regards to the relationship between art and politics, Walter Benjamin described fascism as the aestheticizing of politics and communism as the politicization of aesthetics. Alternatively, in the wake of the destructive effects of literary fascism, one might be tempted to argue for the bourgeois ideology of autonomy of art (as discussed by Bürger). But I suggest that Bolaño (alongside Ruiz in earlier chapters) explores another way of thinking about the relationship between politics and art, illustrated through the Janus-faced figure. The figure, which illustrates the tension

between newness and repetition, stands for an ambivalent relationship between two apparently contradictory elements.¹⁰⁴ In our case, the Siamese twins concept in *Estrella distante* and the pairing of the priest with the “joven envejecido” in *Nocturno de Chile* serve as illustrations of the Janus-face concept.

Estrella distante ends in a recognition scene, where Belano identifies Carlos Wieder, but he also recognizes himself as Wieder’s “horrendous Siamese twin:”

Entonces llegó Carlos Wieder y se sentó junto al ventanal, a tres mesas de distancia. Por un instante (en el que me sentí desfallecer) me vi a mí mismo casi pegado a él, mirando por encima de su hombro, horrendo hermano siamés, el libro que acababa de abrir (un libro científico, un libro sobre el recalentamiento de la Tierra, un libro sobre el origen del universo), tan cerca suyo que era imposible que no se diera cuenta, pero, tal como había predicho Romero, Wieder no me reconoció. (152)

The novel forces the reader to make comparisons between Belano and Wieder. Belano compares himself to Wieder in a very ambiguous way. As the two men sit side by side in the café, Wieder reads a scientific book on the origin of the universe, while Belano tries to concentrate on his reading of the *Complete Works* of Bruno Schulz, Polish Jewish novelist and painter, gunned down by a German Nazi officer in 1942. The relationship between them reflects the ambivalence and the struggle between hideous similarities and welcome differences. The left and the right are linked together not as extremes, but rather as two sides of the same coin.

While Wieder is described as “dueño de sí mismo” (153), owner of his own self, Belano seems to be the one that is most affected by the act of recognition. Belano acts as a witness who identifies the perpetrator, but in that act, his sense of self is interrogated

¹⁰⁴ I borrow this concept from Walter Benjamin’s analysis of the *Trauerspiel*, where he analyzes the tyrant/martyr diad in the sense that oftentimes the tyrant and the martyr are the same person. (121)

and put in relation to that of the criminal. Instead of distancing himself from the figure of Wieder, he establishes a relationship to him.

In an earlier passage, Belano dreamed that he and Wieder were together on a boat heading towards shipwreck:

Soñé que iba en un gran barco de madera, un galeón tal vez, y que atravesábamos el Gran Océano. Yo estaba en una fiesta en la cubierta de popa y escribía un poema o tal vez la página de un diario mientras miraba el mar. Entonces alguien, un viejo, se ponía a gritar ¡tornado!, ¡tornado!, pero no a bordo del galeón sino a bordo de un yate o de pie en una escollera. Exactamente igual que en una escena de *El bebé de Rosemary*, de Polansky. En ese instante el galeón comenzaba a hundirse y todos los sobrevivientes nos convertíamos en naufragos. En el mar, flotando agarrado a un tonel de aguardiente, veía a Carlos Wieder. Yo flotaba agarrado a un palo de madera podrida. Comprendía en ese momento, mientras las olas nos alejaban, que Wieder y yo habíamos viajado en el *mismo* barco, sólo que él había contribuido a hundirlo y yo había hecho poco o nada por evitarlo. (130)

Wieder and Belano are irrevocably linked the history of the shipwreck, of the catastrophe that had split the history of Chile in two. We have reached a moment of impasse in terms of recognition and responsibility. Bolaño opens the space for an exploration of the limits of the self and questioning those limits as an opening towards the possibility of accountability. I read it as a move towards rethinking the relationships that we have with our (microfascist) others, with the Wieder that we encounter sometimes within ourselves.¹⁰⁵

The fact that we never find out whether Wieder was killed or not allows for a variety of interpretations, which do not contradict, but rather complement each other. Firstly, the secret that had been the basis of state terror during the dictatorship is maintained during the democracy, perpetuating a state of affairs that only encourages a

¹⁰⁵ Williams offers a different reading of this scene, noting a melancholic reassembly of the friend/enemy divide. (139)

continuity between authoritarianism and neoliberalism (we remember that the person who employed a detective to search for Wieder is “really” rich), thus annulling even the possibility of contemplating justice. Secondly, the element of the search that had been emphasized so arduously by Bibiano seems to have failed. However, the process of investigation turned out to be more important than the final outcome, since it allowed for the contemplation of the Janus-faced identity of Belano and Wieder in regards to both politics and art.

The end of *Nocturno de Chile* is structured similarly to the end of *Estrella*, in the sense that it underscores another instance of the Janus-face figure. *Nocturno de Chile* also ends with an act of recognition when Urrutia identifies the ‘joven envejecido’ as himself. This act of association is important because the ‘joven envejecido’ had been his nemesis throughout the rest of the novel. The “joven” screams at him, shouts obscenities at him, forcing him to produce his “confession” in the form of the book. Thus, the ‘joven envejecido’ is the one who has been saying calumnies and has prompted the priest’s narrative. We know that the narrative itself is not an act of being “responsible” (11)—far from it. The “confession” serves to exonerate the priest, rather than force him to take responsibility.¹⁰⁶ Nonetheless, the novel deconstructs the priest’s confession, makes the reader see within the fissures of the priest’s account. The fact that the account is prompted by the ‘joven envejecido’ opens up as space for the recognition of the Other in the Self:

¹⁰⁶ Patrick Dove remarks: “The approximately 140 pages that intervene between the opening promise and the conclusion are anything but an ethical act of assuming responsibility – responsibility for one’s sins and responsibility to the other. What comes into focus, instead, are the ways in which Urrutia’s presence – in the social and intellectual circles of the Chilean elite, in teaching a seminar on Marxism to the military junta, and so on – makes him complicit in what transpires, regardless of what he may have said or done”. (148)

Y entonces me pregunto: ¿dónde está el joven envejecido?, ¿por qué se ha ido?, y poco a poco la verdad empieza a ascender como un cadáver. Un cadáver que sube desde el fondo del mar o desde el fondo de un barranco. Veo su sombra que sube. Su sombra vacilante. Su sombra que sube como si ascendiera por la colina de un planeta fosilizado. Y entonces, en la penumbra de mi enfermedad, veo su rostro feroz, su dulce rostro, y me pregunto: ¿soy yo el joven envejecido? ¿Esto es el verdadero, el gran terror, ser yo el joven envejecido que grita sin que nadie lo escuche? ¿Y que el pobre joven envejecido sea yo? Y entonces pasan a una velocidad de vértigo los rostros que admiré, los rostros que amé, odié, envidié, desprecié. Los rostros que protegí, los que atacué, los rostros de los que me defendí, los que busqué vanamente. (149-150)

A possible reading of this paragraph is that the ‘joven envejecido’ is his conscience, which prompts him to explain himself and to defend his actions from his conscience.

However, I think that a more productive reading would be that the recognition at the end of the novel suggests that the priest has perceived a relationship of resemblance with the ‘joven envejecido’. He sees himself as “one who screams without being heard” and this produces horror.

The Janus-faced figure acts as a strategic, literary device to deconstruct the unity of the monumental self-image of Wieder and Urrutia. At the same time, it introduces an element of ambiguity, of doubt, of uncomfortable recognition. It makes it impossible to write off Wieder or Urrutia as “other” to Belano or the ‘joven envejecido.’¹⁰⁷ The ultimate importance of this position does not allow us to dismiss fascism as an aberration within or a radical departure from the dominant Western political tradition.

¹⁰⁷ The “joven envejecido” could represent Bolaño himself, which would make the recognition even more acute from the standpoint of the Janus face. There are some biographical references about the life of the “joven envejecido” to support this reading: “Entonces me pareció ver al joven envejecido en el vano de la puerta. Pero sólo eran los nervios. Estábamos a finales de la década del cincuenta y él entonces sólo debía de tener cinco años, tal vez seis, y estaba lejos del terror, de la invectiva, de la persecución” (22). Also, see p. 24 where he talks about reading the books written by the “joven envejecido.”

The Janus figure allows for a disarticulation of the unity of the Subject. In both instances, the fixed relationship to self unravels to a point where it becomes difficult to distinguish self from other. This is not an easy situation and produces doubt and fear. However, it is a necessary task because the novel, the reading has brought us to a point where the characters are confronted with opening up of the limits of self. Also, by allowing the characters to be identified through a shared past, Bolaño expresses another way in which Wieder and Urrutia fail to be a-historical.

The recognition scenes provide a non-redemptive ending to both novels, which refuses closure through the resolution of conflict. Instead, the Janus-faced figure opens up the space for a reevaluation of the unity of the knowing subject. In *Estrella* we do not know with certainty if Romero has killed Wieder, thus leaving us with a secret never to be found out (Martín-Cabrera 240-241). In *Nocturno*, as observed by Dove, eschatology is replaced with scatology—“Y después se desata la tormenta de mierda” (150). Once again we are confronted with a refusal to accept an onto-teleological vision of history, where all differences are absorbed. The Janus figure does not stand neither for the dissolution of conflict nor for eternal war—both eschatological visions. Instead, the Janus figure problematizes our own tendencies of resolving conflict through either Manichean binaries (fascist/non-fascist) or through homogenizing difference (either “we are all to blame” or “nobody is to blame”).

Conclusion

In these novels, the political dimension lies in the writing itself, where the task of the writer becomes to re-describe, re-write how things are, based on a clear historical context, instead of pretending to create out of nothing. Bolaño questions historical

teleology through various narrative strategies, such as the search, detours, and inter-textual references. In the process he questions how we view the cultural tradition and the social function of the literary. The Janus-faced character of the protagonist challenges the binaries of identity and difference, calling for a notion of the political that seeks to demystify and rethink political binaries.

Chapter 4

Contemplating the Abyss: Motherhood, Bearing Witness, and the Role of Literature in Roberto Bolaño's *Amuleto*

The brief novel *Amuleto* (1999), narrated by one of the secondary characters in *Los detectives salvajes*, is a first-person narrative that begins with the violent repression of Mexico's 1968 student demonstrations and ends with a vision: an army of children singing as they march towards an abyss. They recall the crusading children of 1212 and Marcel Schwob's rendition of the medieval legend, but they stand in for the idealistic young South Americans who came to adulthood in the 1960s and 1970s, two decades of significant political upheavals for Latin America, from student movements to military coups.¹⁰⁸ Of interest to my analysis is the role played by literature in understanding the political circumstances of the time. I argue that the novel redefines the social role of literature through the Latin American writer who writes from the perspective of a mother bearing witness to the catastrophic effects of a paternal logic present in both sides of the ideological divide. The novel's protagonist, Auxilio Lacouture, bears witness to these social and political upheavals, reinterpreting them from her perspective as "mother of

¹⁰⁸ In *La croisade des enfants* (1896) Marcel Schwob gives a fictionalized account of the historically contested Children's Crusade of 1212, where it is said that an army of children travelled across Europe towards the Holy Land in the hopes of reaching Jerusalem and of peacefully converting Muslims to Christianity. As they reached the Mediterranean coast, they were captured and sold into slavery. Marcel Schwob rewrites the story in the form of five testimonials, which together give an account of the children's voyage and eventual capture by slave traders. Of interest to Bolaño for *Amuleto* is Schwob's choice of five testimonials to construct a narrative, as well as the use of a historical event as departing point for the fictional work. For the translation in Spanish, which contains a prologue by Jorge Luis Borges, see *La cruzada de los niños* (Buenos Aires: La Perdiz, 1949. Trans.: Ricardo Baeza.)

Mexican poetry” (11) and as marginal presence to the Latin American academic establishment. The phrase “auxilio a la cultura,” hidden in plain view in the main character’s name, sees this type of (re)writing as a necessary practice for the survival of culture.

Bolaño, I will argue, exposes the systematic exclusion of the maternal structure from Latin American political thought. The condition of our times, what Bolaño had called a slow aesthetic and ethical shipwreck, is linked to viewing the maternal figure as abject.¹⁰⁹ In this light, I see *Amuleto* and Auxilio’s account as a return of the repressed and non-reproductive mother, who witnesses the reproduction not of life, but of sacrificial violence. From the ruins of the leftist revolutionary utopian ideal and the destructive effects of the dictatorship, Auxilio offers a way of thinking about a future social and political project founded on an ethics of inter-subjectivity, to replace the sacrificial discourse of revolutionary rhetoric.

The ethical value of maternal practice lies in its potential to offer an alternative model for subjectivity formation that values inter-relationality and produces a specific type of language that acquires an affective dimension upon bearing witness as mother. In her critique of the official discourse on memory of the Chilean government during the post-dictatorial transition, Nelly Richard shows how the anesthetizing discourse of official memory sucks away the affective aspect of memory or of history.¹¹⁰ Richard’s overall proposal for an affective dimension of history parallels Bolaño’s emphasis on the affective dimension of motherhood encountered in *Amuleto* is a meditation on the

¹⁰⁹ In the short story “Dentista” Bolaño writes about “el lento naufragio de nuestras vidas, del lento naufragio de la estética, de la ética.” *Putas asesinas*, 187.

¹¹⁰ This is the topic of an important discussion throughout *Residuos y metáforas: ensayos de crítica cultural sobre el Chile de la transición*. Santiago: Cuarto Propio, 1998.

affective role that literature plays within the social sphere. The social dimension of literature passes through affectivity, in this case filtered through the prism of motherhood. Within Latin American Studies, the notion of affectivity in relationship to the written text has been structured by the discussion on testimonial narrative or *testimonio*. Therefore, before engaging with the *Amuleto* text per-se, it will be useful to make a detour for the sake of an overview of the scholarship on the social role of literature in Latin America and how *testimonio* and, I argue, Bolaño's work have challenged traditional conceptions of class struggle.

Literature and the City

One cannot engage the topic of the role of literature in Latin America without referring to Angel Rama's seminal *La ciudad letrada*, where he discusses the pivotal role of the written word in the consolidation of the Latin American societies. The term "lettered city" denotes the convergence of lettered culture and state power within an urban space. The "lettered city" is not merely a literate society, but rather a lettered *elite* closely associated with the institutions of the State, either supporting them or in opposition to them. For Rama, writing has been closely associated with power and the State throughout the historical formation of Latin America, with various degrees of transformations, from "the ordered city" of colonial times to "the city revolutionized" of the twentieth century. Rama's study has gained enormous currency within the field of Latin American studies as an ambitious project to illustrate the role of the written word and of intellectuals to create and to shape the Latin American urban institutions. Rama's historical trajectory endows the lettered intellectual not only with a crucial role in the

formation of Latin America as we know it today, but also projects an emancipatory potential to be found in the advent of public education and the free press that has distanced itself more and more from the traditional center of power, the State. Within this context, Rama anticipates that the advent of independent and oppositional lettered intellectuals will have the capacity to shape and to ultimately revolutionize the lettered city from within.

During Latin America's colonial rule, the *letrados* were those with privileged access to power due to their ability to access and interpret Spanish colonial documents. Rama explains that, in the "lettered city," writing was an everyday practice. It overwhelmingly consisted of bureaucratic writings, such as administrative, judicial, and religious documents. Fiction writing was not a priority. This situation changed after independence, when the political *letrados* started writing essays, fiction, and verse alongside constitutional reforms and new laws. These fiction works form part of various literary canons of Latin America, such as the works of Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, Andrés Bello, and Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna. In the transition from the colonial period to national independence, there were some continuities as well as contrasts: the *letrados* became political and intellectual public figures communicating their ideas to the "masses" through public speeches and the periodical press, while at the same time literacy and education expanded to a wider sector of the population. Nonetheless, prestige came from the connection to a lettered culture centered in Europe.

Rama's analysis goes most in depth during 1880-1920, where Rama sees a shift in interest from the city per-se to the countryside and explains how that shift (writing from outside the "lettered city") allowed for the emergence of inner contradictions and

conflicts of the process of modernization and the rise of nationalisms. He maintains that, even after Latin America entered the international capitalist system, politics did not fully become a separate activity. Rather, the now-*litteratos* did not withdraw from political life but served as ideological guides, either as collaborators with authoritarian rule (during Porfirio Díaz's regime in Mexico, for example) or as voices against the status-quo. The *litteratos* (the modernist writers among them) largely assumed ideological functions, giving way to a rise in political propaganda and partisan politics. Politicians and intellectuals began to appeal to the recently educated masses, polarizing politics and creating a new generation of oppositional *letrados*.

With the creation of Latin American publishing houses, the *litteratos* gained some independence from the State and direct access to a wider reading public. Rama describes three important parts of this transformation: the incorporation of social doctrine (the introduction of anarchist thought and their focus on the proletariat), the rise of the self-educated (the universities lose the monopoly on education), and the advent of the professional writer (whose relative independence was assured by the market, entering the demands of the literary marketplace). Rama's optimistic claim is based on the assumption that the literary marketplace will reach a wider and increasingly educated readership, as well as guarantee the *litteratos'* independence from the State.

This *tour-de-force* intellectual history of Latin America might have been cut short by Rama's untimely death, and in a certain way we have to pick up from where he left off, namely at the potential of a "city revolutionized" by the oppositional *litteratos*. Rama's trajectory from writing as instrument of State power to the optimistic assessment of the liberating potential of public education and the rise of a new *letrado* who questions

the authority of the State seems to lead us down to the path of independence from the State, but it does so at the cost of catering to the publishing market. One of the problems that Rama's essays runs into with his account of the *litteratos*' independence from the political State apparatus is that the *litteratos* become instead dependent on another institution, namely the literary marketplace.¹¹¹ Furthermore, can we expect them to maintain a politically oppositional stand that challenges the *status quo* now that they have to abide by the rules of the market in order to survive? Fear of being poor is the drive behind many writers' works today, as Roberto Bolaño had keenly observed in his essays on the literary establishment in Latin America and Spain.¹¹²

During the Cold War period, Jean Franco argues in *The Decline and Fall of the Lettered City*, "free" markets did ultimately transform the face of Latin American culture, but in radically different ways than those expected by Rama. Franco explains that, in the cultural clash between those intellectuals who advocated artistic freedom (and who advocated freedom from censorship even if it meant U.S. cultural dominance) and those who defended a Soviet-style "pragmatic realism" based on class struggle inspired and supported by the Cuban Revolution, neoliberalism won as the "cultural revolution" that forever altered the intellectual's role in society (14). In the wake of the Cold War, which in Latin America took the form of armed struggle for liberation and violent military dictatorships, Franco contemplates an abandoned lettered city. The ensuing urban landscape, the result of what she calls "the dirty wars" stands in stark contrast with

¹¹¹ Although it is beyond the scope of this chapter, it would be interesting to consider the role of the University in the contemporary "lettered city," the literary marketplace notwithstanding. The University remains the ultimate legitimizer of the written word. Today, cultural hegemony is established at the level of the University, which functions in a state of melancholia in relationship to its loss of direct ties to the political realm of the State. Whereas in the "lettered city" politics and culture seemed to be interchangeable, today's University seems to be looking for ways to meaningfully reinsert itself in the political realm.

¹¹² In the conference titled "Sevilla me mata" (176-177) published posthumously in *Entre paréntesis*.

Rama's optimistic assessment of the transformative power of the *litteratos* (239).

Franco's grim view of the ruined lettered city finds a precise expression in Roberto Bolaño's depiction of Mexico City's intellectual life in the period surrounding the student movements of 1968 in *Amuleto*. Bolaño presents us with a dystopian city, where everything is transformed into dust, carried away by the wind into nothingness. The generalized state of disaster permeating the city arises from the ideological clash between the student movement and the State, followed by the violent intervention of the police and military, with widespread arrests of student demonstrators, culminating in the Tlatelolco massacre, when the army opened fire against protesters on October 2nd, 1968. Bolaño makes a point not to focus on the Tlatelolco massacre itself since this was clearly a catastrophic event for the city, and instead chooses to describe the overall cultural atmosphere of Mexico City at the time. Bolaño depicts the intellectual life of the city as triply divided into the intellectual life of the University, the bars and the cafés frequented by the bohemian poets who dream of creating vanguard movements, and the private lives of exiled Spanish Republican artists. Bolaño not only brings specificity to Rama's concept of the Latin American "lettered city" during the Cold War, he also shows how the "lettered city" is far from a unified entity.

It could be argued that part of the failure of the "lettered city" to propose and carry out a political alternative that could have sprung from the 1968 movements was due to the failure to integrate these discrete parts of intellectual life. I do not mean to suggest that Bolaño is blaming the victims of State violence, but rather that he is suggesting ways of engaging with the intellectual history of Mexico City and of Latin America in ways that could shed light on the conditions of possibility of its failure. The novel gives

testimony to the rich intellectual life of Mexico City of the 1960s and 1970s and attempts to explain its failure to promote the social and political change it sought to achieve. In that sense, the social role of literature in Bolaño is literature's potential to bear witness to its own disaster, alongside bearing witness to the catastrophic consequences of State-sponsored violence.

The novel *Amuleto* could be read as an attempt to integrate the scattered parts of the “lettered city,” bringing them into a conversation about the nature and the role of the engaged leftist intellectual. In this context, a lot hinges on the novel's main character, Auxilio Lacouture, who witnesses first-hand the failure of this intellectual model. Auxilio is the only character that navigates or can navigate her way around these discrete intellectual islands—she is the survivor of a political and intellectual shipwreck. Auxilio comes to the rescue of culture—she is, through her name, an “auxilio a la cultura”—by navigating the city and by interacting with the many types of *litteratos* from within her position as mother and friend.

The fact that the novel was written in 1999, more than thirty years after the 1968 events, testifies to the contemporary relevance of the critique that Bolaño engages in, attesting to the fact that tracing the history of intellectual life can give us an insight into the achievements as well as into the failures of leftist political practice. Ten years after the end of the Cold War, Bolaño takes up the issue of revolution with the intent to show that, even though the ideological wars might appear to be forgotten, the memory of that possibility still haunts Latin America in ways that are significant to understand for a deeper reformulation of a leftist political project today.

Literature and *Testimonio*

At this point in the discussion, as I have just claimed that the social role of literature, as Bolaño understands it, is to bear witness to disaster, it is impossible to continue without remarking that this claim directly touches upon the theorization of testimonial narrative (or *testimonio*) as a specifically Latin American discursive formation/ genre. *Testimonio* has challenged and changed our conception of literature, displacing the centrality of the “lettered city” in terms of the written word’s potential for social change. With Bolaño’s *Amuleto* we can see an effort to preserve or revive the testimonial aspect that literature appeared to have lost in the wake of *testimonio*’s arrival on the Latin American cultural scene. I read *Amuleto* as indicative of a drive to reintegrate that testimonial aspect into literature.

As I had indicated earlier, Bolaño had warned that one of the dangers of the professionalization of the writer is the substitution of politics for aesthetics, prompted by the writer’s “fear of being poor” (*Entre Paréntesis* 311). In “El boom en perspectiva,” Rama himself had argued that the Boom as an unprecedented publishing-house phenomenon could be seen as the culminating point of the professionalization of the Latin American writer. The emergence of the professional writer who was also an engaged intellectual, but who nonetheless worked within the constraints of the marketplace, led *not* to the politicization of aesthetics, but rather to the aestheticization of politics. In other words, literature, under the pressure of the market, lost its testimonial aspect. In this light, the task undertaken by Bolaño to reincorporate the lost testimonial aspect of literature comes as a reaction against aestheticization and a move towards the politicization of said aesthetics. In fact, the drive to reincorporate a lost object, as we will

see, might be the testimonial act par excellence.

The appearance of *testimonio* on the horizon of Latin American studies has contested beginnings. It is generally regarded as having reached full genre maturity in connection with the revolutionary struggles in Central America in the 1980s although it came into existence due to the Cuban Revolution (Gugelberger, 8). The attention given to *testimonio* by literary critics¹¹³ under post-Cold War conditions is indicative of the same drive that motivated Rama to search for the liberating potential of writing in the “lettered city”, with the exception that *testimonio* was seen as a welcome change from the “high literature” of the intellectual elite, be they politically engaged like Gabriel García Márquez or Julio Cortázar. From the standpoint of *testimonio* critics, the “lettered city” functioned not so much as a means to bring on political change, but to maintain the status quo. The fact that many of these politicized and socially conscious scholars came from Latin American *literature* departments gave way to a debate on the question of *testimonio* as literary genre that came to be presented as “authentically” Latin American, produced from the ground up, without the mediation of the lettered elites of Latin America, be they left leaning or not.

One of the earliest definitions of the genre comes from John Beverley in “Margin at the Center” (1989):

By *testimonio* I mean a novel or novella-length narrative in book or pamphlet form, told in the first person by a narrator who is also a real protagonist or witness of the event he or she recounts, and whose unit of narration is usually a ‘life’ or a significant life experience. *Testimonio*

¹¹³ It seems that the desire to effect political change from within the University by embracing and analyzing the genre of *testimonio*, for example, seems to run into the same problems: trying to de-institutionalize from within the institution. Or, even more problematically, to produce a change on something that it does not have control over: the political realm.

may include, but is not subsumed under, any of the following categories, some of which are conventionally considered literature, others not: autobiography, autobiographical novel, oral history, memoir, confession, diary, interview, eyewitness report, life history, novela-*testimonio*, nonfiction novel, or ‘factographic literature’. . . The situation of narration in *testimonio* has to involve an urgency to communicate, a problem of repression, poverty, subalternity, imprisonment, struggle for survival, and so on. (in Gugelberger 9)¹¹⁴

In his definition Beverley highlights the “real” witness of *testimonio*, whose discursive production borders literary genres, but somehow transcends them. Rather, the genre is defined by an urgency to reveal an oppressive situation. It follows that, in light of *testimonio*’s evidence, the politically engaged critic cannot not feel empathy and indignation, which in turns gives rise to the need to produce *testimonio* criticism as a way of articulating a “real” politics of solidarity with the oppressed. In subsequent work, especially in *Against Literature*, Beverley will come to see *testimonio* as a privileged form of cultural production, a more accurate representation of the current political and economic situation than literature could ever aspire to be. Ultimately, Beverley will pit *testimonio* against literature, denouncing literature as sustaining institutionalized forms of ideological oppression (in this case the academic establishment) and conversely co-opting *testimonio* as a tool to fight against traditional literary studies.

Similarly to Beverley, George Yúdice gives the following definition:

...testimonial writing may be defined as an authentic narrative, told by a witness who is moved to narrate by the urgency of the situation (e.g., war,

¹¹⁴ Another similar definition is given by Beverley and Zimmerman in 1990: “...a novel or a novella-length narrative, told in the first person by a narrator who is also the actual protagonist or witness of the events he or she recounts. The unit of narration is usually a life or a significant life episode (e.g., the experience of being a prisoner). Since in many cases the narrator is someone who is either functionally illiterate, or, if literate, not a professional writer or intellectual, the production of a *testimonio* generally involves the recording and/or transcription and editing of an oral account by an interlocutor who is a journalist, writer, or social activist. The word suggests the act of testifying or bearing witness in a legal or religious sense.” (in Sklodowska, 86)

oppression, revolution, etc.) Emphasizing popular, oral discourse, the witness portrays his or her own experience as an agent (rather than a representative) of a collective memory and identity. Truth is summoned in the cause of denouncing a present situation of exploitation and oppression or in exorcising and setting aright official history. (in Gugelberger 44)

In Yúdice's definition the testimonial witness voluntarily transforms himself or herself in an “agent” of “authentic” collective memory. This definition of the witness relies on a certain faith or trust in the witness to tell the Truth for the sake of the community.

Yúdice's faith, shared by other *testimonio* critics such as Beverley and Zimmerman, is what allows him to make claims of authenticity on the part of the testimonial voice.

In “The Spanish American Testimonial Novel,” Elzbieta Sklodowska engages with and problematizes the definitions offered by the above-mentioned scholars. What Sklodowska sees in these definitions is that they are both “politically principled and strongly action-oriented” but they are incomplete or fail to do justice to *testimonio* (even though they set out precisely from that desire for justice):

Seeing *testimonio* as a seamless monument of authenticity and truth deprives it, in my opinion, of the ongoing tension between stories told and remaining to be told. More to the point, perhaps it also diminishes its potential as a forward-looking discourse participating in an open ended and endless task of rewriting human experience. (in Gugelberger 98)

Sklodowska's review of *testimonio* criticism concludes that most critics have paid more attention to the official voices of the texts—the editor and/or the transcriber—instead of taking their cue from the voice of the witness. Albeit dangerously courting the fall into the same discourse of authenticity and mystification of the subaltern voice that she critiques, Sklodowska's gesture points to the duty that *testimonio* and literary critics have to acknowledge the text's witnessing voice as a voice of authority, but without monumentalizing the speaking voice.

Skłodowska sees *testimonio* as “a literary genre in its own right” and recognizes the difficulty of an unambiguous definition, as an “explicit interplay between factual and fictional, between aesthetic aspirations to literariness and scientific claims to objectivity” thus challenging *testimonio* critics’ own assumptions about truth and falsity or history and fiction (84-85). In fact, she contends that the appropriation of testimonial form in the literary works of Boom novelists allows for a demystification of the testimonial format. For her, albeit a first-person narrative, *testimonio* is not autobiography because “it does not focus on the inner self, but on communal experience” (85). It is not exactly a novel, because it positions itself around the shifting borders of the novelistic genre. Instead, she gives primacy to the idea of a “testimonial contract” established between the witness and the reader of the text (87). However, her notion of the contract between witness and reader, while disavowing the earlier demand for authenticity, does not seem to eradicate the problem altogether since the “contract” seems to echo Yúdice’s faith in the *literal*, not literary truth of *testimonio*.

In “The Aura of *Testimonio*” Alberto Moreiras identifies the appeal of *testimonio* as a felicitous “fit” with the advent of cultural studies and identity politics. He argues that the exhaustion of Boom/post-Boom literary models was due partly to the changing nature of the sociopolitical scene, namely the rise of post-national and non-national social movements in Latin America.¹¹⁵ Moreiras asserts that after the Cold War, “identity politics seems to have replaced class politics”, and with it came the importance given to *testimonio*. The emphasis on identity politics and its various means of expression arose as a new avenue to “contest the homogenizing apparatus that an increasing

¹¹⁵ In the case of 1968, the social movements in Mexico were closely related to others in Europe, Japan, and the United States.

socioeconomic globalization is imposing in the cultural sphere” (193). Moreiras identifies two factors that account for the relevance of *testimonio* criticism: firstly, it conveys the discursive irruption of alternative, non-traditional subjects of enunciation, and secondly, it promises to break out of the collapse-of-high-literature impasse (197).

As we have seen, there is agreement among the literary critics who have worked on *testimonio* that its significance is not so much literary (its entrance in the North American literary canon notwithstanding) as it is political. Moreiras believes that what is so appealing to critics in *testimonio*'s extra-literary dimension is the “possibility of the real,” which gives it a political claim and potential that “high-literature” seemed to have irretrievably lost. In other words, as “high-literature” loses its political relevance (post-Rama’s “ciudad letrada”), *testimonio* comes to infuse the cultural scene with renewed political potential. This is both the danger and the fascination of *testimonio*. Moreiras writes:

Testimonio is testimonio because it suspends the literary at the very same time that it constitutes itself as a literary act: as literature, it is a liminal event opening into a non-representational, drastically indexical order of experience... what can make the reading of *testimonio* an addictive experience, from the literary as well as from the political perspective, is the fact that *testimonio* always already incorporates an abandonment of the literary. *Testimonio* provides its reader with the possibility of entering what we might call a subdued sublime: the twilight region where the literary breaks off into something else, which is not so much the real as it is its unguarded possibility. This unguarded possibility of the real, which is arguably the very core of the testimonial experience, is also its preeminent political claim. (195)

The power and fascination of *testimonio* came from its extra-literary claim, from its desire to effect social and political change from the ground up. The positive responses to *testimonio* from the North American academia came from a desire of solidarity with

those marginalized (and in many cases indigenous) in Latin America who were speaking against hundreds of years of State violence and repression. *Testimonio* criticism came to be the battleground for issues that in a way have nothing to do with *testimonio* itself, but are rather symptoms that reflect an anxiety about the role of literature in the political sphere.¹¹⁶ By being perceived as an empty aesthetic form, literature appeared to have lost its claim to the possibility to affect political change, while *testimonio* seemed to some to be the solution to this problem. *Testimonio* could be seen as a discursive product of the underprivileged that could lead to such change, which had the liberating potential Rama was envisioning as emerging from the “lettered city.” The subaltern had finally spoken.¹¹⁷

In this context, a hard blow to the discourse of *testimonio* came precisely from the subject of its authenticity and accuracy. As some Latin Americanist critics were hailing *testimonio* as not only ‘authentically’ Latin American but as *empirical* proof of the social injustices suffered by subaltern groups, one book sought to challenge *testimonio*’s empirical claims. In 1999 anthropologist David Stoll published a book called *Rigoberta Menchú and the Story of all Poor Guatemalans* where he challenged the truth claims of one of the most representative texts of Latin American testimonial narrative, namely *Me*

¹¹⁶ For Moreiras the crucial difference between literature and *testimonio* is the relationship established between the critic and the testimonial or narrative voice: the distance between the critic and the enunciating subject (the narrator) is bridged by the voluntaristic solidarity of the critic. Thus, the critic becomes affectively involved in *testimonio* critique. However, Moreiras warns that “solidarity allows for political articulation, or cannot or by in itself provide for an epistemological leap into an-other knowledge, understood as genuine knowledge of the other. . . My point is that solidarity, although it can indeed be represented, is an affective phenomenon of non-representational order—as such either manifests itself as praxis or it is by definition nothing but the epigonal false consciousness of a Hegelian beautiful soul.” (198)

¹¹⁷ Idelber Avelar’s critique of *testimonio* revolves around *testimonio*’s language. Writing in the context of Southern Cone testimonial texts written by the victims of the dictatorship’s violence, Avelar sees *testimonio* as a necessary but insufficient gesture, because he reads its language as mythical, tragic, and very much within the same discourse as the dictatorship that had created the necessity of testimonial discourses in the first place. See *The Untimely Present* p. 64.

llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia (1983). Based on field research he did in Guatemala, Stoll concluded that Menchú had presented some episodes as first-hand accounts, whereas in fact they were second-hand accounts of military violence perpetrated against her family.

Stoll's book and the resulting controversy surrounding Menchú's credibility pointed to a problem that, ironically, had been created not by *testimonio* proper but by *testimonio* critics. In *testimonio* the claim to truth is tangential to the purposes of *testimonio* itself, which is more concerned with raising awareness of social injustices and with prompting collective socio-political praxis. However, the way it had been theorized in the North American academia allowed for a conflation between *testimonio* per-se and *testimonio* criticism. Latin Americanist critics' faith in *testimonio*'s "authenticity" is what permitted Stoll to make the opposite argument regarding the veracity of Menchú's text. By seeing *testimonio* as a monument to truth, these critics have allowed for THEIR imagined truth to be contested and to have that contesting be directed at Menchú's text. Stoll's challenges were not directed at Menchú, nor at Beverley's *testimonio* criticism per-se, but at his politics. What allowed for these two things to be conflated was precisely Beverley's identification of *testimonio* with Truth. Or maybe Beverley conflated these things to begin with, which allowed Stoll to attack Beverley's politics by attacking *testimonio* as a genre.

Moreiras had already warned about the dangers of "voluntaristic solidarity," of co-opting *testimonio* as "aesthetic fix" that cannot produce solidarity, only a poetics of solidarity and that, within *testimonio* criticism, loses its extra-literary potential (Gugelberger 16). It seems to me that what Stoll has actually taught us as literary critics,

in spite of himself, is that the *testimonio*/literature dichotomy is a false dichotomy and we only stand to lose if we accept this demarcation. Undoubtedly due to perceived criticism from the part of other Latin Americanists, in “The Real Thing” Beverley renounces *testimonio* and declares its exhaustion as a form to further the goal of political emancipation. Beverley even seems to be disappointed that *testimonio* writers (including Rigoberta Menchú) want to write conventional literary texts in Spanish (282). In light of this discussion, rather than turning our back on literature or abandoning *testimonio* altogether—as Beverley did at various times—it might prove more fruitful to ask how literature can function in a “responsible and perhaps even re-humanizing way” or how literature might have had a testimonial aspect to begin with (Gugelberger 7).

Albeit a problematic and loosely defined corpus of works, *testimonio* does more than defy genres. *Testimonio* problematizes the genres themselves—that is, it questions the limits of other genres, such as autobiography, ethnography, anthropology, and, most importantly for our purposes, of literature. The issue of “authenticity” in *testimonio* is revealed as an actual distraction, instead of the political leverage critics sought to reclaim by engaging with *testimonio* from the standpoint of truth. In fact it can give literary critics more freedom—no more bound by trying to define the genre in formal terms, we can think of *testimonio* in terms of its discursive strategies.

Can we still have testimonial writing that preserves its political claim without resorting to claims of “experience” or “authenticity”? I think we can and Bolaño confronts this issue head on by challenging the cherished notions of “authenticity” and “experience” that have shaped so many controversies surrounding *testimonio*. A reclaiming of the political in literature is accomplished by Bolaño’s insistence on the fact

that notions of “authenticity” and “experience” are not only empty legitimizers of knowledge, but that they distract us from exploring other creative possibilities to come out of the political impasse of a leftist political project. These notions literally keep us from looking, from being able to bear witness to the sacrificial violence promoted by a certain leftist political model and pay attention to what has been expelled from that discourse. So maybe, before we can formulate new political claims for the future, we should look back at what has been excluded in the struggle for the future.

In “Translation and Mourning: The Cultural Challenge of Latin American Testimonial Autobiography,” Gareth Williams conceptualizes *testimonio* as a discourse that produces a specific kind of identity based on the introjection of radical loss. He maintains that *testimonio* is a cultural manifestation of identity politics and testimonial discourses are phenomena of mourning, with distinctive dialectics of lamentation and commemoration, where the remembrance of loss of language, of one’s past, or of one’s family members “permits a new process of becoming” (94). Williams integrates *testimonio* into Latin America’s continuing process of transculturation, meaning that *testimonio* itself is part of a process of continual translation, thus disavowing claims of authenticity for *testimonio*.¹¹⁸

The problematic nature of identity politics and, consequently, of the solidarity-based voluntarism characterizing some *testimonio*-based criticism is revealed in its

¹¹⁸ Williams starts with a discussion of trans-culturation and challenges the view, held by critics such as George Yúdice, that *testimonio* is an “authentically” Latin American creation, untainted by first-world postmodernity. “The cultural synthesis implied by transculturation renders Latin America the product of a constant transitive process in which phenomena are translated from one cultural space to another” (79). In other words, with transculturation, we can think of Latin America as a space for and of continuous cultural translation, beginning with the colonial encounter and all the way to contemporary testimonial autobiography). The process of translation is such that it always loses something of the “original” meaning and gains something else as meaning is continuously transformed.

assumptions: the presumption of a shared experience, a reification of social and political categories, and normativity in representational practices, meaning in this case that it requires a stable identity from the testimonial voice. Instead, can we envision a language that remains committed to the testimonial impetus while not indulging in the “aesthetic fix” or requiring authenticity for the sake of politics? Could literature be the space where it would be possible to envision a solution to the aforementioned problems that *testimonio* criticism raises? By critically engaging with *testimonio*, can literature reclaim its political significance?

Chilean novelist Diamela Eltit has probed the limits of identity politics and of *testimonio* in *El Padre Mio* (1989), a transcription of a tape recording of a schizophrenic vagrant in Santiago de Chile who calls himself “My Father.” Nelly Richard has observed that, by disrupting the usual responses of identification with and empathy for the narrator, Eltit calls into question some of the key assumptions about testimonial practice and its reception (*Residuos y metáforas* 83). Eltit’s transcription not only challenges traditional claims to testimonial authenticity, but her intervention reveals a post-dictatorial psychological and social fragmentation. However, while Eltit’s disruptive strategy is useful and important as a mechanism to dismantle the seduction of identification with the marginalized subject, it leaves the reader in a conceptual impasse: it shows how *testimonio* does not work, yet it silences *testimonio*’s potential for non-identity-based affirmative work.¹¹⁹ In *Amuleto* Bolaño offers a way to think our way out of this new impasse, by emulating the first person narrative of *testimonio* and not refusing the

¹¹⁹ Bolaño might have deliberately chosen to challenge Eltit’s text, given that he was familiar with her work. This would be in line with Bolaño’s other parodies of works by the Chilean *avanzada* group, such as Raúl Zurita’s writing in the air, discussed in the previous chapter.

narrator-reader empathy as Eltit does, but rather by presenting the first person narrator exclusively in relationship to the social milieu she inhabits. In the same vein as Eltit, Bolaño maintains a testimonial form that seeks to go beyond identity-based empathy. However, instead of representing the pure fragmentation of an identity through schizophrenia, Bolaño offers a “madre nuestra” who, although turned crazy after witnessing a traumatic episode, does contribute to a reflection on the future of the cultural and political life in Latin America.

Williams calls *testimonio* texts “autobiography with a difference” since they are mostly a first person narrative of one’s life (discursive enunciator and enunciated), but whose function—and this is where the important difference comes in—is to “engender immediate and collective socio-political and cultural praxis” (83). Thus, the function of the first-person voice that recounts past experiences is not the telling of the “story” or the “experience” itself, but rather the story serves a *communal* purpose for the *future*. The first person-narrative provides an important connection between the *testimonio* and Bolaño’s novel *Amuleto*. Although *Amuleto* is also a first person narrative, the novel is not preoccupied with Auxilio’s actions themselves, but with how her individual actions relate to the social.

Another significant connection that takes us beyond the autobiographical is the fact that they are texts that voice a particular kind of loss: the loss of loved ones in the socio-political struggle. They are bound by lamentation upon witnessing and experiencing loss. For Williams, in *testimonio* “lamentation is designed to provide the reader with an exemplary narrative of martyrdom and self-sacrifice, of heroic self-divestment that will serve to inform future generations of their historical patrimony of

revolution, thereby guaranteeing continuity in the counter-hegemonic struggle” (84).

This description is very useful in tracing important similarities between *testimonio* and *Amuleto*, but also in identifying key points of divergence from *testimonio*. As signaled earlier, lamentation as rhetorical device is present in both, as well as, most importantly, the function of the text as a counter-hegemonic instrument.

The diverging points bring into focus issues that are as important, if not more important than their similarities. As a matter of fact, these diverging points bring into focus if not a critique of *testimonio* itself, at least a powerful critique of the rhetoric that shrouds—and ultimately undermines, I will argue, the counter-hegemonic struggle. What Bolaño suggests, through Auxilio’s actions in *Amuleto*, is that the *continuity* of the counter-hegemonic struggle is all but guaranteed by the narrative of self-sacrifice or heroic self-divestment for the sake of revolution. Furthermore, this narrative has had the negative effect of undermining the very struggle it seeks to advance. So maybe we can think of *Amuleto* and Bolaño’s work in general as ‘*testimonio* with a difference’ in the sense that it shares with *testimonio* a living concern for the continuity of the struggle for political alternatives, but it departs from melancholic or self-sacrificial rhetoric in order to show us that the loss of the leftist-political project is two-fold: not only the loss of lives to the utopian revolutionary ideal embodied by Che Guevara and the Cuban Revolution, but the loss of a maternal perspective.

The kind of literature Bolaño proposes could be thought of as a way out and beyond the impasse of the high-culture/*testimonio* dichotomy. We can see it as an alternative path, a middle ground for *literatos*, neither catering to the literary market nor using the sacrificial tone of revolutionary rhetoric embraced by *testimonio*. In Bolaño, we

find unexpected limits for both literature and *testimonio* in regards to the political.

Bolaño, himself marginal to the University establishment, tries to envision a way to bear witness, a kind of *testimonio* that, from literature, maintains itself on the margins of both University and *testimonio*.¹²⁰

Testimonio* and witnessing in *Amuleto

In a review of *Amuleto*, critic Mihály Dés contrasts the novel with *Los detectives salvajes*, from which the Auxilio Lacouture episode spins off. He argues that *Amuleto* is more than a mere expansion or elaboration of that episode in *Los detectives salvajes*: whereas *Los detectives salvajes* is an epic work with a “choral construction,” denoting a multiplicity of voices and perspectives, *Amuleto* has a poetic conception built around a first (and only) person narrative voice. Everything depends on Auxilio’s voice: the structure of the narration is not conditioned by the events it narrates, but rather it ascribes to a logic of revelation, “a kind of *aleph*,” from where past and future are reinterpreted (172). Dés attributes the novel to the fantastic genre, giving as evidence one episode that could not have possibly been factual, having occurred in the narrator’s imagination (the encounter with the Catalan painter Remedios Varo in Mexico City, which is factually impossible because Varo died in 1963, two years before Auxilio’s move to Mexico). Dés uses this example to discard the possibility of *Amuleto* as a testimonial narrative—for him this episode is evidence of the fantastic nature of the work and its lack of factual accuracy.

¹²⁰ If we think of *testimonio* as a type of witnessing narrative specific to Latin America, we can align Bolaño’s text with other non-Latin American witnessing narratives, as well with an ongoing debate on the “truth” of witnessing in Holocaust survivor texts, such as Charlotte Delbo for example, whose survivor texts have been proved to be fiction, not memoir, thus enriching and making even more complex the ways we think of survivors’ narrative devices.

However, I think Dés is too fast to shy away from the possibility of viewing *Amuleto* as a type of testimonial narrative. Surely, some episodes in the narrative are non-chronological and non-factual, but this just demonstrates the existence of an alternative logic that is not foreign to the Latin American genre of *testimonio*. If we are to learn anything from the *testimonio* controversy, which stemmed from Stoll's accusations that Rigoberta Menchú's narrative contains factual contradictions in order to serve a Marxist backed guerrilla insurgency, it is that the "truth" of *testimonio* follows an alternative logic that puts into question notions of authenticity and historicity while pointing to the fact that concentrating on factual accuracy distracts from what is truly at stake in the content of the text.¹²¹ In the case of Rigoberta Menchú's *testimonio*, it is the call to solidarity and the urgency to act upon the truth of centuries of discrimination. In the case of *Amuleto*, it is the call to pay attention to the one lone voice that speaks to us from a place of abjection: the figure of the mother, witness to the violence of the State.

Albeit a fictional text, *Amuleto* has many common characteristics with Latin American testimonial autobiography and shares many of its concerns. In terms of common characteristics we can enumerate the first person narrative, the witnessing and description of instances of state repression, and the abject condition of its protagonist, which permeates all levels of the text. In terms of its concerns, they reflect on the social and political role of the written word (regardless of whether we call it "*testimonio*" or

¹²¹ For a discussion of Stoll's accusations, see Arias and Beverley. Starting with his 1999 book and later, David Stoll had confronted alleged inaccuracies in Menchú's *testimonio*, claiming that it is a propaganda piece for a political purpose that is informed by and mimics the discourse of one of Guatemala's radical leftist guerrilla groups, the Guerilla Army of the Poor (EGP) (Arias, 86). While Stoll wants to plant the seed of doubt that Menchú's story is not a true reference of reality, but only a true reference of a personal reality, Stoll's critics have retorted that her book does have a political agenda: she wants to create solidarity in order to call for the end of military oppression. In that sense, the controversy raises questions not only about "truth" or "authenticity" but also about authority: Stoll wants to establish himself as *the* authority on Menchú's story.

“novel”) in Latin America’s public sphere. Related to this, the urgency of the message in the form of social mobilization is clearer and more immediate in *testimonio*, but is not absent in *Amuleto*. *Amuleto* is equally urgent, but its focus is on questioning the assumptions on which the Latin American left operates in relationship to its role in envisioning and producing social and political change. Bolaño’s challenge of these assumptions exposes the mythification of the masculine and/or paternal element and the systematic exclusion and abjection of the feminine and/or maternal element, as well as the consequences that this polarization has on the way we conceive of the literary tradition in Latin America and its relationship (and complicity) to power.

Amuleto presents itself as a combination of testimonial narrative and detective story: in the first pages the first-person narrator informs us that we should read it as a horror story, although it might not appear as such. As we have seen earlier in connection to *testimonio*, our genre expectations are frustrated and redefined. Although we do not yet know the narrator, who will later introduce herself as Auxilio Lacouture, a Uruguayan woman, she is acutely aware of the possibility of encountering skeptical reactions to her testimonial claims and asks us to not be deceived by appearances:

Ésta será una historia de terror. Será una historia policíaca, un relato de serie negra y de terror. Pero no lo parecerá. No lo parecerá porque soy **yo**¹²² la que lo cuenta. Soy **yo** la que habla y por eso no lo parecerá. Pero en el fondo es la historia de un crimen atroz. (11) [my emphasis]

No act of witnessing to “an atrocious crime” can be objective—Auxilio makes no claim to objectivity, admitting that her perspective influences the perception of the story, but cautioning that this subjective perspective should not divert the readers’ attention from the crime itself. The narrator is aware of the interpretative limitations of her testimony—

¹²² Most of Bolaño’s novels concentrate on a singular character to be examined: *Nocturno de Chile* (the priest), *Estrella distante* (Carlos Wieder), *2666* (Archimboldi), *Amuleto* (Auxilio) etc.

“it will not seem so”—yet she presents herself as an unlikely witness whose story is not conditioned by the reader’s trust.

In *Remnants of Auschwitz*, Giorgio Agamben writes about the necessity to look for the meaning of testimony in places we might not expect:

Whoever assumes the charge of bearing witness in their name [the drowned, the *muselmann*] knows that he or she must bear witness in the name of the impossibility of bearing witness. But this alters the value of testimony in a definitive way; it makes it necessary to look for its meaning in an unexpected area. (34)

In similar fashion, Auxilio does ask us to remember that what she is witnessing should never be interpreted as anything but terror. What that terror means and how it is expressed remains to be defined in the text, but it is important to keep in mind that horror itself is present in areas that the reader might not expect. Auxilio will go on to link multiple witnessing moments through a discourse that will reveal their common underpinnings and will, in the process, offer a feminist critique of the breakdown of social relationships, rooted in a reflection on what is excluded in the subject’s coming to being. She will offer, instead, a way to think inter-subjectively.

Moments of Witnessing

Amuleto presents the reader with three moments of witnessing. Each in its own way illuminates different aspects of what it means to witness and it seeks to indicate multiple ways of conceiving that experience. Firstly, Auxilio witnesses the violence of the State against its own citizens during the Mexico 68 student movement and decides to remain hidden while her friends are carried away by the military. Secondly, one of the novel’s male characters, Arturito Belano, comes back after having witnessed the fall of Allende’s

democratic government in Chile, yet decides to keep silent about his experiences and lets Auxilio disseminate the story. Thirdly, Auxilio has a vision about the voluntary sacrifice of a whole generation of Latin American youth and is too weak to stop them from heading towards their own death.

Mexico '68: the violence of the State.

Bolaño makes direct references to the violent repression of the Mexican student movement in 1968 and concentrates his attention on the military invasion of the Universidad Autónoma de México (UNAM) on September 18, 1968.¹²³ The novel focuses on an episode at UNAM prior to the Tlatelolco massacre in order to address the issue of autonomy and to offer a less visited perspective on the '68 events. Linking these two events explicitly reinserts both instances into a common historical account. Auxilio, who happened to be reading a book of poems in the fourth floor women's bathroom, watches helplessly as the University's constitutional autonomy is violated by the military invasion and decides to remain inside, hidden in the University's bathroom for thirteen days:

¿Qué hice entonces? Lo que cualquier persona, me asomé a una ventana y miré hacia abajo y vi soldados y luego me asomé a otra ventana y vi tanquetas y luego a otra, la que está al fondo del pasillo (recorrí el pasillo

¹²³ He concentrates his attention on this episode, although he pays homage to the victims of the Tlatelolco massacre: "Yo estaba en la Facultad aquel 18 de septiembre cuando el ejército violó la autonomía y entró en el campus a detener o a matar a todo el mundo. No. En la Universidad no hubo muchos muertos. Fue en Tlatelolco. ¡Ese nombre que quede en nuestra memoria para siempre! (27-28)." The reference to the Tlatelolco massacre as the site of disaster is part of the duty to remember; although it is not her direct experience, the duty to remember the other site of disaster is inextricably related to an overarching concern to connect moments of catastrophe. For Bolaño, the gesture to write about this event and not the Tlatelolco massacre is a writing-other, a displaced (and untimely) rewriting of Poniatowska's testimonial narrative, *La noche de Tlatelolco*. Writing more than thirty years after the fact (1999), Bolaño's fictionalized testimonial brings renewed relevance to Mexico '68 without the same urgency—which risks freezing the event in time because of its shock-value—but with a renewed sense of duty. Displacing the narrative away from Tlatelolco is a way for Bolaño to not contribute to the process of mythification of Tlatelolco, which impedes thinking critically about it.

dando saltos de ultratumba), y vi furgonetas en donde los granaderos y algunos policías vestidos de civil estaban metiendo a los estudiantes y profesores presos, como en una escena de una película de la Segunda Guerra Mundial mezclada con una de María Félix y Pedro Armendáriz de la Revolución Mexicana¹²⁴, una película que se resolvía en una tela oscura pero con figuritas fosforescentes, como dicen que ven algunos locos o las personas que sufren repentinamente un ataque de miedo. Y luego vi a un grupo de secretarias, entre las que creí distinguir a más de una amiga (¡en realidad creí distinguirlas a todas!), que salían en fila india, arreglándose los vestidos, con las carteras en las manos o colgadas del hombro, y después vi a un grupo de profesores que también salía ordenadamente, al menos tan ordenadamente como la situación lo permitía, vi gente con libros en las manos, vi gente con carpetas y páginas mecanografiadas que se desparramaban por el suelo y ellos se agachaban y las recogían, y vi gente que era sacada a rastras o gente que salía de la Facultad cubriéndose la nariz con un pañuelo blanco que la sangre ennegrecía rápidamente. Y entonces yo me dije: quédate aquí, Auxilio. No permitas, nena, que te lleven presa. Quédate aquí, Auxilio, no entres voluntariamente en esa película, nena, si te quieren meter que se tomen el trabajo de encontrarte. (31)

Auxilio tells herself not to “voluntarily enter in this movie,” choosing not to be an active participant, in this way being the only one who was able to eschew the military violence—precisely by keeping her distance. What is important to take from this scene is that she decides not to participate actively in her own destruction (imprisonment, perhaps torture) and to resist by remaining within the University’s walls. Her act impedes the university’s violation of autonomy to take on an absolute value: she is the last bastion of autonomy, “el último reducto de autonomía de la UNAM” (33). She refuses to take on what would be considered a heroic role by trying to resist actively, by defying or confronting the soldiers. It is not time to get involved in the violence, not like this, not now. She chooses to wait.

¹²⁴ It is important to note that she relates what she sees with a virtual experience of other moments of conflict and violence: the Second World War and The Mexican Revolution. In this way, the episode is weaved into a spatio-temporal network of historical conflicts.

The 1973 Chilean military coup d'état.

Amuleto links Mexico '68 with yet another episode of State violence, the Chilean coup d'état on September 11, 1973. This time the witness is a friend of Auxilio's, a young poet called Arturito Belano (clearly an alter-ego of Roberto Bolaño himself) who returns to Chile to participate in the democratic revolution led by Salvador Allende.¹²⁵ Unknowingly, he reaches Chile the day of the Popular Unity government's overthrow by Pinochet's military coup. Upon his return to Mexico City Belano refuses to talk about his experience. Auxilio notes:

Quiero decir: era el mismo de siempre pero en el fondo algo había cambiado o había crecido o había cambiado y crecido al mismo tiempo. Quiero decir: la gente, sus amigos, lo empezaron a mirar como si fuera otro aunque él fuera el mismo de siempre. Quiero decir: todos esperaban de alguna manera que él abriera la boca y contara las últimas noticias del Horror, pero él se mantenía en silencio como si lo que esperaban los demás se hubiera transmutado en un lenguaje incomprensible o le importara un carajo. (69)

She notices that the transformation in Belano is actually a change in his friends' perception of him. In other words, his friends' expectations and, consequently, their image of him is what changed. They started to see him "as if he were someone else." They stop talking to him because he refuses to satisfy their voyeuristic hunger for an account of violence. Belano refuses to turn his experience into a spectacle of horror and thus to show himself as the revolutionary victim they want him to be. His silence also has another motive: having arrived too late for the Chilean revolution, it is too early for

¹²⁵ Auxilio meets Arturo Belano in 1970, around the time when Salvador Allende had won the presidential elections in Chile. She feels a certain affinity and solidarity with him because they were both South-Americans living in Mexico and she comes to consider herself as his friend and mentor, introducing him to the works of Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, T.S. Eliot, and others, taking on the role of an artistic mother and mentor to him and his friends. Auxilio befriends the other women in Belano's family—his mother and sister—feeling a special affinity to his mother because, although they had very different lives, they were part of the same generation and shared a maternal connection.

him to talk about his traumatic experience and the witnessing of the violent curtailment of the Popular Unity government.

There is a concern with timing or un-timeliness in relation to testimony: Belano/Bolaño's silence at the time indicates a need to wait to tell the story, thus thwarting the expectations of urgency to speak that are generally associated with these events. Like Auxilio in the UNAM bathroom, he chooses to wait. Bolaño had later described this real-life episode in various novels, essays, and interviews.¹²⁶ What is important to underline, for the purposes of *Amuleto*'s analysis, is that Bolaño-the writer chooses to tell the story of Belano-the character through the feminine voice of Auxilio, thus validating her language and restoring the urgency of the account not by speaking right away but rather by talking through the voice of the mother. In this way, the urgency of the historical moment is channeled towards hearing (that is, reading) Auxilio speak. By having a feminine voice recount the young man's experience, Bolaño is performing an act of dislocation, a movement towards the marginalized feminine figure. The de-centering of the masculine voice is a similar operation to that of the first witnessing scene, where Bolaño chooses to focus on an event that is invoked less often than the Tlatelolco massacre but that is, nevertheless, fundamental to understanding the historical moment.

The final scene of the novel: the sacrificial violence.

Amuleto begins with the witnessing of state violence but the end of the novel confronts us with another type of violence in the Latin American political landscape:

¹²⁶See for example *Estrella Distante* (1996) or the collection of interviews titled *Bolaño por sí mismo* (2006).

sacrificial violence. The last scene, one of Auxilio's hallucinations in the UNAM bathroom, is a vision of an army of Latin American youth marching to war, singing while heading towards the edge of a cliff, to be swallowed by the abyss of history. Unable to stop them, Auxilio can only watch helplessly as the young soldiers march towards their own death:

Y los oí cantar, los oigo cantar todavía, ahora que ya no estoy en el valle, muy bajito, apenas un murmullo casi inaudible, a los niños más lindos de Latinoamérica, a los niños mal alimentados y a los bien alimentados, a los que lo tuvieron todo y a los que no tuvieron nada, qué canto más bonito es el que sale de sus labios, qué bonitos eran ellos, qué belleza, aunque estuvieran marchando hombro con hombro hacia la muerte, los oí cantar y me volví loca, los oí cantar y nada pude hacer para que se detuvieran, yo estaba demasiado lejos y no tenía fuerzas para bajar al valle, para ponerme en medio de aquel prado y decirles que se detuvieran, que marchaban hacia una muerte cierta. Lo único que pude hacer fue ponerme de pie, temblorosa, y escuchar hasta el último suspiro su canto, escuchar siempre su canto, porque aunque a ellos se los tragó el abismo el canto siguió en el aire del valle, en la neblina del valle que al atardecer subía hacia los faldeos y hacia los riscos.

Así pues los muchachos fantasmas cruzaron el valle y se despeñaron en el abismo. Un tránsito breve. Y su canto fantasma o el eco de su canto fantasma, que es como decir el eco de la nada, siguió marchando al mismo paso que ellos, que era el paso del valor y de la generosidad, en mis oídos. Una canción apenas audible, un canto de guerra y de amor, porque los niños sin duda se dirigían hacia la guerra pero lo hacían recordando las actitudes teatrales y soberanas del amor.

¿Pero qué clase de amor pudieron conocer ellos?, pensé cuando el valle se quedó vacío y sólo su canto seguía resonando en mis oídos. El amor de sus padres, el amor de sus perros y de sus gatos, el amor de sus juguetes, pero sobre todo el amor que se tuvieron entre ellos, el deseo y el placer.

Y aunque el canto que escuché hablaba de la guerra, de las hazañas heroicas de una generación entera de jóvenes latinoamericanos sacrificados, yo supe que por encima de todo hablaba del valor y de los espejos, del deseo y del placer.

Y ese canto es nuestro *Amuleto*. (153-154)¹²⁷

¹²⁷ A point of departure for understanding the meaning of "amulet:" it is not a symbol, as it seems to be initially, but rather an allegorical device. That is, 'amulet' does not signify the connection between hope and revolution, but rather the collapse of this relationship. In the light of Benjamin's conception, amulet as allegory points precisely to the severing of the relationship between hope and direct revolutionary action.

Auxilio's attitude towards the scene she is witnessing is one of ambivalence—she is moved by their courage but wants to stop them. However, she does not have the force to shout and warn them that they are walking towards sure death. Initially, Auxilio is mesmerized by the young soldiers' generosity and recognizes that their motivations for going to war are feelings and memories of love. Rich or poor, the love for their close ones unites them as equals against an unseen enemy. Their song talks not only about love, however. It also talks about the heroic adventures of a whole generation of “sacrificed Latin American youth.” Although the children are willing to go to war out of love, the ultimate outcome of their sacrifice is their death and Auxilio's madness—“*me volví loca.*” They commit the violence against themselves. Their sacrifice is rooted in a fight for a better world, but it results in more madness and more violence.

After their death, their song continues as a phantom-song to remind us of their sacrifice and of our duty to remember and think *in their wake*. The song that Auxilio heard then and still hears in the form of a murmur, fading away but never ceasing, is the memory of their struggle. We are haunted not only by the screams of those who fell victim to state violence, but also by the song of those who have sacrificed themselves in the struggle for a more equitable society. It is impossible to remain indifferent to their sacrifice; it is hard not to be moved by their love and generosity. It is crucial to remember, but it is also crucial to know *how* to remember and what to learn from these episodes. It is a challenge and a duty for us to remain motivated by the love for others but without reproducing the violence that led to their untimely death.

In order to better understand this apocalyptic scene, we need to return to an earlier experience of Bolaño's difficult voyage by land from Mexico City to Chile to

support and participate in the political changes of the Allende government. Auxilio comments:

Después, en 1973, él decidió volver a su patria a hacer la revolución y yo fui la única, aparte de su familia, que lo fue a despedir a la estación de autobuses, pues Arturito Belano se marchó por tierra, un viaje largo, larguísimo, plagado de peligros, el viaje iniciático de todos los pobres muchachos latinoamericanos, recorrer este continente absurdo que entendemos mal o que de plano no entendemos. (63)

Through his own experience as a young man Bolaño examines the figure of the “machito latinoamericano” who feels compelled, out of a sense of duty and justice, to come into manhood by taking the initiating voyage across Latin America, by confronting obstacles and dangers with the goal of learning something about themselves as well as find their own place within the continent. While driven by generosity and a sense of social consciousness, it seems that somehow the goal of the trip itself, which is to acquire knowledge about the identity of their continent, is flawed to begin with. The continent itself presents to the young man as absurd, turning out to be resistant to understanding through experience. Bolaño suggests that the kind of understanding that the young man seeks is not to be acquired by the first-hand experience offered by traveling, but by a certain attitude towards the world that already surrounds us.

It is impossible to think about the kind of voyage that Bolaño describes without recalling Che Guevara’s mythical motorcycle voyage across South America that took him from Buenos Aires all the way to Cuba in 1952 at the age of twenty-three.¹²⁸ In short,

¹²⁸ Through the characters they encounter on the road, Guevara and Granado learn the injustices the impoverished face and are exposed to people they would have never encountered in their hometown. An interesting comparison would be between *The Motorcycle Diaries* and *Detectives Salvajes*, where two friends embark on a journey, one of self-discovery and the other of complete loss. Bolaño’s novel could be read as the negative copy of Guevara’s, where political consciousness does not lead to the desire for social salvation.

Che Guevara's voyage led to the victory of the Cuban Revolution, but also to his assassination in 1967 by CIA-backed Bolivian army soldiers as he was trying to mobilize the indigenous peasants. While Che Guevara has become a symbol of leftist ideals, his voyage across South America has come to symbolize the voyage towards acquiring political awareness and the path to the creation of the New Man. The "machito latinoamericano" in order to become "machito" seeks to duplicate or reproduce this formative experience.

In her analysis of the 1960s decade in Latin America, Diana Sorensen contends that the success of the Cuban Revolution produced a structure of feeling based on "redemptive longing:" impelled by feelings of love, young men saw themselves as "the motor of history" (28).¹²⁹ In an essay on Ernesto Che Guevara's early days as a revolutionary, Ricardo Piglia explains how Che believed that one's willingness to self-sacrifice was the pre-condition for political subjectivity. Within this logic the new political subject as hero follows an ethical model of "primitive christianism," where the subject is constituted precisely by his willingness to sacrifice himself for the love of others (*El último lector*, 131-135). Piglia calls this logic "sacrificial ethics," meaning that the condition for the victory of the Cuban Revolution is precisely the construction of a new subjectivity through sacrifice.

In Auxilio's vision, the "jovenes latinoamericanos sacrificados," in their struggle against inequality, reproduce exactly the revolutionary fighter model put forth by Che

¹²⁹ "Structure of feeling" is Raymond Williams' term to denote the "culture of a particular historical moment. . . . It suggests a common set of perceptions and values shared by a particular generation and is most clearly articulated in particular and artistic forms and conventions. The industrial novel of the 1840s would be one example of the structure of feeling which emerged in middle-class consciousness out of the development of industrial capitalism. Each generation lives and produces its own 'structure of feeling,' and while particular groups might express this most forcibly, it extends unevenly through the culture as a whole" (in *A Dictionary of Cultural and Critical Theory*, Blackwell, 517-518).

Guevara. The Che Guevara myth still offers one of the most seductive models for the leftist Latin American intellectual. Auxilio fails to stop them from repeating the same history; she can only bear witness to what is ultimately “una historia de terror” or “un crimen atroz,” as she had forewarned at the beginning of her story (11). In *Amuleto* bearing witness means bearing witness to this failure to think otherwise about what it means to be courageous, about how to be politically engaged yet depart from a model that glorifies violence and puts action before thought. Bolaño, through the voice of Auxilio, tries to call attention to the madness of martyr-like practice, which reproduces violence and ends in failure. The catastrophe in this case is the reproduction of violence, not only from the part of the State, but from within.

Profoundly shaped by the repressive Southern Cone military dictatorships of the 1970s and 1980s, as well as by the resulting loss of the revolutionary horizon inspired by the Cuban Revolution, Post Boom narrative (Bolaño’s included) grows from the witnessing of paternal loss or paternal abandonment. Once the patriarchal logic has manifested itself first as trauma, through the military coups that impose the father figure of the Latin American dictator, and second as absence, through the death of political figures such as Che Guevara or Salvador Allende, mothers and orphaned children are left behind, seemingly adrift. But, in the wake of the loss of the political man, suggests Bolaño, we can learn something else about the political from somewhere else: the abjected figure of the mother.

Although the young soldiers go to war because of love for their parents, it is striking to note the differences between the maternal and the paternal figure. The mother figure bears witness as *absent presence*, meaning that they do not see or hear her

although she is there. In contrast, the father figure exists as *present absence*: the children's actions are motivated by political ideals instilled by male revolutionary figures that assume a paternal role, one that a "machito latinoamericano" is expected to later reproduce. In fact, in most of Bolaño's narrative fathers are either absent or unavailable and sterile (the Catholic Father in *Nocturno de Chile*) or crazy (the father of the two poet sisters in *Detectives salvajes*).¹³⁰ Even in instances where the fathers love their children, they are incapable of saving them from disaster (in "El hijo del coronel" from *El secreto del mal*) or end up fighting with their sons ("Últimos atardeceres en la tierra"). Bolaño's work as a whole could be read as narratives of paternal abandonment: fathers are either absent or do not take care of their offspring.

Auxilio might not be successful in preventing the sacrificial violence she is witnessing, but Bolaño is asking us to listen to her worries and fears. Auxilio goes mad after witnessing the unnecessary sacrifice of her sons. Since the enemy they desire to fight in the name of love and justice is nowhere in sight, then maybe the struggle is to be fought elsewhere. Auxilio might not be able provide a solution, but she sees the flaws of a certain kind of leftist political project and its roots in a patriarchal logic of heroic suicide, which is inescapably accompanied by an abjection of the feminine, maternal element. From within the framework of "sacrificial ethics," as Piglia refers to it, Auxilio could be considered a coward because she decides to remain hidden and to observe the military invasion of the University instead of actively participating and being imprisoned. However, Bolaño questions that line of thought, which defines heroism as the necessary

¹³⁰ In *Nocturno de Chile* the Father has no children of his own, but literary critic Fogwell stands in for both his "father" and potential lover. Their relationship engenders not actual writers, but a line of literary critics subservient to the dictatorship.

sacrifice of one's life as a prerequisite for the furthering of a just political cause. What Auxilio witnesses is not only State-sponsored violence upon the bodies of the young, but also violence that the young impose on their own bodies. Auxilio breaks the sacrificial return of the same old history of victims and victimizers and self-victimizers. Maybe, instead, along with Auxilio, one should step back and examine what inspires and motivates this model, as well as what this model fails to take into account, what it abjects or represses, what it does not deal with. Then, maybe if we allow for a return of the mother, we might be able to move beyond the constant reproduction of sacrificial violence.

The three witnessing moments presented earlier are linked by their catastrophic effects, culminating in the apocalyptic vision of the end of a whole generation of Latin American youth. Although apocalypse has come to stand in for the end of the world, death, destruction, apocalypse is intrinsically related to revelation. The root meaning of the word *apokalypsis* is “unveiling or “disclosure,” thus presenting a catastrophic event with the potential for the revelation or a particular understanding.¹³¹ Apocalypse means to disclose or reveal, coming from the Greek *apo* [from] and *kalyptein* [to cover]. Revelation, to make known or expose comes from the Latin *re* [back] and *velum* [veil], to draw back the veil on what has been hidden, to reveal a secret. In that sense, to educate and to teach is to reveal something about the state of the world. In Walter Benjamin's conception of history, which does away with any faith or hope in progress, a great

¹³¹ Etymology: Middle English, revelation, Revelation, from Anglo-French *apocalipse*, from Late Latin *apocalypsis*, from Greek *apokalypsis*, from *apokalypsein* to uncover, from *apo-* + *kalyptein* to cover — more at [hell](#) 1 a: one of the Jewish and Christian writings of 200 b.c. to a.d. 150 marked by pseudonymity, symbolic imagery, and the expectation of an imminent cosmic cataclysm in which God destroys the ruling powers of evil and raises the righteous to life in a messianic kingdom b *capitalized* : [revelation](#) 32 a: something viewed as a prophetic revelation b: [armageddon](#)3: a great disaster <an environmental *apocalypse*> [Oxford Dictionary]

disaster, as tragic and detrimental as it is, brings with it the seed for envisioning a different world.¹³²

The apocalyptic tone of Auxilio's visions points to a desire to think of how to continue in the face of disaster, how to maintain a hope for the future when the future seems to hold no hope. How to think after and beyond Salvador's ultimate sacrificial gesture? After the demise of Salvador Allende's political project of a Marxist democratic state and after the violent curtailment of the international student movements of 1968, Bolaño makes a case for Auxilio's maternal practice, for an ethics of care. After Salvador, a case for Auxilio: her self-appointed role is not that of a savior, but rather she puts herself in a position of mother who both assists and aids her "children." After the demise of the Marxist democratic state, the artist's role becomes comparable to that of a single mother, raising her orphaned children and mustering ways to instill hope into a post-apocalyptic world. We learn from *Amuleto* that the failure of an alternative intellectual project has as much to do with state violence as with a leftist model that privileges sacrifice over the integration of maternal or feminine thought, or that focuses on the paternal instead of recognizing and valuing the presence of a maternal element. Bolaño's critique of the revolutionary discourse in Latin America is that, although it tried to incorporate the feminine, it only did so partially and insufficiently. One of Bolaño's assertions is that the revolutionary struggle also silenced women—gender violence is present regardless of ideology. Woman remains the other of both State and revolution.

Women and Language

¹³² See particularly "On the concept of history" (1940) in Benjamin, Walter. *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 4: 1938-1940*. Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006. Print.

In *Amuleto*, on a first impression, men appear as actors while women are portrayed as lovers, as mothers, as auxiliary appendages, or as enablers of men's actions. Women are portrayed as marginal actors in the Latin American revolutionary struggles of the last half of the twentieth century. However, the novel indicates a desire to think differently about the feminine. It signals to the lessons we might learn if we pay close attention to their stories. As the mother of one of the characters in Bolaño's last novel, *2666*, says: "Hay que hacer caso a las mujeres. Lo mejor es no desoír los temores de las mujeres" (438). The ethical imperative of paying attention to women recurs throughout Bolaño's work. In *Amuleto* the imperative of listening to women is put in practice by concentrating on the real and imagined conversations that Auxilio has with other female characters in the novel—Lilian Serpas, Elena the philosopher, Remedios Varo, Alberto Belano's mother, and others.

One female character, the poetess Lilian Serpas, the single mother of a recluse painter, is famous in the leftist circles of Mexico City for having slept one night with el Che and, by her own account, the experience was "so-so" (104). As Auxilio admits, it could have been a lie, but the story is part of those contemporary myths, in this case the emblem of the Latin American macho. Che's image as powerful masculine figure is both enforced (he had sex with admirers around the world) and undermined (the experience was not spectacular for the woman, it was an average sexual encounter). In the "folklore of DF" Lilian is defined by her sexual relationship to el Che, and not by her own merits as poet. However, what ultimately defines Lilian in Auxilio's eyes is her motherhood. Lilian, who is a poet herself, a creator of poems, wanders the public spaces of the city trying to sell the engravings made by her son. By concentrating on Lilian's maternal love

for her son, Bolaño takes away the aura of Che's virile masculinity. Even though it could be argued that she is still tied affectively to a masculine element, her son, what is radically different in this relationship is the affective element, the mutual inter-relationship between mother and son.

Another instance of gender silencing is Elena the philosopher, who seems to lose her ability to act and speak for herself once she falls in love with Paolo, an Italian journalist.¹³³ A philosophy post-graduate student, Elena undergoes a subtle but noticeable transformation when she falls in love with the Italian man on his way to Cuba to interview Fidel Castro (45). Elena's love for him seems to paralyze and silence her—she is only interested in listening to her lover's stories. On the other hand, Paolo's intention to interview the Father figure of the Cuban Revolution puts him on the side of production of revolutionary discourse, thus on the side of political action. While Paolo seems friendly yet detached, Elena's romantic love incapacitates her. She loses her head, becoming incapable of reasoning and speaking. Romantic love thus can be seen as paralysis, apolitical; it is also the type of affect that cuts her away from friends and from language. Auxilio remarks that in love (Elena's for Paolo) one is always alone, whereas in friendship (Elena and Auxilio) one is never alone, thus favoring the communal experience of friendship over the isolating experience of love (52).

Even though Auxilio registers the changes in Elena, she feels unable to help. The relationship between “the mother of Mexican poetry” and the female philosopher seems

¹³³ Auxilio notices a mysterious change in Elena's mood “no estaba bien, sin poder precisar qué era” (48) as if the Italian man was an “evil” influence on her, like his presence was something that withered or annihilated her being. This intangible feeling of threat also surrounded Wieder's character in *Estrella distante* (in my prospectus), and the mysterious fascination he produced in the female poets of the literary circles. As we know, Wieder, a DINA agent, ultimately kills the two sister poets, one of which he was romantically involved with.

to have been severed by the arrival of “political man.” After her lover receives permission to leave for Cuba and the relationship inevitably ends, Elena disappears: “se esfuma” (53-54). After Paolo’s departure Elena becomes unreachable for Auxilio, her whereabouts untraceable. Auxilio sets out to go to her house, but gets lost anytime she attempts to find it. It seems that the relationship between poetry and philosophy cannot be sustained only by the work of poetry, but rather by collaboration, which in this case has been interrupted by the paradoxically apolitical effects of (male) politics. Auxilio is left to witness the fragmented relationship between philosophy and poetry in the wake of the man’s departure.

Through Auxilio’s testimony the novel emphasizes the importance of women’s speech and actions. Bolaño not only gives voice to a woman, a marginalized woman, but also to a woman who calls herself “mother of all poets” (27). Auxilio, “amiga de todos los mexicanos,” recognized by the young poets as “madre de la poesía mexicana,” narrates the “atrocious crime” (148; 11) from the perspective of friend and mother. What does it imply to witness the unnamed crime from a mother’s viewpoint? How does a mother narrate a crime against, not only her own children, but against others towards whom the same affective relationship is extended?¹³⁴ What kind of language is produced and what kind of language is created in this process? And what can we learn about literature when we are attentive to a mother’s lamentation? By looking from the perspective of the “mother”—artistic and otherwise—we can explore the political aspect of her acts and the political potential of listening and thinking-with the mother.

¹³⁴ The Madres de Plaza de Mayo as another possible historical reference, which connects the Madres’ ongoing political struggle long after the end of the Argentinean Dirty War with the duty to continually bear witness to, to make present, the absence of the disappeared.

However, the mother finds it hard to make her voice heard. We remember that Belano had returned from Chile and had refused to talk about his frustrated experience during Pinochet's military coup. Instead, Auxilio speaks for him. The importance of this act becomes evident in the following passage:

Y yo soy la única que puede contarlo. [...] Los primeros días, tras su regreso, Arturo se mantuvo encerrado en su casa, casi sin pisar la calle, y para todos, menos para mí, fue como si no hubiera vuelto de Chile. Pero yo fui a su casa y hablé con él y supe que había estado preso, ocho días, y que, aunque no fue torturado se comportó como un valiente. Y se lo dije a sus amigos. [...] para ellos Arturito ahora estaba instalado en la categoría de aquellos que han visto a la muerte de cerca, en la categoría de los tipos duros, y eso, en la jerarquía de los machitos desesperados de Latinoamérica, era un diploma, un jardín de medallas indesdeñables. (70-71)

Auxilio insists that she is the only one who can convey the truth about Belano's experience because she had made the effort to seek him and, in a way, collect his testimony first-hand. It is very important to note this assertion, since she is aware that she is offering us a second-hand account of the events. However, similarly to the earlier discussion on the witnessing moments, what is at stake is not the truth-value or the accuracy of the account, but rather that it is Auxilio's language and her language alone that conditions how the narrative unfolds. Thus, it is very surprising and rather disappointing for her to learn further along that Belano's former friends were somewhat incredulous:

En el fondo, también se ha de decir, nadie se lo tomaba a pie de letra. Es decir, la leyenda había partido de mis labios, mis labios ocultos por el dorso de mi mano, y aunque en esencia todo lo que yo había dicho de él cuando él permanecía en su casa era verdad, por venir de quién venía, de mí, no merecía una credibilidad excesiva. Así son las cosas en este continente. Yo era la madre y me creían, pero tampoco me creían *demasiado*. (72) [original emphasis]

Auxilio recognizes that they did not take her seriously and were rather suspicious. While she acknowledges that Arturito's story had been transformed into a legend, she also expresses a resigned disappointment at not being taken too seriously. They have a certain respect for her as "mother" but just not enough. Bolaño bemoans this fact and the situation that gives rise to the phenomenon: "así son las cosas en este continente." In other words, Latin America listens to the mother, but just not enough. Maybe this is what fails in the discourse produced in Latin America: giving the mother *some* credibility, *some* voice, but just not *enough*. In an effort to consider the consolidation of Latin American subjectivity, Bolaño sees certain political failure in the failure to listen to the mother and seeks to remedy that by aligning language production with the idea of motherhood.

The mother and psychoanalysis

Feminist critics have lamented the absence of a discussion on the mother in psychoanalytic theory. Indeed, psychoanalytic accounts of subject-formation are built precisely on the separation or repudiation of the mother as a necessary step towards the formation of the self. In *Amuleto*, the mother is somehow lost too, but Bolaño's writing-act strives to make the mother present.¹³⁵ I read Bolaño's novel as an attempt to make us aware of her importance, to make her present through language.

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* Freud establishes maternal loss as a prerequisite for subjective articulation. That is, Freud interprets the infant behavior in the *fort-da* game as an anticipatory act of rejection of the mother. In other words, if the subject

¹³⁵ Contrast with speech-act. In psychoanalysis the speech-act or the talking cure refers to the curative potential of the person through his/her speech. Here, in the writing act, we go beyond the idea of self-cure to an explicit social dimension.

decides to expel the mother before she expulses him/her into the world, this allows for an independent, masterful subjectivity. In the *fort-da* game, the infant is able to preemptively transform the future loss of the mother into *his* loss, a gain that cancels the initial loss and produces a certain satisfaction when the child realizes that he can dispense of the mother. Freud concludes that the child must lose or abandon the mother in order to begin his development, independently from the mother. This act guarantees the infant's entrance into language and is the first step towards subject formation. The child renounces the mother through the act of symbolic representation, inoculating itself against vulnerability to her rejection. The assumption of language equals the appropriation of discourse of rejection, the appropriation of loss (14-15).

For Lacan, this step takes the name of the "mirror stage." Briefly, the child's encounter with its own self-image disrupts the previous mother-child unity. According to Lacan, in the mirror stage the infant begins recognizing itself in the "mirror" and begins to develop his subjectivity based on the ideal image perceived in the mirror. Lacan's contribution to Freud's analysis has to do with the infant's entry into language. Through language the infant acquires a sense of meaning and can control his drives (initially the drive toward reunion with the mother) and enters as a subject into the Symbolic order, where he is an "I." Now the subject has entered into the vicious cycle of desire of freedom from lack (*Four Fundamental Concepts* 218-19). Of concern to our discussion is that the mirror phase signals the disruption of the child-mother unity and guarantees the child's passage into the Symbolic order. The child's entrance into the Symbolic realm is guaranteed by seeing the mother as something other than itself. As the child is formed as a subject, the mother is lost and the child submits to the authority of the father (the Name

of the Father). The unstated consequence of Lacan's system is that the mother is relegated not only to the realm of the unconscious Other, but to a pre-linguistic order in relationship to the self.

Among the psychoanalysts who have sought to compensate for the absence of the mother in psychoanalytic theory, Julia Kristeva claims that the mother is not "lost" but rather abjected. In order to account for the role of the mother, Kristeva introduced a theory of the semiotic where the mother has a linguistic capacity—the Semiotic (72-73). This theory, according to some feminist critics, remains highly problematic because the Semiotic is presented as pre-Symbolic, thus still trapped within a patriarchal hierarchy. For example, Judith Butler argues that Kristeva's attempt to "engage Lacanian premises only to expose their limits and to offer a specifically feminine locus of subversion of the paternal law within language" fails because her theory depends precisely on the paternal law she seeks to displace, conceding that the semiotic is subordinate to the symbolic, which is in turn subsumed under the Law of the Father ("The Body Politics of Julia Kristeva" 164). Thus, Butler argues, Kristeva's semiotic cannot have the subversive potential she claims it does because, as she sets it up, the semiotic is pre-cultural, thus pre-political. Similarly, by associating the figure of the mother with the semiotic, Kristeva reifies motherhood instead of analyzing its cultural construction (165). Ultimately, Butler sees Kristeva's attempt to think a theory of maternity as a theory that recuperates all difference and makes it actually harder to envision the possibility of change or revolution, both within language and within politics. To use Kristeva's own words, Butler would argue that even Kristeva abjects the mother. The problem remains: the symbolic or the cultural is still predicated upon a rejection of women's bodies (177).

Given psychoanalytic theory's failure to account for the mother other than as a pre-cultural or pre-linguistic figure, feminist critics have sought alternative avenues to approach the topic of subject formation that does not abject the mother. Carolyn Dever privileges object-relations theory over the Freudian psychoanalytic model because, as she argues, "psychoanalytic theories of subjectivity commence with the 'death' of the mother..." (203).¹³⁶ With this premise in mind, Dever turns to Melanie Klein and other object-relations theorists who challenge the Freudian conceptualization and asserts that the mother is and remains central throughout the child's construction of subjectivity. In Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis the mother is both origin and loss; she is the original object of both desire and prohibition. In Melanie Klein's object-relations theory the mother is a figure whose presence is legible throughout the subject's existence.

As Dever contends, "the psychoanalytic child protects itself from the fact of maternal loss with the weapon of language," so maternal loss equates subjective articulation (45). The feminist thrust that Dever gives to her argument is her claim that the return of the mother raises fears within the socio-political establishment. For Dever it follows that, as the mother has been relegated to the pre-linguistic realm, a possible return of the mother could be seen as a threat that could revert the (speaking) subject back to the pre-linguistic realm it has managed to escape from. Using Klein's view that sadism and aggression toward women is a preemptive response to the fear of domination and dependence, Dever suggests that certain misogyny might be at the heart of the fear of

¹³⁶ Dever engages theories of subject-formation to convincingly argue that the Victorian novel is built on maternal loss. Of interest to my project is that this observation allows her to make an analogy between the absence of the mother in Victorian novels and her absence from psychoanalytic theory.

dependence of mother (54-55).¹³⁷

Dever's analysis privileges object-relations theory over psychoanalytic theories of subject formation. But, albeit useful because she challenges the psychoanalytical patriarchy, Dever seems to be content with the "death of the mother" in the end and to use that symbolic death as a means to promote "an emancipatory ethic of individualism." Dever argues that the event of maternal death acts as a "felicitous narrative structure" that allows for the opportunity for the creation of new female identities, an emancipatory ethic of individualism, of self creation...." (206). I could not be further from this desire to create an "ethics of individualism from the mother's absence." As Dever strives to focus on the creation of female identities outside of a patriarchal mold, she resorts to also "killing" the mother for the sake of a feminine independence from a patriarchal order. It seems that, in her search for a more equitable ethics for women, Dever missed her chance to integrate the mother figure into a discussion on the potential of an ethics of intersubjectivity that could take into account the mother's liminal yet integral presence into the subject's formulation of a sense of self.

In contrast to Dever, Barbara Gelpi contends that it is the *relationship* to the mother, not her loss, which plays a role in the construction of subjectivity and the acquisition of language.¹³⁸ She maintains that the current ambivalence towards the

¹³⁷ The mixture of desire and dependence gives rise to aggression. Bolaño explores male aggression towards females in depth, especially in relationship to (group) feminicides in *2666* and *Estrella Distante*.

¹³⁸ Gelpi's analysis focuses on motherhood in Shelley's poems, but her discussion of subject-formation theories in the context of feminist thought is useful in order to tease out paternal versus maternal theories of subjectivity.

maternal comes from fascination with and fear of feminine power.¹³⁹ In Gelpi's view, Lacanian and Kristevan models approach subject formation through the impossible relationship between the maternal and the acquisition of language. For Gelpi the relationship that Kristeva maintains between motherhood and language relegates the mother to an archaic territory appropriated by a conscious subjectivity.¹⁴⁰ In that sense, the link between subjectivity and language becomes possible by the repudiation or abjection of the maternal. Instead, Gelpi seeks to "look to the relationship between mother and infant as the locus for imagining a new experience of subjectivity, a just and non-violational exchange through language" (xii). In other words, she is seeking to find ways to think of motherhood as not incompatible with her offspring's entrance into language, as a way of envisioning subjectivity that passes through language but does not repudiate the mother in the same way that psychoanalytic theory does. The drive for this project is the restructuring of subjectivity and language that re-members the relationship with the mother and can "radically alter all human institutions" (xiii).

Gelpi critiques the dichotomy established by the Freudian paradigm between the infant's speechless bonding with the maternal (the 'Imaginary' according to Lacan) and the child's entrance into language (what Lacan calls the 'Symbolic order') through the paternal. She sets out to explore the connection between the acquisition of language and the "mirroring" of the maternal (xii). As an alternative, she privileges Daniel Stern's contributions to developmental psychoanalytic theory, which focus on inter-subjectivity

¹³⁹ Both Bolaño and Ruiz are fully aware of the connection between male aggression and fear of the feminine and analyze it most of their works. For both, the fear manifests itself as aggressiveness and explains a fascist-like behavior.

¹⁴⁰ Gelpi appreciates Kristeva's discussion of the mother's liminality, but challenges Kristeva's view of the transition from the "semiotic" to the "symbolic."

and social relatedness as being present throughout the infant's development. Gelpi contrasts the Lacanian-Kristevian narrative of subject formation with the research put forth by Daniel Stern, where he points to the ongoing relationality of the subject, beginning with infancy and continuing throughout its adult life.¹⁴¹ In other words, Gelpi departs from a patriarchal subjectivity model to propose an inter-relational maternal subjectivity. Ultimately, Gelpi believes that mother-centeredness allows the possibility of entrance into a new historicity, moving beyond the fear of the pre-linguistic maternal abyss and towards a new way to access the feminine (4).

To be fair, Kristeva was also offering a new way of accessing the feminine when proposing to integrate the semiotic within the Lacanian framework. I propose to complement Kristeva's work on the semiotic with the other feminists' desire to think beyond the subject-centered discourse of psychoanalysis and to replace it with an inter-subjective or relational discourse. Thus, a model of inter-subjectivity based on the maternal figure becomes fundamental for thinking other ways to reformulate social, political, and cultural models that question paternal genealogies.

Motherhood as an ethical practice has been theorized by feminist scholars as a way to rethink traditional Western models that tend to ignore, trivialize, or demean

¹⁴¹ Stern suggests that infants differentiate themselves almost from birth and then move through increasingly complex ways of relating to their social environment. He observes that the child has, from an early age, the capacity to integrate different sensory information about an object in the world and play an active role in their relationships with others. The relationships to others are vital both for a sense of self and a sense of other as a separate other person in his or her own right. The subjective sense of self is something that arises about of a kind of mutual, wordless experience that Stern describes from his observational work as 'attunement.' In *The Interpersonal World of the Infant* (New York: Basic Books (1985) Stern uses the concept of 'affect attunement'-- a sharing or alignment of internal states in the domain of intersubjective relatedness--as an alternative to talking about mirroring or echoing. From Beebe, B., Sorter, D., Rustin, J., Knoblauch, S.H. (2003). "A Comparison of Meltzoff, Trevarthen, and Stern." *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, 13:777-804.

characteristics culturally associated with women. Through a gendered approach to morality, some feminist ethics seeks to value those traits that have traditionally been associated with women and to argue for their integration into the overall Western moral structure. For example, Carol Gilligan has argued for a 'ethics of care' that pays attention to care and relationships (culturally associated with women) in addition to the language of justice and rights, culturally associated with men (63). Although Gilligan's argument has been criticized for having the detrimental consequences of essentializing women as care-givers and ultimately risking disempowering those it sought to empower, I would like to reclaim her concept of 'ethics of care' in order to reflect on the possibility of an approach to ethics that emphasizes, rather than discounts, the relationships between individuals and the context in which these relationships are produced.

Virginia Held builds on Gilligan's concept to engage with social issues, arguing for the integration of individual rights with values such as care and solidarity, going beyond the market in policy-making decisions on health care, education, and cultural activities. Held goes even further to suggest the possibility for an international civility based on the integrative principles of ethics of care (168). Held's emphasis on a civil society that defies the demands of the marketplace when making decisions about its cultural life resonates strongly with Bolaño's concern for bringing to the fore those artists trampled on by the market's victorious march.

Maternal approaches to ethics provide an additional component to think about the conditions under which the relationships between individuals are established.¹⁴² While recognizing an intrinsic inequality in any kind of relation formed, this approach tries to

¹⁴² See for example Sara Ruddick's discussion in *Maternal Thinking* (1989).

eschew the “gender trap” by paradoxically proposing a model based on maternal logic, which emphasizes the preservation, nourishment and acceptance of others. A maternal logic combines cognition and affect, reason and emotion as principles for care-giving.

Going beyond the biological-filial aspect, maternal practice can help us think through what it means to take on a duty to an unrelated other *as if they were* your own offspring. It also gives us the opportunity to combine the social aspect of ethics of care with the inter-generational component of motherhood practice. Auxilio’s self-naming as “mother of Mexican poetry” allows us to extrapolate from the purely physiological realm into the social and the cultural sphere. Her not being an “authentic” mother makes this maternal ethical practice possible beyond the strictly biological-filial aspect, while displaying sensitivity to the social aspect of motherhood.

With regards to the question of “authenticity,” I adopt Kristeva’s important claim that the semiotic is not governed by the *biological* identity of artists and writers. The concept of the mother can be reclaimed not only as a feminine biological construct but also as a “structure,” as Barbara Johnson seeks to call it when she introduces the concept of ‘Mallarmé as mother’ in *A World of Difference*:

I would like to situate what is maternal in Mallarmé as a function or structure, defined not in terms of a female figure but in terms of a specific set of interactions and transactions that structure the relationship between the earliest parent and the child. (137)

In assigning a ‘maternal’ structure to a male writer Johnson seeks not to silence actual women by giving males all the roles, but rather to think beyond a developmental scheme where the mother’s power is something to be outgrown. Rather than value a successful subject formation as having accomplished autonomy from the mother’s influence,

Johnson proposes to rethink subject discursive positions other than that of a child, to invert positions: not the child's gaze to the mother, but the mother's gaze to the child. In other words, not to abject the mother, but rather *be* the mother.

The language of the mother. Bolaño as mother.

I take a similar stand when I propose that Bolaño sees in the mother a model for the post-Boom writer. In that sense, of course, Bolaño is mother, too. Maybe the social role of literature comes to mean thinking from this point of view, to have this perspective of relationality and claim the mother as subject, rather than object, of discourse. In *Amuleto*, Bolaño constructs a model for post-Boom narrative analogous to the practice of motherhood. Bolaño's conceptualization of motherhood parallels the artistic production of language, engendering a genealogy of—and for—literature.¹⁴³ I interpret this gesture in the context of Bolaño's efforts to think an-other way to envision a literary canon for Latin America. I see this as part of a wider operation of iconoclastic demystification of established meta-narratives such as the Boom phenomenon. Bolaño sees this type of (re)writing as a necessary practice for the survival of culture, which is evident in the main character's name and role: "auxilio a la cultura." *Amuleto* goes against the idea of origin and authenticity in two ways. Firstly, on the meta-narrative level the novel can be seen as the rewriting of seminal texts in the Latin American tradition, such as Juan Rulfo's novel *Pedro Páramo* (Auxilio as the feminine counterpart to Pedro Páramo; while he speaks

¹⁴³ I use 'genealogy' in the Foucauldian sense: an analysis of how historical processes are constituted and the move towards "discontinuous, illegitimate knowledges." It looks at how notions of truth etc. are maintained in society—showing how a text or a concept is constituted. A genealogical analysis seeks to unmask the process by which power-sanctioned knowledge becomes 'truth.' To unitary theories Foucault opposes genealogical fragments that question the "power-effects" of scientific knowledge (or dominating knowledge that presents itself as truth). A genealogy illuminates the fact that, counter to Enlightenment reason, there exists a multiplicity of knowledges, not a series of binaries such as knowledge/ignorance, day/night, reason/error, etc.

from beyond the grave, she speaks from behind the walls of the desolate university) or Jorge Luis Borges's short story "El aleph" (the bathroom as the space where all temporalities are manifested simultaneously), as well as drawing from Dante's *Divine Comedy* (Auxilio's reemergence from the hell of her experience and the final revelation) and *Don Quixote* (a Spanish poet refers to her as "the feminine version of Don Quixote") (30). Secondly, *Amuleto* belongs to Bolaño's overall project of rewriting the detective fiction genre in *Estrella Distante*, *Los Detectives Salvajes*, or even *2666*), this time through a woman's voice and from the mother's point of view (as *absent presence*).

The importance of women's speech and of Auxilio's role is further emphasized in one imaginary encounter between Auxilio and the phantom of Catalan painter Remedios Varo. During her thirteen days of confinement in the University, Auxilio remembers, dreams or hallucinates about various encounters. In one of them she visits the house of Remedios Varo, who calms Auxilio and encourages her to resist in the name of saving the honor of the University, which is an important affirmation, knowing that both Auxilio and Remedios Varo are marginal figures to the University establishment. There is affinity between Remedios and Auxilio through their names: they are the ones who provide remedy ("Remedios") and help ("Auxilio") to others and to each other:

Y Remedios Varo me mira y su mirada dice: no te preocupes, Auxilio, no te vas a morir, no te vas a volver loca, **tú estás manteniendo el estandarte de la autonomía universitaria, tú estás salvando el honor de las universidades de nuestra América**, lo peor que te puede pasar es que adelgaces horriblemente, lo peor que te puede pasar es que tengas **visiones**, lo peor que te puede pasar es que te descubran, pero tú no pienses en eso, mantente firme, lee al pobre Pedrito Garfias (ya podías haberte llevado otro libro al baño, mujer) y deja que tu mente fluya libremente por el tiempo, desde el 18 de septiembre al 30 de septiembre de 1968, ni un día más, eso es todo lo que tienes que hacer. (97) [my emphasis]

Remedios Varo (1908-1963), the Catalan painter exiled in Mexico in 1941, fled Spain in 1939 because of the Civil War and later France following the Nazi occupation.¹⁴⁴ Varo is an emblematic figure affected by history's catastrophes, not spatially restricted, on the contrary, condemned wandering the earth—a political nomad. Remedios Varo speaks from the past (1962) about Auxilio's present (September 1968). Auxilio travels temporally from her confined space in the women's bathroom to reach Varo's house in 1962. Even though she admits to never having met her, the imagined visit to Varo as ghost is one of the fabricated memories that helped her survive the thirteen days of terror of 1968. Producing language through the invention of memories is what gives Auxilio the strength to maintain the University's autonomy.

At one point while in the UNAM bathroom, she begins to have dream-prophecies about the future of literature. She begins to prophesy the relationship between readers and texts of marginal or established authors, mostly of twentieth century literature. She foretells which authors will be popular and where and which authors will cease to be read. A voyage through the future life of world literature, it reveals the fragility of the reader-text relationship. In the end, the future of literature is just this—the relationship established between the text and its readers. Her prediction is focused on the relationship text-readership, touching upon the affective bonds formed in the reading process, highlighting that literature is foremost an affective practice. A curious “dream guardian angel” with a heavy Buenos Aires accent (a spoof on the Argentine obsession with psychoanalysis) convinces Auxilio to recount her dreams, but there is no possible ‘interpretation’ to her dream, since it is a dream about the future of literature and offers

¹⁴⁴ Mexico was a common destination for the Spanish Republicans who became political exiles after Franco's takeover in 1939 due to the political refugee policy encouraged by then president Lázaro Cárdenas.

no insight into Auxilio's psyche (132). This passage claims back the affect for literature and challenges psychoanalysis' monopoly on affectivity and its subject-centered insight and analysis. In psychoanalysis the concept of revelation is tied to the notion of self, where the patient "discovers" and gains access to the self through talking, whereas the kinds of revelations that Auxilio has involve the destinies of a whole generation. Even Auxilio's conception of self is defined by the genealogical relationships she has with the young poets of Mexico. *Amuleto* tries to get away from the centripetal movement towards the self and seeks to think relationally through the emphasis on motherhood, inter-generational thought, and storytelling.

After the thirteen days of confinement, once the staff returns to the University and she can leave the bathroom, she does not directly recount her experience, but lets her story be told through "the folklore of Mexico City," which, by its dynamic character, will invariably alter the truth-content of the story:

La leyenda se esparció en el viento del DF y en el viento del 68, se fundió con los muertos y los sobrevivientes y ahora todo el mundo sabe que una mujer permaneció en la Universidad cuando fue violada la autonomía en aquel hermoso y aciago año. Y yo seguí viviendo (pero faltaba algo, faltaba lo que había visto), y muchas veces escuché mi historia, contada por otros, en donde aquella mujer que estuvo trece días sin comer, encerrada en un baño, es una estudiante de Medicina o una secretaria de la Torre de Rectoría, y no una uruguaya sin papeles y sin trabajo y sin una casa donde reposar la cabeza. Y a veces ni siquiera es una mujer sino un hombre, un estudiante maoísta o un profesor con problemas gastrointestinales. Y cuando yo escuchaba esas historias, esas versiones de mi historia, generalmente (sobre todo si no estaba bebida) no decía nada. ¡Y si estaba borracha le quitaba importancia al asunto! Eso no es importante, les decía, eso es folklore universitario, eso es folklore del DF, y entonces ellos me miraban (¿pero quiénes me miraban?) y decían: Auxilio, tú eres la madre de la poesía mexicana. Y yo les decía (si estaba bebida les gritaba) que no, que no soy la madre de nadie, pero que, eso sí, los conocía a todos, a todos los jóvenes poetas del DF, a los que nacieron aquí y a los que llegaron de provincias, y a los que el oleaje trajo de otros lugares de Latinoamérica, y que los quería a todos. (147-148)

Auxilio has no pretenses as to the “truth” of witnessing but rather the important part is the gesture, as well as the fact that it enters the public space of folklore. It is significant that she takes no credit for it—no authenticity, no originality—because what is important is that the story of symbolic autonomy be told. Individual stories are not important until they flow into collective life. In this way, her experience multiplies, becomes a multiplicity of stories: experience matters in so far as it produces language and it allows for language to be dynamic and to produce more language in turn. The fact that her experience is converted into a legend enables to uphold, within the social imaginary, the constitutional reality of the University’s autonomy.

The many forms of language (reading, talking, putting into words her experiences, memories and invented stories) guarantee Auxilio’s survival and allow her to offer language as nourishment for others. Auxilio survives the thirteen days in the UNAM bathroom by feeding herself with poems and producing discourse on invented encounters with marginal artistic figures. She literally feeds herself with language to survive by reading a book of poems by Pedro Garfias. While her survival is enabled by poetry, the fact that she happened to read a book of poems by the Spanish exile points to yet another intersection of disasters. Bolaño, through Auxilio, professes his faith in speech, in a language that does not allow itself be silenced by moments of catastrophe.

The first-person narrative repeats the “yo” form to the point where it becomes rhythmic, trance-like, whereas the repetition of simple past tense verbs “pensé,” “vi,” “supe,” (34-35) “miré,” “decidí,” “oí,” etc. emphasizes the interrelation of sensorial and rational experience. The connectors *y, y entonces, luego*, link ideas and thoughts and

transform the language into a river flowing through the text, carrying the reader towards the end of the novel with an urgency that parallels the children's march towards the abyss of war. Through his prose, Bolaño is able to dislocate the reader's sense of chronological time in a gesture that parallels how history is itself dislocated.

Auxilio is both witness to and mourner of the lost generation of Latin American youth. Her language is a lament that mourns the death of her "children." The almost ritual-like repetitions appear to us as wailing, as verbal expressions of mourning. Witnessing becomes a form of mourning through the repetitions and the lyrical character of the prose. What could be seen as an overtly artificial form is in reality the place, the time, the moment when language stutters, where clear articulation reaches its limits of discourse formation, but which must carry on nonetheless. The only possession that Auxilio and the youth of Latin America have is the utopia of language, "la utopía de la palabra" (43). Language is the only thing that they possess and with which they can envision a future-to-hope-for:

Y yo estaba allí con ellos porque yo tampoco tenía nada, excepto mi memoria.
Yo tenía recuerdos. Yo vivía encerrada en el lavabo de mujeres de la Facultad, vivía empotrada en el mes de septiembre del año 1968 y podía, por tanto, verlos sin pasión... (43)

Her past experiences, especially the events of September 1968, define the relationship that Auxilio has with the young poets; she forms a symbolic solidarity with them on the basis of lack. They have nothing but language; she has nothing but memories.

With Bolaño's conception of the mother we can elaborate an additional departure from Kristeva's conception of maternal ethics. According to Kristeva, motherhood ethics—'heretics'—challenges the autonomy of the ethical subject and links the subject

to the other through love, not through Law. Bolaño, while also challenging the idea of autonomous ethical subject, does not propose an ethics through love. For him, as we have seen in the final apocalyptic scene, an ethics through love as sacrifice, an ethics of solidarity is as dangerous as the ethics through Law—it ends in unnecessary violence committed against oneself. Instead, the mother’s perspective reveals something else: not love but catastrophe.

As Auxilio witnesses the sacrifice of a whole generation she sees that, although seductive, the idea of going to war, albeit motivated by love, only brings with it more violence. If we think from the perspective of the children, their actions are justified because their struggle is done out of love and a sense of justice for others. This gesture links their effort with Che Guevara’s discourse on revolution as an act of love. We recall that Che wrote that “the true revolutionary is guided by a great feeling of love. It is impossible to think of a genuine revolutionary lacking this quality”.¹⁴⁵ However, they don’t know they are going to sure death or that their fight is in vain because there is no enemy in sight. But, if instead we look from Auxilio’s point of view we see that their sacrifice is in vain. The mother’s perspective reveals not love, but catastrophe. The mother can only witness the birth of history in the form of the death of her children. Bolaño’s mother does not procreate but is witness to the birth of history as loss, not as productive or reproductive enterprise, but in negative terms. The mother does not give birth—she does not re-produce a failing logic. Rather, the social role of literature is to bear witness as mother to the failure of a patriarchal logic of political emancipation.

¹⁴⁵ In “Socialism and Man in Cuba” Written March, 1965. First Published: March 12, 1965, under the title, “From Algiers, for *Marcha*. The Cuban Revolution Today.” Source: *The Che Reader*, Ocean Press, 2005. <http://www.marxists.org/archive/guevara/1965/03/man-socialism.htm> accessed February 27, 2009.

Auxilio is left to bear witness to the birth of History as catastrophe, not as progress or development. She does not “make history” in the conventional sense. It is not time to *make* history; it is time to think about what it takes to make history happen otherwise. Instead, Bolaño, through Auxilio, creates an-other kind of language—a language of mourning, but a language that reformulates an inter-subjective approach to testimonial narrative and to literature in general.

What is at stake in the formulation of this new language is the reconfiguration of the “lettered city,” that is, the social role of literature in the wake of the historical events that profoundly impacted Latin America’s cultural and political life: the Cuban Revolution, Mexico ’68, as well as the Southern Cone dictatorships. The novel’s main character recounts a “horror story,” a history of oppression, and she witnesses instances of violence, both of the State against its citizens and of the young revolutionaries against themselves. The type of witnessing offered by Bolaño’s character eschews the identity-politics of *testimonio* narrative through its focus on inter-subjectivity—Auxilio’s subjectivity is defined through her relationships with others. Furthermore, literature does not lay claim to “truth” and “authenticity,” but it does engage with notions of authorship (the marginalized maternal voice) and it addresses the social role of the written text by bearing witness to history as catastrophe.

Nonetheless, the forward-looking aspect of *testimonio* is also present in *Amuleto*. Auxilio contemplates the catastrophe, but musters ways to express a forward looking discourse that integrates the maternal aspect into a reformulation of the future. The forward-looking appeal, not its claim to Truth, is where the political potential of the written text might lie. This model for post-Boom literature underlines the question of

affectivity through an ethics of care, but without the problematic of identity politics, since it does not invoke or require solidarity, but rather pushes us to reformulate our own assumptions on the limits of politics. To think historically in this case means that, in order to look forward, we must look back through the mother's eyes.

Conclusion

Throughout this dissertation I have discussed Ruiz and Bolaño's work in separate chapters. In this conclusion I would like to establish a more focused discussion of the conceptual points shared by the two authors in light of my close readings of their works. Both exiled authors, they have sought to find ways of confronting the Chilean coup and its effects. In the search for avenues of responding to the political catastrophe that curtailed the project of political emancipation of the Popular Unity (UP) government, the main conceptual focus became the issue of responsibility and self-critique. In turn, responsibility motivates their poetics.

The concept of responsibility seeks to account for the historical conditions that have produced both the first democratically elected Marxist president, as well as one of the most oppressive dictatorships of the Southern Cone. Bolaño and Ruiz are two exilic figures that are actively supportive of the Allende government, but are also critical about perceived dogmatic and patriarchal tendencies of leftist political projects. These considerations motivate them to pursue artistic projects that emphasize responsibility and representation, as opposed to commitment and transparency. To that end, they both problematize the national popular project of the UP. Bolaño focuses on critiquing the Christian telos that informs militant discourse and rails against the sacrificial ethos that motivates it. In the same spirit, Ruiz plays with issues of formal representation in order

to dismantle the illusion of a unified, collective subjective will that the UP sought to convey.

In particular, the consequences of focusing on the issue of responsibility in the post-coup and the post-dictatorship destroy the illusion that there is an evil other always outside of ourselves. For example, in my discussion of *Life is a Dream* I showed how the source of memory obstruction is the subject's desire to forget, giving rise to the need to account for not only external, but also internal repressive mechanisms. Along similar lines, in my analysis of *Estrella distante* and *Nocturno de Chile*, I underscored the pervasiveness of microfascisms, especially in the final recognition scenes, where the reader is forced to confront the uncomfortable realization of one's complicity with repressive forces.

In addition, I argue that the idea of responsibility generates a very specific kind of political commitment, which in this case is manifested in an overt concern with issues of artistic representation. In other words, the concept of responsibility motivates these artists' poetics. The consequences of formal disruptions were examined in depth in the case of Ruiz's use of surrealist documentary and Bolaño's fictionalization of the *testimonio* genre. Specifically, in my analysis of Ruiz's documentaries on his return to Chile, I have shown how he uses the documentary form, only to subvert its claims to truth and transparent knowledge by infusing it with surrealist elements. In the same vein, I showed how Bolaño's use of *testimonio*-like narrative in *Amuleto* works to reclaim the genre's potential for affirmative political work, but without resorting to exclusionary identity politics and claims to narrative Truth.

Another related theme is the issue of time and temporality in their work. In reaction to what they see as the politically destructive effects of a teleological conception of time both from the left and the right of the ideological spectrum, both artists seek to disrupt notions of linear temporality. For example, Bolaño works against fascist notions of temporality (both mythic and teleological) by underscoring the historical dimensions of language in his narrative. In Ruiz's case, his staunch rejection of central conflict theory (generally Hollywood style of filmmaking, where all films begin with a conflict and culminate with its resolution) disrupts linear temporality to create moments of undecidability, such as the one at the end of *Life is a Dream*.

In line with the possibilities open by a non-teleological conception of temporality espoused by both authors, the use of a psychoanalytic theoretical framework emerged as a fruitful way to account for narrative and cinematic features that do not fit within a rationalist and transparent scheme. In my analysis of Ruiz I have used Freudian psychoanalysis to account for the subject's internal mechanisms of repression, which give way to a complicated relationship to post-dictatorship memory. My reading of Bolaño's maternal figure in *Amuleto*, however, departs from Freudian psychoanalysis and privileges object relations theory in an effort to search for ways to engage the maternal figure into a theoretical discussion that allows for a powerful critique of the patriarchal logic that structures much of Latin American militant revolutionary discourse. Ruiz and Bolaño's common critique of traditional leftist assumptions of transparency and patriarchal logic is illustrated in their focus on the fundamental importance of the unconscious and the maternal element in the process of rethinking notions of the political.

The psychoanalytic framework has also served to open avenues for understanding the ways in which both Bolaño and Ruiz conceptualize and rethink the notion of the political subject. The texts examined in the dissertation are first-person narratives that work to dismantle precisely the concept of a unified and transparent enunciating subject. In Ruiz's work on surrealist documentary I have argued that the camera's point of view and the subject's point of view find themselves in dissonance, thus interrupting the processes that reinforce the image of a knowledgeable subject. In a similar fashion, the protagonist in *Life is a Dream* embarks on a quest to recover lost information, yet the process impedes the simple recovery of facts and instead opens the space for his self-critique.

Bolaño's reworking of the *testimonio* genre into fiction approaches the issue of the status of the autobiographical in light of the Truth Commissions formed in the 1980s and 1990s as a response to human rights violations by the military in Latin America. Auxilio Lacouture and Arturo Belano are characters defined by their connection to writing and literature, and who respond to the failures of a political project of emancipation. These responses, however, heighten the allegorical aspect in relationship to the autobiographical element. In other words, I have argued that Bolaño is seeking to unravel the image of a knowledgeable enunciating subject through the Janus-faced figure (examined in the recognition scenes analyzed in Chapter Three) and through the emphasis on the relational quality of Auxilio's character (who defines herself in relation to others).

In conclusion, the works of these artists have allowed me to explore ways in which responses to the destructive effects of the coup serve to conceptualize the

relationship between aesthetics and politics. Both authors work against the idea of a universal humanism to critique the affirmation of a subject and the imposition of a subjective will. Through questioning and disrupting conventional forms of representation they work to open up a theoretical space from which to approach the question of responsibility in the wake of historical catastrophes in Latin America.

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