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# THE TESTIMONIAL WORLD: AFFECT AND ETHICS IN LATIN AMERICAN LITERATURE AND FILM (1969-1991)

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by

**Cora Starker Gorman Malone**

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The Dissertation of Cora Malone is approved:

_____
Professor Norma Klahn, chair

_____
Professor Wlad Godzich

_____
Professor Lourdes Martínez-Echazábal

_____
Tyrus Miller
Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies

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**Abstract**

**Cora Starker Gorman Malone**

**The Testimonial World: Affect and Ethics in Latin American Literature and Film (1969-1991)**

This dissertation explores how theories of affect and ethics inform our understanding of the way testimonial texts communicate with readers. Adopting a broad definition of "the testimonial world" to encompass fictional and documentary literature and film, the pages that follow focus on testimonial work in Latin America from 1969-1991. By exploring testimonial's narrative qualities, historical relationship to ethnography and memoir, and attention to gender and ethnicity, this study considers the symbolic re-representation of violence in testimonial texts and the ethics (and the reader's ethical position) they advocate, particularly in positioning the reader as responsible to an "other" who is a victim of violence.

I investigate literary and filmic texts that respond to the violence of systemic socioeconomic marginalization as well as the imprisonment, death and disappearance, traumatic and post-traumatic experience brought about by state-sponsored violence; these texts span various regions and genres, and include *La noche de Tlateloco* and *Rojo amanecer* (Mexico), *Si me permiten hablar* (Bolivia), *El zorro de arriba y el zorro de abajo* (Peru), *Conversación al sur* (Uruguay and Argentina), *The Little School, Pasos bajo el agua* and *La historia oficial* (Argentina) and *Que Bom Te Ver Viva* (Brazil). One of the concerns brought to the fore through this project is whether there is a fundamental difference with the discussion of affect in testimonial work due

to its relationship to real-world violence. I argue that through a comparative rereading of testimonial attentive to the deterritorialized play of affect, these texts reconceive of distinctions between the public and private spheres, collective and individual stories, and the self and its responsibility to the other. My reading demonstrates that the intersubjective qualities of the testimonial imaginary allow it to articulate an ethics of readership in the communication of violence.

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## Introduction

> "De la 'verdad' no es dueño el escritor sino el lector, el que va a re-interpretar esa interpretación hecha por el que escribió la historia"
>
> -Alicia Kozameh

"¿Qué tipo de discurso—verbal o icónico, narrativo o teatral—puede producir una 'transformación interior' que sensibilice al espectador para la recepción de ese tema terrible: la muerte anónima, la muerte sin escena?" (Schnaith 26).[1] This question, posed by Nelly Schnaith in "La muerte sin escena" (1997 and 2000), speaks to the core of testimonial endeavors—that they may, by some manner, effectively communicate to the reader (receptor?) an experience of violence that escapes communication. Through a critical rereading of Latin American testimonial work, my project takes the testimonial world as a subject/object of investigation, and examines the construction of testimonial texts and the ways they—and the affective lives of their characters—interact with readers. Of course, "testimonial world" does not derive from a standard glossary of literary criticism. Part of the task of the chapters that follow will be to help articulate through examples what this term might encompass and how this sort of inquiry relates to a more broadly conceived relationship between readers (or viewers, in the case of film) and literary or filmic texts. For the moment, I

[1] What sort of discourse—verbal or iconic, narrative or theatrical—could produce an 'internal transformation' that would sensitize the spectator for the reception of that terrible topic: anonymous death, unstaged death?" Translations will be provided in footnotes from English versions of the text when available unless noted. In the absence of an English version, translations will be my own.

would like to tentatively describe the *testimonial world* as the imaginative space (wherein the distinctions between fiction and "truth" are momentarily suspended) for encounters with referential (related to real-world) accounts of violence.

The specific texts that provide examples of the testimonial world in this project originate from various points in Latin America—Mexico, the Andes and the Southern Cone—during a similar time period characterized by violent confrontation between military governments and marginalized populations (and/or revolutionaries). The primary texts span from 1968, with the repression of the student movement in Mexico, to the late 1980s and early 1990s, which saw attempts at reconciliation and redemocratization in the Southern Cone. Each of the texts I have chosen in some way challenges dominant societal narratives, seeking to communicate stories hitherto excluded in authoritarian discourses. The ability to communicate—to speak and to be seen and heard—is of particular importance to these texts, given that many of them deal with the literal "disappearing" of persons (and their bodies) by agents of the state, and all address the invisibility of those socioeconomically and politically marginalized. In this regard, the testimonial text (even when claiming to present a fictionalized account),[2] almost more than the physical monument, provides a locus for memory and the discursive space to engage in an active process of remembering, one

[2] As mentioned above, this study intends to approach the testimonial world by considering together both texts that stake a claim to documentary truth (such as *Si me permiten hablar*) and those whose authors acknowledge the goal of a more poetic truth (such as *Pasos bajo el agua*)—recognizing the complexity of drawing distinctions between documentation and fiction in testimonial, particularly when a prologue or introduction encourages the reader to approach a text as fiction based on the lived experience of a speaker and/or her community.

that involves reconsidering one's orientation to the past and an imagined future. While this study approaches these texts with much remove from the political violence which inspired them—and the distance of several decades—this should not diminish the our interest in the imaginaries they develop and their relevance to readers given contemporary domestic and global military/political events.

*Testimonial literature* (and film), for the purpose of this project, at least, veers from the way Latin American(ist) scholars describe *testimonio*; choosing the term *testimonial literature* allows us to think outside the conventions of genre,[3] more broadly construing the meaning of "testimonial" work to include fictional texts and those that adopt forms of address other than first-person narratives. While the testimonial texts this project explores are often fragmented and heterogenous in structure, in conveying their stories to the reader they do subscribe to narrative techniques and for that reason I at times find it useful to refer to certain groupings as *testimonial narratives.* Similarly, my use of *testimonial text* means to include both literary and filmic texts. I choose to include several films in this project with the understanding that, despite important differences between mediums, they too can be "read" and that doing so comparatively enriches the investigation of testimonial work. Particularly in the context of testimonial, however, it is important to bear in mind the

[3] Over the past decades, *testimonio* has grown in popularity but also become more established in its conventions as a genre to include only texts that claim to present the experience of a speaker and/or community of speakers. The testimonial world could be contstrued as a hybrid genre, employing conventions of *testimonio*, melodrama, documentary, sentimental novel, memoir, short story, oral history, etc.

different constraints on the production and distribution of film versus print text, and the long tradition in Latin America of state-sponsored cinema industry.[4]

One of the problems with a critical approach to reading testimonial literature results from how we approach the testimonial world in a given text, considering the complicated and at times contested relationships it elaborates between concepts of truth, fiction, political urgency and history. The challenge, brought to the fore by the positioning of *testimonio* in broader culture debates over university curriculum, remains *how* and *why* to read this body of work from the standpoint of the literary, that is to say, to approach it as an aesthetic encounter—and, as such, an ethical one—without losing the historical and political specificity that contribute so vitally to the continued resonance of these texts. Furthermore, as we look further at the scenario of reading these literary and filmic texts, it becomes necessary to also articulate this encounter in terms that exceed the category of the individual. First, as we begin to explore what aspects of these texts lead them to have an impact on the reader at their time of publication/release, and even more pertinently, what it might be about the testimonial world that continues to resonate with readers in subsequent decades, it is important to consider that readers bring to the text certain expectations, and the potential to modify those expectations through the process of reading; that is, readers and texts do not encounter one another in a vacuum, but rather form part of

[4] As Michael Channan outlines in "Cinema in Latin America," the growth of the cinema industry in the three main domestic producers in Latin America, Mexico, Argentina and Brazil, was accompanied by the implementation of quotas, restrictions on distribution of foreign films and/or production financing and state loans.

interpretive communities.[5] Second, if we were to consider the appeal of the testimonial world to the reader in terms limited to the individual, such discussion might miss the ways testimonial texts may operate differently from psychological or sentimental models of identification in the way they communicate affectively with readers.

In trying to analyze the connection forged between testimonial texts and readers, and the powerful impact of many texts on readers, we might understand the act of reading itself as a scenario[6] in which the reader is an active participant, with her own orientation to the text, shaped by personal and interpersonal experience (including her previous encounters with literary and filmic texts). In this regard the work on reception theory and literary history by H.R. Jauss influences my treatment of readers/viewers and offers an argument for why it continues to be relevant to reexamine texts written and critiqued by previous generations. For Jauss, the study of the aesthetics of reception allows/demands that literary history constantly reinvent itself with each generation, according to the "changing horizon of experience" of the text's recipients (8). Jauss claims that in this way the aesthetics of reception restores historicity to the study of literature; additionally, for him, the continual need to

[5] I use this term somewhat tentatively, noting points of convergeance between my focus on readers, bodies and affect in testimonial work and reader-response theory; the work of Jauss in particular can be helpful in discussing the social reception and impact of the most widely distributed testimonial texts.

[6] My use of the term scenario is influenced in particular by Diana Taylor's *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (2003), although Taylor develops her concept specifically in relation to live performance. With this term I hope to emphasize the act of reading as an encounter, in which the reader actively participates.

rewrite history "[…] is not a defect of history but its most liberating feature, for it ensures that no fixed view ever prevails and that each generation must read the texts anew, interrogate them from its own perspective, and find itself concerned, in its own fashion, by the work's questions" (Godzich 41). The role of the reader, particularly when she is prompted by the text to take an active role as recipient, returns as a concern in some form in each of the chapters of this study; I find it useful to conceptualize reading, and in particular reading testimonial literature, as an intersubjective endeavor.

Most prior studies of my selected texts approach them with great interest in how they fit into more limited genres—for example, *testimonio*, prison narratives, contestatory women's writing, or *indigenista* novels—and many focus on questions of subalternity, truthfulness and the fictionalization of real-world events. While these concerns similarly arise in the chapters that follow, this project moves the conversation in the direction of aesthetics and ethics in testimonial texts by considering their work on readers, particularly through appeal to the affects. My study of Latin American testimonial is informed by academic conversations from the 1980s and 90s, and collections such as Georg Gugelberger's *The Real Thing* (1996), which includes work by John Beverley, George Yúdice, Elzbieta Sklowsowka, Doris Sommer, Santiago Colás and Alberto Moreiras, among others, though my concerns diverge from this work's restricted study of *testimonio*. My analysis of testimonial text loosely aligns itself with a variety of projects looking at creativity, counter-discourses, narrative, or witnessing, to which I will refer in following chapters, and

for the moment will mention a few examples. For one, my thinking about what could be considered testimonial literature has been influenced greatly by Martín Lienhard, particularly in "Voces marginadas y poder discursivo en América Latina" (2000), an article which reminds us that the practice of testimonial and ethnographic writing in Latin America began long before the academic popularity of *testimonio* and reaffirms the importance of aesthetics in "los textos testimoniales más convincentes" that manage, "de alguna manera, volver 'tangible' el discurso popular" (794).[7] Alternatively, in *Women Witnessing Terror* (2005), Anne Cubilié approaches testimonial writing from a human rights perspective with particular concern for gender, yet sustains attention to ethics and aesthetics through engagement in close textual analysis. Cubilié's work is instructive in the way it grounds literary analysis in the real political project of witnessing involved in the "writing of atrocity," which she defines as the "massive, deliberate infliction of violence against people's selves and bodies by state actors" (145). Additionally, my interest in the role of the reader in testimonial literature is informed by but yet diverges from Kimberly Nance's rhetorical analysis of *testimonio* as a project of persuasion in *Can Literature Promote Justice?* (2006). These particular texts have helped in defining the focus of this project, and in determining the scope of the field that I will address as Latin American testimonial literature.

As a student of literature, I try throughout to let my approach in reading these texts to be shaped by the texts themselves, rather than to read them through the lens

[7] "In some manner, to make popular discourse 'tangible'"

of a particular theory, as tends to occur with overly psychoanalytic readings of trauma narratives. That said, my own work is influenced by the work of many others, some of whom I find relevant to mention in some detail to complement and further the close textual analysis that drives each chapter. The chapters naturally differ in emphasis and dialogue more directly with various theorists according to the questions asked by the set of texts each considers. Here I will mention a few of the most influential selections for the conception of this project as a whole, beginning with Brian Massumi's "The Autonomy of Affect" (1995). Massumi draws on studies of perception, reaction time and emotional response to a variety of stimuli to explore the arousal of affect in/on/between (the) body/ies, referred to as intensity. The article suggests that, when participants in a study receive a story through images, narration has the potential to dampen the intensity or to assist in its qualification as emotion, thereby "resonating" with the affective sensation. A time-delay in the firing and perceiving of neurons, Massumi suggests, means that the affective response occurs outside conscious control and as such might challenge traditional ideas of the boundedness of bodies and subjects, perhaps more appropriately along the lines of Spinoza or Deleuze.

Regarding the study of affect in a specifically Latin American context, I mention two relatively recent studies of contemporary Latin American film, Hermann Herlinghaus's "Affectivity beyond 'Bare Life': On the Non-Tragic Return of Violence in Latin American Film" (2008) and Laura Podalsky's *The Politics of Affect and Emotion in Contemporary Latin American Cinema: Argentina, Brazil, Cuba and*

*Mexico* (2011). In his article, Herlinghaus reevaluates Benjamin's "Critique of Violence" and Agamben's distinction between *zoe* and *bios* in light of newer Latin American films that explore the vulnerability of life in neoliberal societies, while Podalsky favors a Deleuzian approach to affect and film criticism, asserting that "we need to acknowledge and account for the myriad touchpoints through which films and situated audiences encounter each other" (14). Building on the work of Lisa Cartwright in affect and representation, Podalsky seems to approach empathy along the register of affect, an expression of that which escapes capture or conscious perception.

Herlinghaus and Podalsky's work could be seen as examples of a shift toward the discussion of emotion and affect in Latin American literary and cultural criticism. Hoewever, as Mabel Moraña, co-editor of the recent volume *El lenguaje de las emociones. Afecto y cultura en América Latina* (2012), cautions the reader, Latin American theory has explored affect (albeit in a thematic, textual approach) long before the "affective turn" identified by Patricia Ticineto Clough—think of studies of sentimental novels, visual arts, sports, and postdictatorship transition (Moraña 323). For Moraña, the difference in recent endeavors, and the productive direction for such study to take, involves the awareness that by affect (el afecto) we mean "la capacidad de afectar y de ser afectado" (318),[8] a deterritorialized and impersonal energy (323). In a lengthier description, but one that bears repeating here, Moraña elaborates her understanding of affect along the philosophical tradition of Spinoza and Deleuze:

[8] "The capacity to affect and to be affected"

> Permeando las relaciones intersubjetivas, la órbita de la domesticidad y de la intimidad y adentrándose en todos los niveles de la esfera pública, el impulso afectivo—en cualquiera de sus manifestaciones pasionales, emocionales, sentimentales, etc.—modela la relación de la comunidad hacia el futuro posible, deseado e imaginado en concordancia o en oposición a los proyectos dominantes. (315)[9]

One of the ways attention to affect will inform my approach will be to explore the potentiality (virtuality) of affect in relation to the specificity of readers and texts.

Heightened intensity and awareness of emotion accompanies the themes of torture and/or political violence in much testimonial work, and many of the texts I read include vivid, intense sequences that attempt to communicate the visceral sensation and the vulnerability of the self subjected to torture and its traumatic memory. The reader will likely notice the influence of such paradigmatic accounts from Elaine Scarry, Cathy Caruth, and in regard to Argentina, Marguerite Feitlowitz, on my approach to the relationships between corporality, torture, trauma and the word. The texts themselves, insomuch as they concern themselves with aesthetics in the presentation of violence (against the self and other) place what I consider to be an ethical demand on the reader of testimonial work. To some extent, all scenarios of reading, so far that they can be considered encounters with the/an other, can be framed in terms of ethics; testimonial texts complicate the scenario for the reader finds herself responsible to an "other" who represents the (real or fictionalized) victim

[9] Permiating intersubjective relationships, the domestic and intimate realm, and entering all levels of the public sphere, the affective impulse—in whatever passionate, emotional or sentimental, etc., manifestations—models the relation of the community toward a possible future, desired and imagined in accordance or in opposition to dominant projects.

of state-sponsored violence. By investigating this scenario through the question of how these texts communicate to the reader in the transmission of affect and emotion, I hope to remain respectful of the experiences these sequences portray while thinking critically about the ethics of reading testimonial literature and the ethical demand it places on the reader herself.

In *Precarious Life* (2004), Judith Butler reflects on Levinas to discuss the human as a limit-point of representation, perhaps calling into question the ability of one to act as witness. Following Butler, along with Cubilié and Susan Sontag, I argue that the ethical critique of testimonial narratives emanates from the limits they encounter in representation, where narrative breaks elude closure. The *testimonio*'s ability to bear witness to atrocity, or to interpolate the reader as witness or a "witness-to-the-witness," while of great interest for human rights activists,[10] may overshadow the text's insistence on (re)asserting the humanity, or perhaps more appropriately, the subjectivity, of the protagonist and her community against a dictatorial rhetoric that seeks to render them illegitimate or invisible. Along with official rhetoric, state-sponsored violence and torture attempt to reconfigure classical oppositions between the public/private, self/other, and body/mind; consequently these divisions are also engaged with and reconsidered in the testimonial world.

[10] For two different approaches that emphasize humanitarian concerns, see the discussion of human rights and Alicia Partnoy's *testimonio, The Little School,* in Anne Cubilié's *Women Witnessing Terror* and the discussion of the production of testimony and Ariel Dorfman's play, *Death and the Maiden,* in Stevan Weine.

As previously mentioned, I choose in this project to use the terms testimonial literature, text and narrative somewhat interchangeably, although at times the distinctions between them do become important to the conversation and I have tried to make these points clear. Of course, as a general term testimonial literature is somewhat problematic because it threatens to obfuscate the difference between printed work and film, particularly consequential when looking at films that respond to state-sponsored violence while subject to the influence of national cinematic institutes on funding, production and distribution; however, it does stress the literary quality of these films and the possibility that one can "read" a film. Testimonial text refers more obviously to filmic text as well as literary and non-fiction accounts. Testimonial narrative, apt for both film and print in addition to oral accounts, emphasizes the storytelling quality of these works and the way each can be read narratively, despite unconventional or fragmented structure (and here I think particularly of Elena Poniatowska's *La noche de Tlatelolco*). As an additional note on terms, in reading these texts it becomes important at times to draw a distinction between affect and emotion, understanding the former on the level of sensation, orientation or mood, and the latter as its register, or contextualization, qualified as feelings. This allows us to think of affect in ways not bounded by individual subjects or bodies, while also being able to talk of how texts work on readers. It also becomes complicated when discussing both print and film to constantly refer to both "readers" and "viewers," and, for the same reason that I refer to "reading" a film, I will often choose to refer to "readers" of film along with readers of print. Also for the sake of

clarity, and in line with my approach to these texts, I refer generally to the persons they describe as "characters," including when the text claims to be a non-fictional account. Sometimes, out of respect for the text's distinction between documentary and fiction, it seems more appropriate to choose "interviewee," "testimonial speaker," "respondent" or some other variant on this theme that emphasizes the real-world referentiality of the person I describe. Similarly, for clarity I often use terms such as "state-sponsored violence" to describe the various military dicatorships and authoritarian governments that proliferated in Latin America during the period I consider. In some cases, I deliberately chose terms to refer to these regimes and their policies, as in the preference for the term "Dirty War" in Argentina over "Proceso" (de Reorganización Nacional), the euphemism favored by the government.

Naturally, this project is limited in scope as I can consider only a sampling of testimonial production and have chosen texts on the basis of the questions and concerns that arise from the texts themselves or the circumstances of their production and reception—that is to say, I focus on texts that actively engage with the question of *how* to communicate. It is important to continue reading and rereading these texts not only for an understanding and respect for the history they impart, but also for the work they do in sketching out an imaginary for the future after violence and authoritarianism. They continue to resonate with readers, and continue to issue an ethical demand. The study that follows is divided into four chapters, each focusing on a geographical area, but more importantly on the set of questions raised by each grouping of texts; I hope to show through those cases how these texts, drawing upon a

history of testimonial work in the Americas linked to Las Casas, continue to resonate with readers and issue them an ethical demand. Many of my chosen texts that have already received significant attention outside of Latin America, such as *La noche de Tlatelolco*, *Roho amanecer, Si me permiten hablar…, Pasos bajo el agua, Conversación al sur, The Little School* and *La historia oficial;* my intention is that this revisionist study will contribute to a broader discussion regarding the concerns of testimonial texts and the implications they hold for understanding(s) of Latin America by bringing these texts into dialogue with less distributed work, such as *Que bom te ver viva*, and with theories of affect and the ethics of reading about violence.

The first chapter explores the dynamics of testimony and narrative in two texts that refer to the student movement in Mexico in 1968 and the massacre of student protestors and bystanders by state agents in the Plaza de las Tres Culturas/Plaza de Tlatelolco on October 2 of that year, an atrocity still remembered publicly every year on that date. One of the most prominent testimonial works from Latin America, Elena Poniatowska's *La noche de Tlatelolco* (1971), adopts a hybrid generic form to communicate what has since become a paradigmatic testimonial account of Tlatelolco. *La noche de Tlatelolco* was distinctive for its coverage of events that were publicly disavowed by the state and for its decision to juxtapose a variety of testimonials from students and observers using little overt narration, and it has been read with attention to its historical significance. My reading will also consider the extent to which Poniatowska's choices in arranging the text attribute to it narrative qualities, and the political and ethical critique offered by the text's resistance to

forming a totalizing narrative while trying to testify to, communicate, or perhaps document an atrocity. Returning to *La noche de Tlatelolco* allows us to interrogate the juridical and journalistic elements of testimonial work, the importance of narrative structure and editing, and the study of intensity and emotion in print text. To expand on these ideas, this chapter then considers Jorge Fons's *Rojo amanecer* (1989), a retrospective film covering the fictionalized massacre of a three-generational family in their apartment home overlooking the Plaza on October 2, 1968. *Rojo amanecer* situates the events of 1968 within the context of a family drama, rupturing the distinction between public and private as the violence of the plaza intrudes upon domestic space.

The second chapter builds on the questions raised by the first about narrative structure, depictions of violence, and the role of the reader with respect to indigenist and indigenous testimonial writing, expanding our notion of violence and the state and raising questions regarding the subaltern, the (im)possibility of expression through speech or writing, and political expediency in testimonial work. This chapter focuses on two texts, *Si me permiten hablar* (1976) by the Bolivian activist Domitila Barrios de Chungara with Moema Vizzier, and *El zorro de arriba y el zorro de abajo* (1971) by Peruvian anthropologist and fiction writer José María Arguedas. In reading these texts as testimonial literature, I will provide an account of how these texts have previously been read in histories of Latin American literature, and their relationship to varying discourses including regional novels, anthropological writings of the other, *indigenista* literature of the first half of the twentieth century, and accounts of

indigenous movements of more recent decades. Taking Rigoberta Menchu and Elizabeth Burgos-Debray's well-known collaboration on *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchu y así me nació la conciencia* (1982) as a point of departure, this chapter also thinks critically about the popularization of *testimonio*—largely in the culture debates in universities in the United States—and the ethics of criticism. Read in this context, a comparative reading of *Si me permiten hablar* and *El zorro de arriba y el zorro de abajo* illuminates how communities and specific persons are rendered invisible by state and market forces, and how these texts counter the continual "state of exception" that casts the lives of indigenous and poor persons as expendable in this economy by issuing an ethical demand to the reader through an affective engagement.

The vulnerability of the self, evident in the prison camp and the trauma of torture, resurfaces in the third chapter in its discussion of three texts by women authors from Argentina and Uruguay in the 1980s that focus on gender and explore first-person and fictionalized accounts of imprisonment: Alicia Partnoy's testimonial *The Little School* (1986), Alicia Kozumeh's *Pasos bajo el agua* (1987) and Marta Traba's novel *Conversacion al sur* (1981). As a point of entry for questions of gender, affectivity and witnessing, I begin with a few relevant passages from Manuel Puig's *Beso de la mujer araña* (1976), and from there proceed to explore the implications of these testimonial texts for critical theory and the models of "witnessing" they present the reader. Partnoy's *The Little School* concentrates on her time as a disappeared person in a clandestine prison, combining vignettes or "tales" with illustrations, excerpts of poetry, and documentary appendices; it is used by

studies interested in human rights, torture and testimony as an example of testimonial writing by a survivor, with more or less attention to its literary qualities and the multiple discourses it engages.[11] Kozameh's *Pasos bajo el agua,* while marketed as a novel, offers a fictionalized account of the author's own imprisonment and, like *The Little School*, includes forwards and prefaces that situate the body of the text in a specific historical situation and refer it to actual events. Marta Traba's *Conversación al sur,* while more recognizable in structure as a novel, addresses similar issues to those of *The Little School* and *Pasos bajo el agua* and juxtaposes the violence in Argentina with Uruguay and Chile. Putting the three texts in dialogue prompts us to consider what makes (certain) testimonial texts so compelling for the reader and allows us to focus on gender and emotion, interactions between this project and the prison narrative and models of witnessing in fictionalized texts.

The fourth chapter takes this scenario of "reading" testimonial work and looks to postdictatorial film production, also from the Southern Cone, focusing on film as a testimonial medium that reaches beyond the restrictions of traditional documentary truth-claims, and exploring the particular power of film in engaging the emotions of the viewer and what this can tell us about "knowledge for living together."[12] *La*

[11] As an example, see Cubilié's *Women Witnessing Terror*.

[12] Omar Ette, in taking a phenomenological approach in defense of the study of literature, writes, "Following [Wolfgang] Iser, we may say that fictionality creates a space of experimentation in which readers, in serious playfulness, can test out different life situations, with which they can engage to collect experiences that they could not have in 'real life'" (987). Ette later follows with the claim, "Whether it wants to or not, literature taps into readers' knowledge for living and threatens to upend existing norms" (988).

*historia oficial* (1985), a melodrama by the Argentine director Luis Puenzo and an example of the cinema of redemocratization, presents an alternative (a new official story?) to the "official story" of the dictatorship through the story of a bourgeois woman's search for the truth regarding the birth parents of her adopted daughter. In certain scenes, the elements of the film combine to resonate with the intensity of the moment, which I "read" alongside Massumi's theory of affect. I continue to consider the (inter)subjective dis/identification of the viewer with the protagonist in Brazilian director Lucia Murat's *Que Bom Te Ver Viva* (1989), a film that combines documentary footage and interviews of real ex-guerilleras and torture survivors with the overtly staged and presumably fictionalized monologues of a female actor. Both texts make strategic use of fictional and narrative elements, opening up a discussion of ethical and aesthetic concerns that interacts with human rights discourse, studies of affect, and the question of how to remember/memorialize a violent past.

Continuing this line of questioning, the project also considers the idea of "postmemory"[13] and the reception and production of testimonial texts by subsequent generations. While the rise of authoritarian governments in Latin America during the 1970s and 1980s continues to inform the political and cultural climate, and the

[13] In evaluating the usefulness of the concept in postdictatorship Argentina, Jens Andermann characterizes Marianne Hirsch's idea of postmemory as follows: "Rather than being fully given by the image (or indeed the event it recalls, however irrepresentable), postmemory thus refers to the intersubjective, transgenerational *work* that deliberately re-activates traumatic repetition. Postmemory is then the witnessing, and empathetic adoption of, the trauma of the first generation by subsequent ones" (81). See also Hirsch's *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory.*

popularization of testimonial work has marked literary discourse in and about the region, for obvious reasons this sort of inquiry is not and should not be limited solely to this time period and region; this project is only one contribution to a much broader, necessary conversation about affect and ethics in testimonial work.

## Chapter I:
## Fragmented Testimony:
## *La noche de Tlatelolco* and *Rojo amanecer*

In the decades since its publication, Elena Poniatowska's *La noche de Tlatelolco* (1971) has continued to be one of the most powerful texts referring to the massacre in Mexico on October 2, 1968, if not *the* paradigmatic testimonial account. This remains the case even as time passes, despite *Noche*'s urgent, almost journalistic mode of address. The significance of Poniatowska's text for a broader study of the testimonial world lies—in part—in the cultural and political impact of the real events it references. The nomenclature used in popular discourse to refer to the 1968 massacre offers some insight as to its significance: "In Mexican colonial history, the night the Aztecs of Tenochtitlán massacred Cortés's troops, 30 June 1520, is known as *la noche triste.* In Mexican contemporary history, the night of 2 October 1968 is known as *la nueva noche triste*" (Young 71). It is also known as *la noche de Tlatelolco*, as in Elena Poniatowska's text. While other texts written in the years immediately following the massacre address the state-sponsored violence and the student movement with documentary and novelistic styles, including María Luisa Mendoza's *Con él, conmigo, con nosotros tres* (1971), Luis González de Alba's *Los días y los años* (1971), René Avilés Fabila's *El gran solitario de palacio* (1971) and Gustavo Sainz's *Compadre Lobo* (1975),[14] Poniatowska's *La noche de Tlatelolco* is distinctive for its use of testimonials and its extensive readership. The first edition,

[14] For further discussion of "Tlatelolco literature," see Young.

published in 1971, was reprinted 55 times before a second edition was published in 1998 and reprinted in 2008.

The central questions of this chapter build upon an already extensive bibliography on *La noche de Tlatelolco* and the student movement of 1968. My focus, however, will shift that of these studies to what the working of bodies, affect and text suggests for an ethics of testimonial reading. To enhance such discussion, this chapter will juxtapose close reading of *La noche de Tlatelolco* with a complementary filmic text that retrospectively examines the massacre through family melodrama, *Rojo amanecer* (1989) by director Jorge Fons. I begin by asking in what ways testimonials maintain a physical and literary presence to the violence of 1968 forty-five years later, and what their continued relevance means for an investigation of testimonial projects. More specifically, I then will locate the two main texts of this chapter, *La noche de Tlatelolco* and *Rojo amanecer,* with relation to a loosely bound genre of texts considered "Tlatelolco literature" and films that reflect the massacre.

The questions that arise from a comparative, close reading of these two texts reflect concerns that surface repeatedly in other chapters of this study, and help flesh out the theoretical approach supported by the testimonial world: How do *La noche de Tlatelolco* and *Rojo amanecer* treat victims of violence differently than government reports, and what does this mean for the conception of "history" they advance? What changes when one talks of *people* rather than bodies or corpses? How do *La noche de Tlatelolco* and *Rojo amanecer* employ narrative strategies and negotiate a fluid relationship between fictionalization and fidelity to a referent? Does each address the

reader/viewer—what sort of affective and emotional responses do they elicit—, and what sort of ethical demand is issued by this address? This chapter will be divided into parts, beginning with the continued cultural impact of Tlatelolco, then proceeding to focus more specifically on each text in turn, and finally investigating how each text includes the reader in reaffirming the dignity of the people and bodies described in testimonial work.

**I. The Resonance of Tlatelolco and its Testimonial Projects**

Many former sites of political violence have since been reimagined as memorial spaces or monuments to the victims and to violence done to the community when the state regards citizens as disposable bodies. The aim of such memorials is variable, perhaps to remind a population of what it may know, but would rather forget, to honor the memory of the victims and their families, or to caution younger generations of the abuse of power. On October 22, 2007, the Centro Cultural Universitario Tlatelolco opened up a new permanent exhibition, the Memorial del 68, at the site of the former SRE (Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores) in the Torre de Tlatelolco. The building, which borders the Plaza de las Tres Culturas, was transferred to the control of the Universidad Autónoma de México in 2004, and the Memorial del 68 reflects intense documentary work and interviews conducted during 2006 and 2007. The exhibition offers a mixed-media view of the Mexican student movement of 1968, locating it in the context of global movements in the sixties, but also recognizing its specific call for increased democracy and transparency at a moment of economic modernization in Mexico. If a prospective visitor should question why the student

movement of 68—and the violent reaction of the government—needs memorialization forty years later, the developers of the Memorial explain their reasoning for its continued relevance:

> Las razones para recordarlo son múltiples y están vinculadas al sentido fundacional de la UNAM: por una parte, su impronta política y su mitología ya forman parte de la sangre intelectual de nuestra cultura y, por otro lado, su espíritu transformador debe ser reconocido como un valioso núcleo de energía renovadora y una fuente de inspiración para comprender y estimular los cambios que demanda la sociedad mexicana.[15]

Despite the celebratory tone of this introduction, the Memorial del 68 also prompts its visitors to remember the mass arrests of students and the massacre of peaceful demonstrators in the Plaza it borders on October 2, 1968. As Rubén Gallo reminds us in "Modernist Ruins: The Case Study of Tlatelolco," the construction of the Plaza was completed only a few years before the massacre, part of architect Mario Pani's modernist housing project. Initial stages of construction unearthed an Aztec pyramid near the 16th century church and convent of Santiago Tlatelolco, to which Pani added his modernist pyramid and then recast as the "Plaza de las Tres Culturas": Aztec, Spanish, and the new (mestizo) Mexico. Yet long before Pani, Tlatelolco was the site of a university, the Colegio de la Santa Cruz, where Franciscans set about the task of documenting and preserving Nahuatl documents from which is gathered much of the contemporary knowledge of Aztec civilization (Messinger Cypess, 172).

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[15] The reasons for remembering [1968] are mumerous and are connected to the fundamental spirit of the University: on one hand, its political mark and its mythology already form part of the intellectual blood of our culture and, on the other hand, its transformative spirit ought to be recognized as a valuable core of energy for renewal and a source of inspiration for understanding and stimulating the changes demanded by Mexican society.

However, Tlatelolco was also a contested space and the site of violence during the Spanish conquest. In more recent times, Pani's design for Tlatelolco demonstrated the use of modernist architecture as a means of control; few access points, easily closed gates, one central area and retaining walls formed Tlatelolco into a "reverse panopticon" that facilitated the military actions of October 2.[16] Today, UNAM's Centro Cultural returns Tlatelolco in part to a place of memory, as the Memorial del 68 is joined at the Centro Cultural by the Museo de Tlatelolco, opened in late 2011 to display archeological finds from the site.

Like its creators suggest, the Memorial del 68 demonstrates the continued importance of 1968 to contemporary Mexico; one of the prominent figures included in its testimonial project is Elena Poniatowska, "the writer whose work on this subject has had, and continues to have, the greatest impact in contemporary Mexican society" (Harris, "Remembering" 483). Poniatowska's own testimonial project responding to the massacre on October 2 resulted in the publication of *La noche de Tlatelolco* in 1971. Unlike the hyperlinked multimedia-filled experience of the Memorial del 68 exhibit, the testimonial potential of *La noche de Tlatelolco* is both limited and enhanced by the format of the book; often compared to fictional documentary narrative (Harris 495), its novelistic qualities exploit the affective exchange between reader and text.

Numerous Mexican intellectuals—among them Octavio Paz, Carlos Fuentes, Carlos Monsiváis and Carlos Montemayor—have identified the importance of the

[16] For further discussion see Gallo 113 and Montemayor.

events of 1968 for the Mexican people and its relationship to government. For the purposes of our discussion in this chapter, these events bear brief summary due to their centrality to the testimonial aspects of both *Noche* and *Rojo amanecer.* As in multiple international locations, 1968 saw the rise of a student movement in Mexico; however, unlike most others, the movement in Mexico found support from the faculty and some administration, and primarily focused on domestic issues of democracy and inequality.[17] The *Movimiento Estundiantil* was initiated in July in response to the incongruous brutality of police intervention in a street fight between secondary school students. Students from both the Universidad Autónoma de México (UNAM) and the Instituto Politécnico Nacional (IPN) formed a strike committee, the Colegio Nacional de la Huelga (CNH), based on six demands, including public dialogue, release of political prisoners, disbanding of riot police (*granaderos*) and reform to laws placing limits on public gatherings (Jörgensen, *Writing* 73-4). Two public protests, one a march in silence, drew over a hundred thousand people, with tens of thousands attending several other protests. Attendance at these demonstrations suggests that the student movement garnered popular support. In "The Other Mexico" (*Posdata*), Octavio Paz assesses the movement as follows:

> All of their petitions could be summed up in a single word that was both the crux of the movement and the key to its magnetic influence on the conscience of the people: *democratization*. Again and again the demonstrators asked for a

[17] For an assessment of the differences between the movement in Mexico and that in France, see Sorenson.

> 'public dialogue between the government and the students' as a prelude to a dialogue between the people and the authorities. (233)[18]

Police response to the strike and the student protesters intensified, and on September 18 the army occupied UNAM. The CNH organized a peaceful rally (*mitin*) over the government's refusal to enter into public dialogue on October 2 at the Plaza de las Tres Culturas in Nonoalco-Tlatelolco; police and army troops—including an undercover special forces unit—closed off the exits to the plaza, opened fire indiscriminately and pursued demonstrators into the apartment buildings surrounding the plaza. Official reports indicated that armed protestors had provoked the attack, and grossly underestimated the numbers of civilians killed, wounded or imprisoned (many of whom were tortured). As Paz notes, the English newspaper *The Guardian* conducted its own investigation, which determined that the number killed likely totaled 325 (Paz 235).

With the student movement effectively repressed, the Mexican government refocused public attention on the upcoming Olympics, opening in Mexico City on October 12, ten days after the massacre. Through the international spotlight on the capital city, the Olympics were intended to celebrate the arrival of the "developing" Mexico as a modern democracy. The violent repression of the student movement in Tlatelolco prevented demonstrators from contradicting the Mexican government's presentation of itself to the international community; however, it did so at the cost of its legitimacy as a democratic state. Diana Sorenson refines this point in her recent

[18] It should be mentioned that Paz resigned his post in the Mexican Foreign Service in response to the massacre at Tlatelolco.

retrospective look at the period in *A Turbulent Decade Remembered: Scenes from the Latin American Sixties*, "[i]ndeed, even as it asserted its might, the government of President Díaz Ordaz was in fact acknowledging its incapacity to rule within the law" (56). The events at Tlatelolco, while unprecedented in scope, are symptomatic of systemic oppression and a repressive state; as David William Foster argued in a *PMLA* article on documentary narrative in 1984, "[t]he massacre at Tlatelolco was neither an isolated 'accident' nor the folly of a particular dictatorial ambition but rather the dramatic example of repression inherent in the Mexican system of government" (46). The massacre of peaceful student demonstrators, while calling for democratic dialogue, provided a concrete reminder that the promises of the Mexican Revolution had not been realized, a point that plays out through the intergenerational conflict between the college students and their revolutionary war veteran grandfather in *Rojo amanecer*—and the reminder that "Con el gobierno no se juega."

The search to shed light on the violence at Tlatelolco has prompted many testimonial accounts of participation in the student movement and the October 2 rally, along with investigation into the orchestration of the massacre itself and the degrees of involvement by various government and military officials. Testimonials, either first-person accounts and essays or compilations of several interviews, include many of the same voices heard in *La noche de Tlatelolco* and in the Memorial del '68 project, among them Ramón Ramírez's *El Movimiento Estudiantil de México* (1969), Renata Sevilla's *Tlatelolco: Ocho años después. Testimonios de José Revueltas, Herberto Castillo, Luis González de Alba, Gilberto Guevara Niebla, Carlos Sevilla y*

*Raúl Alvarez* (1976), Eduardo Valle's *Escritos sobre el Movimiento del 68* (1984), Raúl Álvarez Garín and Gilberto Guevara Niebla's *Pensar el 68* (1988), Paco Ignacio Taibo II's *'68* (1991),[19] Raúl Jardón's *1968, El fuego de la esperanza* (1998),[20] and Esteban Ascencio's *1968: Más allá del Mito* (1998). Some contemporary texts shift their focus from giving voice to the accounts of witnesses and survivors to making known the events and effects of 1968 for younger generations, examples being Arnulfo Aquino and Jorge Pérezvega's *Imágenes y símbolos del 68. Fotografía y gráfica del movimiento estudiantil* (2004),[21] Gilberto Guevara Niebla's *1968: Largo*

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[19] While writing his own testimonial account detailing and reflecting on his participation in the student movement (Taibo was in Madrid on October 2, 1968 but returned to Mexico City soon after), Taibo explains the significance (for him) of Poniatowska's work: "On October 2 the army attacked the rally in Tlatelolco. What happened is well known. The story of the massacre has been told and retold. The attempt to falsify history—which the machinery of the government launched moments after the first students fell, hit by gunfire—demanded a response. The response is in the second part of Elena Poniatowska's book *La noche de Tlatelolco* and in the thousands of Tlatelolco poems" (104). He later continues, "Today everybody knows that the provocateurs were soldiers disguised as civilians, each wearing a single identifying white glove, soldiers from the Olimpia Battalion. Today everybody knows that flares thrown from a military helicopter were the signal to open fire, the signal for the army to begin to shoot into the unarmed crowd. Today even the liars know the truth. But there is little consolation in the fact the version of the survivors has finally triumphed over the official story" (105).

[20] Jardón both acknowledges that his text will not be impartial and claims that it will be objective, relating events as they happened, in order that it may "difundir la historia del movimiento del 68, dar a conocer las experiencias de la lucha, mostrar la conducta artera, y a veces ridículamente histérica, con que el sistema politico mexicano (y no solo los gobernantes en turno) enfrentó el reto planeado por los jóvenes" (11). The text is divided into three parts, the first a third person chronicle of events, then testimonials and reflections from participants and witnesses, and finally the opinions and memories of the protagonists of the movement.

[21] This endeavor, which directly relates the photographs of detained students in 1968 to photographs of torture in Vietnam and Iraq (9), provides insight into how different visual media inform the reader about 1968. The text's stated goals are to relive a

*camino a la democracia* (2008), and Pablo Gómez's *1968: La historia también está hecha de derrotas* (2008).[22]

In "What Is a Camp?" Georgio Agamben writes about the camp as a space of exception where human lives and human bodies are made vulnerable to biopolitical power. For future study, he insists, the useful question is not "how it could have been possible to commit such atrocious horrors against other human beings" but, "how—that is, thanks to what juridical procedures and political devices—human beings could have been so completely derived of their rights and prerogatives to the point that committing any act toward them would no longer appear as a crime" (Agamben 41). Agamben's question, insomuch as the scenario of the camp can be extended to the massacre in the Plaza de Tlatelolco and its related political detention and torture, underlies the investigation attempted in *Parte de Guerra II: Los rostros del 68* (2002), *El 68, la tradición de la resistencia* (2008), and *La violencia de Estado en México* (2010). The first draws upon documentary evidence to describe the repression of the student movement and the ways by which the perpetrators ensured their impunity. Along with analysis by Julio Scherer García and Carlos Monsaváis, the text includes documents previously published in *Proceso: the letters of General*

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national tragedy, enrich reflection and analysis of events, do away with impunity and seek judgment for those responsible, and to promote greater knowledge of 68 among future generations (9, 16).

[22] In addition to the many testimonial accounts that followed Tlatelolco, a more general shift in Mexican literature and the novel accompanied the events of 1968, or, as Norma Klahn writes, "la novelística despúes del 68 se interesa por experiencias vividas, rompe el tiempo cíclico al buscar en la historia su material y nos ofrece dentro del mundo novelesco un movimiento lineal" ("Un Nuevo versimo" 925).

*Marcelino García Barragán* (1995) and leaked photographs from the night of October 2 that were reportedly taken by a photographer of Luis Echeverría and kept in government archives (2001). Monsaváis revisits the impact of 1968 on human rights in Mexico in *El 68*, through a chronicle of the student movement, attempts to repress it or render its message inaudible and reasons for which it has not, like so many other repressions and politically motivated acts of violence by government agencies, been completely banished from public awareness. According to Monsaváis, "en el siglo XX mexicano prevalece el afán por controlar (seleccionar) ese alud de documentos, imágenes, testimonios y recuerdos, del que se pretende borrar el criterio ético, el rechazo de los actos ilegales de gobierno y los saqueos de la oligarquía" (26).[23] In *La violencia de Estado en México*, Carlos Montemayor discusses in some detail the use of force by the Mexican government; his interrogation of military accounts and documents—uncovering numerous discrepancies and internal disputes—also includes documentary evidence of US CIA/FBI information, and refutes many of the claims made by the government about the leadership of the student movement. *La violencia de Estado en México* emphasizes the level of collaboration by legal, political and military administrations to plan and coordinate

[23] "The prevalent tendency in twentieth century Mexico was to control (select) that mass of documents, images, testimonials and memories, from which they attempted to eliminate ethical criteria, the denial of illegal acts by the government and the pillaging by the oligarchy"

the official response (as Montemayor's research clarifies, effectively a cover-up) to October 2.[24]

The studies I have just mentioned acknowledge the sustained relevance of 1968 and its interest as an example of government repression where citizens' rights are suspended and history is doctored. Most testimonial texts share these concerns to some extent, but what is most powerful about *La noche de Tlatelolco* and *Rojo amanecer* is not whether or not they use documentary evidence to examine the government's treatment of citizens and their bodies, rather how they engage the reader and make the encounter with the text a demanding ethical experience.

**II. *La noche de Tlatelolco***

In a detailed and sentimental biography, Poniatowska tells Michael Schuessler how she learned about Tlatelolco:

> I heard about the massacre at nine o'clock that night, when María Alicia Martínez Medrano and her friend Mercedes Olivera came to my house […] I thought they were crazy. They told me there was blood on the walls of the buildings, that the elevators were perforated with machine-gun bullets, that the glass windows of the shops were shattered, that tanks were in the plaza, that there was blood on the staircases of the buildings, that they could hear people shouting, moaning, and crying. (159)

[24] "El 2 de octubre fue un laboratorio de experimentos represivos a gran escala: la coordinación entre cuerpos policiales y militares con el Ministerio Público y los juices, una maquinaria inmensa echada a andar en la Operación Galeana con el Batallón Olimpia en primer término, los destacamentos militares apostados en diversos puntos de un amplio perímetro que ceñía a la plaza de Tlatelolco y las actuaciones en serie del Ministerio Público y las resoluciones de los jueces […] La diferencia ahora fue la continuidad de mandos, contigentes y modo de operar de cuerpos politicos y del ejército a lo largo de varias décadas." (Montemayor 95, rep. 193)

Though the news came to her from trusted sources, Poniatowska reiterates her initial disbelief in an interview with Esteban Ascencio: "No podia creer que algo tan espantoso hubiera sucedido. Por eso al día siguente, a las ocho de la mañana fui a la Plaza de las Tres Culturas" (41).[25] The visit to the plaza galvanized Poniatowska, and she began to collect testimonies, visiting the Lecumberri prison to talk with many of the movement's surviving leaders. It took several years before the publication of *La noche de Tlatelolco*, but word-of-mouth publicity and official resistance to open discussion of October 2 contributed to its wide readership.

*La noche de Tlatelolco* begins with a section of photographs and consists of two sections of text, "Ganar la calle" and "La noche de Tlatelolco," which include poems, newspaper headlines, rally cries, excerpts from speeches by government officials, rare comments from the editor and testimonial fragments ranging from a few words to several paragraphs from student demonstrators and organizers, bystanders, family members and anonymous voices. The first section assembles testimonials that primarily relate to the student movement before Tlatelolco, as well as the imprisonment and torture of students before and after the massacre. The second section pertains more directly to Tlatelolco and its immediate aftermath, but numerous overlapping testimonials point to the artificiality of this division. This is perhaps characteristic of the text, which noticeably undermines authoritative narrative structures as soon as it appeals to them. Over thirty pages of photographs precede the

[25] "I couldn't believe that something so terrible could have happened. So the next day, at eight in the morning I went to the Plaza of the Three Cultures."

two parts of written testimonials and include captions drawn from the latter. The images both embody for the reader the violence described by the testimonial voices that follow and, as in the photograph depicting a pile of empty women's shoes, alert the reader to the absence of violated bodies, and by extension the absence of voices. A chronology of events from July 22 through December 13, 1968, "basada en los hechos a que se refieren los estudiantes en sus testimonios de historia oral,"[26] follows "La noche de Tlatelolco" and acts as an appendix for the reader to clarify the diegesis of the narrative pieced together in the various fragments and excerpts.

Bodies—which we could conceive of broadly as social bodies and bodies of work, but most specifically, human bodies—are contested sites in the narrative that arises from the testimonials. Once the site of self-expression—much is made by supporters and critics of the student movement of associated new styles of hair and dress—with imprisonment, torture, and the indiscriminant shooting of October 2, human bodies become the marker of vulnerability. The last testimonial fragment in *La noche de Tlatelolco,* directly before the chronology, appears multiple times in the text: "Son cuerpos, señor…" (172, 198, 274). Simple and distinctive, the reader recognizes the repetition, and each time the words are attributed to "un soldado al periodista José Antonio del Campo, de *El día*."[27] The reader first encounters this fragment in the second part of *Noche*, almost immediately following a series of

[26] "Events Mentioned by the Students in Their Tape-Recorded Testimony" (325)
[27] "They're dead bodies, sir…" attributed to "A soldier, to José Antonio Campo, reporter for *El Día*" (323). For this and all other quotations from *Noche* I will provide translations from the English version of the text, *Massacre in Mexico*.

newspaper headlines (mis)representing the events on October 2, 1968 in the Plaza de las Tres Culturas and a lengthy note by the editor. Directed at a journalist, the words seem to be simply an iteration of the obvious; while the reader receives no further context, we might infer that the two men stand either in the Plaza itself or, perhaps, in the morgue. The brevity and detachment in this fragment read somewhat differently later on in the text when it follows numerous personal accounts of being in the Plaza during and following the massacre, descriptions which include the loss of loved ones and the materiality of the blood and corpses. Still later, as the final words of the text, "Son cuerpos, señor…" seems deliberate in its lack of conclusion, as *Noche* presumably aims to present testimony rather than explain the violence of October 2.[28] Although the burden of interpretation is pushed to the reader—while the fragments in the text (mostly) are attributed to specific speakers, the reader must infer further contextualization from the organization of the text—the editing and shaping of the fragments gives the text narrative structure.

The soldier's comment—"Son cuerpos, señor…"—invokes one of the primary concerns of testimonial literature, as these texts actively work to contest the idea that state-sponsored violence is acted on *bodies* rather than people. The soldier reduces the victims—read here as representative of all the Mexican people, or at least its youth—to corpses. Unlike the position of the Mexican government, which sought to

[28] In several interviews Elena Poniatowska discusses her role as an editor of *Noche.* She specifically mentions the decision to include, out of several hours of interviews with José Antonio del Campo, only, "Son cuerpos, señor…," finding it to have greatest impact. See Jörgensen and Schuessler.

minimize and/or deny the extent of the massacre in its official record, the testimonial voices in *Noche* function not so much to document as to re-member the individual and collective bodies attacked during the state repression of the student movement and particularly the massacre in the Plaza. It is the work of the text, including the photographs with which it begins, to flesh out these bodies through testimonies that witness the shooting and tell stories of personal loss, so that in the world of the text—into which the reader enters—these are bodies which can be (ought to be?) mourned.

*La noche de Tlatelolco* develops this question of (un)mournable bodies through the reader's investment in the stories told by the testimonial voices. To mourn the deaths in *Noche*—or, similarly, in *Rojo amanecer*—is to challenge, on the grounds of a human responsibility to the other, the official story wherein violence may be met with impunity. For the reader, that violence is acted out on fictionalized characters or persons unknown does not interrupt the initial affects it evokes, but it is the work of the text to move the reader—that is, allow for this play on the affects to be processed as emotion. There is an urgency to *Noche*—in Paco Ignacio Taibo's estimation it is *the* response to the violence sanctioned by the government—but the call to the reader to feel for the other does not dissipate with the passing immediacy of the moment. This feeling for the other, and what sort of vulnerability in the self is exposed by grieving, is pursued by Judith Butler in *Precarious Life,* and several of her comments help advance our discussion of ethics in testimonial texts. While Butler grounds her argument in the specific situation of US response to the events of September 11, 2001, I think many of her remarks can speak to the scenario of reading

extended by testimonial works, as her central questions focus on our understanding/construction of the category "human," and most pertinent to our discussion, what makes for a grievable life (20). Butler asks whether grief can be productive, if through tarrying with grief we are "returned to a sense of human vulnerability, to our collective responsibility for the physical lives of one another?" (30). To grieve, she suggests,

> can be a point of departure for a new understanding if the narcissistic preoccupation of melancholia can be moved into a consideration of the vulnerability of others. Then we might critically evaluate and oppose the conditions under which certain human lives are more vulnerable than others, and thus certain human lives are more grievable than others. (30)

The vulnerability of others, and the conditions under which such vulnerability may be capitalized upon with impunity, is of primary concern in both *Noche* and *Rojo amanecer.* By the final repetition of "Son cuerpos, señor…" the reader is acutely aware that these bodies represent not merely corpses but grievable lives; likewise, as we will return to later, the melodramatic ending of *Rojo amanecer* opens the viewer to the vulnerability of grief.

Several of the academic studies on *La noche de Tlatelolco* center around the narrative structure of the text, making the argument for why the editing/authoring of the text allows one to study it as literature—and shifting emphasis away from the truth-claim of the testimonials. David William Foster, Beth Jörgensen, and more recently, Christopher Harris have worked on this aspect of Poniatowska's text. Their inquiries and close readings are particularly useful to this chapter, and brief reviews of their work allow us to consider how the narrative strategies of the text inform the

presentation of bodies and identities. As previously discussed, *Noche* consists of a compilation with fragments of testimony, speeches, rally cries, poetry, newspaper headlines and photographs. These fragments are purposefully edited and arranged; this collage effect lends the text a democratic quality, and the fragments—which the reader may forget are edited—work together to evoke the idea of a collective memory. They include the voices of people involved in the student movement leading up to the massacre at Tlatelolco, those in the plaza, and those affected by the events through personal loss, proximity or other means.[29] For some, these formalistic choices, and their rejection of the need "to portray individual psychologies" in *Noche* relate it to contemporary fiction writing in Latin America, comparable to that of *Pedro Páramo* (Juan Rulfo 1955)*, Rayuela* (Julio Cortázar 1963)*,* or *La region más transparente* (Carlos Fuentes 1958) (Foster, "Narrative" 46); however, others identify in *Noche* a paradigmatic shift away from the discourse of the "modern" Latin American nation, as a text that offers "una respuesta al autoritarismo del estado" while opening "un espacio pos-nacionalista" (Klahn, "Genealogías" 227).[30] Alternatively, *Noche* has been read as kin to the practice of *testimonio* popularized by Miguel Barnet and Esteban Montejo's *Biografía de un cimarrón* (1966), or seen as

[29] For a recent discussion of Poniatowska's portrayal of the student movement, in comparison to that of Luis González de Alba, see Chris Harris. Harris identifies the role of González de Alba and Poniatowska in "shaping cultural memory," suggesting if they "both wanted their readers to establish images of peaceful and creative protest, it is possible that they also both consciously wanted certain other features of the student experience to slip into oblivion," such as the arms carried by some of the students ("Foundational Representations" 116).

[30] "a response to state authoritarianism" "a post-nationalist space"

part of a long tradition of chronicle-writing dating to the colonial period.[31] Regardless, the text does more than recreate a journalistic account. With numerous voices, including highly personal testimony from those directly and indirectly involved on October 2, *Noche* challenges the reader to view reading the text as an intersubjective experience whether or not she was present during the actual movement or massacre. Many of the testimonial speakers directly engage the reader, shifting tenses to convey immediacy; for example, in an excerpt from a longer testimonial, María Alicia Martínez Medrano, a nursery-school director, describes fear in this way,

> Cuando oí al niño, me entró la onda del miedo. De pronto sientes que todo tu cuerpo es hipersensible y que la piel se te estira, se te apergamina y no sabes cómo, no sabes por qué, la boca te sabe a pólvora, la lengua de pronto también te sabe a pólvora, de pronto te crispas y de pronto te ablandas. Luego sientes lo que puede ser la nada, el vacío, el dejar de existir…. creo que el miedo es eso. (209)[32]

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[31] While writing about the chronicle in Mexico, Carlos Monsiváis offers this celebratory assessment of Poniatowska's text: "*La noche de Tlatelolco*, Poniatowska's classic book, is a choral narration, a reportage constructed by fragments, a montage of voices that give notice of collective consciousness-raising and repressive acts. Thanks to the framework of narrative images and testimonials, Poniatowska reconstructs the objective circumstances and subjective dimensions of the student movement, the spontaneity sustained by fearlessness, the visceral ideology, and the epic found, literally, at the turn of he corner" (33).

[32] When I heard that baby crying, I suddenly felt really scared. You feel that every nerve in your body is hypersensitive all of a sudden, that your skin is stretched as taut as a drum, that it's like very thin parchment, and for some reason your mouth and your tongue are suddenly bone-dry, and your every muscle tenses one minute and the next you're limp as a dishrag. You realize then what nothingness, what absolute emptiness is, what it's like to have your life come to a sudden end… that's what sheer terror does to you, it seems to me. (250)

To emphasize the importance of the editorial choices for shaping the reading experience of *Noche*, Beth Jörgensen refers to Jacques Derrida's essay "The Parergon," which identifies the intimate involvement of the parergon to ergon (frame to work) to describe the importance of the editor's framing to the testimonial, "supplying a lack within the testimonies and inscribing herself into their story" (*Writing* 81). The few instances where the editor (Poniatowska) acknowledges her intervention in the text—those fragments attributed to "E.P."—serve to highlight the figure of the editor and, simultaneously, limit the reader's perception of the extent to which she can be said to intervene in the text (83). By identifying her interventions, the editor encourages the reader to implicitly assume, even as she knows it to be false, that the rest of the fragments do not result from edited testimony.[33] However, the editor also provides a caution to the reader seeking to interpret the text: "La noche triste de Tlatelolco—a pesar de todas sus voces y testimonios—sigue siendo incomprensible. ¿Por qué? Tlatelolco es incoherente, contradictorio. Pero la muerte no lo es. Ninguna crónica no da una vision del conjunto" (170).[34]

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[33] As Jorgensen notes, the role of the editor/narrator, though the text includes few overt interventions of a narrative voice, is decisive and imperative to the text: "The apparent absence of a unifying, authoritative narrative voice, and its replacement by an elusive editor who appears and disappears, who slips on and off the page, is a crucial narrative strategy […] this very snipping of the what into the how we see is itself a powerful wielding of narrative authority, suggesting as it does the deliberate manipulation of the many fragmented testimonies" ("Framing" 83).

[34] "Despite all the voices that have been raised, despite all the eyewitness testimony, the tragic night of Tlatelolco is still incomprehensible. Why? The story of what happened at Tlatelolco is puzzling and full of contradictions. The one fact that is certain is that many died. Not one of the accounts provides an over-all picture of what happened" (208).

Focusing on a few examples allows us to interrogate further the effect of the arrangement of the text; in particular we will look at the way the stories of Cabeza de Vaca and Diana Salmerón de Contreras are oriented to work on the affects of the reader. The structure of *Noche*, which breaks up the stories of the various informants/characters who often reappear at later points in the text in their own words or those of others, indicates the contestatory historiographic practice with which it comes into dialogue. The narrative woven by the pieces of testimony, while loosely chronological, often repeats, frequently shifts voices and derives its authority from a plurality of witnesses. The resulting story is jumbled rather than authoritative, and questioning rather than totalizing—even as it encompasses multiple points of view. The repetition of certain speakers, along with the interruption and editing of their stories, helps shape the experience of reading their stories into a narrative form. These repeated voices include leaders of the student movement, such as Luis González de Alba, Luis Tomás Cervantes Cabeza de Vaca, Roberta "Tita" Avendaño Martínez, Ana "Nacha" Ignacia Rodríguez, and Sócrates Amado Campos Lemus, as well as those more peripheral to the movement, including friends, parents and spouses such as Artemisa de Gortari. When selections of testimony—which I find appropriate to refer to as testimonial "fragments"—begin to focus on the period from mid to late September, they tell in more detail personal stories of arrest, interrogation and torture through both firsthand accounts and the impressions family members offer regarding the experience of their loved ones. For example, while many of the fragments are less than a paragraph or two, Cabeza de Vaca describes his interrogation in an excerpt

three times that length. The description reveals the extent to which the speaker/character/testifier feels his life to be subject to the designs of his interrogators. One of them says:

> —Es mejor que digas la verdad y tal vez salves la vida.
> Era tentadora la oferta, pero yo no decía otra cosa que no fuera la verdad. Sentía que mi vida estaba perdida y, dijera lo que dijera, si tenían orden de matarme, de todos modos lo harían. (107)[35]

In a passage difficult for the reader in its detail, Cabeza de Vaca continues to describe the course of the torture session and interrogation, including beatings and electric shock. Eight pages later, his description of torture continues in another fragment, followed after several pages by a (briefer) account of a mock castration and its scar tissue. Later we read about Cabeza de Vaca through the words of his friend, Artemisa, when she visits him in prison: "La primera vez que vi a Cabeza, cuando lo llevaron de la H a la M, me impresionó horriblemente. Hasta percibí—dentro de mí misma—su dolor físico, como cuando notas que alguien ha sufrido mucho, aunque no te lo diga. No es que se viera amolado, es que todo él era un dolor andando" (119).[36] Following Cabeza de Vaca's testimony as they do, Artemisa's words confront the reader. Although he does not inform her about the torture, she witnesses his suffering

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[35] You'd better tell the truth—it might save your neck.'
The offer was tempting, but I'd been telling the truth all along. I was sure I was a goner, no matter what I told them. If they had orders to kill me, they'd do just that. (106)

[36] "The first time I saw Cabeza, when they transferred him from cell block H to cell block M, I was terribly shocked. It was as though *I* could feel *his* pain—like when you see that someone has been in agony, even though he doesn't say a word. It wasn't just that he was worn to a frazzle; he was a total wreck, pain itself stumbling down the corridor." (120)

by perceiving on an intersubjective level—"Hasta percibí—dentro de mí misma—su dolor físico."

The fragmentation of Cabeza de Vaca's account of torture preempts the reader from approaching it as an individual (exceptional, extreme or outlier) example—an inattentive reader might miss that they come from the same source—and instead frame torture as a practiced form of violence in the prison that reflects the repressive practices of the government toward the people as acted out on the body. The fragmentation of other personal accounts, interspersed in the text, similarly encourages the reader to identify (with) their stories as part of a collective experience. For example, in the second part of *Noche,* a series of fragments attributed to Diana Salmerón de Contreras describes how the speaker discovers that her brother, Julio, a fifteen year old at his second political meeting, has been shot while holding her hand—a detail not lost on the reader—as they try to make their way out of the plaza in Tlatelolco.[37] At first, in the chaos of the plaza, she does not know what has happened, and the second fragment begins, "Jalé el brazo de mi hermano: 'Julio, ¿qué te pasa?' Lo volví a jalar, sus ojos estaban muy tristes y entreabiertos y pude oír sus palabras: '…Es que…'[…]" (184).[38] In this fragment, she continues to say that upon

[37] In "Remembering 1968 in Mexico" Harris also notes the particular fragmentation of the testimony by Diana Salmerón de Contreras. Harris's interest is in Poniatowska's use of this narrative strategy and others to expose human rights abuses through *La noche de Tlatelolco*. For him, this example contributes to Poniatowska's ability to provide "a view of Tlatelolco as a massacre of the innocent" (487).

[38] "I tugged at my brother's arm. 'Julio, what's the matter?' I asked him. I tugged at his arm again; his eyes were half closed and there was a very sad look in them. And I heard him murmur the words 'I think'…" (224)

loosening his belt she encountered a wound, and she learned at the hospital that he was shot three times and was dying. Later, we read a fragment of only one line from Diana: "Hermanito, ¿qué tienes? Hermanito, contéstame…" (186).[39] A fragment from a newspaper article in *El Universal,* "Durante Varias Horas Terroristas y Soldados Sostuvieron Rudo Combate," separates this from the following poignant lines, "Hermanito, háblame… ¡Una camilla, por favor! Hermanito, aquí estoy… ¡Una camilla! Soldado, ¡una camilla para una persona herida!..." (186).[40] Diana's version of the violence starkly contrasts the account in the headline of a clash between terrorists and military troops. She later continues, "[…] Mi primera impression fue la de las personas que estaban tiradas en la Plaza; los vivos y los muertos se entremezclaban. Mi segunda impresión fue que mi hermano estaba acribillado a balazos" (187);[41] this situates her testimony for the reader within the greater context of the massacre while maintaining a level of intimacy and affectivity made possible through the individual story.

**III. *Rojo amanecer***

In film, while several documentaries had addressed Tlatelolco—including the distinctive *El grito* (1969-70) by Leobardo López Arretche and film students from the UNAM, and *Dos de octubre, aquí México* (1969) by Oscar Menéndez—no fictional

[39] "'Hey, little brother, what's the matter? Answer me, little brother…'" (224)
[40] "Little brother, speak to me… Please, somebody get him a stretcher! I'm right here, Julio… a stretcher! … Soldier, a stretcher for somebody who's been wounded…" (225)
[41] "The very first thing I noticed was all the people lying on the ground; the entire Plaza was covered with the bodies of the living and the dead, all lying side by side. The second thing I noticed was my kid brother had been riddled with bullets." (225)

film confronted the topic unambiguously until *Rojo amanecer*,[42] "la primera cinta en abordar directamente uno de los tabúes de la historia nacional" (Porras Ferreyra 97).[43] This more likely reflects the challenges of state censorship and production difficulties than a lack of interest on the part of filmmakers;[44] in the case of *Rojo amanecer*, after its difficult and largely clandestine production in 1989, which demonstrated the dedication of the actors and crew to the project,[45] the film was first permitted to be screened in 1990 and achieved success in 1991 (Velazco 69). In the version screened publicly, references to the army and its role on October 2 were censored, but some of the cuts survived for release on video[46] though not on the most widely available DVD version.

*Rojo amanecer* ends with the striking images of bodies lying on the floor on the steps of an apartment building the morning after the massacre. It begins the

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[42] *Canoa* (1975), directed by Felipe Cazals, is often interpreted as a reflection on 1968 but the film does not make the connection explicit. In his discussion of Tlatelolco in film, John Mraz focuses on *Canoa* and *Rojo amanecer* but also contends that fictional films "incorporating the experience" appeared earlier, including Joskowicz, *Crates* (1970), *El cambio* (1971), and *Meridiano 100* (1974), directed by Alfredo Joskowicz, and one by Gabriel Retes, *Los años duros* (1973). See Mraz 201.

[43] Salvador Velazco makes a similar assessment: "Jorge Fons tiene el indudable mérito de haber dirigido la primera película dentro del llamado cine industrial en torno a la matanza de Tlatelolco del 2 de octubre de 1968" (69).

[44] See Foster, *Mexico City* 3 and Rojo 51.

[45] Héctor Bonilla, one of the lead actors, provided some of the initial financing for the film. Production proceeded despite numerous financial setbacks. "Fons assembled friends as actors—María Rojo, Bruno and Demián Bichir, Eduardo Palomo—and they worked without pay, providing their own clothes for costumes. […] The movie was filmed clandestinely at night in a warehouse on a set the participants constructed that was furnished from their own homes. […] The director and actors also lived with the fear that they would be discovered and arrested" (Mraz 211-2).

[46] For details on specific cuts, see Velazco.

previous day, in the early morning on October 2, 1968, and centers around the experience of a "normal" middle-class family: the father is a typical government bureaucrat, the mother a homemaker, her father a veteran, and the children, students—two in university and two in grade school. Generational differences quickly appear over breakfast as the family discusses the student movement, in which the two older boys are passionate participants, the upcoming Olympic games, and youth fashion. All but the mother leave for work, school and the market; the grandfather and two youngest children return, and the apartment loses electricity and telephone service. The grandfather and boy see snipers in civilian clothes checking the vantage point from the terrace. The viewer, however, does not see over the balcony; with the exception of a few establishing shots of the square in the early morning from the perspective of the grandfather, similarly brief shots the next morning before the arrival of the paramilitaries to the apartment and the youngest son's departure in the closing scene, the film restricts itself to the space inside the Chihuahua apartment building in Nonalco-Tlatelolco, primarily in the apartment of its protagonist family. On the other hand, despite the lack of visual the film makes the viewer painfully aware of the scene outside: the voice of a student organizer and sounds of the crowd in the plaza project into the apartment, later followed by sounds of helicopters, gunshots and tanks. After a suspenseful period, the older children arrive at the apartment, along with unknown students seeking refuge. Eventually power and telephone service are restored, the father comes home, the women serve food and distribute bedding, and the students plan for how each will leave in the morning.

After this seeming return to a modicum of domestic normalcy with the family unit safely reconstituted within the apartment, a group of unidentified paramilitary troopers abruptly wakes the household and after an aggressive search discovers the group of students hiding in the bathroom. All the students and family members are shot in cold blood except the youngest, who hides beneath a mattress at his grandfather's instruction. The boy must make his way through the bodies and down a stairway stained with blood as he exits the apartment building.

The understanding of the events on October 2 offered by *Rojo amanecer* is limited—as the camera does not move beyond the apartment building, the viewer's knowledge of events outside depends on information gleaned from outside sound and the reactions of those inside to what they have witnessed (whether from the windows or in the plaza)—and partial to viewpoint of the students and victims of the massacre. In part due to restrictions placed by government censors, the film reflects some ambiguity as to the perpetrators, and the degree to which (para)military troops are implicated; we leave the film with a sense of "them," the agents of the government who authorized and orchestrated the attack, but no clear responsibility. Instead, as testimonial fiction, *Rojo amanecer* focuses on the audience's engagement with the "normal" family and its sympathy for the students fleeing the violence outside.[47]

[47] As Jaime Porras Ferreyra concludes, "el objetivo de la cinta era perturbar y recuperar la indignación ante un crimen gubernamental, además de significar la primera representación en el cine de ficción de un hecho que ha marcado a generaciones enteras" (97).

*Rojo amanecer* represents the massacre in the Plaza through the "testimonial" accounts of the characters as they converse in the apartment, a representative microcosm of the testimonial voices in *La noche de Tlatelolco.* Television and radio commentary adds to the dialogue of the characters, contradicting the witnessed accounts of the young people with the "official" version of the student movement, Tlatelolco and the approaching Olympic games. Similar to the newspaper headlines in *Noche*, in *Rojo amanecer* these media accounts intrude in the domestic/private sphere and contrast the testimonials of the students present in the plaza. Yet it seems to be the conceit of the film that the destruction of one normative domestic scene through the violent intrusion of politics might remember Tlatelolco more generally as violence against the collective. Because *Rojo amanecer* follows the experience of the massacre by so few characters, and primarily family members, each one feels invested with meaning; the film places particular stress on the "normal" embodied in the middle class family, whose older children participate in the student movement out of enthusiasm for democratic ideals and a belief in their ability to create change. David William Foster suggests the importance of the "normal" in *Rojo amanecer* relates it to the narrative choices in *Noche*:

> with this family, Fons strives for a degree of typicalness that will serve to underscore the way in which the massacre reached deep into the center of the city's workaday middle class, and how, rather than suppressing an illegitimate student protest movement, it impacted a broad spectrum of the society of the city. This is a point Poniatowska attempted to make with her interviews […] The typicalness of Humberto and Alicia's family is particularly evident because of the wealth of details of everyday life and the commonness of everything about this family, things the film is able to include in its visual frame. (9)

While *Rojo amanecer* focuses less on the student movement than *Noche*, as it begins not with the movement but on the day of the massacre, the students who seek refuge in the apartment are also "normal" students, seemingly representative of differing economic means, some from IPN and another from UNAM. In part, this is what gives the film lasting influence on the viewer decades later. The characters in *Rojo amanecer* are identifiable not only as "normal" for Mexico City in 1968, but appeal to a more general and—though I hesitate to use the term—"universal" familiarity and domesticity that makes the (seemingly impossible) intrusion of state violence even more disturbing to the viewer,[48] and all the more resonant.

The linear narrative progression of *Rojo amanecer* is reinforced by several close-ups of different clocks inside the apartment marking the progress of the day. During the opening credits, the soundtrack begins with a loud ticking, somewhat reminiscent of a noisy film reel. The ticking definitively registers as a that of a clock in the opening frame, with a medium close-up of an old alarm clock on a bedside table, next to typical assortment of items: a glass of water, medicine bottles, a lamp, a children's book *(Blanca Nieve*) and eyeglasses. A wheezing cough adds to the ticking, but the camera focuses for several seconds on the clock before a hand reaches into the frame to grab the glass of water and the camera pans left to follow the glass to the grandfather's lips (the intimacy of this close-up also encourages the viewer to

[48] John Mraz notes, "The sense of normalcy that Fons establishes—and reestablishes time and time again—is crucial, for the state's violence is then seen to be all the more outrageous," and the compressed space of the apartment provides "an encapsulation of what occurred in the plaza" (213).

identify from the start with the characters in the family). Later, the grandfather tears a page from the daily calendar, which now reads October 2, 1968. For the viewer familiar with Tlatelolco, the ticking clock builds apprehension for what will happen, analogous to the tick counting down to the detonation of a bomb.[49] Through the numerous clock faces, time marches forward in *Rojo amanecer* throughout the day. However, while no flashbacks interrupt the forward progress of narrative time, the film is imbued with the resonance of memory—the ailing grandfather in particular recalls the as-yet-unfulfilled promises of the Mexican Revolution—and the testimonies of the students provide the viewer with more information about the massacre in the plaza than any of the images on screen, to the extent that one might make the claim, "[e]n el filme vemos la forma en que la memoria se presenta como la única manera de grabar los acontecimientos de Tlatelolco" (Rojo 50).[50] Consequently, though the massacre in the plaza cannot directly be seen/scene (as a result of practical concerns such as production cost and lack of institutional support), it is accessed through memory and synecdoche.

Though the family in the film is made up of fictional characters, their situation and the violence they encounter is historically plausible, and in this sense the text is testimonial in that it refers to the events of October 2, 1968; the very typical construction of the family at the film's outset also suggests, however, that the setting could be almost anywhere, at any time. Within the testimonial world of the film,

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[49] See Juan J. Rojo.
[50] "In the film we see how memory is presented as the only way to record the events at Tlatelolco"

Alicia's decision issues a challenge to the viewer to determine on what grounds to form an ethical response in the face of violence against others. *Rojo amanecer* establishes a world in which state-sponsored violence and fear penetrate the domestic sphere. Alicia's (gendered) reaction, based on a universal appeal to motherhood, reasserts the obligation of individuals to the collective, articulated as an obligation to members of the family. Of course, within the fictional world the consequence for Alicia is fatal; the stakes are different for the viewer of the film, who encounters this "re-membering" through her interaction with the filmic text.

Elements of *Rojo amanecer* link it aesthetically to *cine imperfecto*[51] and align it with the national politics of the New Latin American Cinema, characterized by Ana López as a cinema that sees itself "as a response to and an activator of a different kind of nationhood or subject positionality than the one sponsored by dominant cultural forces" (López in Rojo 51). This is of particular significance to *Rojo amanecer* as a Mexican film, given the legacy of its national film culture. At the height of their popularity, Mexican films interpolated the audience into a Mexican nation, as Julianne Burton-Carvajal observes in an article on Mexican melodrama and patriarchy,

> Because the Mexican movie industry rose to prominence parallel to the evolution of a new state formation, this massive cultural industry (film ranked third as a generator of gross national product during the 1940s) was integral to the process of constructing and consolidating the Mexican nation, particularly

[51] As Juan Rojo points out, however, given the economic and political constraints on production of the film, this may reflect Fons's ability to make the best of difficult circumstances; regardless, the filmic text reads as subscribing to a certain austere aesthetic.

> because widespread illiteracy meant that the film medium offered the most ubiquitous slate onto which inscriptions of and conscriptions into the national could be written. (228)

Of course, *Rojo amanecer* comes from a different moment of faltering domestic cinema in the 1980s,[52] yet it references and (self-critically) rehearses elements of cinematic nation-building and family melodrama. While the very "normal" family in *Rojo amanecer* may to some extent stand in for the people of Mexico—an idea somewhat complicated by the arrival of students from less privileged socioeconomic backgrounds at the door—rather than conclude with the consolidation of the people into the nation-state, the film witnesses the destruction of the extended (national?) family. Before the massacre, unlike the pessimism of the Abuelo, who presumably has witnessed firsthand the power of the autocracy during his military service, the young people in *Rojo amanecer* express optimism that despite the repressive apparatus of the government, the democratic ideals they find manifest in the student movement will incite the rest of the populace ("El país entero está orgulloso de sus jóvenes") and result in democratic dialogue. After the violence in the plaza, they maintain hope that when the news spreads it will galvanize the populace against the excess of the government response. Instead, with the murder of the others, Carlitos emerges from the apartment as an orphan yet to come of age—part of a generation aware of the unfulfilled promise of the revolution, but witness to repressive power.

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[52] The resurgence in domestic film production and viewership in Mexico, referred to as *el nuevo cine mexicano*, could be said to begin in the years following the production of *Rojo amanecer*; this film might be on the cusp of this movement.

At the end of the film, *Rojo amancer* encourages the viewer to feel for the character of Carlitos, the only one left—except for the viewer herself—to tell the story of his family's assassination. Filmed twenty years after the massacre at Tlatelolco, the boy Carlitos would then be an adult, and the film seems to present its version of historical consciousness through the child character.[53] Carlitos, Rojo notes, says of his school day: "Tuvimos Historia. Es la clase que más me gusta… Vimos otra vez lo de la independencia." Evidently for Carlitos, History implies a process of retelling and reformation, practiced in the classroom as part of a national narrative. In a film that twenty years after the event attempts a historical retelling—through the guise of a fictional family drama—of a massacre marginalized by the narrative of national History, Carlitos's remark underscores history as a creative process. Taken in the context of the film, Carlitos's observations on the reenacting of History and its implications for historical memory complement the breakdown of official government documents by the multiple testimonial voices of those present at Tlatelolco and their families in Poniatowska's *La noche de Tlatelolco.* Given the continued importance of such lines of questioning to both academic and legislative discussion, with the passing of two additional decades the "work" of this film—and Poniatowska's book—has become no less relevant to a viewer concerned with the historical and affective qualities of creative testimonial projects.

[53] Also see Juan Rojo, 54.

**IV. The reader as witness: restoring dignity in testimonial bodies**

As previously mentioned, in *Rojo amanecer* the two older children, Jorge and Sergio (Demián and Bruno Bichir), insist on the democratic ideals and composition of the student movement. After an argument with their father, Humberto (Héctor Bonilla), during the family meal, the two sit with their mother, Alicia (María Rojo), at the dining table and passionately defend to her their continued involvement in politics. She objects on the grounds of the discord their activities bring into the family space, but also out of genuine fear for their safety, concerns which later coincide in the paramilitary's murder of the family within the politicized domestic space of their apartment. Sergio and Jorge explain to their mother (and the viewer) that the student movement has grown over three months from an incident of police brutality to a movement capable of drawing half a million people in silent demonstration. Jorge tries to assuage her concerns for their safety, to which she replies, in echo of their father's earlier admonition, "Con el gobierno no se juega."[54] Sergio and Jorge reassert the goals of the movement and insist on the popular support it enjoys. Sergio tells her, "Todos los estudiantes del país están en la lucha."[55] Jorge continues, asserting that despite governmental attempts to quelch the movement, the leaders have not been detained, "El movimiento continúa, y ahora salimos a la calle, a las fábricas, aquí a Tlatelolco, donde hemos encontrado mucho apoyo,"[56] to which Sergio

[54] "With the government you don't play around"
[55] "All the students in the country are joined in the fight"
[56] "The movement continues, and now we're going to the streets, the factories, here in Tlatelolco, where we've gotten a lot of support"

adds, "¡El país entero puede estar orgulloso de sus jóvenes!"[57] The boys sit on the opposite side of the table from their mother and the sequence takes place primarily in over-the-shoulder shots and reverse shots, integrating more close-ups of Alicia as the conversation progresses. At the end of the sequence during a close-up of Alicia, Jorge crosses in front of the camera to walk around the table and embrace his mother, then cuts to an over-the shoulder shot of the two in which she extends her hand to Jorge, who grasps it with clear emotion in response to her concern. This sequence establishes Alicia as a character concerned about the efficacy of student demonstrations against the government, with the positioning of its final frames indicating her loyalty to her children, which will later translate into sympathy with the other students.

Alicia continues to play a pivotal role in *Rojo amanecer* in guiding the viewer's response to the students who come to the apartment upon fleeing the plaza; her decision to put her self at risk on behalf of strangers is an ethical act, prompted by the question of what makes for meaningful life, that which one will not allow to be killed without consequence. This relates to my previous discussion of how these texts revisit/counter the government's position on which lives may be mourned in the aftermath of October 2. Alicia's response is an intersubjective one. Her character operates through excessive affect and her determination to protect the students, despite her father's warning, comes from the fierceness of her ability to imagine her own children in the place of the strangers. With the students, she acts alternately as

[57] "The entire nation can be proud of its young people!"

interlocutor and observer, facilitating the sequences in which the characters could be said to give testimony to the events in the plaza. At certain moments, such as an exchange with the female student (Leonor Bonilla) in which Alicia burns the CNH propaganda and insists that donations be hidden,[58] her character seems an amalgamation of several testimonial voices in *Noche*. It is only after she tends to the wounded student and he finally falls asleep that she asks Jorge, "¿Lo conoces?"[59] At this point the students acknowledge that none of them knows the others, and they begin to recount how they ended up at the door of the apartment. As the students alternate in telling stories of the massacre, the camera repeatedly cuts back to close-ups of Alicia's face, lit more brightly by candlelight than those of the students. Guided by Alicia's questions and facial expressions, the viewer encounters the anonymous wounded and dead in the plaza through the reflections of the students in the apartment, who communally sit and recreate in words the scene they witnessed before finding refuge.

> Muchacho II: […] Pero ya después todos corrimos también. Yo vi caer a una muchacha con toda esta parte de la cara ensangrentada. Malditos asesinos.
> Muchacha: La plaza estaba lleno de muertos. Y de zapatos. Había muchos zapatos tirados. Zapatos de mujer…
> Sergio: Y niños: Yo vi a dos niños muertos, uno encima del otro, llenos de sangre.[60]

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[58] For comparison, see Poniatowska 207.
[59] "Do you know him?"
[60] Boy 2: … But later we were all running, too. I saw a girl fall with all this part of her face covered with blood. Cursed murderers.
Girl: The plaza was filled with dead bodies. And with shoes. There were many discarded shoes. Women's shoes…
Sergio: And children: I saw two dead little boys, one on top of the other, covered in blood.

The image of shoes, absent their owners, in particular allows the viewer to concretely imagine the victims of the massacre—bodies without shoes—characterized by their absence as testimonial voices. Similarly, in *Noche* a full-page photograph of the ground littered with shoes bears the caption, "Quedaron tirados en el suelo entre jirones de ropa y plantas machucadas muchos zapatos, sobre todo de mujer; mudos testigos de la desaparición de sus dueños."[61] As the text presents it, despite coming from clearly different socioeconomic backgrounds, the students unite with one another in support of the movement, but perhaps more determinedly against the state as an agent of violence.

In *La noche de Tlatelolco,* the organization and content of the testimonial fragments encourage the reader to interpret the frequent "nosotros" as an open, democratic "we" with whom the reader can (should?) align herself against the perpetrators of violence. The text primarily presents the viewpoints of survivors of Tlatelolco, but rather than articulate a unilateral position, it relies on a collage of speakers to foster a sense of indignity and a need for remembrance through the sharing of testimony. Most of the testimonial fragments dealing directly with Tlatelolco allow the speaker to witness to the massacre; however, certain sequences of fragments also call upon the reader to imagine herself a witness.

> ¡Alto! ¡Alto el fuego! ¡Alto el fuego! ¡Alto!
> -Voces en la multitud
> ¡No puedo! ¡No suporto más!

[61] "Strewn about the pavement, among the torn clothing and the plants trampled underfoot, were many shoes, most of them women's" (192)

-Voz de mujer
¡No salgas! ¡No te muevas!
-Voz de hombre
¡Cérquenlos! ¡Ahí! ¡Ahí! ¡Cérquenlos, cérquenlos les digo!
-Una voz
¡Estoy herido! Llamen a un medico. ¡Estoy…!
-Una voz (197)[62]

The anonymous voices (including those of security forces and victims) in this series convey a sense of collective chaos and confusion, fostered in part by their brevity and intensity. Rather than describe the scene of the massacre with the detail of separate individual experiences, this series of voices immerses the reader, making her present for the event as it unfolds on the page. Anonymous voices, and those attributed vaguely to "un militar," populate subsequent pages amidst the testimony of specific students and residents. These voices often beg for relief or medical assistance, such as the cry of 'una voz en la multitud,' "¡Sanidad! ¡Oficial! ¡Tenemos un herido!" (199).[63] Such anonymous cries for help, without descriptive (narrative?) context, seem to ask the reader to take on the role of witness, involving him or herself in the "we" of the testimonial project.

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[62] "Stop shooting! Stop shooting! Stop shooting!
-Voices in the crowd
I can't stand this another minute!
-A woman's voice
Stay under cover! Don't move!
-A man's voice
Surround them! Over there, over there! Hem them in, I tell you!
-A voice
I've been wounded. Get me a doctor. I've been…
-A voice" (236)

[63] "Medical Corps! Officer! We've got somebody who's been wounded over here!" (238)

However, as important as the democratic, (anonymous?) "we" is to the testimonial drive of these texts, both *Noche* and *Rojo amanecer* suggest that the testimonial project also attend to the particular stories of named characters; accordingly, the recognition of names provides added resonance for the affective lives of certain students and their relatives, rendering their stories identifiable and to a certain extent, substantial. The imagination of the reader/viewer, if she is open to the encounter, allows her to approach with intimacy the named characters in the text.

Poniatowska makes some reference to the names of individual soldiers, primarily with excepts from televised speeches by various officials, but more often they remain anonymous, the effect being for the reader—as previously mentioned—one of a general sense of an authoritarian force that seeks to cast as illegitimate the demands of the demonstrators and render unintelligible the voices of victims and their families. This ambiguous agent of repression similarly lurks in the background of the family space in *Rojo amanecer*. In the distributed (censored) version of the film, soldiers escort Don Roque back to the apartment but no overt references to their involvement in the massacre are made. The students address their indignance toward "el gobierno" and condemn as murderers the plainclothes forces in the crowd, presumably paramilitary troops. It is they who enter the apartment and shoot its inhabitants, arrogant, violent figures against whom the audience identifies with the students and the family.

In contrast to the generalized negative presence of the "government" and the "granaderos" in *Noche*, the testimonial voices do, with the exception of the selections

previously mentioned (photograph captions and fragments comprising scenes of chaotic violence) receive specific names and epithets, usually describing the speaker's profession, position in the movement's leadership, or family relationship. The inclusion of names after each fragment allows the reader to draw connections between the different speakers and join together various accounts without abandoning the fragmented structure of the text as a whole. A name also renders each voice discrete and helps to associate the fragments with the actual speakers whose testimony they seem to communicate. In discussing the relationship between the testimonial voices in *Noche* and the interviews with actual people conducted and compiled by Poniatowska, however, it is important to note that while names are given to nearly all of the testimonial speakers, many are invented by the author to protect her testimonial informants. This practice, common in journalism and political exposés, further supports the opinion that the figures in these testimonials, in addition to referencing the effects of violence in the real world, take on an affective life within the text through their interaction with the reader. Consequently, the recognition of repeated voices through the repetition of names becomes most important for the reader when piecing together personal tragedies, as many of the fragments shift in style back and forth from narrative to dialogue without contextualization.

In *Rojo amanecer*, while we learn the names of the family members from the opening scene, when fleeing the plaza the students rush into the apartment without introduction. Only later do we learn that they are also strangers to Jorge and Sergio.

During the middle of the night, as all in the apartment try to sleep, a woman cries out in the stairway, searching for her son by name. At this point, in response to the concern of the mother for her son, we learn the names of the two students, Jaime and Fernando (Simón Guevara and Sergio Sánchez). Although the characters of the two boys are already well-differentiated, the personalized care of the mother figure insists on the unique, named—and thus able to be documented—presence of each, despite official efforts to render them invisible, and even the film credits listing of the actors as "Muchacho I" and "Muchacho II." Regardless, it seems fitting with the ethical concerns of the film that we learn the names of the students before witnessing their assassination. Testimonial fragments describe similar scenes in *Noche*, where mothers frantically search for their children (or the bodies of their children) following the night's massacre and mass arrests. For example, first we read from Margarita's point of view a description of her search for Carlos, where having heard that he was hiding in an apartment in the Chihuahua building, she goes from door to door screaming for him. Later, her friend Mercedes describes the unreality of the scene and the mothers looking for their children—"Era kafkiano"—and Margarita, "ya fuera de sí." Then, a resident's account of "una madre…una madre gritando: '¡Carlitos!' por pasillos y escaleras, sollozando en busca de su hijo y preguntando por él" (249)[64] seems to further Margarita's story from a stranger's point of view, in which she—but not her

[64] "It was all straight out of Kafka" … "absolutely beside herself"… "a mother… a mother sobbing and calling 'Carlitos, Carlitos!' along all the corridors and up and down the stairways, searching for her son and asking everyone if they had seen him." (294-5)

son—is no longer called by name but rather stands in for a general mother figure capable of articulating a claim for recognition of behalf of the arrested or massacred child.

In *Rojo amanecer*, the mother calling out to her child from the stairwell opens up the opportunity for the male students (and the viewer) to also call one another by name; similarly, it is through the character of Alicia, the mother, that the viewer is encouraged to align herself with the students against the violence of the government. While a military officer inspects her father's paperwork, Alicia witnesses the brutal beating and interrogation of two young men on the stairwell by unidentified paramilitary troops. The viewer also witnesses this scene, through a series of reverse shots that both show Alicia in the doorway and provide us with her point of view. In this scene Alicia affords the film a model of engagement based not on solidarity (with the movement) but on (motherly) protest against violence. However, it is not Alicia but Carlitos, the child who studies the annual re-creation of history, who survives as a witness at the end of the film. Like the reader of *La noche de Tlatelolco*, encountering the last testimonial, "Son cuerpos, señor…", Carlitos must step over the bodies of his assassinated family members as he exits the apartment building and walks out into the morning. These endings do not provide what we normally would refer to as "closure" to the text; to borrow Judith Butler's term, they encourage the reader/viewer to tarry with grief.[65] In this respect it does not matter how many decades pass between 1968 and the present reading, as the affective encounter remains as primary and immediate

[65] See Butler, 30.

to the reader as ever. Additionally, while the meaning of the events of 1968 may shift for subsequent generations, they find echoes and resonances in both current political developments and projects for testimonial expression.

## Chapter II:
## Testimonial Readers/Writerly Testimonials?
## The Ethical Demands of a Literary Approach

What should be considered "testimonial literature" and, even more narrowly, *testimonio*, is a point of some debate. I have mentioned this point in the introduction, and to a certain extent it has factored into the previous chapter, but as this chapter turns more specifically to writing by and about indigenous peoples it bears explanation of how the texts I examine—and the categories to which I tentatively ascribe them—fit into a literary history of Latin America and the visibility of Latin American texts through *testimonio* in studies of "world" literature. For example, David Damrosch's *What is World Literature?* (2003) takes as its representative sampling from the continent one of the most widely distributed examples of *testimonio, Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia* (1982). Damrosch's choice to include *testimonio* in a project outlining world literature is yet another reason to take another look at indigenous and testimonial writing and revisit their critical reception.

As a broadly conceived practice, testimonial writing could be said to emerge in Latin America colonial times, notably in Bartolomé de las Casas's denunciation of what he saw as the brutal treatment of indigenous populations by the Spanish colonizers. The distinction between historical, ethnographic and literary writing blurs in many descriptions/depictions of indigenous peoples,[66] especially apparent in

[66] For a more specific discussion of the overlap between ethnographic writing and literature, see Norma Klahn's "Juan Pérez Jolote ¿Antropología o ficción?"

social-realist works and those considered "indigenist" writing. It remains clear for a 21st century reading, however, that attempting any such genealogy/chronology of testimonial writing in Latin America necessarily involves an investigation of the possible inadequacy of traditional social and ethical categorizations in describing marginalization and the "periphery."[67] Testimonial texts can develop complicated and sometimes explicit positions with regard to determinations of ethnicity, race, socioeconomic position and gender as well as their relevance to testimony itself. Likewise, the consideration of testimonial texts as "literature," which implies access to print culture and participation in what Ángel Rama termed the *ciudad letrada* and its control of discursive power,[68] calls into question the relationship of both author and reader to the text.

Part of the excitement of the texts produced in the 1960s and 1970s, recognized as the literary category of *testimonio* by Casa de las Américas in1970, developed from their promise to give voice in print to the stories of populations hitherto excluded from the *ciudad letrada*. John Beverley, in his essay "The Real Thing," asserts that "something of the experience of the body in pain or hunger or danger inheres in testimonio" (274); in the urgency of its "moment," *testimonio* held power to convey the visceral experience of the subaltern to the academic: "It was the Real, the voice of the body in pain, of the disappeared, of the losers in the rush to marketize, that demystified the false utopian discourse of neoliberalism, its claims to

[67] Lienhard, "Voces marginadas y poder discursivo en América Latina."
[68] See Ángel Rama, *La ciudad letrada*.

have finally reconciled history and society" (281). However, Beverley considers the force of *testimonio* to be driven by its political immediacy and to no longer have the same potency. In the introduction to *The Real Thing: Testimonial Discourse in Latin America* (1996), Georg Gugelberger echoes Beverley in stating that the "euphoric moment" of *testimonio* had run its course by the mid-nineties and what remained was to reassess its critical/academic reception and begin the search for a new cultural development that might have the "potential" of *testimonio* in its prime. While the individual essays in *The Real Thing* provide unique insights into ways of thinking and reading *testimonio*—notably Elzbieta Sklodowska's insistence on the "literariness" of testimonial narratives[69]—the collection serves to underscore a persistent anxiety about both the politics of representation involved and the nature of *testimonio* as an object of study. Since *The Real Thing*, these concerns have been partially assuaged by criticism that follows one of two trends: that based in psychoanalytic and/or juridical discourse, that reads *testimonio* together with testimonial fictions as a form of witnessing; and that based on rhetorical analysis, understanding *testimonio* as a

[69] In her essay, "Spanish American Testimonial Novel: Some Afterthoughts," Sklodowska questions the lack of deconstructive readings of *testimonio* and the assessment of *testimonio* as a "neorealist genre" despite its internal contradictions. For Sklodowska, the reception of *testimonio* fits into a more general "critical trend that views all Latin American literature as an ongoing quest, a quest for a style that not only expresses the New World in its own terms, but also demonstrates an unrelenting commitment to the subaltern other" (98). Also noteworthy in *The Real Thing* is Yúdice's suggestion that the *testimonio* is important for postmodernity because it offers a model for "recogniz[ing] and valoriz[ing] the aesthetics of life practices themselves" (49).

persuasive enunciation inextricably linked to goals of prompting action by the (privileged, "first world") reader for the sake of social justice.[70]

Martín Lienhard suggests—and here his characterization indicates, even if he does not draw a direct connection, that *testimonio* might aptly be described in Antonio Cornejo Polar's terms as "heterogeneous literature"—that *testimonio* continues the unequal power relations established during the conquest as the production of "discurso 'subalterno' destinado a los sectores hegemónicos" ("Voces marginadas" 791).[71] Lienhard's assessment situates *testimonio* within the "historical project" of Latin American literature,[72] incorporating indigenous populations through textual forms of recognition, engagement and subjection (Legrás 218). For this reason Lienhard seems to favor texts that address the demands of both *testimonio* and fiction writing, suggesting that "los textos testimoniales más convincentes no son siempre los que proporcionan la mayor información etnográfica, sociográfica y sociolinguística, sino aquellos que logran, de alguna manera, volver 'tangible' el discurso popular" (794).[73] For this exploration of the workings of testimonials and the testimonial world, I take Lienhard's assessment as an invitation that we consider not primarily

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[70] For recent examples of this first trend, see Linda Maier and Isabel Dufano's *Woman as Witness* and Joanna Bartow's *Subject to Change.* For the second, see Kimberley Nance's *Can Literature Promote Justice?*.

[71] "subaltern 'discourse' addressed to hegemonic sectors"

[72] As Norma Klahn notes in her review of *Literature and Subjection*, for Legrás this entailed the "assimilative incorporation of the margins to literary discourse" that "symbolically constituted the integration of 'the others' into the discourse of modernizing nation-states, that is, to the timetable of European modernity" (496).

[73] "the most convincing testimonial texts are not always those that provide the most ethnographic, sociographic and sociolinguistic information, but rather those that manage, in some manner, to make 'tangible' popular discourse"

what information testimonials impart, but how they seek to communicate with a reader/addressee.

Our approach to *testimonio* in this chapter will address these concerns while investigating the relationship of *testimonio* as a category to indigenist and indigenous practices of testimonial and/or denunciatory writing. To shape this discussion, I will focus on two influential texts from the Andean region: José María Arguedas's posthumous novel, *El zorro de arriba y el zorro de abajo/The Fox from Above and the Fox from Below* (1971) and Domitila Barrios de Chungara's *testimonio* in collaboration with Moema Vizzier, *Si me permiten hablar/Let Me Speak!* (1977/1978). Although *El zorro* may be somewhat unconventional as an example of testimonial writing, I argue that both of these texts constitute examples of testimonial literature as they involve the reader through intellectual and affective engagement with complicated social landscapes and systemic repression.

*El zorro de arriba y el zorro de abajo* has been the subject of critical attention for both its hybrid form and the circumstances of its production, intimately related to the author's decision to take his own life, as detailed in the "diary" sections of the text. In *El zorro,* Arguedas, a Peruvian anthropologist and fiction writer, wrestles with his mestizo heritage and bilingualism,[74] questioning how to be a politically committed writer and intellectual in the sixties in Latin America amidst ethnic confrontation, rapid migrations, and unequal modernization. Portions of the novel

[74] For a more expansive discussion of Arguedas's biography and unusual cultural upbringing see Lambright 10-16.

follow a multitude of characters in and around Chimbote, a rapidly industrializing fishing community confronted with the demands of global capital and the lack of basic services for its burgeoning migrant population. The diverse cast of characters includes fishermen, prostitutes, market vendors, an ex-miner, capitalists, Catholic priests, local leaders and a former Peace Corps volunteer. The story is mediated by the presence of two foxes and their conversation, a mythic element Arguedas incorporates from Quechua tradition that appears to shape the cosmovision of the novel's testimonial world. This chapter will refer to some particularly relevant reviews of the text, notably by Antonio Cornejo Polar, Alberto Moreiras and Martín Lienhard, but will focus on reading the text as it relates to testimonial work.

Critical attention to the collaborative text *Si me permiten hablar* by Domitila Barrios de Chungara and Moema Vizzier has often focused on the politics of its production and its explicit Marxist social commentary. As the speaker (Domitila) asserts at the beginning of *Si me permiten hablar*, this *testimonio* claims to testify to or witness the story not of an individual, personal tragedy, but a collective experience of oppression and state-sponsored violence. While portions of the text are particularly didactic in nature, the testimonial also engages the reader on an affective level. However, in recounting the experiences of Domitila and her community, the *testimonio* relies not on the conventions of sentimental narrative but rather includes (not elides) narrative breaks and fissures that allow for the speaker's uncertainty of her ability to adequately convey traumatic moments in terms understandable to the

reader. Rather than emphasize the extensive bibliography related to "truthfulness" in the text, I will approach *Si me permiten hablar* with attention to its literary qualities.

To pursue a comparative reading of these two texts, this chapter will reflect on how each has been read in histories of Latin American literature, and its relationship to varying discourses including regional novels, anthropological writing of the other, *indigenista* literature of the first half of the twentieth century, and accounts of indigenous movements of more recent decades. Read in this context, these texts illuminate ways in which communities and specific persons are rendered invisible by state and market forces, countering the continual "state of exception" that casts the lives of indigenous and poor persons as expendable in this economy. In my reading of these texts, I will investigate their implications for an understanding of responsibility and how they issue an ethical demand to the reader.

**I. *Testimonio* as World Literature?**

Many accounts of *testimonio*'s genesis and rise to popularity credit Miguel Barnet, a student of Fernando Ortiz, with initiating a new literary form with his hybrid ethnographic and novelistic account of the life of a Cuban former slave, Esteban Montejo, in *Biografía de un cimarrón/Autobiography of a Runaway Slave* (1966/68). Barnet's text has had substancial impact in Cuban and Latin American literature—remembering that Casa de las Américas established a prize for *testimonio* in 1970—but perhaps the *testimonio* most widely distributed internationally is the product of the collaboration between Rigoberta Menchú and Elizabeth Burgos-Debray, *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia/I, Rigoberta*

*Menchú* (1983).[75] The text is the result of a series of tape-recorded conversations between Menchú and the anthropologist Burgos-Debray, compiled and edited by the latter, who retained the rights upon its publication. *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú* frames the life-story of a young Guatemalan woman of Mayan descent with an account of the traditions and ceremonies of her indigenous community. Additionally, Burgos-Debray provides an epigraph to each chapter, the majority coming from the Mayan religious text, the Popol Vuh, a decision that seems to emphasize the speaker's indigenous heritage and, presumably, her difference from the implied reader. In the *testimonio*, Menchú's life and that of her community are shaped by ethnic conflict and the violence of prolonged civil war; descriptions of this violence are often vivid and highly emotional, as in the torture of Menchú's brother by soldiers: "Cuando ellos lo dejaron, ya no se veía como una persona. Toda la cara la tenía desfigurada por los golpes, de las piedras, de los troncos, de los árboles, mi hermano estaba todo deshecho" (199-200).[76] The *testimonio* continues to describe the public burning alive of her brother along with several others, a hauntingly real and evocative scene for the reader despite questions regarding the accuracy of its

[75] The difference in the two projects (the "collaborations" between Barnet/Montejo and Burgos-Debray/Menchú) is apparent in the positioning of the testimonial "informant": "as narrative, [*The Autobiography of a Runaway Slave*] remains, essentially, a neopicaresque tale where the individual experiences of Esteban Montejo occupy a central position. *I... Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala*, on the contrary, breaks the object/subject opposition […] Rigoberta 'speaks' her culture as the cultural 'other' anthropologists, historians and literati often write about" (Martínez-Echazabal 63).

[76] "When they'd done with him, he didn't look like a person any more. His whole face was disfigured with beating, from striking against the stones, the treetrunks; my brother was completely destroyed" (173).

informational content.[77] Though depicting violence, the brief excerpt above does not emphasize the blows of the beating itself but rather the effect of this type of violence carried out by the military on members of a community, thinking both about the physical body of the brother and the figurative communal/familial body. Additionally, the text prompts the reader to interpret this assault of the body as an attack on the personhood and identity of the speaker's brother: "ya no se veía como una persona," "estaba todo deshecho."

Through such descriptions and its focus on the speaker's community's ethnic and socioeconomic (self)awareness, *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú* implies that the violence of the civil war be understood both as an assault on the physical body and one on self-formation. Particularly important to the speaker, however, is that the concept of "self" and personhood not be thought of in terms of the individual of classic liberalism. As many critics have noted, the opening paragraph of the *testimonio* insists on the implied reader's ability to approach the story as simultaneously specific to the person of the speaker—Rigoberta Menchú—and communal in its effort to convey the experience of a people. The speaker asserts:

> Quisiera dar este testimonio vivo que no he aprendido en un libro y que tampoco he aprendido sola ya que todo esto lo he aprendido con mi pueblo y es algo que yo quisiera enfocar. Me cuesta mucho recordarme toda una vida que he vivido, pues muchas veces hay tiempos muy negros y hay tiempos que, sí, se goza también pero lo importante es, yo creo, que quiero hacer un enfoque que no soy la única, pues ha vivido mucha gente y es la vida de todos.

[77] For a thorough discussion of possible factual discrepancies between descriptions included as part of Menchú's story in the *testimonio* and real-life corroborated events, and the possible political motivations/implications of reading her *testimonio* as factual, see David Stoll's *Rigoberta Menchú and the Story of All Poor Guatemalans.*

> La vida de todos los guatemaltecos pobres y trataré de dar un poco mi historia. Mi situación personal engloba toda la realidad de un pueblo. (21)[78]

This paragraph makes several interesting claims that arise in much of testimonial literature. The speaker purports to testify or give testimony, which usually bears a claim as to the truthfulness of the (eye)witness, but alleges that this testimony has been "learned" with her people, in her own life-experience and that of the collective. The testimony is not, first and foremost, an informational account of the life of Rigoberta Menchú, but a personal(ized) story that encompasses and communicates "la realidad" of a people. In this appeal, the speaker seems to invite the reader to look for "truths" in the text, rather than debate its "truthfulness."

Returning to my earlier mention of David Damrosch's reading of *testimonio*, in *What is World Literature?* (2000) Damrosch finds the problems posed to readers and critics alike by *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú* so dynamic that he chooses to devote an entire chapter to them and those raised by Menchú's later text, *Rigoberta: La nieta de los mayas*. In a monograph that purports to provide a definition of—or at least outline parameters for—a critical approach to world literature, Damrosch elects to focus much attention to the figure of Rigoberta Menchú and the controversies surrounding her *testimonios.* Although *What is World Literature* seems to aspire, to

[78] This is my testimony. I didn't learn it from a book and I didn't learn it alone. I'd like to stress that it's not only *my* life, it's also the testimony of my people. It's hard for me to remember everything that's happened to me in my life since there have been many very bad times but, yes, moments of joy as well. The important thing is that what happened to me has happened to many other people too: my story is the story of all poor Guatemalans. My personal experience is the reality of a whole people. (1)

borrow Vilashini Cooppan's terms, to "reading globally" rather than being "globally representative," as the only Latin American author discussed in any great detail, Menchú—and her story—act as representative of Latin American literature as a field. This is indicative, perhaps, of the visibility of some Latin American testimonial literature beyond the region and its continued relevance to a global conversation. Damrosch outlines a history of the texts' production and the questions they raise for the attribution of authorship and the fidelity of translation:

> Menchú knew just what she was doing when she expanded her personal experiences into a collective history. In considering her story within the context of world literature, the real surprise to emerge from Stoll's research is not that her book is so literary but that it is so *worldly*. Though Elizabeth Burgos found her (and perhaps wanted to find her) "childlike" and "astonishingly young" (*I, Rigoberta,* xiv), Rigoberta Menchú had been evolving her story, and her self-presentation in many public forums over the previous two years. (238)

Damrosch's interest lies not in contextualizing the text within a framework of Latin American literature but specifically within a *world* context. The ensuing conversation is of interest and explicates some of the problems of production, distribution, access and control involved in testimonial texts where a "native informant" gives an oral account to an anthropologist or journalist for publication, situating them in a global scene. What drops out of this discussion, however, and would likely augment it, is a thorough approach to these texts as they relate to others produced on a local or regional level, situated within regional literary conversations. In an eagerness to adopt *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú* as a *worldly* text, *What is World Literature?*

neglects to discuss how it dialogues with other texts (Latin American or otherwise) on issues of testimony, witnessing, access to publication and ethnicity.

Damrosch suggests that the various steps in the production of *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú*—Menchú's oral account, Burgos-Debray's transcription and editing, the publisher's decisions on the book's paratext and changes in various translations[79]—reflect in each instance an awareness of the text's production within and for an international or world audience; somewhat differently, in the "diary" entries of *El zorro de arriba y el zorro de abajo* Arguedas reflects on the status of the writer and the publishing industry from a specifically Latin American (regional) vantage point. Arguedas, while acknowledging in multiple instances the desire that others read his work—for example, "Ayer escribí cuatro páginas. Lo hago por terapéutica, pero sin dejar de pensar en que podrán ser leídas" (10)[80]—insists that he is not a "professional" writer. Rather, he claims to be a "provincial" one, itself a vague concept: "Todos somos provincianos […] Provinciano de las naciones y provincianos de lo supranacional que es, también una esfera, un estrato bien cerrado […]" (21).[81] Arguedas responds directly in the "diaries" to Julio Cortázar's commentary on the professionalization of writers in Latin America, an idea Arguedas

[79] Although this dissertation touches only briefly on the politics of translation of testimonial texts, translation adds an additional layer of complexity regarding the possible "truth" they convey and its cross-cultural as well as linguistic communication. For a discussion of translation and testimonial narrative, see Lourdes Martínez-Echazábal.

[80] "Yesterday I wrote four pages. I wrote them as therapy, but not without thinking they might be read" (12).

[81] "We are all provincials […] Provincial nationally and provincials on a supranational level, which is also its own sphere, quite in a closed stratum" (25)

resists on what could be termed ethical grounds. According to Arguedas, the imperative to write differs for the professional writer, concerned with publishing deadlines, profitability and market share, from his own. He writes to the "Cortázars" of the world:

> Creo que estoy desvariando, pretendiendo lo mismo que ustedes, eso mismo contra lo que me siento como irritado […] Hay escritores que empiezan a trabajar cuando la vida los apera, con apero no tan libremente elegido sino condicionado, y están ustedes, que son, podría decirse, más de oficio. Quizás mayor mérito tengan ustedes, pero ¿no es natural que nos irritemos cuando alguien proclama que la profesionalización del novelista es un signo de progreso, de mayor perfección? (19)[82]

If one of his most popular contemporaries and even the most renowned figure in Hispanic literature would not consider themselves "professional" writers, Arguedas argues, for whom is professionalization—and global marketing—of select Latin American writers a sign of progress?

Later in the text Arguedas continues to articulate a conception of the provincial writer and the motivations for his writing. Unlike the professional writer, the provincial one writes of necessity—both personal and social—and with a knowledge stemming from experience and community. Again referring to Cortázar, the speaker in the diaries writes:

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[82] I think I'm raving, aspiring to do the same thing you all do, the very same thing I'm irritated about […] There are writers who begin working when life equips them for it, with tools not so much freely chosen as given them by life's conditioning, and you others are the ones who are acting more like writers-by-trade, in a manner of speaking. Perhaps you deserve more respect, but isn't it natural for us to get irritated when someone proclaims the professionalization of the novelist is a sign of progress, of greater perfection? (21-2).

> Don Julio ha querido atropellarme y ningunearme, irritadísimo, porque digo en el primer diario de este libro, y lo reito ahora, que soy provinciano de este mundo, que he aprendido menos de los libros que en las diferencias que hay, que he sentido y visto, entre un grillo y un alcalde quechua, entre un pescador del mar y un pescador del Titicaca, entre un oboe, un penacho de totra, la picadura de un piojo blanco y el penacho de la caña de azúcar[…] Y este saber, claro, tiene, tanto como el predominantemente erudito, sus círculos y profundidades. (174)[83]

For Arguedas, the sense of being between two communities—the Quechua one of his childhood and the mestizo one of his birth and adulthood—shapes much of his work and, although he does not use these terms, provides the testimonial impetus of his writing. *El zorro* in particular demonstrates Arguedas's social commitment and the frustration felt by the speaker at his inability to resolve either the conflicts he sees in Peru or those in the novel.

A similar testimonial drive seems to motivate Domitila Barrios de Chungara in *Si me permiten hablar*, where the speaker tells of her decision to denounce the massacre of civilians during a military takeover. The townspeople, kept silent by the fear of imprisonment, loss of employment or worse, ask Domitila to speak on their behalf. The speaker complies: "Entonces me pare y comencé a hablar. Y denuncié todo lo que había ocurrido" (112). While the speaker in *Si me permiten hablar*

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[83] Don Julio has tried to trample me underfoot and make a nobody out of me; he is extremely annoyed because in the First Diary of this book I say—and I repeat it now—that I am one of the provincial people of this world, that I have learned less from books than from the differences that exist—differences that I have felt and seen—between a cricket [a loquacious dandy] and a Quechua staff-bearing leader, between a deep-sea fisherman and one from Lake Titicaca, between an oboe, the plume of a *totora* reed, the bite of a white louse, and the feathery plume of the sugarcane […] And indeed, this kind of knowledge has its circles and depths, just as the predominately erudite lore has. (183).

explicitly privileges class difference over gender as well as ethnic and racial identification, unlike the foregrounding of the latter by both Arguedas and Menchú, the speaker nevertheless expresses pride in her *mestiza* heritage. She insists, "Yo me siento orgullosa de llevar sangre india en mi corazón" (17),[84] and explains the ambiguous indigenous identity of her father: "Mi papá es indígena. No sé si quechua o aymara, porque habla muy bien los dos idiomas, correctamente. Pero sí, sé que ha nacido en el campo, en Toledo" (49).[85] It is organically, as a member of her community, that the speaker claims to have developed her political consciousness: "fue el fruto de la experiencia del pueblo, de mis propias experiencias y de los pocos libros que he podido leer" (180).[86] Although Barrios de Chungara's speaker would not use the term, *Si me permiten hablar*, like *El zorro,* encourages its reader to think of it as provincial writing, despite the orientation of its testimony toward an exterior (international) audience.

**II. Survival in/of *El zorro:* Cultural Heterogeneity in Testimonial Fiction**

The multiple characters and scenes of *El zorro*, alternating with the first-person diaries in the voice of Arguedas, contribute to a sense of the text as both a personal story—that of the diary's speaker/the author who recounts his attempts to effectively craft and communicate a narrative of the exploitation he encounters in

[84] "I'm proud to have Indian blood in my heart" (19).
[85] "My father is Indian. I don't know if he's Quechua or Aymara, because he speaks both languages very well, very correctly. Oh, I know he was born in the countryside, in Toledo" (48).
[86] "For me it was the fruit of the people's experience, of my own experience, and of the few books I've been able to read" (163).

Chimbote—and a testimonial (if fictional) account of the violent effects of capitalist labor practice on vulnerable communities. The diary entries lead the reader to think that for Arguedas, perhaps even more acutely than for Menchú, the success of this testimonial project is linked to survival. Given the circumstances of the novel's production, however, for Arguedas, the reader assumes that "survival" takes on a different meaning from that of the physical body. The diaries conclude, accordingly, with a possibility:

> …Quizas conmigo empieza a cerrarse un ciclo y a abrirse otro en el Perú y lo que él representa: se cierra el de la calandria consolodora, del azote, del arrieraje, del odio imponente, de los fúnebres 'alzamientos' del temor a Dios y del predominio de ese Dios y sus protegidos, sus fabricantes; se abre el de la luz y de la fuerza liberadora invincible del hombre de Vietnam, el de la calandria de fuego, el del dios liberador, Aquel que se reintegra. (246)[87]

Arguedas's proposition that he—and his death—mark a cyclical break for Peru becomes particularly noteworthy for what it offers the reader as to the cosmology of the novel. Arguedas, we gather from his 1968 acceptance speech for the prize "Inca Garcilaso de la Vega," considered himself a *mestizo* in that he identified with his Quechua upbringing yet could operate in a cosmopolitan world. Emphasizing the strength of his commitment to valorizing a Quechua understanding of the world, he states, "Yo no soy un aculturado; yo soy un peruano que

[87] Perhaps with me one historical cycle draws to a close and another begins in Peru, with all that this represents. It means the closing of the cycle of the consoling calendar lark, of the whip, of being driven like beasts of burden, of impotent hatred, of mournful funeral 'uprisings,' of the fear of God and the predominance of the God and his protégées, his fabricators. It signifies the opening of the cycle of light and of the indomitable, liberating strength of Vietnamese man, of the fiery calendar lark, of the Liberator God. That God who is coming back into action. (259).

orgullosamente, como un demonio feliz habla en cristiano y en indio, en español y en quechua" (257).[88] His final letters indicate that Arguedas had hoped that this speech and the vision of a heterogenous Peruvian community it outlines—"no hay país más diverso, más multiple en varidad terrena y humana; todos los grados de calor y color, de amor y odio, de urdimbres y sutilezas, de símbolos utilizados e inspiradores" (258)[89]—would preface his final novel, but instead they act as a sort of epilogue to the main text after the conclusion of the last diary entry. In his speech, Arguedas positions himself as a symbolic figure, an example of the potential for Peru as a modernized Quechua nation (Cornejo Polar, *Un ensayo* 299); however, the speaker in the diaries of *El zorro* finds himself unable to negotiate this position, or to create from the disparate voices of Chimbote a world where such a figure might be viable. The (utopian) dream that remains, then, is to look to the opening of a new world, one that might express the multiple characters in the novel and convey the complex processes of hybridization brought on by capitalism and rapid industrialization in a region already heterogeneous in its cultures, languages, and modes of production due to its history of Conquest and (neo)colonization.

Such a reading of *El zorro de arriba y el zorro de abajo* situates the text in relation to various conceptual and/or descriptive frameworks developed in reference to ontological uncertainty over the cultural identity of Latin America, including

[88] "I am not an acculturated man; I am a Peruvian who, like a cheerful demon, proudly speaks in Christian and in Indian, in Spanish and in Quechua" (269).
[89] "No, there is no other country more diverse, nor with a greater multiplicity of earthly and human resources, it has all degrees of heat and hue, of love and hatred, of warps and subtleties, of symbols both utilized and inspiring" (270).

Fernando Ortiz's anthropological transculturation in Cuba (1940), Ángel Rama's literary transculturation in the Andes (1970s and 80s), Antonio Cornejo Polar's heterogeneity in Latin America and the Andes as a result of cultural clash brought about by the Conquest (1970s and 80s) and Néstor García Canclini's processes of hybridization (1989). In *El zorro*, a mythological, circular, indigenous temporality underlies the novel's narrative of the social injustice and destabilization brought about by the transnational promotion of developmentalist policies. Read in this way, the novel's transculturated form allows it to adopt a critical approach to a description of cultural hybridization in a heterogeneous community-in-process.

Alteratively, in *The Exhaustion of Difference* Alberto Moreiras interprets Ángel Rama's literary transculturation as a "war machine" that feeds off cultural heterogeneity to produce a synthesized (national) culture. In this aspect, Moreiras's interpretation finds commonality with Cornejo Polar in that both find evidence of the failure of identity politics. In the diaries of *El zorro*, the speaker understands his suicide as a necessary act to make way for a new era in Peru: he must annihilate his own difference (a mestizo identifying as culturally indigenous). For this reason, Moreiras argues that Arguedas's novel marks the end of magical realism (for him understood as a representation of transculturation) because it "transculturates transculturation" to the extent that indigenous rationality comes to account for modernity. Arguedas's novel and his suicide can thus be read two ways: first, as Moreiras contends, as an act of desperation at failure of identity politics (his term) in a globalizing and migratory economy, and secondly, as a gesture towards a

community to come, even if it is not yet conceivable in the current cycle. As such, in its narrative construction and linguistic deterritorialization *El zorro* belies for Moreiras an ontological uncertainty over the possibility of a transculturated and thus homogenous Peruvian cultural identity, and instead suggests a revisioning of anthropological—and literary—transculturation as producing an unstable and fluctuating subject.

According to Moreiras, "Arguedas's suicide is, properly speaking, the end of the book" and the "testimony of a violent conflict of cultures that will not be mediated away" (103); according to him, as the most "magical realist" of all the elements in the book, the suicide negates the possibility of magic realism as a cultural mediator—allowing for "the simultaneous textualization of both A and non-A without scandal" (185)—by embodying the failure of cultural mediation through text in the person of Arguedas.[90] However, this suicide, through its play with representation and the relationship between the text and the real, operates within an alternate (Quechua) cosmovision that, beyond challenging the reconciliatory possibility of magical realism to incorporate the indigenous and modern in text, may call into question the logic of the realist novel itself. It may be, as Lienhard suggests, that "el modelo occidental—la novela urbana de vanguardia—se ve subvertido por una cosmovisión de origen rural, como también por la realidad urbana de una ciudad del Tercer

[90] Here it may be interesting to bear in mind Lambright's suggestion that Moreiras focues more on the "material existence of the work" than the text itself. See Lambright 221.

Mundo" ("La 'Andinización'" 323).[91] In this sense Arguedas's suicide is not a negative affirmation but a utopian gesture corresponding to an Andean logic of dualism contradictory to that of the novel. If we are to read the text as printed (though against Arguedas's intention), the announcement of his planned suicide is followed by a vision of a socio-culturally heterogeneous nation, a reciprocal representation of death and life.

Thus Antonio Cornejo Polar suggests that in *El zorro de arriba y el zorro de abajo*, Quechua, rather than occidental logic, dominates the text: "los componentes andinos son de tal magnitud y ejercen tan decisivas funciones que es legítimo pensar que en esa novela, por primera vez, la racionalidad indígena es la que da razón de la modernidad" ("Ensayo" 303).[92] In this enterprise, Arguedas functions as a mediator, but not as part of the transculturating "war machine" described by Moreiras; instead, Cornejo Polar attributes to him the condition of a *zorro moderno*, communicating between the dualities of the Quechua cosmos ("Ensayo" 300). Arguedas's use of the *zorros* is itself an intertextual reference to *Dioses y hombres de Huarochirí*, which Lienhard reminds us was the only text from the sixteenth and seventeenth century Arguedas regarded as a comprehensive account of pre-Colombian tradition (Lienhard "Tradición Oral" 82). *Dioses y hombres* tells of the first meeting of the two foxes, divine beings with knowledge of the past and present of their respective regions (84)

[91] "The occidental model—the urban novel of the vanguard—finds itself subverted by a cosmovision of rural origin, likewise by the urban reality of a Third World city."
[92] "The Andean components are of such magnitude and exert such decisive functions that it is legitimate to think that in this novel, for the first time, the indigenous rationality is that which makes sense of modernity."

and Arguedas constructs *El zorro* around their imagined second meeting, with the *zorro de abajo* telling (and participating in) the story of Chimbote (49). In the mythic account of their first meeting, "the foxes stop and engage in a sort of gossip session […] This gossip, however, is more than mere entertainment; the foxes are not just reporters but also magically endowed storytellers" (Mitchell 1978). In their second meeting in *El zorro,* the foxes themselves question the division of above and below in the new Peru and the figure of the author/transculturator. The *zorro de arriba* remarks, "El individuo que pretendió quitarse la vida y escribe este libro era de arriba; tiene aún *ima sapra* sacudiéndose bajo su pecho. ¿De dónde, de qué es ahora?" (50).[93] The *zorros* subscribe to a cosmos in which heterogeneity (duality) exist in communication without syncretism, a cosmovision contradicted, as Cornejo Polar and Moreiras note, by the "realities" of the *hervores* and the author's suicide. However, if we read the aporia of *El zorro* alongside Arguedas's other texts, as Cornejo Polar suggests, death represents continuation and renovation, not desperation and finality ("Ensayo" 305).[94]. In the novel, the *zorros* intervene when communication breaks down: for example, don Diego turns to music and dance when "there is very little hope for remedying the [cultural] conflict at the discursive level" (Lindstrom 217).

*El zorro*, after all, is far from a "finalized" text; in the diaries, the speaker self-consciously records his inability to craft the novel as a totality, or even go as far as

[93] "The individual who tried to take his own life and is writing this book was from up above; he still has *ima sapra* swaying in his bosom. Where is he from, what is he made of now?" (54).

[94] Sandra Castro-Klarén further develops this interpretation, which, as Legrás notes, views the mythical as "creative rather than preserving energy."

construct a linear history.[95] Rather than conclude the novel and the resolve the various *hervores*—boiling points—that arise in the second part of the text, in the "¿Último Diario?" the speaker gestures toward what will *not* be told, the places where he an the foxes will not intervene:

> ¡Cuantos *Hervores* han quedado enterrados! Los Zorros no podrán narra la lucha entre los líderes izquierdistas, y de los otros, en el sindicato de pescadores; no podrán intervenir […] No aparecerá Moncada pronunciando su discurso funario, de noche, inmediatamente después de la muerte de don Esteban de la Cruz […] No podré relatar, minuciosamente, la suerte final de Tinoco […] (243)[96]

The ruptures in Arguedas's novel, however, differ from those found in many Latin American texts, including those often referred to as the "Boom." Without discounting the aesthetic import of *El zorro,* in my reading Arguedas's formalistic choices derive from the testimonial imperative of his work more directly than a drive for aesthetic experimentalism and differentiation. In a 1978 article, Jean Franco uses her own terms to describe what I interpret as a similar quality in *El zorro*: "Arguedas, so often regarded as ingenuous or provincial in literary matters, voices a problem that the more sophisticated would have difficulty in solving, the problem that technique or device alone does not necessarily make a text revolutionary" (80). She also notes that

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[95] In this aspect I agree with Mario Vargas Llosa, that this is one of the strengths of the novel. In a 1979 piece on *El zorro*, Vargas Llosa writes, "Pero un análisis de la sola forma literaria soslayaría lo esencial, pues esta novela, pese a sus deficiencias, y, curiosamente, en parte debido a ellas, se lee con la intranquilidad que provocan las ficciones más logradas" (3).

[96] How many 'Boilings' have been buried! The Foxes won't be able to tell the story of the struggle between the leftist leaders and others in the fisherman's union; the won't be able to intervene […] Moncada will not appear delivering his funeral ovation by night, immediately after the death of Don Esteban de la Cruz […] I shan't be able to relate, in minute detail, the fate of Tinoco […] (256-7).

history for Arguedas "initially" presented as "continuous progressive development" but by the writing of *El zorro* "eventually came to present itself as a shifting panorama, a text subject to revision and rereading" (80).

These observations are significant for a study of testimonial literature as they suggest one way a text can seek to express cultural heterogeneity in a testimonial world without closing off that world through the formalistic or narrative resolution of its contradictions. *Los zorros* maintains a connection to real-world oppression even as it problematizes its status as fiction/testimony, one of the primary concerns in critical approaches to *testimonio*.

**III. The (Presumed) Reader of Testimonial Fiction**

As discussed, one approach to reading *El zorro* involves looking at its appeal to a Quechua conception of history as cyclical renewal, in which the author's death signals both the end of a transculturating vision of *mestizaje* and the opening of new potential for recognizing a changing (industrializing) and heterogenous community shaped by a "*lloqlla"* of migrants to the city (87-8). In this sense the author gestures toward the future of industrializing cities like Chimbote as they undergo dramatic demographic change, but also the future of literature that attempts to re/present marginalized—and particularly indigenous—populations. In *El zorro*, the social realism of early 20th century indigenist novels like *Huasipungo* breaks down. The self-conscious speaker in the diaries shares with the reader his own awareness that the novel will not reach narrative conclusion nor will it aspire to moral instruction;

instead, the openness of the text prompts consideration of readerly and writerly responsibility.

How might the reader's response to *El zorro* vary from her response to reading *testimonio*, given the difference in their truth-claims? Both texts place an ethical demand on the reader, and many *testimonios*, such as *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú* and *Si me permiten hablar*, display internal discord and narrative fissures even as they gesture toward the future and the potential for political change. While many critics have steered away from an aesthetic assessment of *testimonio* and testimonial texts in general, wary of diminishing their political impact and cautious of the politics of representation involved, in a recent study Kimberly Nance takes up the question of *testimonio* as a rhetorical project, understanding it to be both political and literary. Employing data from Melvin Lerner's *The Belief in a Just World* (1980), Nance argues that in the most successful *testimonios* (that is, those resonating most with the reader and consequently most likely to prompt her to act on behalf of social justice), the speakers use deliberative rhetoric to persuade their readers to future action. Notably, Nance insists that the deliberative *testimonio* speaker resists a simplified portrayal that positions her as a sort of saintly subaltern champion of the people; rather,

> The self-presentation of these speakers is often marked by a thoroughgoing sense of tension—a conflict that is as much personal as it is social…these tensions seem to resonate with ordinary readers and stand in striking contrast to many collaborating writers' and critics' descriptions of speakers as possessors of spiritual and revolutionary certainties. (Nance 93-94)

Read as works of literature (as opposed to "factual" or legalistic accounts), deliberative *testimonios* are strengthened in their ability to engage a readership by the very qualities that differentiate them from journalistic and historical accounts. While not what Nance would consider a deliberative *testimonio*, *El zorro* (and its multiple narrative voices) shares much in common with the works she describes; the tension in the text is both personal and social, deliberating the responsibility of the writer and reader to the text, the self, the Other, the historical moment, and the future. In the first diary, the speaker gives some indication of the depth of his feeling of responsibility to act: "Y ahora estoy otra vez a las puertas del suicidio. Porque, nuevamente, me siento incapaz de luchar bien, de trabajar bien. Y no deseo, como en abril de 66, convertirme en un enfermo inepto, en un testigo lamentable de los acontecimientos" (7).[97] In this passage the speaker indicates frustration—to the point of suicide—with his perceived inability to act in response to the events he witnesses. The reader gathers from other parts of the diary that for the speaker, included in this idea of fighting and working (for a more "just world," to use Lerner and Nance's terms) is the act of writing the novel, that is, of actively bearing witness.

As Nance and others have acknowledged, the act of bearing witness or giving testimony also extends beyond the personal for many testimonial speakers, including Domitila Barrios de Chungara in *Si me permiten hablar.* The opening lines of the first section, titled "*Testimonio*," include the speaker's assertion that "La historia que voy

[97] "And now I am once again at the doors of suicide. Because once more I feel incapable of putting up a good fight, of doing good work. As in April of 1966, I do not wish to become an incompetent invalid, a plaintive witness of events" (9).

a relatar, no quiero en ningún momento que la interpreten solamente como un problema personal. Porque pienso que mi vida está relacionada con mi pueblo" (13).[98] The speaker's experience is similarly cast within the larger context of Bolivian history and movements for social change by her collaborator, Moema Viezzer, in her directive to the reader that precedes the main text: "Nada de cuanto está aquí consignado es ajeno a la realidad de Bolivia. Porque el itinerario personal de Domitila se inscribe dentro de la gran trayectoria de la clase trabajadora y del pueblo boliviano" (3).[99]

In the example of *Si me permiten hablar*, both the testimonial speaker and the collaborating "author"/interpreter explicitly frame the *testimonio* as part of a broad historical project seeking sociopolitical change in Bolivia, and many literary critics eagerly suggested that such *testimonios* signaled a similarly revolutionary change in the category of "the literary" in Latin America and beyond. Nance acknowledges the good deal of skepticism that now surrounds both projects—the social(ist) revolution in Latin America and the radical democratization of Latin American literature—yet suggests that the success of the testimonial project be reconsidered in terms of its historical scope. In her shift from situating the domain of testimonial narrative *vis a vis* "Literature" to that of social projects, Nance reminds us that the temporal logic of

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[98] "I don't want anyone at any moment to interpret the story I'm about to tell as something that is only personal. Because I think that my life is related to my people" (15).

[99] "Nothing of what appears hear is alien to Bolivia's reality, because Domitila's personal itinerary is a part of the great march of the Bolivian working class and people" (11).

social movements produces change over generations and should not be evaluated or determined ineffective based on the criteria of rapid resolution of injustice (15). As Nance describes, Lerner's study suggests that average people will, under the right circumstances, act against injustice even in the face of consequences for themselves. Nance's application of these findings to testimonial narratives belies the temporal aspect of these findings, stating that "to meet readers' requirements for action, *testimonio* must present injustice not only as ongoing or in danger of happening again but also as potentially avoidable" (73). In other words, the "just world" findings show in order to prompt action, accounts of injustice must be oriented towards the future even while telling the story of past and present events. The text must encourage the reader to identify with the victim but also return to herself and her own social position in order to act; Bakhtin's idea of the circle of empathy and exotopy as the ethical response to witnessing suffering needs to be channeled by the testimonial narrative into an ethical and *active* response (62-3).

In *Si me permiten hablar*, the speaker describes a beating she receives while a political prisoner, despite the advanced term of her pregnancy:

> Y me pegaba, diciéndome que hable, que hable. Me pegaba sin compasión, a mí que estaba esperando familia de ocho meses…
>
> El soldadito que estaba a mi lado con su metralleta miraba todo asombrado cómo este tipo me pegaba. Y el tipo le decía que no hay que tener compasión con estas herejes, con estas comunistas que no tienen moral, que son peores que las fieras… Y seguía pegándome sin ninguna compassion. (159)[100]

[100] And he hit me, telling me to talk. He hit me very hard, and me in my eighth month…

The young soldier who was next to me with his submachine gun looked shocked at how bad that guy was hitting me. And the guy said to him that one shouldn't have

The reader, like the soldier, "witnesses" the beating of the pregnant Domitila, and the violent perpetrator's denial of the need for compassion encourages the reader to have the opposite reaction to this description of physical abuse on the body. Additionally, while the text presents the sergeant as an agent of a repressive government, the reference to the second soldier's shock at the force of the beating prompts the reader to think of the soldiers also as people affected (to varying degrees) by the violence they witness and/or perpetrate. The sergeant encourages the younger soldier not to identify with Domitila, and to view her instead like other "communists" and "worse than a beast." While his words attempt to reduce Domitila to "less" than human, for the reader they have the opposite effect as the rest of the testimonial contradicts the claim that the speaker and her compatriots are without "morals" and suggests that it is the soldier himself who more aptly fits such description.

The relationship between the townspeople and the soldiers is complicated further by the speaker's differentiation between "*los manchegos*" and "*los* rangers." The former, conscripts to the army, befriend and are befriended by the community despite their official role as enforcers and participants in the "operación limpieza" [clean-up operation] of Siglo XX. At the end of the day the officers eat while leaving the young conscripts to their own devices, and the women of the town share their provisions: "A ver cómo es el pueblo, pues: a ratos los matan, les meten balas a todo dar… está chorreando sangre a su alrededor por todas partes. Pasa el tiroteo… y salen

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pity on these heretics, these communists who have no morals, who are worse than beasts… And he went on hitting me without let-up. (144)

las mujers con su pancito y les dan a los soldaditos" (109).[101] The speaker, angry at the perceived injustice of this behavior, questions the actions of the women. They respond, "¡Son nuestros mismos hijos! …Son, pues, los de arriba los que están mandando, señora. Éstos no tienen la culpa. Y pasado mañana, tal vez le va a occurir lo mismo a mi hijo, cuando sea conscripto: que lo manden a matar al pueblo" (109).[102] The speaker then uses this exchange both to praise the generosity and compassion of her people and to instruct the reader in the difference between the army leadership and the conscripts. *Los manchegos,* the reader learns, are later punished when some advocate on behalf of the townspeople; some die and others disappear from Siglo XX. Years later, some of the women discover that another group of army conscripts has been murdered in the course of their training. The army tries to cover up the deaths, claiming the indigenous soldiers, unable to swim, suffered a "collective cramp," and the speaker recounts the words of a major,"esos indios… si no saben ni bañarse… se asustaron los tontos y se ahogaron" (212),[103] using his commentary to indicate the racist subtext of the event. Despite the officer's dismissal of the deaths—as indigenous conscripts, much as "communists" for sergeant who beats Domitila, their lives do not register—the women of Siglo XX

[101] "Aren't people funny: sometimes the soldiers kill them, they fill them full of bullets, blood is flowing all around them. The shooting ends…and the women come out with their bread and give some to the soldier boys" (100).
[102] "They're like our own sons! It's the ones at the top who give the orders, señora. It's not these boys' fault. And day after tomorrow, maybe the same thing's going to happen to my son, when he's drafted: he'll be sent to kill people" (100).
[103] "Those Indians… they don't even know how to swim… the fools got scared and drowned" (191).

pursue the truth and find the bodies of the soldier boys beaten and disrespectfully buried.

Cumulatively, these descriptions and others drive the reader of *Si me permiten hablar* to identify with the *pueblo* and, like the women, reject the officers' position of disregard for human life. The text accomplishes this, as Nance notes, in part through the rhetorical strategy of the speaking subject. However, while one of Nance's primary concerns is to establish the literary and rhetorical qualities of *testimonio* as integral to an understanding of the genre, in its eagerness to assert the relevance of literary texts (and more broadly, humanistic study) beyond academia, *Can Literature Promote Justice?* borders on conflating the rhetorical techniques of persuasion used by testimonial speakers with the ethical demand issued by a given testimonial text. This critique requires some further explanation as to what Nance appears to mean by an "ethical response to witnessing suffering" and other potential frameworks for understanding "ethics" and "responsibility" as they relate specifically to the testimonial world.

**IV. Responsible Readers? Demands of Testimonial Literature**

In *Si me permiten hablar*, the speaker is imprisoned for her outspokenness against the regime but also, in the scene previously described ("me pegaba sin compasión"), attacked by the sergeant as a woman and mother: his targeted beatings presumably cause the stillbirth of her son.[104] In the midst of this violence, however,

[104] The speaker also describes how the police attempt to use her position as a mother to manipulate her into signing a blank document (purportedly to authorize social

the reader finds one model of engaged compassion in the figure of the doctor, who helps Domitila by forcing the soldiers out of her room and providing her with medication. Her father offers this assessment: "[…]hubo una persona buena, entre tantas malas, que te ha querido ayudar" (171).[105] In the visceral descriptions of certain passages, the reader, like the doctor, "feels for" the speaker, responding on both an affective and an emotional level. When arrested, "De hecho, por primera vez tuve yo un terror. Mis rodillas me temblaban, rodilla con rodilla se me chocaban. Yo quería desaparecer en aquel momento. Y, sinceramente, parece que mi cuerpo adivinaba lo que me iba a pasar. Temblaba… y era como si mi corazón lo estubiera estrujando una mano de hierro" (156).[106] This passage foreshadows the violent scene to come in which the speaker is beaten unconscious and wakes to discover the stillbirth of her child. While it is generally accepted (if also a point of interest and an apt subject for theorization) that literary works can evoke affective responses in their readers, does our understanding of this change when, in the case of the speaker in *Si me permiten hablar*, the reader accepts the testimonial's claim to refer to real—in addition to literary—characters? With these considerations in mind, what sort of subject is articulated by/for testimonial literature?

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services to intervene on behalf of her children but likely intended for use as a false confession). See pages 131-141, 120-129 in translation.

[105] "[…] there was one good person, among so many bad ones, who wanted to help you" (155).

[106] "As a matter of fact, for the first time I was really terrified. My knees were trembling, they knocked against each other. I wanted to disappear. And, really, it seemed that my body guessed what was going to happen to me. I was trembling…and it was like my heart was being wrung by an iron hand" (142).

Enrique Dussel, known for his advancement of the philosophy of liberation developed after the events of 1968, revisits in *Coloniality at Large* (2008) the role of testimonial literature in realizing the need for "victims" of the Eurocentric narrative of modernity to construct their own historical framework through which to orient their memories and organize their struggle (Dussel 343). Dussel deviates from earlier critical approaches to *testimonio*, however, as he does not envision testimonial literature in terms of a national political project—that is, to use De la Campa's description, no longer "an ideal discursive form for national emancipation movements" (De la Campa 447) but rather an expression of indigenous and subaltern history. For Dussel, then, a critical philosophy in accordance with the ethical demand issued by testimonial literature (in his terms, the philosophy of liberation) has a particular responsibility: "it should study the more abstract, general, philosophical, theoretical framework of 'testimonial' literature" (345). Here Dussel does not limit this assertion to a definition of *testimonio*, opting, as does this discussion, to focus on the testimonial quality or drive of a work rather than generic distinctions. While Dussel's articulation of the philosophy of liberation indicates that it finds in testimonial literature an encounter with "the Other" in which the subject finds himself in a position of responsibility to this Other, as Levinas describes in his discussion of ethics, Dussel seeks to differentiate between the two approaches to ethics. "The philosophy of liberation soon deviates from Levinas, because it ought to consider, from a critical standpoint, its responsibility regarding the vulnerability of the other in the process of constructing a new order (with all of the ambiguities that implies)"

(342). In attending to the specifics of testimonial literature as subaltern, and the situatedness of "responsibility to vulnerability," Dussel seeks to bridge a position of openness to the encounter with the other with the urgency of praxis demanded by injustice.

In testimonial literature the ethical imperative of *poesis* is to awaken this sensibility, even when the experience of bodily pain exceeds words[107] to be found in the interstitial spaces of narrative. In this sense, while testimonial literatures may correlate to the project advanced by discourses of human rights, they function to "make a general appeal to humanitarianism specific"[108] and resist the statistical reduction of the *bios* to "bare life".

Dussel suggests that testimonial literature may offer a space for recognition of the historical and cultural memory of marginalized or subaltern groups, but for the critical philosophy he advocates this is not a complete response. A critical approach to testimonial literature includes an investigation of its workings. As a result, Dussel's project differentiates itself from the "historical project" of Latin American literature, characterized by Horacio Legrás as one that "entailed the symbolic incorporation of peoples and practices persisting in the margins of society or nation into a sanctioned form of representation" (4). Testimonial literature from the 1960s, 70s and beyond, Dussel's philosophy puts forward (as does Nance, from a differing

[107] See Elaine Scarry's *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*.
[108] See Laura Rice-Sayre, "Witnessing History: Diplomacy Versus Testimony."

perspective), remains relevant for more than its value as a phenomenon in Latin American history.

What does "responsibility regarding the vulnerability of the other" mean for the scenario of reading testimonial literature? To what other is the reader responsible (and perhaps also vulnerable)—a character, a referent, an account, a work of literature—and in what way is this a question of ethics? In "Ethical Asymmetries" (2008), Doris Sommer addresses concerns over the (im)possibility of understanding when the reader lacks (Sommer, in my reading, does present this as a lack) the cultural or linguistic competency to fully access the text in question. This scenario, to some degree, presents itself during an encounter with any text, but Sommer specifically refers to those by minority/marginalized writers for a "mainstream" audience. Sommer maintains, "The point I am making is that competent reading locates a constitutive lack in our understanding; it engages with more, not less, refinement than theorists generally access because they tend to mistake foreignness as interference, something to be overcome rather than as a sign of sacred otherness" (187). Here Sommer intimates at the value of this (frustrating) scenario of reading without complete understanding as an encounter with that which is foreign, other. However, this does not seem to be a defense of humanism along the lines of Nussbaum; instead it frames reading as an ethical engagement based on both the responsive relationship between the reader and text *and* the recognition of the world in the text as ultimately only partially accessible and foreign at best.

The ethical position taken by critics toward *testimonio*, particularly in *The Real Thing,* necessitates respect for and solidarity with "the secret" of the speaker and the "other-ness" of his/her community. I would like to reframe this idea, however, by consideration of two different critical positions. First, Martín Lienhard suggests that *testimonio* be considered as a long-standing practice of "subaltern" experience, shaped and disseminated in the terms of the hegemonic culture (in the colonial era, indigenous informants who detailed their practices *for* the priests), and in this sense aligned somewhat epistemologically and ideologically with anthropological practice. These texts are not problematic in and of themselves, but become so when the question of authenticity is invoked. Lienhard notes that alternative practices of testimonial literatures claim to blend fiction and "authentic" experiences, and perhaps for this more effectively convey marginalized experience. Second, Anne Cubilié observes in the context of women's literature of atrocity (which she distinguishes from testimonio for its portrayal of specific events of state-sponsored violence/imprisonment that separate the speaker/witness from her community) that the ethical demand of these texts is not one of solidarity with "the secret" (alterity) but attention to the fissures and disruptions of the narrative. I read this to mean attention to the elements that are not included in the narrative or not fully expressed by it but that involve attention to the affective and emotional experience of the person beyond the truthfulness of events. Remembering Enrique Dussel's idea of ethical critique[109] as an active "opening up" or "sensibility to the 'sensibility'" of the other as

[109] See Enrique Dussel, *Ethics and Community.* George Yúdice also turns to Dussel to

a person in the dignity of his or her fleshy presence,[110] reading testimonial literature, even decades later, need not be a passive experience.

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help articulate an idea of ethics, but focuses primarily on the "new unfoldings" of the "analectic moment" in relation to the Foucault's aesthetics of self-forming. "We might say that a 'practical poetics' is the ethical 'self-forming' activity in which the 'self' is 'practiced' in solidarity with others struggling for survival" (229).

[110] For Dussel, "the ethical consists in praxis…as activity directed toward, and the relationship to, the other as other, as person…" (*Ethics and Community* 49), and "*ethical* conscience consists in knowing how to 'open up' to the other and take that other in charge—*for the sake of the other*" (39). Dussel insists that respecting the other cannot be divorced from the material reality of the other as both mind and body (with physical needs).

## Chapter III
## Characters and Witnesses:
## Prison Narratives, Women's Writing and the Dirty War

In the various introductions, prologues, forewords and author's notes to testimonial accounts—whether they be termed *testimonios*, "tales" or novels—one of the points most frequently and insistently stressed is that they be read not *only* as individual records of torture and imprisonment, but as accounts that somehow express or testify to a collective experience of repression. The importance of validation for individual experience—recognition of the first-person witness in the statement, "I saw" (itself an interpersonal demand, in that the words of the seer must be intelligible in discourse and she must be recognize by another)—is joined by the need to account for the testimonial as experience that somehow exceeds the traditional boundaries of the individual. For example, in the foreword to *Tejas verdes* (1974), translated in 1975 as *Diary of a Chilean Concentration Camp,* Hernán Valdés makes this goal explicit:

> If I nevertheless undertook the task [of recording or reliving these events in book form] it was not with the object of arousing readers' sympathies with the story of an unfortunate personal experience, but with the clearly defined aim of making known through it the collective experience of the Chilean people: an experience which continues to repeat itself daily and which, with the `hindsight afforded by the loss of political innocence, one could consider a possibility for any other nation, anywhere in the world, in the even of a fascist-type repression. (Valdés 5)

Here Valdés is clear and direct, articulating a self-analytical stance that informs the rest of the account, as he frames his experience as a recreated "diary" of his imprisonment, told in the present, as if reoccurring in the moment. This prescriptive

forward instructs the reader that the text, however, should not be read as the factual account of one prisoner, but rather for its ability to somehow convey through one particular story the collective experience of a people. In this sense, the protagonist/narrator of *Tejas verdes* stands in for the possible experience of countless other victims. Alicia Partnoy expresses somewhat similar sentiments as she explains in the prologue her motivations for writing *The Little School* (1986) a few years after her release from a clandestine Argentine prison camp:

> The voices of my friends grew stronger in my memory. By publishing these stories I feel those voices will not pass unheard […] Today, while sharing this part of my experience, I pay tribute to a generation of Argentines lost in an attempt to bring social change and justice. I also pay tribute to the victims of repression in Latin America. (Partnoy 18)[111]

Both Valdés and Partnoy express a desire to "make known" or make "heard" an experience of imprisonment to which they attribute collective, in addition to personal, significance. Although for Partnoy this notion of collectivity is intimately involved in a desire to give voice specifically to her friends who did not survive to tell their own tales, both she and Valdés extend the notion of collective experience beyond their

[111] "Las voces de los compañeros de la Escuelita resuenan con fuerza en mi memoria. Publico estos relatos para que esas voces no sean silenciadaa […] Hoy, al compartir con ustedes esta experiencia, rindo tributo a una generación de argentinos perdida en el intento de lograr justicia y cambio social. También rindo tributo a las víctimas de la represión en América Latina" (Partnoy 15). When quoting Partnoy's *The Little School/La escuelita* I will include quotes from the English version, which was published first, with corresponding passages in Spanish in footnotes.

immediate associates to include a broader national, regional or even global sense of collectivity.[112]

As such, what these texts tell us about the possible world constructed by testimonial texts—that is, the world we encounter as readers—is not their factual portrayal of actual, historical events but rather their fealty to the task of communicating to the reader a story or experience. This would, of course, depend on both the ability of the text to engage the reader and the reader's acceptance of being engaged by and becoming involved in the testimonial world. The testimonial world, then, must be a plausible world; for the purposes of this investigation it is much less important (though not to say irrelevant) whether the events described occurred and actually happened to the speaker than whether for the reader it is plausible that they occurred, that their occurrence corresponds in a significant way with the reader's historical understanding and "encyclopedic knowledge" (Eco). For example, Marta Traba's *Conversación al sur* does not require that the reader understand there to be a young woman named Dolores whose friend Victoria was "disappeared" by a repressive Argentine government; on the other hand, the 21st century reader—and here may be a difference from some readers of the text at the time of its publication—presumably turns his or her concern from the fate of the character Victoria to an internet search on Argentina in the 1970s. The reader quickly learns that, while

[112] See Nora Strejilevich's comments on the collective labor of testimonio with regard to both texts like Partnoy's, written without an interlocutor, and collaborative works between a witness/informant and a journalist/anthropologist, like Rigoberta Menchú and Elizabeth Burgos-Debray (80). For other perspectives, see Doris Sommer, 111 and Francine Masiello, 54. See also Partnoy "*Cuando vienen matando*"

Victoria herself may not be said to have a material existence outside of the text, undoubtedly women like Victoria were "disappeared" in a similar manner. While the reader's attachment is to the character Victoria, the testimonial qualities of the text allow the reader to relate the experience of Victoria to that of real-world victims.[113] Such correspondence to real world events, independent of generic conventions (autobiographical testimonials, testimonial novels, *testimonios*, short stories, film, etc), helps to characterize the relationship between reader, real world and text in the testimonial imaginary.

The texts discussed in this chapter, like many testimonial narratives, emphasize the ethical concerns and possibilities involved in bearing witness to violence. Even when reflecting on the author's personal experience of imprisonment, these texts complicate a reading of the testimonial as an individual act or experience. This is done explicitly, as in the earlier cited introductions by Valdés and Partnoy, and implicitly through the various narrative techniques and interpersonal relationships developed between characters to include the reader/viewer. One of the goals of this chapter is to explore how explicit appeals to collective witnessing function in the

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[113] Clare Sullivan makes a related observation regarding the English versions of Argentine testimonial texts, in which the occasional word is often left untranslated. Referring to *259 Leaps, the Last One Death-Defying* by Kozameh, she notices that, "Readers seeking to conquer this difficult text must be willing to look up certain terms, either on the internet or in a bilingual dictionary (or simply infer their meaning from context). My hope is that after such inquiry, a reader will gain a more complete picture of both a foreign region and an increasingly distant historical period" (9). *Steps Under Water*, on the other hand, has footnotes that supply this information and other cultural points, such as the traditional Argentine maté.

testimonial imaginary through a discussion of intersubjective experience and affectivity.

As in *Tejas verdes* and *The Little School,* numerous testimonial narratives relate stories of political imprisonment, disappearance and torture, particularly those involving dictatorships in the Southern Cone during the 1970s and 1980s. A few of the more widely distributed texts include Jacobo Timerman's *Preso sin nombre, celda sin numero/Prisoner Without a Name, Cell Without a Number* (1980/1981), Alicia Kozameh's *Pasos bajo el agua/Steps Under Water* (1987/1996), and Tununa Mercado's *En estado de memoria/In a State of Memory* (1990/2001). These texts, which I will refer to loosely as testimonial narratives, often claim to be novels or "testimonial novels," sometimes presenting themselves as fictionalized prison narratives based on the author's personal experience or that of his or her family. The literary or novelistic quality of these testimonials supports a reading of them along with more "traditional" fictions; as Fernando Reati remarks about Nora Strejilevich's *Una sola muerte numerosa* (1997)/*A Single, Numberless Death* (2002), "contrariamente a los que esperamos del testimonio, y más en consonancia con el estatuto de lo ficcional, la fuerza del relato proviene no tanto de la denuncia puntual como del tratamiento lírico del drama personal y humano de la victimización" (109).[114] Marta Traba's *Conversación al sur* (1981), translated as *Mothers and Shadows* (1986), also deals with similar concerns but is not commonly read as a

[114] "Contrary to what we expect from testimonio, and more concordant to the rules of fiction, the force of the narrative derives not so much from detailed denunciation as the lyric treatment of the personal and human drama of victimization."

"testimonial" text. Each of these texts engages with ethical questions of how and to what end the act of witnessing and the figure of the witness are articulated in the testimonial world.

In order to pursue this line of questioning and those regarding gender, imprisonment, sovereignty and memory in this chapter, after introducing these topics through another look at Puig's *El beso de la mujer araña*, I choose to focus on *The Little School*, *Pasos bajo el agua* and *Conversación al sur.* All three are texts written in the 1980s by women authors who, either at the time of writing or afterwards, also were exiled from their home country and pursued academic appointments abroad.[115] As testimonials, they refer to the Dirty War of the 1970s in Argentina and the *Proceso de Reorganización Nacional*, the euphemism used by the military government (1976-83) to describe its campaign of political repression, torture, and disappearances of (estimated) 30,000 people.

*The Little School* (1986) consists of what the subtitle terms "tales of disappearance and survival" inspired by the three and a half months spent by Partnoy as a disappeared person in the clandestine prison camp La Escuelita before her

[115] In December 1979, Partnoy was taken from prison to the airport and flown to exile in the United States. She returned to Argentina in 1984 after the collapse of the dictatorship to participated in the CONADEP hearings. Partnoy currently works as an assistant professor at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles. After her release from prison, Kozameh also left Argentina for exile in the United States at the end of her parole in 1979. She returned to Argentina from 1984-88, but after the publication of her novel was again threatened by political repression and returned to Los Angeles, where she currently teaches at Emeritus College. Marta Traba was born in Argentina but worked as a professor of art in Colombia until a military occupation of the University in 1968 forced her into exile. She lived in Uruguay, Venezuela, Puerto Rico, the U.S., Spain and France before her accidental death in a plane crash in 1983.

transfer and eventual reappearance. These "tales" are presented in the text as brief, titled vignettes, framed from the beginning by Partnoy in a sober introduction to the history of imprisonment and disappearance in Argentina and its impact on her life, and at the close with a series of appendices detailing the cases of the disappeared at the Little School and describing the distinctive characteristics of the prison guards. Almost all of the "tales" are told in first person, and in many the speaker seems closely identified with Partnoy herself.[116] Focusing on the text as a reflection of Partnoy's experience, *The Little School* is often read in concert with literature on human rights, torture and testimony as an example of testimonial writing by a survivor, with more or less attention to its literary qualities and the multiple discourses it engages.

Kozameh's testimonial, *Pasos bajo el agua* (1987), in its English translation as *Steps Under Water: A Novel* purports to offer a fictionalized account of experiences within and after release from an Argentine prison camp in the late 1970s. As in *The Little School,* the speaker in many of the stories or chapters seems intimately associated with Kozameh's own experience as a political prisoner, although unlike Kozameh the protagonist's name is Sara. The "novel" includes various semi-autonomous chapters that skip back and forth in time from Sara's imprisonment to the time after her release, including letters to an exiled friend,

[116] Amy Kaminsky addresses the question of genre with regard to Partnoy's text, suggesting it is not "strait testimony" but rather "the elusive form of crafted personal recollection that cannot quite be called either fiction or nonfiction" (*Reading* 53). As such, she chooses to term the text "testimonial literary writing."

"Juliana, who is Estela," and a multi-perspective account of the breakup of friends, Elsa and Marco. The Spanish and English versions of the novel begin with a note from the author, briefly stating the dates of her imprisonment and exile, emphasizing that, although presented as a novel, the text refers to verifiable events and pertains to a particular historical period. Additionally, Kozameh writes, "[l]o sustancial de cada [relato] es verdadero, sucedió, lo viví yo misma o lo vivieron otras compañeras y yo lo supe, aunque he reemplazado nombres o quizá detalles que para nada cambian, de hecho, la esencia de la cosa" (7).[117] Kozameh's text has been used both as a testimonial in judicial proceedings and as an aesthetically and politically motivated piece of literature.

In Marta Traba's novel *Conversación al sur* (1981), the woman characters reconstruct for each other (and for themselves) an assemblage of imprisonments and disappearances that concludes with a harsh knock at the door, signaling their impending re-arrest. As the novel proceeds, following the thoughts and conversations of first one woman then the other, it becomes increasingly apparent to the characters and the reader that various confrontations with terror regimes in Montevideo, Buenos Aires, and Santiago share multiple connections and are far from isolated events. Although the novel does not make the sort of claim that precedes Kozameh's, it

[117] "The substance of the story, of every episode, is real; it happened. Either I myself or other *compañeras* lived it. I have, however, replaced names or possible details that in no way affect the essence of what occurred" (Kozameh xvi). For Kozameh's *Pasos bajo el agua* I will include in footnotes relevant passages in English from David E. Davis's translation, except for passages first included in the translation, which I will quote in English.

includes the dedication: "a Gustavo y Elba, para no olvidar." [118] The novel is divided into two sections; the first begins with the arrival of Dolores, a former affiliate of revolutionary groups in Montevideo and Buenos Aires, now in her mid-twenties, having miscarried in prison and been widowed by the state violence, at the Montevideo apartment of Irene, a middle-aged woman and well-known actress who was earlier arrested with Dolores and her friends and whose son has now gone missing in Chile. The first section of the novel follows Irene's point of view, and the fluid narration shifts between the character's thoughts, third person observation and dialogue as the two women review the day of their arrest in Montevideo and Irene's visit with Elena, the mother of Dolores's missing friend, Victoria, in Buenos Aires after Victoria is disappeared. The second section includes Dolores's memories and thoughts while she rides the bus from Irene's apartment to her parent's house, describing her association with the Buenos Aires group of revolutionaries and Victoria's involvement as a leader in the movement. Arriving home to find her father dead, Dolores returns to Irene's apartment where the novel breaks off as men arrive at the home and the two women are (presumably) arrested.

What is of greatest concern about these texts for this chapter are the conditions and possibilities they offer to the figure of the witness, and their call upon the reader to approach the text in such capacity. Each text suggests that the experiences of imprisonment, torture and repression it describes may be exemplified

[118] "For Gustavo and Elba, Lest we forget." For quotes from *Conversación al sur*, I will include in footnotes English translations from *Mothers and Shadows.*

but necessarily is not limited by a discrete, individually understood experience. It seems to follow that a further investigation into such framing of testimonials as intersubjective experiences can elucidate the significance of ethics in the testimonial imaginary, namely, if "ethics" is possible or desirable. And, regarding the witness, what conditions of the testimonial world allow for witnessing and what are the stakes—in other words, the question, to what should one witness? In pursuing this line of questioning, this chapter will first situate these texts as testimonial accounts of the self/prison narratives—by way of *El beso de la mujer araña*—then continue in a comparative reading, moving back and forth between the texts to follow some of the concerns they collectively raise.

**I. "Character" as Witness: Rereading *El beso de la mujer araña***

Let us begin this discussion with a text not often included in studies of testimonials. It was published before the 1976 coup d'etat in Argentina that led to an unprecedented number of clandestine prison camps, political imprisonments and "disappearances" of persons considered to be involved with "subversive" elements by military and paramilitary groups. Nevertheless, when entering into a discussion of ethical and political questions deriving from narratives of imprisonment and repression during Argentina's "Dirty War" and similar military dictatorships in Chile and Uruguay, it seems apt to return to Manuel Puig's *El beso de la mujer araña/Kiss of the Spider Woman* (1976/1979), a novel that draws relationships between political and sexual repression in Argentina in the 1970s and introduces many lines of questioning elaborated by later testimonials. *El beso de la mujer araña* opens with the

unnarrated[119] dialogue of two prisoners, Valentín and Molina, the former a committed revolutionary and the latter a homosexual imprisoned for "sexual deviancy" and "corruption of minors." As the novel continues, Puig disrupts narrative/discursive space by substituting unqualified dialogue, footnotes, and prison reports for narration. The bared dialogue nevertheless is filled with Molina's narration as s/he[120] retells the emotive excess of romantic movies to Valentín, who finds comfort in analytical engagement. A tentative friendship builds between the unlikely pair, and as each adapts to the other's mode of engagement they develop an ill-fated emotional and physical relationship that builds them as characters outside the opposition of emotion and intellect. Valentín reluctantly softens toward Molina, while the reader learns that the latter has been recruited by the warden to act as an informant in exchange for early release.

In addition to its experimental form, *El beso de la mujer araña* is of interest in part for the questions it raises about the space of imprisonment. The following passage, beginning with Valentín, bears quoting at length:

> -¿Y estamos tan presionados… por el mundo de afuera, que no podemos actuar de forma civilizada?, ¿es posible que pueda tanto… el enemigo que está afuera?
> -Ahora sí no te entiendo bien…

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[119] It may be important to remember, however, that even as *El beso de la mujer araña* tells the story of Valentín and Molina, it pushes the reader to think critically about narrative storytelling techniques. For example, although Valentín and Molina communicate in the text through pure dialogue, the account each gives of him(her)self to the other is elaborated the narration of movie plots.

[120] Although Molina is biologically male, he (dis)identifies with certain notions of femininity, and on occasion insists on being referred to as a woman.

> -Sí, que todo lo que está mal en el mundo, y que yo quiero cambiar, ¿será posible que no me deje actuar… humanamente, ni un solo momento?
> -¿Qué te vas a hacer?, porque el agua hierve.
> -Poné té para los dos, por favor.
> -Bueno.
> -No sé si me entendés…pero aquí estamos los dos solos, y nuestra relación, ¿cómo podría decirte?, la podemos moldear como queremos, nuestra relación no está presionada por nadie.
> -Sí, te escucho.
> -En cierto modo estamos perfectamente libres de actuar como queremos el uno respecto al otro, ¿me explico? Es como si estuviéramos en una isla desierta. Una isla en la que tal vez estemos solos años. Porque, sí, fuera de la celda están nuestros opresores, pero adentro no. (Puig 206)[121]

In the context of the novel it becomes apparent that Valentín's musings about his prison experience have implications beyond the literal space of the prison cell. At this point, Valentín's utopian vision of the cell as an island is undermined by the reader's knowledge of Molina's negotiations with the warden. Cultural and political influences from the outside world pervade the space of the cell, elaborated by Molina's movie plots with their tales of romantic love, fidelity and betrayal,

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[121] -Then are we so pressured…by the outside world, that we can't act civilized? Is it possible…that the enemy, out there, has so much power?
-I don't follow you…
-Well, that everything that's wrong with the world…and everything that I want to change…is it possible all that won't allow me to…behave…even for a single minute, like a decent human being?
-What do you want to have? The water's boiling.
-Put tea on for both of us, okay?
-Fine.
-I don't know if you understand me…but here we are, all alone, and when it comes to our relationship, how should I put it? We could make any damn thing out of it we want; our relationship isn't pressured by anyone.
-Yes, I'm listening.
-In a sense we're perfectly free to behave however we choose with respect to one another, am I making myself clear? It's as if we were on some desert island. An island on which we may have to remain alone together for years. Because, well, outside of this cell we may have our oppressors, yes, but not inside. (Puig 202).

introduced through specially prepared, poisoned or selected foods, and resonant of the looming threat of political torture. Rather, Valentín's assertion that "fuera de la celda están nuestros opresores, pero adentro no" seems an optimistic assertion that despite the imprisoning influence of political repression and societal and cultural norms, interpersonal relations still offer the choice to act "humanamente." In the end, both the police and the revolutionary cell negate this possibility; after Molina refuses to inform on Valentín, state officials release him in hopes that he will lead them to Valentín's friends, and the latter shoot him to prevent his recapture by the police, who dump his body on the side of the street once they realize he has died and is no longer of use. Molina's anonymous death seems all the more striking if we are to read in broad terms Valentín's suggestion, "en cierto modo estamos perfectamente libres de actuar como queremos el uno respecto al otro." In the final pages of the novel, Valentín undergoes torture that sends him into a delirium, where he finds some relief as he reconnects with his former love, Marta, and she takes him to a deserted island.

Some of the core concerns of *El beso de la mujer araña* are also taken up by testimonial literature and relate specifically to *The Little School, Pasos bajo el agua* and *Conversación al sur.* In Puig's novel, Valentín raises the question of what it means to behave humanly (humanely?), suggesting that perhaps such behavior is (only) possible in the extraordinary space of the prison. If to behave humanly means, as Valentín seems to suggest, to find oneself face to face with another and enter into a self-determined relationship, what do Molina and Valentín offer to a discussion of ethics? *El beso de la mujer araña,* it seems, presents an unfinished idea of what ethics

means in a prison narrative, but does argue on behalf of interpersonal relationships however ill-fated or seemingly futile such relationships may appear. In this sense, a "human" act is determined by the intent on the part of the actor to engage in a relationship of responsibility to the other, regardless of the outcome of such action or the risks it may involve. By offering the reader a emotional (and romantic) context through which to approach Molina's death, *El beso de la mujer araña* presents the contrast between the official police report that documents the death and the complexity of Molina's humanity and personhood.

This distinction between life-as-existence and recognized life-as-person has been addressed in a different Latin American context by Herman Herlinghaus through his discussion of affective marginalities and the ethical positioning of 1990s Argentine, Mexican, and Brazilian cinema. Herlinghaus proposes that this non-tragic cinematic portrayal gestures towards new ethical configurations around what he considers Walter Benjamin's and Georgio Agamben's conceptions of "bare life." In his "Critique of Violence," Benjamin distinguishes between "bare life" (or "mere life") and just life, questioning and rejecting the idea that bare life has sacred value beyond that of just life. As I have mentioned in earlier chapters, for Georgio Agamben, the Greek distinction between *zoe* (natural life) and *bios* (qualified life) lies at the center of sovereign power and the "state of exception"—such as the concentration camp—where bare life is at stake. While in his study of 1990s cinema Herlinghaus's interest lies in the ethical critique emerging from situations where bare life is at stake but the "state of exception" arises from marginalization rather than the

sovereign, the questions raised by Herlinghaus, Benjamin, and Agamben contribute to a reassessment of the ethical imperative of testimonial literature by attending to the different conceptions of human life that are themselves at stake in these narratives.[122] As Herlinghaus suggests in his expansion of the concept under neoliberal conditions, Agamben's state of exception presumes the political visibility of marginalized persons under "normal" conditions. However, the police practice of torture, ethnic, gender, and racial discrimination indicate this is not the case, as a textual example such as *El beso de la mujer araña* demonstrates.

Herlinghaus's comments prompt us as readers to consider the ways that exception and sovereignty operate not only in relation to state power, but also through other forms of policing related to governmentality and the market, and what ways narratives work to critique the invisibility of persons who register only as "bare life." Although Benjamin seems to dismiss the idea that human life has any value in a purely corporeal existence, he emphasizes the importance of a just life, which we might understand as qualified life or a way of life bestowed with a certain quotient of dignity. What emerges from testimonial literature, however, is an insistence on recognition of the dignity of the person as both *bios,* capable of communicating experience in narrative, and as fleshy, material body (in pain).

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[122] In *Women Witnessing Terror*, Cubilié writes: "As the women's testimonies under consideration in this book suggest, survivors themselves can provide important interventions into these current debates through their insistence on the importance of maintaining categories both of humanity and of difference—on a value that is always locatable within human relations of recognition of the other, of ethical relations, yet is always also impermanent, mobile and contingent" (8).

Returning to *El beso de la mujer araña,* while both the police and the revolutionary cell consider Molina's life expendable in the pursuit of their contradictory goals, in the novel Molina's sacrifice for Valentín mimics the tragic heroines of his/her movie plots and to a certain extent may render his/her death tragic. Even when the urgency of denunciatory testimony has passed or testimonials make explicit their fictional or novelistic qualities, the imperative remains to render visible within the possible space of the testimonial world that which would not otherwise be so.

**II. Countering the "Vanishing" of the World: Interpersonal Relationships**

To what extent can we consider Molina's death tragic in *El beso de la mujer araña*? Molina would not be called a tragic figure in the classical sense, yet his death achieves a certain pathos for the reader, accentuated by the horrifyingly cold disregard the state demonstrates for his remains as the police find his death inconvenient and virtually anonymous. The reader learns of Molina's death not through the immediate account of an "omniscient narrator" nor the interpersonal and internal dialogues that previously dominated the text, but through the starkness of police records detailing their surveillance of the ex-prisoner after his release. The "document" refers to Molina as "el procesado" and records with little sympathy how "los extremistas" shoot and kill him as the police approach. The implied reader, familiar with Molina from the rest of the text, would be acutely aware of the paucity of the official report, which speculates but fails to authoritatively account for Molina's involvement with "los extremistas." Puig does not include an actual police

report and does not make the claim that Molina existed in the real world; nevertheless the text explores in the testimonial world the inability of the official narrative—and perhaps any narrative—to give more than a partial, subjective account. In *Conversaciones al sur*, the story of Victoria's disappearance likewise prompts the reader to consider the limitations of the official record; told from the perspective of one sympathetic to and imprecated in Victoria's revolutionary group, the narrative describes Victoria's background of privilege, politicization and rejection of her family's status, and subsequent dedication to the cause. An aloof but beautiful young woman and a capable leader, Victoria is "disappeared" during a rare visit to her family home, at the moment of appealing to her mother for assistance. Although not the protagonist of the novel, Victoria's character appeals to the reader as a universal figure for the loss of a generation to political violence and the personal tragedy of this loss to the family unit, particularly the mother. Victoria herself never appears directly in the novel, but only in the memories of her friend, Dolores, and the ways her disappearance affects her mother. Victoria, though "disappeared" remains a constant presence for Dolores, who affirms that "[n]o es Andrés, es Victoria la que ocupa mi pensamiento. Desaloja todo. Todo lo invade" (106).[123] Victoria inhabits the liminal space of the disappeared, a spectral figure, neither fully present in the text but far from absent.

[123] "It is not Andrés but Victoria who concerns me. Her presence is overpowering" (107)

Just what sort of characters are presented in testimonial texts? Traba, Partnoy and Kozameh all present fictionalized characters, yet the reader understands that these characters and their situations reference real suffering, the political imprisonment and forced disappearance of real persons. We could, as readers, focus on their ontological status, that is, whether the fictionalized characters in these testimonials exist as real persons. This question has been discussed in detail with regard to *testimonio*; many such considerations have been addressed in essays compiled by René Jara and Hernán Vidal in *Testimonio y literatura* and, as discussed in my second chapter, by Georg Gugelburger in *The Real Thing.* Alternatively, we might approach the status of characters in testimonial texts as semiotic objects, allowing us to focus on their presence (or absence, in the case of Victoria and other *desaparecidos*) in the world of the text; our emotional investment with these characters corresponds to an acceptance of the fictional testimonial world as a possible and plausible world, one that we experience as if it were our own.[124] Unlike some fictional texts, however, the reader cannot easily dismiss the testimonial world upon closing the book. Introductions, prefaces, dedication pages and appendices provide haunting reminders that scenes from the testimonial world are more than possible in the real world.[125]

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[124] See Eco, 25.

[125] As such (and one quality I find present in testimonial work) the experimental form and literary qualities of the text inextricably tied to their politics as contestatory writing. In the context of Chicana autobiographical writing, Norma Klahn identified this point, that "theirs is a politics that cannot be divorced from their poetics; that is, their innovative literary forms are inextricable from the stories they tell, stories that fall outside the discourses of dominant Western autobiographies" ("Literary (Re)Mappings" 121).

Accordingly, without suggesting that the protagonists of *Conversación al sur, Pasos bajo el agua,* and *The Little School* document the actual experiences of Traba, Kozameh or Partnoy, we can take seriously the suffering of these characters within the testimonial world and the affective response they evoke from the reader. Within this imaginary, these characters offer a challenge to regimes of terror that attempt to render them liminal subjects, somehow less than present or less than human. While each of these texts includes the interior reflections of certain characters (often the protagonists) through letters, tales or narration, all also place emphasis on interpersonal relationships. *Conversación al sur* follows the memories and conversation of the two women protagonists, focusing on the ways in which one affirms or informs the other. The fragmented narrative in *Pasos bajo el agua,* also focuses on the affective relationships developed between activists as well as prisoners, and the way these relationships change post-imprisonment. *The Little School* is composed of tales that provide reflections on life outside and inside the prison camp, conveying the subtle tortures of each day but centering on the prisoners' ability to realize minor acts of subversion through interpersonal contact. Referring to *The Little School,* Diana Taylor writes in *Disappearing Acts* that Partnoy's writings "work around violence and reenact a survival strategy that she learned in the concentration camp: to distance herself from the biological facticity of the torture and death taking place around her and to cling to an over-riding need for human connectedness and wholeness" (Taylor 58).

Taylor's assessment of *The Little School*, namely its "over-riding need for human connectedness," points to one of the primary ethical concerns of these testimonials. Like *Conversación al sur* and *Pasos bajo el agua*, *The Little School* explores and intervenes in the distinction between life-as-existence and recognized life-as-person. For example, in *The Little School,* in a narrative voice approximating Partnoy's own, one tale describes the importance of bread in the prison camp:

> When tedium mixes with hunger, and four claws of anxiety pierce the pits of our stomachs, eating a piece of bread, very slowly, fiber by fiber, is our great relief. When we feel our isolation growing, the world we seek vanishing in the shadows, to give a brother some bread is a reminder that true values are still alive. To be given some bread is to receive a comforting hug. (85)[126]

In this passage bread serves to nourish both the body of the prisoners held in *La Escuelita* and to inspire a sense of community that may counteract the "vanishing" of the world.[127] The prisoners, held in the camp for political reasons without legal process or lines of communication to the outside, are "disappeared" persons for whom the "vanishing" of the world may be read more literally than poetically. A basic need that sustains the body, bread takes on a symbolic weight that connects it to the sustenance of the entire person, both body and spirit. In a climate where the

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[126] "Cuando el tedio se mezcla con el hambre y la ansiedad nos clava cuatro garras en la boca del estómago, comer un pan lentamente, fibra a fibra, es nuestro gran consuelo. Cuando sentís que te va ganando la idea de que estás solo, de que el mundo que buscabas se esfuma, pasarle un pan a un compañero es recordarte a vos mismo que lo valedero sigue allí, firme. Recibir un pan, es como recibir un abrazo." (71). In the English version of the text, this selection forms part of the tale "Bread." In the Spanish versión, rather than forming a distinct vignette it accompanies the text from "Toothbrush" in "Cepillo de dientes."

[127] For comments on how the narrator of "Ruth's Father" also engages in "struggling against the loss of a world," see Nance 44, and more generally her discussion of *The Little School* (40-45).

prisoners lie blindfolded and cannot converse without punishment, the passing of bread and the touch of another replace speaking and facial expressions. Additionally, the distribution of bread gives structure to the day and provides a constant marker of time, while the exchange of bread between prisoners acts as a reminder of their compassionate relationship to one another. Partnoy writes, "In this climate of overall uncertainty, bread is the only reliable thing. I mean, it is the only reliable thing besides the belief that we have always been right, that betting our blood in the fight against these killers was the only intelligent option" (83).[128] In this indirect association, bread as bodily and interpersonal sustenance comes to substitute for the ideals that, according to Partnoy, prompted her own political involvement and that of her fellow prisoners, the loosely designated "we" that resurfaces throughout the text.

*The Little School* counters the "disappeared" or invisible status of the prisoners by presenting them in moments of camaraderie with one another and in slight but not insignificant subversion of the rules laid out by the prison guards. The text attempts to develop a sense of their different personalities and the Partnoy frequently reflects on their lives before they were detained. For example, she describes one of her fellow prisoners and friends:

> When they first met, María Elena was only fifteen. Five years older and carrying a baby in her womb, she had become motherly with the teenagers in her theatre classes. Two years later she was still feeling the need to protect María Elena, the girl who had dreamt of knitting socks for the baby and had

[128] "Entre tanta incertidumbre el pan es lo único seguro. Quiero decir, además de saber que estamos en la justa, que el habernos jugado toda la sangre contra estos carniceros, es la única opción clara" (69).

> found sweet names for it. She did not know that María Elena was involved in politics. (73)[129]

Here Partnoy's speaker emphasizes her relationship to María Elena and focuses on their life together before detainment. By frequently including such reflections in the main text and rather than cataloguing abuses suffered in the prison camp, *The Little School* prioritizes the presentation of relationships between prisoners and leaves a more juridical-legal account for the appendices to the text. A rare and clandestine conversation between the two women prisoners elucidates their relationship and demonstrates their companionship despite the guards' efforts to force the prisoners into isolation. Partnoy concludes the tale "A Conversation in the Rain" by speculating about a beating from one of the guards, Peine, "She thought he was upset because in spite of the blows and restraints, in spite of the filth and torture, both women had had that long and warm conversation under the rain" (73).[130] In this way, *The Little School* appeals to diverse grounds of "authenticity" and witnessing, privileging in the body of the text affectivity and the valorization of the prisoners' qualified lives, while refusing to reduce them to invisibility and insisting on a collective approach in the "tales" to assert a collective voice of the prisoners as persons.

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[129] Cuando la conoció tenía solo quince años. Ella, cinco años mayor y con un bebé en la panza, se había puesto maternal con los adolescentes que compartían las clases de teatro. Todavía dos años después sentía que necesitaba protegerla. María Elena, en aquella época soñaba con tejerle calcetines al bebé e imaginaba dulces nombres para ponerle. Ella no sabía que María Elena era compañera. (61)

[130] "Eran patadas de bronca porque, a pesar de los golpes y las prohibiciones, a pesar de la mugre y la tortura, ellas dos habían tenido aquella larga y tibia conversación bajo la lluvia" (62).

The emphasis on solidarity in *The Little School* can be read as a quality common to many prison narratives. According to Mary Jane Treacy, what "seems to be" the "standardized prison narrative" (presumably for accounts by former prisoners of Latin American prisons in the 1970s and 80s) consists of three parts: self-identification and a story of arrest; description of inhumane conditions and illegal treatments that delegitimize the government; and assertion that acts of solidarity and collectivity maintain the humanity of the prisoners and the hope for a (just) cause that extends beyond the limits of the individual (which Treacy terms the *personal)* (134). While Treacy finds unique potential in the personal reflections found in *The Little School,* it her analysis it remains constrained by the need to conform to generic conventions. Partnoy's introduction, which stresses her need as a writer to "pay tribute" to memory, supports in part this reading of *The Little School* as a prison narrative. Additionally, regarding testimonial writing and prison narratives, M. Edurne Portela notes that "carceral space not only refers to 'behind the bars,' the stone walls, the electric fence, or the armed guards, but also to the ideological and discursive formations that are intrinsic to any space" (25). Prison space, in narratives, is reenacted "as a theater of domination but, again, also resistance" (30).[131] Portela's

[131] In her discussion of *The Little School* and its Spanish publication as *La escuelita,* Portela differentiates her study of Partnoy's text from earlier ones (including Taylor's *Disappearing Acts* and Kaminsky's *Reading the Body Politic*), emphasizing that while Partnoy engages with the denunciatory intent often attributed to testimonio, she also demonstrates the difficult process of remembering and representing traumatic experience after the fact. Because the Spanish edition of the *The Little School* was not published until 2006, Portela's is one of the few academic studies to consider both versions of the text.

observation may be particularly pertinent for the reader of *The Little School* who encounters not a single narrative voice developing the story of a protagonist, illegally arrested and detained, but rather a web of voices and characters that intertwine to form an implicit narrative of detention and solidarity.[132] While Partnoy acknowledges her desire to "pay tribute" and encourages such a reading of the text, she also cautions that in little schools the line blurs between truth and fiction.

Read as such, Partnoy's testimonial questions the meaning of "authenticity"—whether in the poetic voice of the "tales" and/or juridical accounts—and the prerogative to witness, asking to what does one witness, whether to the atrocity committed or to the lives lived by the victims.[133] While expressing uncertainty of its ability to witness, *The Little School* insists on the need to reanimate the dead and demands that the reader engage with the text and its interstitial spaces.[134]

**III. Writing against disappearance: Testimonial characters as mournable lives**

In *The Little School* the reader enters the affective and personal lives of the prison camp "desaparecidos," reconstituting these characters as emotional, psychic and physical persons in the world of the text, in contrast to their forced disappearance

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[132] See Loise Detwiler, 67. Detwiler comments on the protagonist's fragmented view of the camp, attained only through gaps in her blindfold, and the fragmentation of the text that leaves the reader to piece together a coherent narrative.

[133] This question is further complicated, perhaps, by Partnoy's presentation of selections from *The Little School* at judicial hearings in Bahia Blanca in 1999. Strejilevich comments: "paradójicamente, en esa ocasión [Partnoy] no lee la sección de las "evidencias" sino la escena—dramática y conmovedora—'Graciela: Alrededor de la mesa' y el poema 'Natividad' […] Lo literario hace su intervención en la escena legal y aparece como noticia (83).

[134] See Cubilié, Chapter 4.

and victimhood during the Dirty War. Although *The Little School,* like *Conversación al sur* and *Pasos bajo el agua,* rarely recounts explicit scenes of torture, testimonial literature often attempts to communicate in some manner such situations of extreme violence, torture, or repression where the very personhood of the victim is at stake.

As Elaine Scarry has discussed in detail in *Bodies in Pain*, the goal of torture is not to extract information or make the victim talk but rather to push physical experience beyond the limit of words in an unmaking of the person. Pain, she reiterates, cannot be adequately communicated in words. In the hands of the torturer (and, in situations of state-sponsored violence such as those discussed in these texts, by extension the state) life is precarious. Texts like those by Partnoy, Traba and Kozameh help elucidate that the life at stake is more than just the survival of the physical body. In a review of the English translation of *Pasos bajo el agua,* Partnoy relates Scarry's work to Kozameh's literary techniques:

> Scarry analyzes the mechanisms torturers use to destroy their victims' world. Among them is the transformation of al objects that represent comfort and protection into agents of pain. One of the most effective techniques Kozameh employs is directly related to Scarry's observation: in *Steps Under Water* the lover's treasured jacket becomes an instrument for psychological torture, the bottles lovingly fed by prisoner mothers to their babies are transformed into elements of destruction, Sara's favorite animal, the cat, turns into a threat, a friendly New Year's celebration becomes a dreaded event, doctors cause the death of patients… (Partnoy "Steps" 26)

Similar to Partnoy's observations of the function of once-familiar objects in Kozameh's fictionalized account of her imprisonment and release, Marguerite Feitlowitz describes the manipulation of familiar words and meanings by military and paramilitary groups to form what she terms a "lexicon of terror." While the official

rhetoric of the junta "drew much of its power from being at once 'comprehensible,' incongruous, and disorienting" (20), everyday and beloved words, such as *parilla*, the focal point of the social barbeque, came to refer to the operations of torture and systematic disappearance. *Parilla*, Feitlowitz explains, stood in concentration camp "slang" for the table on which prisoners were tortured (49-50).

In *Conversación al sur*, Irene wonders about the shifting use of language under the dictatorial regimes in the Southern Cone, questioning how a cavalier conversation about torture comes to be appropriate over a cup of coffee. As she talks to Dolores she calls into question what constitutes torture, effectively dismissing the idea that the assault on the younger woman, extreme enough to abort her pregnancy, is not itself torture.

> Como si le hubieran dado cuerda, Dolores seguía diciendo que se consideraba bien librada porque únicamente la habían hecho abortar a patadas en cambio de torturarla. Entonces, ¿eso no era tortura? ¡Pero qué te pasa! Eso es que se les fue la mano, no más, a los hijos de puta. Tortura es otra cosa, no te hagas la distraída. De pronto se puso a clasificar las torturas como si hablara de especies vegetales. Habría sido una conversación impensable en otro tiempo. No lo sé, hace rato que aquí todo ha cambiado. Mientras fumamos un cigarrillo o tomamos un café es posible comentar que a alguien le han hecho tragar sus excrementos o beber su orina; todo el mundo permanece impávido, a nadie se le ocurriría comenzar a aullar o tirarse por la ventana. (45)[135]

[135] Dolores droned on mechanically about how she'd got off lightly because at least they hadn't tortured her but had only made her have a miscarriage by stomping on her belly. So that doesn't count as torture? Are you living in cloud-cuckoo-land or something? They just overdid it, the brutes. Torture is an entirely different matter, don't kid yourself. She launched into a classification of types of torture as if reeling off a list of plant species. A few years ago such a conversation would have been unthinkable. I don't understand it, for some time now everything in this place has ceased to be what it was. Now we can talk over a cigarette or coffee about how someone was made to eat his excrement or drink his urine; no one bats an eyelid, no one thinks of screaming or throwing himself out of the window. (42)

While Dolores downplays her experience to the older woman, Irene, as a mother, recognizes the attack as not only torture, but torture specifically targeted at Dolores as a woman and potential mother. This calls to the reader's attention the gendered aspect of torture, further emphasizing its (gender's) invisibility as Dolores herself, a committed revolutionary, seems unwilling to interpret her experience in this way.

Both Dolores and Irene articulate for the reader of *Conversación al sur* the decisive power of the para/military and police forces. Dolores in particular recounts how her revolutionary group can no longer depend on the securities of legal rights and due process. "[C]ualquier locura paramilitar quedaba justificada por la sucia guerra. Desde el momento en que el enemigo la bautizó así, pensaba Dolores, había dejado de ser una guerra para convertirse en una matanza; no más cuartel, no más procesos, se acabó el mito de las leyes y la juventud dorada" (124).[136] The Dirty War no longer operates under the former rule of law, and Dolores experiences the vulnerability of the prisoner in this new regime first-hand after her arrest in Montevideo with her comrades and, circumstantially, Irene. Irene describes the experience as on of complete lack of agency and the reduction of self, in which

[136] [A]ny paramilitary outrage could be justified in the name of the dirty war. From the moment the enemy invented that phrase, Dolores thought, it had ceased to be a war and had become a bloodbath; there would be no more mercy, no more trials, it was the end of the myth of legality and '*l'imagination au pouvoir.'* (127)

"Fuera quien fuera, yo no existía para ellos. Mejor dicho; ellos decretaban quién podía existir y quién no" (48).[137]

As previously mentioned, Herlinghaus's comments on sovereignty affirm the observations made by the characters of *Conversación al sur.* Dolores and Irene both express acute awareness that both within the prison and as former prisoners their experience remains invisible to society. While Dolores accepts and to a certain extent expects that her political marginality relegates her to the periphery, Irene, as an accomplished and recognized actress, is unaccustomed to the position in which she finds herself. Similarly Andrés, Victoria, and her mother, Elena, find that despite their families' places of privilege among the Buenos Aires elite, the rhetoric of the Dirty War renders them criminal, and paramilitary actions make their deaths invisible and unmournable—the police deny Elena even the acknowledgement that her daughter was arrested and imprisoned.

Through Dolores's (and Irene's) remembrances of Victoria and Andrés, *Conversación al sur* draws attention to the political violence of the Dirty War, during which time students such as they from professional families could become "legitimate" targets for state-sponsored torture and murder. However, the novel resists the idea that, to return to Agamben and Herlinghaus, this can be described as a period of "state-of-exception." Instead, *Conversación al sur* alerts the reader to the marginalization of families of few economic means, such as those of Dolores and her

[137] No matter who I might be, I simply didn't exist for them. Or rather: they decreed who could exist and who could not (44).

husband, Enrique. Despite Dolores's pessimism regarding the possibility of revolutionary change, her voiced frustration with societal inequality prompts the reader to consider systemic violence along with the targeted political violence and terror heightened by the Dirty War.[138]

Irene questions, however, how the violence of the Dirty War in particular came to be acceptable. She wonders to herself, "¿En qué momento se dejó de pensar que dos muertos eran muchísimos muertos, o que cien, una matanza? Este punto es exactamente lo que me atormenta. Porque si ese cambio puede llegar a producirse, ya no hay ninguna distancia entre la vida y la muerte" (Traba 33).[139] For Irene, this collapsing of the difference between life and death occurs alongside the breakdown of social privilege, where status and privilege no longer guarantee personal safety, even less access to judicial process. This is precisely the question that concerns Agamben regarding the camp; that is, "to investigate carefully how—that is, thanks to what juridical procedures and political devices—human beings could have been so completely deprived of their rights and prerogatives to the point that committing any act toward them would no longer appear as a crime (at this point, in fact, truly anything had become possible)" (41).

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[138] Jean Franco notes that the "dialogism between different social positions" found in testimonio and its production is also reproduced in novels like *Conversación al sur, A hora da estrela,* y *Hasta no verte Jesús mío* (111), as the relationship between Irene and Dolores indicates.

[139] "At what point did two deaths stop sounding like a lot, at what point did a hundred deaths stop sounding like a bloodbath? That's what disturbs me. Because once that point has been reached, the frontier between life and death no longer exists" (29).

In *Pasos bajo el agua,* Sara describes the scenario in which one of the female inmates, Patricia del Campo, dies of complications from hepatitis because the prison doctor refuses to enter the ward. Despite the other inmates' protests as Patricia's condition worsens, medical treatment is not provided. When medical staff eventually arrives, they adopt a nonchalant attitude toward disposing of Patricia's body. Sara records, "[e]ntonces sí aparecieron dos enfermeros y una celadora, charlando entre ellos, arrastrando una camilla. Abrieron la reja, entraron al pabellón-hospital como al almacén, riéndose, hablando de los pies checos de otra celadora. La subieron a la camilla y sin mirar al resto fueron empujándola" (74).[140] The death of Patricia, though stunning to the inmates, seems of little consequence to the nurses and guard, suggesting that her death is not, for them, a mournable one. Similarly, they do not seem to view the denial of basic medical treatment to the prisoner as a crime; as in the camp Agamben describes, the inmates have been "so completely deprived of their rights and prerogatives" that the causing their deaths does not constitute a criminal act.

However, although the description of the staff's actions indicates a lack of concern for Patricia and the inmates, Sara's narrative (re)telling resists the reduction of the prisoners to the status of disposable lives. This section, or chapter, of the novel in the Spanish version of the text bears the title "Del diario de Sara." In the original

[140] "This time two male nurses and a female guard appeared, talking among themselves, dragging a gurney along with them. They slid open the gate, entering the hospital ward as if they were going to the corner market, laughing, going on about the pigeon-toed walk of another female guard. They placed her on the gurney and without looking at the rest of them they slowly wheeled her away" (119).

1987 edition, the opening pages include a photocopy of the "Autorización de Cuaderno" granted to Alicia Kozameh as a prisoner on the 31st block in 1977. While Kozameh maintains that, although *Pasos bajo el agua* reflects actual experiences, it should be read as a fictionalized account, the reader is perhaps invited to associate Kozameh's journal with the fragment from her character Sara's diary. This movement allows the text flexibility, freeing it from the task of documenting Patricia's death, yet encourages the reader to interpret this death as more than a fiction. In the English translation, the photocopied authorization does not appear; instead, the chapter includes a dedication, "For Alicia País, who was murdered" (112), and we associate the story of the prisoner Patricia del Campo with that of the murdered woman.[141] This demonstrates what one commentator notices about Kozameh's fictionalization of violence: "Para Kozameh, la solución al dilemna de cómo representar la violencia que ella misma sufrió y compartió con otros, se encuentra en la experimentación con estrategias narrativas que ofrecen alternativas al discurso autoritario y unívoco de la 'historia oficial' de su país" (Buchanan 44).[142]

**IV. Writing to Remember, Writing to Contest**

In *Conversación al sur*, Dolores describes a shift in her writing after the Dirty War impressed itself on her personal life—her imprisonment and forced miscarriage,

[141] For additional reflections on the "Autorización de Cuaderno" and Patricia del Campo/Alicia País, see Partnoy, "Solidarity and Survival."
[142] "For Kozameh, the solution to the dilemma of how to represent the violence she herself suffered and shared with others is found in experimentation with narrative strategies that offer alternatives to the authoritarian and univocal discourse of the 'official history' of her country."

the murder of her husband, the death of Andrés and the disappearance of Victoria—as one from writing as a source of pleasure to writing as a means of survival. "Antes escribía por placer, por vanidad, ¡qué sé yo! Ahora porque es mi medio de defensa. Es curioso, pero la poesía me defiende de la vida y me defiende de la muerte" (56).[143] Writing functions for Dolores an ambiguous space, one that seems to allow for an incomplete sense of self, a partial existence that resists determinations of living and dead. Anne Cubilié finds a similar quality in *The Little Scho.ol*, which she suggests tries, through writing, to reanimate the dead. Likewise, in *Pasos bajo el agua*, Kozameh dedicates her text to her fellow prisoners, the dead and the disappeared, which particularly resonates when reading the fragments of Sara's diary that relate the death of Patricia del Campo. These texts write of and for the dead to testify to their existence despite falsified or absent official records. The testimonial force of Partnoy, Traba and Kozameh's writing actively contests the idea that "[i]f there are no bodies or traces of bodies, the governments can deny the existence of their victims" (Agosin "So We Will Not Forget" 183), suggesting instead an ethical imperative to writing and reading about violence. Writing acquires an added significance, where "[Latin American women] resurrect their dead through language: they do not 'make the word flesh' rather they 'make the flesh word,' and in so doing establish an entirely new reading of 'writing the body'" (Sternbach 94). Testimonial texts, like the photographs displayed in the Plaza de Mayo, enlist communities of

[143]"Before, I used to write for pleasure., out of vanity, who knows. Now I do it as a defence. It's odd, but poetry is my defence against both life and death" (53).

readers as witnesses to the lives of the disappeared and the spectral presence they maintain in society.

As contestatory writing, that is, writing against the official record and its fictions, these texts not only try to "resurrect" the dead, they actively enlist the reader as a witness to the humanity and complexity of their characters, the prisoners, despite the marginality of their status as defined by the governments and exemplified by the prison guards. In *Pasos bajo el agua*, the prisoners counteract the divisive and dehumanizing practices of the guards with frequent if often furtive demonstrations of solidarity, such as notes written on cigarette paper passed between cells tucked inside an iron, a technique Sara learns from another prisoner shortly after her arrest. "Observó maravillada como, con dedos cirujanos, Adriana extraía papeles minúsculos doblados y vueltos a doblar y se los iba entregando [… Sara] abrió el primero de los papeles y leyó: 'Querida compañera […]'" (Kozameh 33).[144] However, the relationships between prisoners in *Pasos bajo el agua* remain complicated, at times contrarian, and resist succumbing to an idealized notion of solidarity,[145] as earlier mentioned with regard to Treacy's characterization of the standard Latin American prison narrative. What are at times less than savory interactions between prisoners, such as those in "Descripción chata y desganada de una Noche de Fin de Año" ["A Flat and Jaded Description of a New Year's Eve"] have the effect of making the

[144] "[Sara] marveled at how Adriana, with the fingers of a surgeon, extracted tiny pieces of paper that had been folded over several times, handing them to her [… Sara] opened the first of the papers and read: Dear *compañera* […]" (27).
[145] See Portela 108.

characters in *Pasos bajo el agua* more rather than less sympathetic; the text does not focus on portraying their revolutionary (or criminal, as some of the women are not political prisoners) lives, but on communicating their emotional and interpersonal experiences.

Kozameh and Traba also explore the lives of prisoners after their release, including the guilt, doubt and fear that follow them. Kozameh expands on this aspect in the English translation of *Pasos bajo el agua*, including several chapters not found in the 1987 Spanish version that express the confusion, loneliness and contradiction of a would-be affair between Sara and the husband of her former prison mate, Elsa. As Partnoy reflects, in *Pasos bajo el agua,* as in *Conversación al sur,* the released prisoners "do not become the embodiment of heroism" (Partnoy "Solidarity" 26); however, they do not, as she continues to suggest, "try to survive in an everyday world," but rather one of sustained surveillance, terror and instability, made evident in the chapter, "Sara, What Does a Jacket Mean to You?".

The question of what survival means in the context of the Dirty War, prominent in *Pasos bajo el agua* and specifically in the additional chapters found in *Steps Under Water*, also reverberates throughout *Conversación al sur*. Dolores in particular struggles to make sense of her marginalized status as a prisoner and, after her release, a revolutionary in what she perceives as a lost battle. After the violent beating by the prison guards that forces her miscarriage, Dolores awakes to find herself in a hospital. "La enfermera es una mujer tierna y asustadiza; salgo del sangriento túnel agarrada, sin embargo, a su mano afectuosa. Cierto que cuando llega alguien del hospital me

suelta como si mi mano quemara y se hace la distraída. Pero mi mano está fría como el hielo, nada logra calentarla" (133-4).[146] The nurse individually recognizes a human bond—and perhaps a womanly one—with Dolores and connects with her through the touch of a hand. Under the surveillance of others, she denies the connection so as not to confront the official rhetoric that casts Dolores as subversive, disposable and part of a cancer on the body of the people.[147] Despite the initial sympathy in the nurse's touch and the acknowledgement it conveys, however, Dolores insists that her hand, now frozen cold, can never be reanimated; she seems to want to hold herself apart from interpersonal connections, wary of the duplicitous actions of the nurse.

Hands and touch are mentioned repeatedly throughout Dolores's conversation with Irene and her interior monologues. Unlike with the nurse, with Irene touch and memory seem to intertwine in ways that provide connection and comfort. The text repeatedly mentions the coldness of the women's hands, yet physical touch between the two takes on the warmth of familiarity when Irene reaches out to Dolores. "Sólo cuando sintió su mano agarrándole el mentón y obligándola a dar vuelta la cara recuperó el aliento; porque la mano, su presión amistosa, su calor, desautorizaron sus aprensiones. Volvieron a enfrentarse y escudriñarse" (162-3).[148] This connection

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[146] "The nurse is kind and impressionable; I come out of the tunnel clutching her sympathetic hand. But if any of the hospital staff come in, she drops my hand as if I were a hot brick and gets on with her business, ignoring me completely. But my hand is as cold as ice, nothing will ever succeed in warming it" (137).

[147] For more discussion of this rhetoric, particularly that of cancer, see Feitlowitz.

[148] "Only when she felt the woman's hand take her by the chin and tilt her face up towards her own did some life come back into her features; the hand's warmth and

between the two women, now able to look each other in the eye, develops at the end of their conversation in which they recognize the violence that pervades both the political and the personal. For Dolores, making sense of her experience also involves the connection of shared memory she uncovers while talking to Irene, described in physical terms: "¡Increíble que Irene se acordara de estos detalles! Le enterneció una vez más la calidad afectuosa de esa memoria dispuesta a alimentar como una matriz a todos sus protegidos" (157-8).[149] As they tortured her, the police destroyed the protection offered by Dolores's womb, killing her unborn child (and the hope it offered to her and Enrique). Irene's memory, however, metaphorically reconstitutes the womb and its protections although, as the end of the text implies, this remains a metaphorical protection not a literal one. Political violence interrupts the domestic, maternal space occupied by the two women, their intimacy shaped by the Dirty War.[150]

In *Conversación al sur*, Irene does not initially welcome Dolores's arrival at her door and the memories it prompts. The prospect of the conversation, described in terms of danger, upsets Irene, anger bubbling up inside her as water boils for coffee.

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firm, friendly touch allayed her fears. They stood face to face, eyeing each other" (168).

[149] "How amazing it was that Irene should have remembered such details! She felt touched yet again by the warmth of that memory, offering its protection like a womb" (163).

[150] In writing about the dictatorship, the distinction between public and private often blurs. "Es así que [en el contexto de la dictatura militar] les resultaba difícil dedicarse a los juegos gratuitos de la escritura; su propósito literario, su representación de sí misma, servía, más bien, para desafiar a las instituciones del estado, además de utilizar al sujeto femenino como puente entre la vida privada y la acción pública" (Masiello 57).

> Claramente advierte que la conversación estará erizada de peligros. Le acongoja pensar cuánto terreno ha perdido, cuánta seguridad, cuánto desparpajo. ¿Y a qué vino, al fin? El agua sube en la cafetera, y borbotea con fuerza. ¿A qué diablos viene a meterse justo ahora que ella está defendiéndose de la memoria? Sin embargo no es normal esta ira repentina con la muchacha quieta que está en la sala. (9)[151]

Dolores's (re)appearance interrupts Irene's own preoccupations, forcing her to confront and acknowledge their shared past. In the first section of the novel, where Irene and Dolores talk about their arrest in Montevideo and subsequent events, Irene's memory supplies certain details and descriptions that elude Dolores, yet Irene still insists, "[h]ay cosas que se me escapan" (23).[152] As she recounts her version of events, she doubts her ability to accurately reconstruct the story, inviting the reader to pose the same question. Irene suggests to Dolores, "[v]amos por partes, hermana; a ver si somos inventoras o testigos" (19).[153] Irene's statement is curious in context; presumably the two women already know what they have experienced, that their memory is not the product of invention but already the necessary tool to act as a witness. What Irene suggests to the reader, however, may be that the difference between invention and witnessing is not so clear-cut, and, by extension, a novel (invention) may not be so distinct from the act of witnessing. Irene's comment does

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[151] The conversation is clearly fraught with danger. To her alarm she can feel the ground slipping away from beneath her feet, her poise and self-assurance drifting away. What ever made her come to the kitchen? The coffee starts to percolate, spluttering loudly. Why on earth did she have to turn up right now, just when she was trying to fend off memories of the past? But she has no right to feel so angry with the girl meekly in the other room. (3)

[152] "There are some things I can't get straight" (18).

[153] "Let's go through it step by step, hand in hand, like sisters; let's see if what we remember is fact or fiction" (14).

imply, however, that witnessing requires collaboration, in this case a witness to second the testimony or experience. In *Conversación al sur*, the women divide this labor of memory; while Irene realizes that "no podría sino contarle detalles, nimiedades" (47)[154] on the contrary Dolores remembers by and through emotions (144).

For Dolores in particular the process of remembering does not follow a single linear pattern, instead acting as a sort of incomplete unraveling or uncovering. She also expresses the tension between her frustrating effort to remember a coherent narrative and the desire to repress painful knowledge. "Se me vuelve un lío la muerte de Enrique, la visión de Juan deshecho a palos, los otros desaparecidos. ¿Cuándo? ¿Cómo? Hay que revisar cosa por cosa; o no, tapar, tapar, olvidar, echar tierra sobre los muertos y los vivos" (106).[155] Despite Dolores's difficulty in representing to herself or Irene a narrative she feels can accurately convey her experience, the memories of her dead and disappeared friends haunt her, as does the fear of re-arrest.

In *Pasos bajo el agua*, traumatic memories similarly haunt the character Sara after her release from prison. In the translated version, the chapter "Sara, What Does a Jacket Mean to You?" describes the persistent and almost ghostly presence of a *milico* wearing her husband's jacket, following her throughout Rosario as a constant reminder of her precarious position. While in the chapter the *milico* exhibits the force

[154] "Nothing but trivial details that are of no importance to anyone" (46).
[155] "It's all jumbled up in my head, Enrique's death, Juan's broken body, the others who've disappeared. What happened when? How? I've got to sort it out one thing at a time; or else forget it, suppress it, bury it, bury the dead and the living" (107).

of a physical person, he can also be understood as the manifestation of her fear and sense of constant surveillance. Likewise for the reader Sara's preoccupation with the presence (or absence) of cats signals more than the cats themselves; they seem associated at once with the world outside prison, traumatic memory, childhood, domestication, and political violence. Sara wonders:

> Quisiera recordar por dónde andan los gatos, además de las terrazas.
> Qué diferencia habrá entre lo que siente un milico al ver un gato y lo que yo siento ahora con sus maullidos. Quizá una enciclopedia me ayude. Tengo que averiguar algo sobre gatos; volver a enterarme, aprender. (14) [156]

It seems that the cats hold as much mystery for Sara as they do for the reader, embodying a knowledge or memory that lies just outside the range of accessibility. Understanding the cats, Sara indicates, is imperative if she is to find a "modo de regreso" or a way back to living outside the prison. Appearing in numerous places throughout the text, however, the cats remind her of the difficulty (perhaps impossibility) of this project given her repeating trauma and the continued violence of the Dirty War.

Perhaps for this reason *Pasos bajo el agua,* while conveying a narrative of Sara's arrest, imprisonment, release and exile, remains in fragments, with multiple narrative voices through achronologic moments in time, tied together by the imperative to remember and to witness. "As several writers claim, the process of writing serves to recreate a fragmented self unified by the power of memory.

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[156] I'd like to remember where cats go, besides the terraces.
What difference can there be between what a *milico* feels when he sees a dead cat and what I feel now when I hear their mewing. Maybe an encyclopedia would help. I need to look something up about cats; find out once again, learn. (6)

Although it cannot restore the past, remembrance often honors the power of human agency to create as well as to do harm" (Blend 4). In her diary Sara, the writer, reflects on the contradictions of what to write about the experience in prison; overwhelmed by the monotony of daily life, she laments having nothing to say, to create. A few days later, however, after recording the events leading to the death of Patricia del Campo, she regrets her earlier dissatisfaction. "Unos pocos días atrás me lamentaba de no tener nada que decir en este cuaderno. 'Qué porquería, había anotado: nada que decir'. O algo por el estilo" (Kozameh 74).[157] Preoccupied by this question of what story to tell and how to write it, *Pasos bajo el agua* struggles with the possibility and impossibility of moving the narrative forward. As Florinda Goldberg notes, the linear story of the narrative proceeds until Sara arrives at the prison, then collapses to continue in circles, a movement accentuated by the epigraphs to each chapter (92).

Through the fragmentation of its structure, the multiple narrative voices and its circular movement, *Pasos bajo el agua* conveys to the reader that the characters are grappling with traumatic, open memories. Similarly, while the reader pieces together a narrative from the various conversations and interior monologues in *Conversación al sur,* the text also indicates that these characters are working through trauma in the act of remembering but that they do not reach closure. According to Diana Taylor, "[n]ot all blows or wounds create trauma—just those that produce the

[157] "A few days back I regretted not having anything to say in this notebook. 'So shitty,' I had jotted down: 'nothing to say.' Or something to that effect" (119).

characteristic aftershock. Thus trauma is known only by the nature of its repeats. Like performance, trauma always makes itself felt viscerally in the here and now. Past blows haunt our present and shake the individual and social body" (Taylor, "Lessons" 1675). In both texts, trauma is felt viscerally, both on and in the body. The reenacting of traumatic memory, whether written to a (presumed) audience or through direct conversation, in *Conversación al sur, Pasos bajo el agua* and *The Little School,* demands an intersubjective response and recognition.

The literary techniques used in these texts help communicate a sense of this trauma to the reader; while all testimonial texts may do so varying degrees, it may be that making the claim that these texts present fictionalized characters rather than represent the actual experience of the authors allows them more plasticity in their affective qualities. Kozameh's literary experimentation in *Pasos bajo el agua* allows for the expression of traumatic memory in several ways: "procesamientos cognitivos y/o emocionales incompletos, depresión, hiperreacción ante el peligro, amnesia, insomnio, pesadillas o flashbacks constantes producto de la repetición del trauma, y, principalmente, dificultades en la construcción de un esquema de la realidad que concuerde con la dominante social" (Tompkins 61). For example, after Elsa and Sara are released from prison, Sara tries to articulate for her friend the unhomed sense she feels in "Sara, Elsa, Marco, and the Dance of Great Sadness," a chapter added to the English translation. "I feel like I'm sitting in a movie audience. Each little action, each word, isn't coming from me. I'm not the protagonist" (53). She later continues, "I'm in the middle of all that movement [the city life], but emotionally I just don't

take part. It's like I'm sitting there watching a movie" (54). Distanced from herself by trauma, Sara cannot construct a narrative that would account for her own presence and participation in the world outside the prison. She feels emotionally removed, yet at the same time recognizes herself to be violently emotive: "The problem is that objectivity just isn't working for me. I'm always imagining, imagining so many things […] And my emotions are so strong, like explosions that make me flinch as I try to analyze myself, when I try to understand this life of 'freedom' we now have. They blindside me. They paralyze me" (54).

At the end of *Conversación al sur*, Irene undergoes a similar dissociation from the self, and specifically, from the rhythms of her body. In a moment of panic, huddled with Dolores in anticipation of arrest, she fixates on her lack of bodily awareness: "La mujer pensó que se salvaría de ese pánico enloquecido si lograba percibir algo dentro de su cuerpo, pero por más atención que puso en oírse, no escuchó ni el más leve rumor de vísceras, ni un latido. En ese silencio absoluto, el otro ruido, nítido, despiadado, fue creciendo y, finalmente, las cercó" (170).[158] In place of her body, she attunes herself to another sound, presumably the footsteps of the police searching the house and approaching the women. Instead of perceiving the "self" and perhaps some feeling of autonomy, Irene's senses alert her to the presence of others. The novel's abrupt close—a close that in many ways denies closure—

[158] "The woman thought she might be able to control this frantic terror if she could focus on the sound of her own body, but for all her efforts at concentration she could hear nothing, not the slightest twitch of a pulse, not a single heartbeat. And in the total silence that other noise, cutting, merciless, grew and grew till finally it was all around them" (177).

leaves it to the reader to engage with the character Irene, against her own dissociation and the violence of the "others," as an "other" to which the reader feels an ethical responsibility.

**V. Reader as Witness?**

The women characters in *Conversación al sur, Pasos bajo el agua,* and *The Little School* try to give an account of their experiences as prisoners, and struggle to account for their survival, the death of *compañeros* and the dehumanizing practices of the Dirty War. Each text, however, consists not of a linear, explanatory narrative but of fragments that shift in narrative voice, chronology and perspective; the task of narrative construction is largely left to the reader. Many commentators have noted the silences in these texts, such as the suggestion that in them, "[l]a literatura se convierte en un vehículo para reescribir la historia, tanto para el lector como para la autora, y la novela es un medio de conocer en el presente, acontecimientos que transcurrieron en el pasado" (García 165).[159] The reader, this statement suggests, plays a role in the process of re-writing the story of the novel, and, perhaps, the official story (History) of events in the past. Additionally, according to this statement a novel such as *Conversación al sur*, while understood as fiction, can communicate to the reader in the present an awareness of violence several decades old.

I propose that testimonial texts such as *Conversación al sur* accomplish this—awakening the reader to the violence of the past without making a claim to its direct

[159] "Literature is converted into a vehicle for the rewriting of history, equally for reader as for the writer, and the novel is a medium for knowing in the present events that happened in the past."

"representation"—by challenging the reader to engage with the process of making narrative sense out of traumatic memory, and by involving the reader in the affective lives of the characters without idealizing them but with attention to the marginalized status they occupy.[160] The reading of testimonial fiction, then, to use Diana Taylor's terms, should be considered more an encounter, rehearsal or performance than an archival project.[161] While testimonial writing has been interrogated in terms of both epistemology and aesthetics,[162] I suggest the primary concern of the testimonial world is not so much an epistemological question—does the reader gain reliable knowledge of past violence—as an ethical one—what questions are asked of the reader about her relationship to the text and the characters it presents.

"Open memory […] works by a refusal to come to closure; it tarries, waits, weeps, and, at least lately, writes" (Greene 1724). *Conversación al sur, Pasos bajo el agua* and *The Little School* deny the reader the sort of closure that would allow her to close the book and end the scenario of reading without further consideration. Though difficult to read stories of torture and clandestine imprisonment, and as Portela reminds us, it *should* be difficult, these texts challenge to reader to read otherwise than for the spectacle of violence. Instead, the reader is asked to "see" and give testimony along with the characters, as if through the gaps and spaces of a blindfold.

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[160] Such qualities have been identified with this sort of women's testimonial fiction: "Precisamente este rasgo, el de la reivindicación de una individualidad llena de fuerza emocional y sentimental, pero desde la sinceridad que proporciona la plena conciencia de una condición marginal y periférica, es el que me parece más significativo a la hora de caracterizar a este grupo de escritoras" (Salvador 174).
[161] See Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire.*
[162] See Kaminsky "Densely" 45.

In *Pasos bajo el agua*, Sara reflects on the importance of sight: "A mí no me van a dejar ver a nadie, si es que no deciden que deje de verlo todo" (33).[163]

Despite the desire to see everything, Sara wrestles with how to communicate traumatic experience through writing in terms that can be understood by one alien to such trauma.

> Estoy que estoy haciendo es ineficaz. Estoy intentando describir un momento de ese calibre. Casi absurdo. Posible, pero absurdo. Y esto ultimo también es una aclaración estéril: yo creo en la palabra. Con fervor. Para tantos que no pueden ni imaginar ciertas realidades, que han pasado por zonas tan alejadas de la empiria, o que no han pasado por ninguna zona, no hay más recurso que la palabra escuchada, leída. Imágenes o no imágenes, siempre la palabra. (101-2)[164]

Through the words of Sara, Kozameh self-critically deliberates the effectiveness of language as a tool for expression. While she ultimately defends the spoken and written word, her deliberations recall to the reader that language is not transparent, meaning is not fixed and the reader cannot occupy a neutral space in the testimonial world. This exigency calls upon the reader to consider her position *vis a vis* the marginalization of the characters in the text, both during the scenario of reading and in response to "real-world" violence. Perhaps for this reason, Kozameh can assert,

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[163] "They aren't going to let me see anyone, but hopefully they won't decide to stop me from seeing everything" (26).

[164] What I'm doing just isn't working, trying to describe a moment of that magnitude. Almost absurd. Possible, but absurd. And let this be a sterile clarification; I believe in the word. Fervently. For so many who can't even imagine certain realities, who have passed through zones so distant from actual experience, or who haven't passed through any zone at all, there's no recourse other than words that are heard, read. Images or no images, always the word. (143).

"[s]iempre creí que la ficción garantiza la fidelidad al hecho ético" (Kozameh "Escribo" 171).[165]

[165] "I have always believed that fiction writing ensures faithfulness to ethics and reality"

## Chapter IV
## Film as Testimonial Text in the Southern Cone: *La historia oficial* and *Que Bom Te Ver Viva*

To continue an exploration of testimonial text and narrative, this chapter turns to the role of film in processes of redemocratization in Latin America, with particular emphasis on the Southern Cone in the mid to late 1980s. As it is beyond the scope of this chapter to address all such film production, it will focus on two films, *La historia oficial* (Luis Puenzo, 1985) from Argentina and *Que Bom Te Ver Viva* (Lúcia Murat, 1989) from Brazil. These two films differ greatly, in both their production and distribution and aesthetic choices, providing us with productive points of contrast and, potentially, of dialogue.

Why return to these films at this moment, other than as a valuable exercise in Latin American literary and filmic history? Broadly speaking, the Brazilian public has never been particularly eager to address the violence that accompanied the economic development of the military regime, and the rise of a new generation in Argentina has signaled a shift in the conversation about the 1970s if not fatigue with the theme of dictatorship. Nevertheless, in Argentina groups such as H.I.J.O.S. (Hijos e Hijas por la Identidad y la Justicia contra el Olvido y el Silencio) continue their efforts to seek justice, and recent events in Brazil have reminded the public of the social need to confront the past.

In Argentina, in the years immediately following the military dictatorship the new president, Raúl Alfonsín, appointed a commission, headed by the prominent novelist Ernesto Sábato, to investigate crimes from the Dirty War (1976-83), and

many top military officials received life sentences. However, the 1986 and 1987 Punto Final and Obediencia Debida laws limited prosecutions, and in 1989 President Carlos Menem granted amnesty to those already sentenced. After the election of Néstor Kirchner to the presidency in 2003, prosecutions and new investigations resumed with the annulment of the amnesty laws. The acclaimed reception of *El secreto de sus ojos* (2009), a film set in 1999 that deals with the expression of justice within the system of neoliberal democracy after a period of amnesty, suggests that the issue remains relevant to cinema audiences;[166] likewise, the Argentine telenovela *Montecristo* (2006), made with the advice and collaboration of the Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo[167] was among the year's most popular novelas among television audiences and was later adapted for foreign audiences, beginning with Chile and Mexico. The construction and conservation of various memory sites and museums also indicate the haunting presence of the state-sponsored violence from the Dirty War—and its continued controversy: for examples, in 2004, ESMA (the former Escuela Superior de Mecánica de la Armada) was declared a memory site by national and city

[166] Silvia R. Tandeciarz reads the film as suggesting that "restoration of a justice system that works can provide sufficient closure for most and lead to full civic engagement in a healthy democracy" (63); however, she also finds the film indicative of a shift in the concerns of an Argentine public that may now belong to a generation with no personal memory of the Dirty War, "the counterpart to *The Official Story* […] urging us to focus on the construction of a better world by breaking free from the stranglehold of a past that threatens to make us all victims" (69).

[167] For more information about *Montecristo* and its postdictatoship themes, see Sueldo and Landau. Additionally, the recent telenovela shares a certain continuity with *La historia oficial* in its effort to raise public awareness of the missing children from the Dirty War and the work of the Abuelas. In Montecristo, the actress Flora Bloise again portrays one of the Abuelas (Sueldo 189).

governments and entrusted to a coalition of human rights organizations, an advisory board of survivors and an executive board of government officials; in 2002 *El Pozo* in Rosario was declared *Centro Popular de la Memoria* as part of two reconstructive efforts, one archeological and the other testimonial; in 2010, more than a decade after an intitial declaration, an army site in Rosario officially was inaugurated as the Rosario Memory Museum (Hidalgo 195-203).

The Brazilian government, unlike the Alfonsín administration in Argentina, did not initiate a truth commission contemporary to the return to democracy. Instead, the best known investigation originated with the Catholic archdiocese of São Paolo, published as *Brasil Nunca Mais* in 1985. During the late 1980s and 1990s, limited access was granted to government archives, and in 1995 the state issued an official apology for state violence and made payments to victims' families providing they had proof of murder and torture (although such proof was not easy to produce). Before returning power to civilian government, the military regime passed an Amnesty Law in 1979 that grants full amnesty to both military officials involved in human rights violations and militants in opposition to the regime; accordingly, although a court "morally and politically" condemned a torturer in 2008 for crimes during the regime, he was not criminally convicted. In 2010 the Brazilian Supreme Court refused to revoke the amnesty, a decision that was met with some controversy on either side. As Nina Schneider frames it, "[i]n contrast to Argentina, the key feature of Brazilian collective memory has been silence and polarization, as public consensus is lacking, and a significant number of Brazilians view the military era in a positive way […]

Survey responses confim that public opinion on military rule is highly fragmented" (7). However, in recent years new projects, including The Right of Memory and Truth (2006, an educational effort including monuments and a museum), and Revealed Memories (2009, the creation of a research center on the political struggles of the 1960s and 1980s) marked a shift in the administration's politics of memory under Paulo Vannuchi, the Human Rights Minister until 2010. In 2009, benefitting from high popularity ratings and a successful economy, combined with international pressure from the UN and the IACHR (Inter-American Commission on Human Rights), President Lula da Silva signed a proposal to create a National Truth Commission investigating human rights violations committed during the military Regime (although the proposal was protested by top military officials and amended so that as a truth commission, the investigation would lead to no criminal prosecutions nor would it change exisiting amnesty laws). In May of 2012, President Dilma Rousseff inaugurated a commission of seven members to conduct a two-year investigation (BBC). A number of more recent fictional and documentary films, most sympathetic to the resistance to the military regime, indicate the unresolved status of this history in the national imaginary; *O Ano em Que Meus Pais Saíram de Férias* (2006), *Batismo de Sange* (2006), *Hercúles 56* (2006), *Em Teu Nome* (2009), and Murat's *Quase Dois Iramãos* (2004) are examples of films that look back at the political violence of the 1960s and 1970s.

Given recent events, it seems an appropriate moment to revisit films made in the intial period following the fall of military regimes in Argentina and Brazil. As

many notable scholars of Latin American cinema have observed, film offered a particularly salient medium for post-dictatorial creative projects, both those seeking to testify to atrocities committed by the regimes and those engaging in processes of reconstruction—although these aims are not necessarily mutually exclusive. In part due to the limitations placed on film production—in Argentina the practical concerns of filmmaking resulted in a near lack of subversive cinema during the height of military power (Foster, *Argentine Cinema* 7), though in Brazil the situation was somewhat different, where the military provided increased funding for national cinema coupled with increased repression (Schiff 469)—redemocratization coincided with a(n often politically motivated) resurgence in film production. This is particularly evident in Argentina, where the newly elected government in 1983 looked to film production as an avenue for promoting its policies and framing the discourse of "redemocratization" through the influence of the Instituto Argentino de Cinematografía in the industry. Julianne Burton-Carvajal describes this in more explicit terms, noting that "film has been a weapon of choice in the (re)definition of the national project" and, in particular, "post-dictatorship Argentine cinema of the 1980s offer[s] exemplary instances of films as the register through which a revised national project can be both formulated and promulgated" (579).

The redemocratization process required maneuvering legally, politically and culturally between the need to uncover brutal practices of disappearance and torture—and attribute accountability—while maintaining a working relationship between civilian government and military leadership and undergoing a general

process of reconciliation. Not surprisingly, as in testimonial writing, testimonial films from this period grapple with the impetus to forget the past in the name of national reconciliation matched by the need (both personal and communal) to remember the atrocities committed against survivors and *desaparecidos*. In this respect, testimonial films do different work than that of truth commissions such as the state-sanctioned *Nunca más* in Argentina or the church-led effort in *Brasil: Nunca Mais*, although they share a similar interest in communicating the experience of those persecuted by the military regime. This concern is not unique to the redemocratization process in the Southern Cone, but finds echoes in countries undergoing similar transitions; for example, M. Palmira Vélez Jiménez, in her comparison of testimonial work in Spain and Latin America, finds that in both, "[e]ncarar las violaciones de los derechos humanos y centrarse en las víctimas (=voz silenciada) fue lo prioritario del proceso transicional" (1793). Reacting against a military regime's version of its own conduct, which generally cast the junta as the "savior" of the nation from the grips of chaos or communism, testimonial films offer an alternative account(s). One of the questions this chapter will consider is to what extent this account asserts itself as a corrective history or, conversely, leaves itself open for the interpretation of the viewer/participant.

How does a work present, through the medium of documentary or fiction film, an alternative history that reclaims the voices of those marginalized by the regime without substituting a new, moralizing version of history to hold as collective memory? Christa Berger and Juliana Campos Chaves take up this question in their

study of Brazilian cinema and the memory of the dictatorship, considering Pollak's writing on collective memory:

> Se, por um lado, existe a tendência à documentação pelo desejo de guardar as vivências, há acontecimentos históricos que exigem o não esquecimento, a obsessão necessária, poderíamos dizer. Pollak lembra que o estudo que privilegia os excluídos, as minorias, os marginalizados vai produzir uma memória que se contrapõe à memória oficial. Para ele, há memórias subterrâneas que disputam sentidos com outras e, por isso, a memória coletiva não é consensual. Em qualquer contexto é impossível encontrar uma visão e uma interpretação única do passado, compartilhada por toda a sociedade. (30-31)[168]

Due to the (formerly) collective experience of the cinema, films of redemocratization, perhaps more than written testimonial works, seem to offer a site for the construction of collective memory; however, it may be that what they do is more an act of remembering, one that depends upon the participation of the viewer and accordingly reinvents itself in each encounter.

Laura Podalsky's *The Politics of Affect and Emotion in Contemporary Latin American Cinema* takes up recent interest in how film (and literature) stimulate an affective response in the viewer/spectator and how this shapes the cinematic experience. She is particularly interested in the interplay of affect, empathy and representation, and, following Lisa Cartwright, seems to question the common

[168] On the one hand, there exists the tendency to document due to the wish to hold onto the experiences, there are historical events that demand not to be forgotten, the "necessary obsession," one could say. Pollak reminds us that the study that priveleges those excluded, the minority, the marginalized will produce a memory in counterpoint to the official memory. For him, there are subterranean memories that dispute the meaning of others and, because of this, collective memory is not a consensus. In whatever context it is impossible to find a vision and an interpretation of the past that is unified and shared by all of society.

opposition of identification and empathy that casts the former as an unconscious process and the latter as a conscious one (10-11). Cartwright observes that "in empathy there is a force in that moment in which I feel that I know how you feel, a welling up and bursting forth of emotion about the object of regard, that is not held solely in the register of conscious perception and expression" (in Podalsky 11). Although Podalsky does not use the term, it might be useful to consider this response as an intersubjective one, and I find it particularly integral to a discussion of testimonial works in the ways their emotional appeal maintains an unstable connection to real-world violence and marginalization. The spontaneous force of empathy described by Cartwright, if it is truly spontaneous, occurs in the cinematic encounter and cannot be predictably "generated" by the film itself; while this seems to agree with cognitive film theory's assertion that "films do not make people feel, but rather offer invitations to feel" (Podalsky 11), Podalsky cautions us that such an overly textualist approach privileges narratology and character while neglecting the "historical and sociocultural situatedness of feelings" (12). Even as this chapter emphasizes the particular offerings of certain films in the way they work (on us) as testimonial texts, it is important to bear in mind this situatedness in the interaction between films and their audiences.

Nelly Schnaith asks another question crucial to this discussion: "¿Qué tipo de discurso—verbal o icónico, narrativo o teatral—puede producir una 'transformación interior' que sensibilice al espectador para la recepción de ese tema terrible: la muerte anónima, la muerte sin escena?" (Schnaith 26). Western tradition, she argues, has

privileged genres organized around the figure of the individual, such as drama and melodrama, that emphasize subjective identification between the author, protagonist and reader. For Schnaith, such identifications are at best inadequate and more likely inappropriate responses to the sort of anonymous death and disappearance found in the military dictatorships of the 1970s and 1980s in the Southern Cone (27).[169] Although I find Schnaith's concerns to be well-articulated and relevant to this discussion, I am concerned that by rejecting texts which encourage a subjective/ intersubjective relationship with the viewer/reader we would miss much of what makes certain testimonial texts so effective and persistent beyond their moment of political expediency. This difficulty, of how to establish a powerful subjective connection with the reader while maintaining an ethical relationship to the referent, has similarly appeared in previous chapters and will remain relevant throughout this one as we focus on two films, a melodrama and a dramatic documentary.

Both *La historia oficial* and *Que Bom Te Ver Viva* invite (demand?) consideration of what happens after dictatorship to both individuals and communities. One of the most prominent films of the redemocratization period, *La historia oficial* encourages the viewer to identify with the new democratic Argentina in rewriting an "official story" of the military regime. Benefiting from the cooperation of the recently

[169] For Schnaith, melodrama is an inadequate form in this context because "fuerza nuestra identificación con una peripecia individual cuando lo propio del fenómeno al que se refiere es que toda peripecia individual quedó abismada en el destino de los N. N., marca identificatoria de los cadáveres sin identidad que aparecieron—cuando aparecían—hacinados en tumbas comunes" (28-9)

elected government.[170] *La historia oficial* enjoyed good domestic distribution (though a far second to that of María Luisa Bemberg's *Camila,* released a year prior), and even stronger international reception, receiving the Academy Award for Best Foreign Film. Although, as the title suggests, the film unravels the "official story" expounded by the military government, many critics are wary of the extent to which it seems to posit a new "official story" of redemocratization and the role of the Argentine public in the Dirty War of the Junta years in a way that is "political but by no means revolutionary" (Burucúa 5). The appeal of *La historia oficial* lies in part in its subscription to melodramatic conventions, not the least in its treatment of the "universally accessible theme of disappeared children" so crucial to its international popularity (Foster *Argentine Cinema* 43). The year is 1983, and the story unfolds from the point of view of a history teacher, who is also the wife of a businessman with close ties to the military government, and her investigation into the circumstances surrounding the birth of their adopted daughter. Both the narrative and the technical production of the film encourage the viewer to have an affective and emotional encounter with *La historia oficial*. Also, while the specific narrative is fictional, it tells a story that directly references the declining moments of the dictatorship and the challenge of how to respond/witness to targeted state-sponsored violence.

[170] According to the research in *La memoria agitada*, while the elected government supported the film, production had to be paused and completed in secret after the mother of Analía Castro, the actress portraying Gaby, was repeatedly harassed and threatened for her daughter's participation in the project (Millán 114).

*Que Bom Te Ver Viva* did not have the benefit of the widespread distribution of *La historia oficial*, but has found a more specific audience through distribution with Women Make Movies. It was first presented at the Festival de Cinema Brasileiro de Gramado in June 1989 and opened to limited release—but critical acclaim—in October of that year. In subsequent years, *Que Bom Te Ver Viva* was screened at multiple international film festivals, in cities and countries including Toronto, Buenos Aires, San Francisco, Italy, Germany, New York and Japan. A blend of documentary and dramatic modes, *Que Bom Te Ver Viva* focuses on the stories of women imprisoned during the military dictatorship in Brazil and pushes them to discuss what they cannot talk about and what doesn't want to be seen. *Que Bom Te Ver Viva* addresses the need to look at the figure of the woman participant in the armed struggle (Cordeiro Medeiros and Aragão Ramalho), and is, "perhaps the only film wholly dedicated to representing the specific experience of being a woman militant during the dictatorship and provides the opportunity to bridge the critical gap between socio-political and filmic representations of women" (Shaw 11).[171] The film's hybrid form allows it to challenge the "official story" differently than *La historia oficial* by refuting the idea that any single alternate narrative could account for the violent

[171] Although subsequent films, most notably the internationally distributed fictional film *O Que É Isso, Companheiro?* (1997), have sympathized with or romanticized armed resistance to the military regime, *Que Bom Te Ver Viva* remains unique for its focus on women. Also, while the more recent documentary film *Hércules 56* utilizes interviews with ex-militants, it is not specifically concerned with the experience of women.

disjuncture left by the dictatorship,[172] one of the reasons I find it appropriate to include this film in a study of testimonial texts[173]. Recently, *Que Bom Te Ver Viva* has become more accessible—though only to a Portuguese-speaking audience—through the internet project of Armazém Memória's Videoteca Virtual Brasil Nunca Mais.[174]

**I. Testimonial in Latin American Film**

The testimonial drive has played a critical role in Latin America in documentary as well as in fiction filmmaking, striving, as in much of the region's literature, to reconcile vast socioeconomic inequalities and the legacies of colonial rule in modernizing societies. While relevant to many earlier films and movements (Buñuel's *Los olvidados* might be a classic example), the testimonial potential of film became of particular interest with the socialist energy following the Cuban

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[172] Although Lúcia Murat resists the term "feminist" with regard to her work—and suggesting that we read her work as such largely depends on how we interpret "feminist"—this hybridity, in my reading of the film, offers great potential in discussing it as a testimonial text, which I do feel demands attention to concerns specific to gender given the film's focus almost exclusively on women characters/interviewees.

[173] Fernanda Andrade do Nascimiento also chooses to approach *Que Bom Te Ver Viva* as a testimonial work in a comparative study with A Morte e a donzela. She writes, "O que me interessa neste trabalho não é tanto o gênero testemunhal—narrativa em primeira pessoa, redigida por um gestor que vai contar a história do ponto de vista da colectividade--, mas sim de que forma o elemento testemunhal se manifesta nas obras do século XX na América Latina e por que isso permite comparar diferentes modalidades artísticas que estão em diálogo direto com eventos históricos" (112-3). For her, testimonial works are also those in which the subject feels both the necessity and the impossibility of expressing her experience (113).

[174] Videoteca Virtual Brasil Nunca Mais seeks to compile an online repository of documentary film relating to the military dictatorship and to make this information accessible "de forma universal, livre e gratuita a través deste canal."

Revolution. During the 1960s, the New Latin American Cinema advanced a realist, popular cinema characterized by its social engagement, with influences from Italian neo-realism and British social documentary. In Argentina, the idea of a third cinema arose in contrast to big budget, state-funded, Hollywood-style films and to an auteur cinema directed to an elite audience (Burucúa 47). The protagonists of these new movements—Birri, Solanas, Getino, Vallejo, Garcia Espinosa, among others—professed to privilege political themes of revolutionary socialism over character development and what they perceived as the apolitical emotional excess of Hollywood and national cinemas. Film production decreased in subsequent decades due to authoritarian military rule in the Southern Cone (Argentina 1976-83, Brazil 1964-85, Chile 1973-90, Uruguay 1973-85). For the most part, the films that received financial and political support for production during this period promoted sanitized, acritical representations of mainstream society.

Both thematically and temporally, *La historia oficial* and *Que Bom Te Ver Viva* pertain to a loose grouping of films referred to as "cinema of redemocratization." Renewal of cinema and theater after dictatorship necessitated a reconsideration/reconstruction of the relationship between politics and aesthetics that had been co-opted by the military regime, making "the overriding feature" of cinema and theater "the anxiety to re-establish their agency as politically and socially engaged art forms" (Page 1). This was complicated in Argentina by the influence of the new government on the industry through the Instituto Argentino de Cinematografía, which supported post-dictatorship film production and helped

produce several dozen major films that related the themes of redemocratization and the government's orientation to recent Argentine history. In Brazil, films of redemocratization enjoyed strong internal support, as with prior films of the Cinema Novo movement in the early 1960s. Although in Argentina María Luisa Bemberg directed the popular *Camila*, during the period of redemocratization women directors were still a rarity in both Brazilian and Argentine cinema, making Lúcia Murat's work on *Que Bom Te Ver Viva* notable, in addition to being one of the first films to be produced after the return to democracy in Brazil to focus on former women militants and their stories (Cordeiro Medeiros and Aragão Ramalho 3). It bears mention, however, that Murat's film was preceded by the project of another woman director in Brazil working with both documentary and fictional modes during the postdictatorship period. The production of the Tizuka Yamasaki's film, *Patriamada,* entailed continual adaptation of a loose script based on the evolving politics of the filmmakers and current events as it attempted to capture a sense of the country's return to democracy.[175] Murat's film, in contrast, focuses specifically on the traumatic experience of women prisoners during the dictatorship and its haunting aftereffects.

Many films of redemocratization could be considered "testimonial" in their attempts to reflect on the violent repression, detentions and disappearances that shaped life for many under military rule. While politics is pivotal in these films, their approach differs from the revolutionary enthusiasm of testimonial projects from the 1960s. Where third cinema featured inspiring (if sometimes dogmatic) narration

[175] See Julianne Burton's interview with Tizuka Yamasaki.

advancing the proletariat, cinema of redemocratization (re)focuses on establishing an emotional connection with the viewer through character development and (inter)subjective identification, sometimes employing (deploying?) melodramatic conventions.

In my first chapter I have already mentioned the profound influence of melodrama in Latin American film, specifically in relation to Mexican cinema and the melodramatic conventions employed in *Rojo amanecer.* The use of melodramatic conventions in a film such as *La historia oficial* draws on a long tradition of melodrama in Latin American cinema, dating to the era of silent film. Early melodramas demonstrated transnational influences from Italy, France and the United States on the growing industry in Mexico, Argentina and Brazil (Sadlier 5). The revolutionary melodrama is just one example of the widespread influence of melodramatic conventions, although much melodrama primarily targets a female audience and several genres focus on the varying roles of wives, mothers and daughters. *La historia oficial* follows in this tradition, while in addition critically engaging with the familiar melodramatic convention of the lost child and rediscovered identity.

While some recent studies have reconsidered the intricacy of melodrama,[176] it has often been dismissed as an unsophisticated popular form for its excessive appeal to emotion (often with the claim that its aesthetic sensibility comes at the expense of critical political engagement). However, this emotive quality, as in *La historia oficial*,

[176] As examples, see Sadlier and Burucúa.

fosters the intersubjective identification between viewer/reader and character that can add to the vitality of a testimonial text. As previously mentioned, critics like Nelly Schnaith—and along with her, the prominent Latin Americanist Jean Franco—express concern that melodrama and such "transparent narrative forms" (Podalsky 6) encourage a facile identification between the viewer and the narrative. In the case of *La historia oficial*, this identification occurs (problematically) with a protagonist who has comfortably occupied the position of a bystander throughout the Dirty War. Franco and Schnaith suggest that this identification may be less effective than the disruption experienced by viewers of films that instead encourage disidentification (Franco 247). When looking at *La historia oficial*, I want to consider to what extent the identification it encourages provides the opportunity for ethical engagement with the filmic text, as well as the experience of victims of the Dirty War. By "reading" *La historia oficial* comparatively with *Que Bom Te Ver Viva,* I hope to expand on Schnaith and Franco's comments on (dis)identification while focusing on the work in which these two films engage as testimonial texts.

**II. *La historia oficial***

During the period of redemocratization, *La historia oficial* was touted by the press as the first national blockbuster to directly address recent events and take a position critical of the military regime on a national popular scale, but did not enjoy the same reception amongst scholarly critics.[177] On this point, Constance Burucúa

[177] One of the strongest criticisms of *La historia oficial* relates to its role during redemocratization as "a tool for a collective self-deception process […] we did not

makes the following commentary: "What these authors fail to ask […] is why so many people, in Argentina and abroad, liked this 'minor' film and engaged with it" (124). Indeed, Burucúa's remark acknowledges the democratic accessibility of the film's theme and melodramatic conventions that allowed it to communicate to a broad audience (and continues to allow it to do so, not the least as a vehicle for discussing the Dirty War in a classroom setting). Emotional excess, centered on the mother figure, fosters the subjective identification critical for the work of *La historia oficial* at the time of its release in the 1980s: to encourage a popular national discourse that recast the imprisoned and disappeared as victims rather than criminals (Amado 15). The film engages the various discourses that describe the *desaparecidos*, labeled "subversivos" by the military regime, viewed as losers of the financial and social "guerra" by businessmen successful under the regime such as the protagnist's husband, "sospechados" by those who found it easiest to presume that they were participants in some politically suspect activity, or "víctimas inocentes" who were kidnapped and murdered without judicial process or formal charges (Goldstein and

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know, therefore we have no responsibility" (Woodson 46). As Octavio Getino writes about the film, "Algo así como un 'no sabía lo que estaba pasando,' que se proyectaría sobre multitudes de espectadores a manera de redención generalizada. *La historia oficial* ofreció la posibilidad de acceder de pronto al 'conocimiento' de lo sucedido y también, a una serena redención. En esa 'resistencia' a la des-memoria, todos podían reencontrarse, mirándose sin culpas a los ojos" (92). The viewer's identification with Alicia encourages this through the positioning of Alicia as a victim: "Alicia/gran parte de la ciudadanía se liberan sobre todo de culpas, se transforman, como 'ella' en la película, y se disponen a *juzgar* a los responsables" (Jakunowicz and Radetich 168). Additionally, although the film does not conclusively answer what Alicia will choose to do with the knowledge she has gained about Gaby and Sara, it seems to suggest that mothers of stolen babies "no sabían" and, upon finding out, would return the babies (Maranghello 229).

Racciatti 15); the emotional force of the film supports this last construction (and through identification with Alicia encourages the viewer to shift from a discourse of "sospechados" to "víctimas"). From the perspective of two decades, Octavio Getino encourages us to consider the melodramatic conventions of the film in the context of redemocratization, in that "la sociedad de esta época de transición democrática necesitó—como tal vez lo sigue necesitando en nuestros días—la revindicación del gesto subjetivo y personalizado" (95).

*La historia oficial* sets up the initial contrast of the old "official" version—in this case, the national history (identity) told by the military dictatorship and the classroom text—and the "truth" of disappearance and kidnapping—embodied by Gaby and the concealed circumstance of her birth, through the juxtaposition of two pieces of music, the national anthem and its "anti-anthem," the film's theme "El País de Nomeacuerdo," by María Elena Walsh. The former opens the film, broadcast over the school's speaker system as Alicia (Norma Aleandro), her coworkers and the students stand in the courtyard to sing in observance of the beginning to a new school term. "El País de Nomeacuerdo," on the other hand, is first sung by the child, Gaby (Analía Castro), in the bathtub while her mother gathers clothes in the bedroom, the child's voice fading into Walsh's on the radio as the scene shifts to the dinner table. The theme resurfaces in the film as Alicia begins her search in earnest for information about Gaby's birth; the poignant music (and the voice of a woman humming the melody) combines with the image of Alicia opening a memory box containing the items from the day her husband brought Gaby home. The sequence alternates medium

close-ups of Alicia's face with point of view shots of her hands, where the viewer literally sees from Alicia's perspective. As a woman's voice hums the melody to "El País de Nomeacuerdo," Alicia's face tenses, and her lips and hands quiver while she inspects the stitching of the clothes, smells them, and looks away absently. She folds the diaper, then picks it up, her hands quivering so that she can barely hold it steady. Bringing it to her face, she is overcome with emotion. As the theme music continues to play, the film immediately cuts to the doorway of a delivery room, where Alicia listens to the screams of a mother in labor followed by the cry of a child. "El País de Nomeacuerdo" returns at the end of the film, after Robert assaults his wife for "disappearing" their daughter, when Gaby sings the tune to her father over the telephone to say goodnight from her grandparents' house. Alicia walks away from her husband, leaving the key inside the house, and the last sequence of the film depicts Gaby alone in a rocking chair, singing to herself.

In the melodramatic tradition, *La historia oficial* uses the repetition of this theme and others, combined with exuberant emotion and the naïve pathos of its woman protagonist to bring to the surface cultural taboos as well as violent realities suppressed in conversation during the dictatorship. The narrative of the film unfolds from the experience of Alicia, with whom the viewer is encouraged to identify, in the process bringing to the fore—or at least beginning to address—taboo subjects that often have particularly dire repercussions for women, including infertility, rape and domestic violence. Alicia's infertility is a source of anxiety that helps drive the film, initially through her own feelings of inadequacy with respect to traditional gender

roles. After a tense exchange during a dinner with her husband's business associates and their wives, Alicia expresses mutual dislike for Andrada's wife to her husband, Roberto (Héctor Alterio), saying that the other woman "piensa que vos merecés algo mejor que una mujer estéril."[178] Roberto dismisses Alicia's comments, lightly suggesting that the Andradas don't care whether their daughter, Gaby, arrived by stork or was stolen from a gypsy. The casual confidence of Roberto's remark, however, becomes increasingly problematic for Alicia (and the viewer) as the narrative progresses and Alicia's concern over Gaby's origins shifts from a preoccupation with her own infertility to the fear that Gaby's birth mother was a victim of the Dirty War. Alicia's concern heightens with the return of her exiled friend, Ana (Chunchuna Villafañe), and her account of detention and rape at the hands of government agents. Alicia responds to Ana's tearful confession with naïveté, and abruptly ends the evening when Ana's memories of pregnant women prisoners feed fears about Gaby's birth mother. Dropped after this exchange, the topic of rape remains taboo in the film, to be admitted only in the intimate conversation of lifelong female friends. At the climax, after Alicia has conducted her own investigation and confronts Roberto about Gaby's birth mother, Roberto turns violent while demanding that Alicia reveal where she has taken the child. As an "interrogation," this scene of domestic violence is thematically linked to officially sanctioned violence during the dictatorship, played out on the (feminized) national "body."

[178] "She thinks you deserve better than a barren woman." Translations in the footnotes will be from the film's English subtitles.

*La historia oficial* additionally references the political violence of the dictatorship and associated arrests, abductions and disappearances as they affect the classroom and the difference between the savvy literature teacher and the sociohistorically blind approach of Alicia as she instructs her students in National History. The contrast between Alicia's introduction to her students—"Comprender la historia es prepararse para comprender el mundo. Ningún pueblo podría sobrevivir sin memoria. Y la historia es la memoria de los pueblos"[179]—and the lack of awareness she will demonstrate in her own life, until beginning her search to uncover Gaby's personal history, while overt and transparent, allows the viewer to then identify with her as she confronts the (forgotten? ignored? willfully suppressed?) history of the dictatorship and its taboos. While Alicia may take limited responsibility for her own complicity in the practices of the military government (a limit promoted on a national scale during the period of redemocratization), her character does, through the maternal search, gradually confront her denial, "which functions as a protective defense mechanism, shielding the individual from his/her conscience and the internal or external demand to act in defiance of the systemic violation of basic human rights" (Hollander 756). Alicia may not be fully aware, but the violence of the dictatorship particularly targeted already marginalized sectors of society. The socioeconomic disparity between women characters emphasizes how the Alicia's ability to remain

[179] "By understanding history we learn to understand the world. No peoples can survive without memory. History is the memory of the peoples."

(willfully) oblivious to the subtext of her surroundings relates to her privileged position.

While *La historia oficial* does not claim to be a documentary, nor a fiction film based on a "true story," it provides a plausible, relatable account of politics and personal life. The film depends on a carefully constructed mise en scene that shifts to reflect the protagnist's ongoing process in becoming aware of her surroundings (Burucúa 132). The plot of the film pivots around Alicia's moments of "anagnoresis" (Foster 40) coupled with the gradual unraveling of her social world and physical appearance. Alicia initially appears neatly attired and coifed, and in control of her domestic and professional spheres. However, as mentioned earlier, her insecurity becomes apparent when her fertility comes into question through the veiled comments of one of her peers, and again through the return of Ana and the abrupt end of their reunion. However, the viewer's identification with Alicia and her personal journey is interrupted by the unexpected insertion of "documentary" footage. Alicia has driven into the city center, reluctantly allowing her coworker, the literature teacher Benítez (Patricio Contreras), to ride along. The two discuss a report she intended to file about a student, which he knows to be potentially disastrous given the political climate. When Alicia turns the conversation to question the rumors of disappearances, Benítez reacts to her concerns with cynicism, as the camera cuts to a shot of protesters before the literature teacher steps back into the car to address his colleague: "¿Qué problema se hace? Siempre es más fácil creer que no es possible, ¿no? Sobre todo porque para que sea posible se necesitaría mucha complicidad,

mucha gente que no lo pueda creer aunque lo tenga adelante, ¿no?"[180] We see Alicia walk uncertainly through the spirited demonstration, then cut to a shot of her looking outside the window from the top floors of her husband's office building. Cut to documentary footage of the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo, seen from above, then a reverse shot back to Alicia. The stock footage of the demonstration disturbs the viewer, and we are reminded of the complex relationship demanded by testimonial film.[181] Even decades later, the pairing of Benitez's comments and this documentary footage issues a charge to the viewer to critically examine what unethical acts she may turn from in willing disbelief. The scene with Benítez may also frustrate the viewer; watching the film in the present day, it seems almost unbelievable that Alicia has not already reckoned with the circumstances of her daughter's birth, if not the disappearances and political repression that surround her.

**III. The Question of Engagement: Returning to Affect**

These observations on the conventions of melodrama and the use of documentary in *La historia oficial* help explain the film's popular appeal, however, they do not fully address the underlying question posed by Burucúa, "why so many

[180] "Is it your problem? It's always easier to believe it's impossible, right? Because if it were possible it would require complicity. Many people can't believe it, even if they see it."

[181] It should be noted here that specific documentary projects also portray the Plaza de Mayo, in particular Lourdes Portillo's 1985 documentary, *Las Madres: The Mothers of Plaza de Mayo.* As mentioned, a recent project from UNC Chapel Hill depicts the Abuelas of the Plaza de Mayo. The production and distribution of both documentaries, which are subtitled in English, has been primarily aimed at US academic audiences. David William Foster also mentions this scene, referring to the use of archived material as "documentalism" and noting that the perception of this footage depends on the awareness of the viewer and could potentially be missed.

people, in Argentina and abroad, liked this 'minor' film and engaged with it"? Here, as in previous chapters, it is helpful to return to the ideas put forward by Brian Massumi in "The Autonomy of Affect." In introducing his point, Massumi tells us about a study investigating the effect of a short film on children, noting that the experience of watching the film registered most strongly through the stimulation of the skin when it consisted of pure images, but was best remembered when accompanied by narration with emotional cues. A purely factual or observational narration, on the other hand, noticeably dampened the effect of the film. For Massumi, this indicates the difference between intensity and qualification of affect, and the resonance possible through their correspondence when semiotic cues appropriately map onto sensation. What Massumi finds, however, is that the qualification of an emotion resonates with intensity only to the extent that it *does not* function to advance the narrative or, in his words, is "in excess of any narrative or functional line" (87). It is on this order that we draw a distinction between suspense, linked to intensity, and expectation, associated with narrative elements.

When we perceive affect, what we perceive is the actualization (on the body) of the virtual, energies and autonomic responses that are so dynamic they exceed our perception. When we perceive affect and qualify it as emotion, something always escapes capture, and instead "remains unactualized, inseparable from but unassimilable to any *particular*, functionally anchored perspective" (Massumi 96). What is so moving about *La historia oficial* as a testimonial film is its ability to elicit the sensation of affect, guide the qualification of affect as emotion, and leave us with

the lingering recognition of its escape. The escape of affect, which resonates with emotion but is felt as the excess of narrative, allows us to talk about the work of the film in terms of not just subjectivity (thinking the subjective here in terms of qualified emotion or the personal) but also intersubjectivity (that which is not contained). I think we can also approach this idea in terms of *mood* or attunement, which contributes to the emotional and narrative appeal of melodrama but is not fully encompassed by it.

Returning to an earlier example, we can examine in more detail the sequence where Alicia revisits her memory box from the day Roberto came home with the newborn Gaby. The sequence is invested with meaning through the context provided by the scenes that precede and follow it, but the affect display of the woman (Alicia) communicates to the viewer without the need for narrative. The sequence pauses narrative development to pivot around the captured-yet-illusive intensity of the moment and the expression of that intensity on the body of the character (and audience). The lighting and framing of shots focus our attention on the affect display: arm muscles tense, the brow furrows, lips purse, hands tremble, facial muscles quiver and the chest shakes. The tension momentarily breaks as the camera turns to the diaper laid out on the bed, but builds again as two hands first hesitantly, then carefully and delicately fold the layers of the diaper around an imaginary baby, lingering over the feel of the pin. The camera then turns from Alicia's point of view back to the close up of her face as she clasps the diaper to her face. We alternate in viewing the character's face (helping us to perceive her qualified intensity as distinct

from ours) and viewing *as if we were she,* and the trembling hands our own. To say that this sequence encourages sentimental identification, then, provides a partial explanation, but something in the sympathetic relationship between character and viewer—the drawing of a distinction through the process of identification between you and me—escapes qualification.

As noted, this sequence occurs entirely without dialogue or narration. Instead, the repetition of the melody "El País de Nomeacuerdo" connects it narratively to the earlier domestic scene that established the mother-daughter relationship between Alicia and Gaby. The repeated melody qualifies Alicia's affect display with multiple emotions tied to nostalgia for the babyhood of her daughter and fear of what may be the true circumstances of her adoption. To use Massumi's term, the intensity of the sequence resonates with the music. The hummed melody carries over as the image abruptly shifts to the door of the emergency room concurrent to the agonized scream of a woman in labor, an almost surreal or dreamlike transition. The howl of the birthing mother sends a chill down the spine, interrupting the viewer identification with Alicia (as she comes into view, she stands to the side of the frame, from the outside peering in at the delivery room) and abruptly altering the mood. Thematically, this scene also deals with motherhood and the wonder associated with the arrival of a newborn baby, however it does so through the gritty, visceral process of birthing, and the voice and image of a woman in pain.

As music accompanies so many of Alicia's scenes—themes from the original score by Atilio Stampone in addition to "El País de Nomeacuerdo"—it is surprisingly

absent during her conversation in a café with Sara (Chela Ruíz), the probable grandmother of Gaby. Instead, the scene is punctuated with the machinegun shots from a videogame in the background; though the noise from the shots is softened and electronic, they build the tension of the sequence and resonate with the story Sara tells Alicia and Alicia's own awkward affect display. The sequence begins with a series of shots outside the café, where we look in as the two women drink coffee and Sara moves to a seat closer to Alicia. Sara shows Alicia the four remaining photographs of Gaby's (presumed) parents, and those snapshots form the basis for an account of their childhood romance, engagement, wedding, pregnancy and disappearance. Over the course of the exchange, angled two-shots of the women are interrupted by point of view shots of the photographs and the women's fingers. After we see Alicia's manicured fingers return to the picture of the young woman when she was about Gaby's age—the two are identical—the frame shifts to a close-up of Alicia removing her glasses, and then follows with a close-up of Sara's face in a series of repeated reverse shots. Alicia remains silent, but the camera's focus on her face draws attention to her participation in the exchange through eye moments (her eyes rapidly shift from the photographs to Sara's face, pausing to dwell on one or the other, then looking away), posture (the stiffness of her shoulders in the initial two-shots clearly communicates her discomfort with the meeting), gestures (twitching of fingers, agitated movement of the hands on and beneath the table), and the raised eyebrows, pursed lips, quivering chest, whimpering, and covering of the face with the hand that leads to a breakdown in tears. Sara does not break down—as she tells Alicia, "Llorar

no sirve"—but her facial muscles tense and her eyes widen as she recounts the story that visibly comforts and pains her to remember.[182] Sara's words disrupt the viewer and her participation in Alicia's affect display, in one of the rare openly self-conscious moments of the film as a melodrama.

The four photographs of Gaby's mother and father, each imbued with significance as they are so few, communicate a clichéd story of innocence and love even without the descriptive information provided by Sara. The first, from their childhood, shows the two sitting together on a rock by the river, while in the second, still children, they hold hands underneath a table. The third marks their wedding day, and the fourth new construction on a small home as they await the birth of a baby. The gunshots of the videogame, however, menace the story and the ominous sound shapes the mood to frequently remind the viewer that theirs is not a tale of happy endings. At times, Alicia's face almost appears vacant, and her distant expression seems to suggest that she may not even be processing what Sara tells her. The shot of Alicia's fingertips sliding the photographs to reveal the girl by the river, and the following close-up of Alicia's face, informs the viewer that Alicia recognizes the resemblance between her daughter and Sara's without dampening the intensity with a statement to that effect from Alicia. Sara voices Alicia's fears, saying what has

[182] Foster's take on this comment understands it as quite critical: "Sara's observation to Alicia, which is uttered in almost pitiful terms in the face of the woman's lack of sociohistorical awareness, serves to jolt Alicia out of her world, in which domestic misunderstandings for women, including the melodrama of matrimonial betrayal, are handled with tears" (*Argentine* 47).

already become redundant to the viewer: "Yo no digo que sea… pero las fechas coinciden más o menos, ¿no? Y por esta foto… de se puede dar cuenta que esa nena que usted tiene... bien podría ser mi nieta."[183]

We wait several scenes before Alicia voices a response to Sara. The two women meet again in the Plaza de Mayo, where Sara marches in one of the demonstrations seeking answers about the many disappeared persons (including babies and children). *La historia oficial* cuts directly from reverse shots of the women at the protest—Sara boldly displaying a poster with the image of Gaby's parents with Alicia watching as a bystander to the crowd—to a traveling two-shot of the women seated next to each other on the metro, that ends with Alicia almost in profile and Sara to screen right. As in the previous scene with these two characters, music is absent, but background noise again informs the mood of the sequence: the rushing noise of the subway rails (and the ghostly image of another train rushing past through the window) reflects the uncertainty of the moment, in-transit, neither here nor there. At this point, the viewer easily intuits where they come from—different positions in the demonstration at the Plaza—but it is unclear where they are going, on both a literal and metaphorical level. Accentuated by the yellow-green cast of fluorescent lighting, the sense of the sequence is disoriented, off-balance: although the intensity of the sequence is almost palpable, the affect is hard to qualify. When the sequence begins, Sara gazes out the window while Alicia's head is turned away from the

[183] "I'm not saying that she is… but the dates coincide more or less. Right? And there's this photo. You might realize that the girl you have… could well be my granddaughter."

camera to face her. When Alicia asks, "Si Gaby es su nieta, ¿qué hacemos?[184]" Sara deliberately turns to meet her eyes, and while we see only an extreme profile of Alicia's face, it is clear that the two make eye contact for an extended, painful moment before Sara's lips purse, her eyes lower, and the two women look away. The camera cuts to a medium long shot for a protracted, heavy pause, before returning to a close-up of Alicia, now turned to face the camera rather than Sara, wondering aloud about what she used to think she would be capable of in order to protect what she had. The affect display of both women relates pain and awkwardness at the situation; the long shared look between them, however, and the physical proximity of their bodies seated next to one another on the train, tether them together and help establish that at least some amount of compassion has developed from their bond over Gaby.

Each of these sequences combines carefully framed images of the face (and hands), correlating soundtrack, and powerful affect displays to heighten the intensity for the viewer of the film. Although sequences such as these *do* advance the narrative—storytelling is an important part of *La historia oficial*—they also (primarily?) work on the sensitivity of the viewer in her response to the characters onscreen. In the first two examples Alicia breaks down in tears, providing some minimal relief to the tension, but the continued tension in each sequence sustains the intensity through the transition to the next scene. Minimal dialogue, supplementing the images with descriptive, emotional information, contributes rather than detracts

[184] "If Gaby's your grandchild, what do we do?"

from the intensity by neglecting to provide narrative or emotional closure to each sequence.

The lack of closure we find in these sequences explains in part what might make them, and more generally the film—which likewise resists closure—so powerful. *La historia oficial* ends with an uncertain future, paralleled by the forgotten steps in the lyrics to "El País de Nomeacuerdo." In dim lighting that casts a shadow across her face, Gaby sings the first verse of the song to herself in the rocking chair.[185] The camera tracks to the side and back as Gaby falls silent, and after a pause the song continues with the humming of a woman's voice. Gaby, dressed in an off-white nightgown with sleepy eyes, conveys a childish innocence accentuated by the shading of her features and the toddler-like hesitancy in her singing.[186] The sequence is affectively compelling even without the narrative context of the film. In context, Gaby's innocence seems in stark contrast with the violence of the previous scene between Roberto and Alicia. While Gaby's birth is at the center of the film, the story, up to this point, has really focused on Alicia and the process of discovery that destroys the discourse that constructs her world.

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[185] The viewer likely recalls the point earlier in the film when Alicia is at confession and tells the priest (Leal Rey), a friend of Roberto, that she used to wait for years in a rocking chair for her parents, thinking they had abandoned her after their death in an accident. Alicia had wanted to believe that Gaby's parents had abandoned *her*; the film ends before we see her decide what to tell Gaby now that she knows that is not the case.

[186] Although the character Gaby is said to be five and the actress Analia Castro was likely even older, her face maintains the babyish features of a younger child, which, according to recent studies by the University of Toronto, should increase her appeal to adults.

## IV. *Que Bom Te Ver Viva*

*Que Bom Te Ver Viva* adopts a hybrid form, juxtaposing fictional sequences with personal interviews and documentary formatting. The fictional sequences center around a woman character, the unnamed protagonist (Irene Ravache),[187] who always appears alone in her sequences. The use of deliberate lighting, combined with the contained, almost claustrophobic spaces of her apartment home, seems more conventional to theater sets than cinema, and serves to create an intimate, concentrated interaction between the actress and the viewer. Although Irene's monologues allude to the passing of time, and her costume changes convey the idea of time-lapses between her appearances, her on-screen interactions with the outside world are limited. She does participate in some communicative media—the film offers one side of her phone conversations, she reads the newspaper aloud, and conducts a one-sided spoof of a television interview—but her scenes maintain suspense, an encounter suspended from time and space, despite cues in her speech that attempt to establish the flow of narrative in a rough storyline.

We first see Irene seated in front of a television, arranging a stack of VHS tapes and beginning to watch one. The voiceover narration indicates the tapes are of interviews, inviting the viewer both to interpret Irene as a sort of "alter-ego" for the director, Lúcia Murat,[188] and as a viewer herself, a stand-in for the viewer of *Que*

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[187] Although the film never names her, for clarity I will refer to her by the actress's name, Irene.

[188] Apparently Murat used this term to describe her relationship to the character played by Irene Ravache in an interview. See Cordeiro Medeiros and Aragão Ramalho, 4.

*Bom Te Ver Viva.* The ringing telephone initially interrupts Irene's viewing of the documentary footage. After the opening credits Irene's conversations disclose that a newspaper article has identified her as a terrorist and victim of sexual torture, likely based on information she provided for *Brasil: Nunca Mais*[189] which was used by the paper without her permission. The identification between Irene and the viewer is also interrupted by the ringing telephone and the film credits and, in contrast to *La historia oficial*, Murat's film continues to resist the subjective identification between its viewer and the protagonist. In a style reminiscent of a series of stage monologues, Irene often addresses the camera directly as "you," a shifting identifier that moves intermittently between her lover, employer, torturer, the film viewer and the general public. Her words tend to draw a distinction between her character (and the other women in the film) and the addressee by calling attention to the perception of torture victims as other or nonhuman. In different sequences Irene returns to this point: "Todos voces acham que a gente é diferente," "Quem sobrevivou não é humano."[190] While at times she speaks lovingly to "you," in other scenes her tone and words accuse the addressee: for torturing, for complicity, for wanting not to be responsible, for not wanting to hear.

The protagonist/narrator of *Que Bom Te Ver Viva* places particular emphasis on this last point: that, despite her direct address to "you," no audience will receive

[189] The actual report Brasil: Nunca Mais (1985) included thousands of pages of testimony documenting forms of torture and human rights abuses, and identifying victims by name.

[190] "You all think we're different" "Whoever survived is not human." English translations from *Que Bom Te Ver Viva* are from the film's subtitles.

her words. This anxiety permeates the film, further drawing attention to itself through Irene's self-conscious commentary as she reads aloud a book review from the newspaper that criticizes the author by asking if now is really the right time to talk (again) about torture. Irene responds with a bitter laugh at the idea that he (the author of the review) can decide that torture is out of vogue, "Eu tenho que lembrar na hora que ele determina. Babaca."[191] Irene's character insists on the need to testify to her experience as a prisoner and torture victim, framed as both a personal necessity—"Eu detesto fazer as denuncias mais não soubera vivir sim fazerlas"[192]—and the imperative for the government and society to recognize, however unpleasant it may be, the violence of the preceding decades and the stories of the survivors—"Esta é minha história e voces vão ter que me suportar."[193] David William Foster has a pessimistic take on Irene's ability to be heard:

> Even when we are the recipients of her diatribe, within the world of the film, she is actually speaking only to herself, exteriorizing her anger but without any interlocutor present to receive her words: there is no one to hear a woman speak […] *Que Bom Te Ver Viva* is in essence a document that exists to contradict and repudiate the strategies of silence applied by masculinist society. (Foster 102)

While I agree in part with Foster's analysis, it bears repeating that despite limited distribution initially, *Que Bom Te Ver Viva* continues to reach an audience, both through Women Make Movies and, more recently, access on the internet. Of course, as Foster alludes to, watching the film and *hearing* Irene may be different matters;

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[191] "He means I have to remember at the time he thinks fit. The jerk!"
[192] "I hate denouncing things, but I couldn't live without doing it."
[193] "This is my story and you'll have to put up with me."

this is a point of serious interest as we move forward in a discussion of how *Que Bom Te Ver Viva* works as a testimonial film, and what role the film's manipulation of affect plays in its ability to reach an audience/witness.

The opening credits include a brief description in print of the military coup d'etat in Brazil and the use of torture on opponents of the regime, then introduce *Que Bom Te Ver Viva* as "um filme sobre os sobreviventes destes anos."[194] Irene's character represents one such survivor, but also functions as the collective voice of the raw emotion that escapes expression in the more measured speech of the women interviewees. In the initial sequence with Irene and the videotapes, the voice-over narrator, in her choice of pronouns, sets up the idea that the film will tell a communal story, trying to explain how "we" survive—"a pergunta, em vez de por que sobrevivimos, como sobrevivimos"[195]—but the idea that this "we" includes the viewer is complicated by Irene's (accusatory) direct address to the camera. The ambiguity of the plural pronoun reflects the need of the character Irene to voice her story and be heard by a witness, a theme later picked up in the reflections of some of the respondents.

As previously mentioned, Irene's scenes are interjected between excerpts from "real" documentary interviews as well as staged scenes from the lives of eight women survivors of torture during the dictatorship, all of whom are clearly well-educated and

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[194] "This film is about those who survive those years."
[195] "The question: Instead of 'why do we survive?' it should be 'how do we survive?'"

able to describe their experience with a level of sophistication and self-awareness.[196] These sequences at times include comments by male partners, students, friends and relatives, but the focus remains on the women and their reconstruction of roles as workers, mothers and lovers after torture—a focus that sets Múrat's film apart for Brazilian filmmaking, particularly during this period. Rather than attempt to develop a discrete portrait of each woman interviewee, *Que Bom Te Ver Viva* segments their stories and weaves them together with the fictional narrative. This is not to suggest that they are presented as undifferentiated or that their stories are interchangeable because the film carefully introduces each woman before proceeding to interlace the footage of their interviews and daily lives. In this process Murat's film seems to suggest that our approach to each story may be as an individual, subjective encounter—and the film's unsettling affect constantly reminds the viewer that she watches from her own subjective point of view, not based on identification with a particular character—and also an intersubjective one. During the interviews the camera focuses on each woman's face in close-up[197] and the interlocutor does not appear within the frame, although she is clearly present off-screen. The film introduces the interviewees beginning with Maria, where a montage of newspaper

[196] As multiple critics have noted, the women selected for this project demonstrate the ability to speak articulately about the ways in which their political involvement, imprisonment and/or exile, and torture have affected them and continue to inform their way of being in the world. One limitation in the scope of this film is that it not include a more diverse group of women to include those from the working class, rural areas, etc.

[197] With the exception of one woman, who chooses to submit a written statement rather than appear before the camera, and asks to remain anonymous.

articles and photos interrupt Irene. A freeze frame of Maria's face during her interview wipes from black and white to color, dissolves to moving footage, then fades out before giving her biographical data in print, framed by the bars of a prison cell—a motif that continues throughout the film. With the accompaniment of somewhat jarring, electronic music, the remaining women are introduced by brief clips from their interviews that fade out to biographic pages. The biographies provide pertinent information: a description of their involvement with the political opposition or guerilla movements; duration of imprisonment, exile and/or torture; current relationship status, occupation and number of children. The film demonstrates, however, the inadequacy of this information to describe how a person manages to reconstruct enough sense of self after political imprisonment and torture that she can resume daily life.

While each woman appears multiple times during the film, and scenes with Irene provide some degree of continuity and a feel of narrative time, *Que Bom Te Ver Vivia* divides into segments organized around the stories of the different women. In addition to Irene's scenes, their testimony—filmed with a stationary camera, without apparent interruption by interlocutor—is interjected with montages of newspaper articles and personal photographs, comments by family and friends, and a narrative voice-over accompanying scenes from daily life at work and at home.[198] The motif of

[198] As the narrator repeatedly suggests, it is of particular importance to the film that we see the continuity of daily life for these women. Their lives appear relatively "normal" in contrast to the accounts they give of torture, imprisonment and participation in armed resistance. As Shaw notes, "The quotidian survival strategies

prison bars, first presented in the opening credits, also binds the segments together in with literal and figurative image of containment. The insistent image of the bars suggests to the viewer that although these women have been released from prison, the effects reverberate in the way they relate to their bodies after torture (not the least sexual torture or rape) and reinvest in professional and personal relationships.

As Irene suggests in the beginning, *Que Bom Te Ver Viva* investigates *how* these women survive rather than *why*, thereby allowing the film to work as a testimonial by "speaking" of the crimes carried out against these women without the further violence of portraying them solely as victims. For example, in a montage that bookends the introductory sequence of all the women in the "documentary" stream of the film, several of the women speak about reintegrating themselves in families and continuing with life, reinforced by footage of them engaging with daily life. However, the film chooses to disrupt these sequences by following them with excerpts from interviews in which some of the respondents voice the conviction that they must continue to denounce the crimes against them and demand that the torturers account for their actions. They decry the silence that still surrounds torture and justice

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of these women, and therefore access to their practical consciousness, are inherent within the mise-en-scène. For example, all the women are interviewed in their own homes, we see their domestic setting and, on occasions, their families. This is interspersed with footage of them 'going on' with their daily lives; going to work, teaching, or on their way to community groups and so on. On occasions their partners, children or pupils (some of whom are clearly actors) are also asked to give an opinion which helps to contextualise these women within a specific daily reality" (Shaw 55-6). However, as Irene's scenes emphasize, traces of their experience linger, and the film insists that these women are "multifaceted […] as mother, lover, professional, housewife and ex-militant, whilst continuing to act within their *cerned* context in post-dictatorship Brazil" (Shaw 56).

years after the formal return to democracy in Brazil: "Eu persisto na recobrança. Eu não fiz parte desse acordo do siléncio"[199] (Criméia de Almeida); "Eu acho que tortura é uma coisa que é fea, que é poco épica, que não é heróica, e que por tanto, as pessoas têm medo de se-aproximar, têm medo de pegar-se na bandeira"[200] (Rosalina Santa Cruz- Rosa); "Nós não podemos esquecer, não"[201] (Jessie Jane). These words issue an ethical challenge to the viewer, prompting her to question her role in the scenario: does she hesitate, or does she take up the banner? In a film such as *Que Bom Te Ver Viva,* where dramatic staging is interspersed with documentary footage, the question also becomes what it means to take up a cause and how storytelling informs that meaning.

Adrián Cangi writes that documentary film "es aquel que valora la presencia del referente y su testimonio encarnado en el mundo" (35),[202] a description that seems appropriate—not the least for its emphasis on presence—to the work of *Que Bom Te Ver Viva*. John Grierson coined the term "documentary" in 1926 in Britain, understanding it as a "creative treatment of actuality" (Izod and Kilborn 427). If we can properly consider *Que Bom Te Ver Viva* a documentary—and it is, at least for the purposes of Armazém Memória—this original definition seems appropriately to recognize the creativity involved in documentary filmmaking that bubbles to an

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[199] "I still insist on retribution. I am not part of this pact of silence."
[200] "I think torture's ugly and unheroic and therefore, people are unwilling to come closer. They're frightened to take up the banner."
[201] "There's no forgetting. No way!"
[202] "that which places value on the presence of the referent and her testimony embedded in the world"

excess in this film in the persona of its fictionalized character. The scenes with Irene stand in stark visual contrast from the natural lighting of other sequences (as mentioned earlier, the quality of the stage lighting is particularly distinct when Irene appears on screen),[203] and the two threads seem to operate on different emotional registers. The women do have strong affect displays as they recall and recount stories of trauma and loss, and their reactions are particularly strong when they tell of the death or torture of other people—comrades, spouses, even mothers and sisters. They have difficulty describing the torture itself—Regina, for example, closes her eyes, pauses and turns away before continuing with the story of her detention. Jessie, who says she has not talked in some time, wipes her eyes repeatedly throughout her interview and makes the observation that the emotion then, during the period when she and her comrades were tortured, was not as strong as it is now. Although their discomfort is apparent and a few are overtaken by emotion, the women speak in direct address to the camera—and the off-screen interlocutor (presumably Irene/Murat)—as if to a fellow torture victim who implicitly understands the inadequacy of speech and is already sympathetic. In this scenario the viewer can identify with the off-screen voice of the interlocutor as the sympathetic witness. However, Irene's dramatic monologue angrily refutes the idea of the innocent

[203] Cordeiro Medeiros and Aragão Ramalho make mention of this distinction, also noting Murat's choice to film the interviews/testimonials in video: "Para diferenciar a ficção do documentário, Lúcia Murat optou por gravar os depoimentos das ex-presas políticas em vídeo, com o enquadramento semelhante ao de retrato 3x4; filmar seu cotidiano à luz natural, representando assim a vida aparente; e usar a luz teatral, para enfocar o que está atrás da fotografia - o discurso inconsciente do monólogo da personagem de Irene Ravache" (Cordeiro Medeiros and Aragão Ramalho 5)

bystander to torture, using sarcasm to imply that others beyond those in the torture room are also guilty. Irene's scenes do not allow the viewer a comfortable point of identification as an observer, prompting her to reflect on her own position with regard to the characters/interviewees in the film. Through Irene's staged persona—which, though her speech is directed to various addressees, seems to be primarily an accounting to herself—Irene can display an intensity and candor as she voices resentment and anger at the ability of others to choose to ignore or not talk about torture. Irene asks, "Até quando vou ter que baixar os olhos quando se fala de tortura [..] E como que é isso? Um olhar contrito, ligeiramente dolorido, nada muito forte."[204]

Omitting the scenes with Irene, *Que Bom Te Ver Viva* would fit many of the conventions one would expect in a documentary film about the lives of eight female victims of torture and imprisonment after their release. By asking what sort of affect she should project when torture is mentioned, Irene calls attention to our expectations for the affect displays of the women and more generally to the function of expectation in the film. We look for *Que Bom Te Ver Viva* to have some narrative structure as a documentary film, and for the different segments to tell the stories of the characters involved. With Irene, however, although her monologues indicate the passing of time and recount some of what happens outside her apartment, there is no linear narrative that progresses in such a way that we develop a meaningful sense of anticipation for what is to come, and even less of what would provide resolution. The "fictional"

[204] "How long will I have to lower my eyes when torture's mentioned? […] How is it? A contrite look, a slight expression of pain. Nothing too strong."

portions of the film focus on the exploration of a particular mood or emotion, or a specific incident, while the development of a narrative carrying throughout the film seems secondary or even incidental. Irene's presence onscreen is limited to the space of the apartment (she is visually trapped within the space to emphasize the metaphorical prison of traumatic memory), allowing her character to focus on the performance of affect and convey those emotions usually confined to the private sphere. Irene's performance pairs dramatic physicality with abrupt and confrontational language. Her character is exaggerated but not a caricature. Irene's scenes, inserted unpredictably in the film, resurface like latent traumatic memories, interrupting the storytelling of the documentary and bringing it a new layer of self-consciousness reflection.

What effect do these ruptures in narrative continuity have for the viewer of *Que Bom Te Ver Viva*? Do such dramatic interludes distinguish the creative testimonial project of the film from that of more conventional documentaries or taped depositions? The fictional scenes conscript the viewer as a participant in the drama in the moments when Irene breaks the fourth wall—targeting her direct address to "you" as the viewers of the film—but also through particular attention to affect. The soundtrack, lighting and confining set contribute to the general mood of discomfort underlying the awkward intimacy of Irene's character and her exteriorized interior monologues. Her speech often tapers off, pauses, at times accompanied by nervous laughter or chords of electronic music, in a presentation that mirrors the narrative

interruption of her scenes in the film and more broadly, of torture in the stories of the testimonial informants.

To inquire a bit more into how interruption and narrative interact with the affective intensity of the film and its emotional (dis)identifications, I find Massumi's work on affect to again be of great use. Massumi explains intensity and qualification as different levels of embodied reactions, the parallel operation of the purely autonomic and a conscious-autonomic mix. Intensity, unlike expectation, "which depends on consciously positioning oneself in a line of narrative continuity," remains "disconnected from meaningful sequencing […] spreading over the generalized body surface" (85). In the consideration of these autonomic reactions—and the pleasure associated with the intensity of a reaction, independent of the (potential distress of its) emotional content—the gaps and interruptions in *Que Bom Te Ver Viva* appeal to the viewer independently of their narrative function. Similarly, as Massumi suggests, an emotional qualification amplifies the autonomic reaction—or "resonates"—to the extent that it pauses narrative movement to "re-register an already felt state" (86).

When dividing the film into "documentary" and "fictional" portions it becomes almost too easy to read one as "truth" and the other "staged," a division supported by the visual quality of the different modes. Irene's self-conscious observation of affect display, however, and her description of the awkward "viewers" as she tells her story at a social event, points to the performance involved in all testimonial accounts (including documentary interviews) and the autonomic and

conscious reactions in the scenario of witnessing another tell a story of torture.[205] As intensity and qualification resonate in each one, the documentary and fictional modes are not entirely different in the way they work on the viewer. Thematically, the two run parallel, allowing for moments of redundancy that draw the viewer to a repeated image, word or tone, perhaps qualifying an emotion, that engages both senses and feelings. In one scene, Irene paces around the apartment, smoking a cigarette while ranting about her boss who has fired her after the publication of the newspaper article identifying her as a victim of sexual torture. Irene turns to directly face the camera, then breaks her gaze to look vacantly off camera left as she wonders aloud why her boss, a "gaga" old man, has become in her mind as if he were the torturer, "todo poderoso." Two deliberate chords abruptly end the scene and the screen wipes to the documentary interview with Estrela, who dispassionately reflects on the residual effects of torture on her choice of companions and her tendency to gravitate to aggressive men and violent relationships—until recently, as she apparently perceives change in her present relationship and self-awareness. The same chords, wipe back to a medium close-up of Irene in profile, eyes cast downward with hands clasped. Her face is in shadow as she begins to speak, addressing the torturer as she reminds him of how he used to tell her she was being conditioned by the torture like a Pavlovian dog. In a long tracking shot that brings Irene's face into a centered close-up, she

[205] In *The Body in Pain* Scarry engages in a theoretical discussion of some detail regarding the theatricality of torture and the staging of the torture chamber by the torturer. Her work is instrumental in approaching the staging of the former torture victim in Murat's film.

acknowledges that the torture may stay with her, but the many people he terrified need for her to denounce his actions (despite the culture of impunity). An unexpected cut to an establishing shot of the room interrupts the long take and marks a shift in Irene's composure. Her tone issues a challenge to the torturer, and her words follow by asking what his wife thought of the article and her denunciation of sexual torture. Irene stands and advances toward the camera, placing a hand on her hip, asserting, "Pode ser que o seu cachorrinho Pavlov vai passar o resto da vida em choque. Mas ele venceu."[206]

**V. Dis/identification and the ethical witness**

While *La historia oficial* invites the viewer to engage in subjective identification with a fictional character (Alicia) in a way that Schnaith and others find inappropriate as a response to the actual circumstance of disappeared persons (for/with whom subjective identification is no longer possible), *Que Bom Te Ver Viva* may approximate the sort of disidentification with its fictional character they advocate. The characters' affect displays, the mood, and the emotional qualification of dialogue in *La historia oficial* draw in the viewer, offering her Alicia's character as a model for spectatorship with periodic disruptions of the identification that call attention to the ethical position of the witness. The popularity of the film reflects its intensity—the affective experience—and the resonance of the narrative with the level of autonomic sensation. *La historia oficial* works so effectively through its

[206] "Maybe your little Pavlov dog will feel shocks for the rest of its life but it won in the end."

commitment to a strategy of using the conventions of melodrama and affective excess to approach/advocate questions of (limited) complicity and responsibility during the period of redemocratization. Decades later, the film continues to connect on levels of sensation and feelings and, outside of the immediate political context, prompts the viewer to consider in more abstract terms her position as a witness to violence. The film's ambiguous ending, with Alicia's intentions uncertain and Gaby's future unclear, (productively) leaves with a scenario of powerful affect and ethical uncertainty, where "la tarea de juzgar y participar en los juegos de sentimientos le corresponde al espectador" (Delponti Macchione 10).

*Que Bom Te Ver Viva* displays a similar commitment to a strategy of viewer engagement, but opts to disrupt convention and disidentify with a fictional character as a complement to documentary footage. Through Irene's monologues, this film directly challenges the viewer to question the ethics of her position, a disquiet that extends beyond the immediacy of the film's denunciation of torture during the Brazilian dictatorship to the *cerned* context of the viewer. While there is noticeable book-ending of sequences in both the documentary and fictional strains of the film, the content of these sequences rejects the idea that this narrative technique provides closure to the testimonial work of the film. Irene, for one, insists on the lack of closure in her own life, where torture continues to inform her professional life, personal relationships, and understanding of the affects. As a viewer, we are challenged by the film to listen to the stories rather than identify with them—and unlike the spectator-protagonist strategy of *La historia oficial, Que Bom Te Ver Viva*

focuses on the stories of the victims and the difficulty in portraying their testimony—positing an ethical position as a witness beyond/in addition to empathy. Text, in these examples, becomes an alternate site for memorialization instead of the museum or monument, working through the violence of dictatorship while offering another sort of imaginary for an ethical future.

## Conclusion

The "testimonial world" offers readers a space to explore the often complicated relationships between aesthetics and ethics in the presentation of violence; by thinking of affect in terms of deterritorialized energy, able to be processed through narrative context as emotion, the study of affect in testimonial allows us to approach reading these texts as an intersubjective, dynamic encounter. The previous four chapters investigated this idea with regard to specific texts from various regions in Latin America, examining how this scenario of reading allows us to reconsider, decades after publication and/or release, the appeal of these texts to contemporary readers. As this study has demonstrated, the testimonial world "appeals" to the reader in the sense of aesthetic attraction, while concurrently making a demand or supplication to the reader's sense of ethical responsibility. Often, one of the characters in the text acts as a surrogate for the reader as either a direct witness to violence or, like Alicia's character in *La historia oficial*, an observer who gradually comes to awareness of violence that she has previously been content to ignore. One of the distinguishing characteristics of testimonial literature is the intention, often directly expressed, to communicate its appeal to the reluctant reader and engage her as a witness to violence. Close readings of the texts we examined have already delved into the many literary and filmic techniques employed by testimonial to communicate with the reader; in concluding this study I would like to return more generally to the question of how the testimonial world operates and what it may indicate for the study of Latin American literature.

As we have seen, approaching testimonial work as an "intersubjective endeavor" facilitates a critical rereading of the role given to classical dichotomies in testimonial texts. In the testimonial world, the process of remembering and bearing witness to atrocity becomes a process of re-constituting the vulnerable body, allowing for a relationship between body and self that works against the violation of torture as described by Scarry in *A Body in Pain*, in which the prisoner in pain increasingly identifies with the body while the torturer's "ground" becomes that of a voice with no body:

> that eventually the prisoner experience himself exclusively in terms of sentience and the torturer exclusively in terms of self-extension. All those ways in which the torturer dramatizes his opposition to and distance from the prisoner are ways of dramatizing his distance from the body. The most radical act of distancing resides in his disclaiming of the other's hurt. (57)

Testimonial literature, told from the perspective of the tortured or one sympathetic to those made vulnerable by marginalization or state-sponsored violence, calls out for the recognition of the victim as person and resists the reader's impulse to distance herself from the other in pain. The violated body—and the invocation to corporeal presence of the disappeared—surfaces frequently in testimonial work, as previously demonstrated by a close reading of Elena Poniatowska's *La noche de Tlatelolco*; however, unlike the regime of the torturer that seeks to reduce the tortured person to nothing but a body, "bare life," in a text such as *La noche de Tlatelolco* the body becomes reconnected to the self through the text's rejection of the portrayal that relegates the victims of the massacre to nameless corpses. This is accomplished in part through appeal to the affects and, similarly, a rereading of testimonial attentive to

the deterritorialized play of affect allows for a reconception of the distinctions between the public and private spheres, collective and individual stories, and the self and its responsibility to the other.

In making a critical review of the previous chapters, their individual sets of concerns converge on a central question for the study of the testimonial world: how can, and do, testimonial texts communicate to their readers? What models of identification (or disidentification) do they offer in the ways they communicate affectively with readers? Part of what enables us to speak of testimonial texts—this loosely defined genre—as any sort of unit seems to relate to the similarities in how they operate.

The testimonial imaginary shows particular concern for the vulnerability of those absent or marginalized in dominant political narratives. As discussed in Chapter 1, Judith Butler in *Precarious Life* suggests that through a critical reexamination of grief we might identify (and contest) the ways in which some lives are made more vulnerable than others, rendering some "more grievable" (Butler 30). By exploring testimonial's narrative qualities, historical relationship to ethnography and memoir, and attention to gender and ethnicity, this study has considered what the aesthetic presentation of violence in testimonial texts says about the understanding of ethics (and the reader's ethical position) they advocate, particularly in positioning the reader as responsible to an "other" who is a victim of violence. Many testimonial texts, such as Alicia Partnoy's *The Little School* and Alicia Kozameh's *Pasos bajo el agua,* evoke the disappeared in a reaffirmation of their personhood, insisting that while the

official narrative of the *Proceso* renders them invisible as "subversives," their lives merit recognition and their deaths deserve mourning.

All of the texts considered in my close readings take up the question of how to communicate to their readers. All confront the difficultly of constructing a narrative—even in the case of fragmented texts—capable of conveying the excess that escapes words (affect), and the pain of others that, as the paradigmatic work of Scarry reminds us, is so impossible to capture in language. Every chapter, additionally, contextualized each text within a literary and historical framework and situated it comparatively with other texts. The focus of the chapter pertained to the more specific sets of questions that arise in the course of rereading these texts with attention to affect; in casting an eye over this project as a whole, these sets of questions work together to develop a more complex perspective on how testimonial literature from 1969-1991 has operated in Latin America and how it may continue to be reread.

My first chapter's investigation of texts in response to the massacre of student demonstrators in 1968 Mexico focused on how testimonial works to tell a story and communicate atrocity to a reader without constructing a totalizing narrative. Both Elena Poniatowska's *La noche de Tlatelolco* and Jorge Fons's film *Rojo amanecer* utilize multiple perspectives in their portrayal of the massacre, while the former adopts an urgent, journalistic style and the latter chooses to do as a family melodrama. Both texts assert an alternate "history" in contradiction to the official government version of events, calling into question more generally the legitimacy of

historical and journalistic accounts. The narrative strategies of *La noche de Tlatelolco*—fragmentation of narrative sequences, testimonials from multiple points of view, the collaging of various sources and media—allow the text to explore a fluid relationship between fidelity to the referent, the actual massacre, and techniques customary in fiction to establish an affective bond between characters and the reader. Employing some of the conventions of melodrama, *Rojo amanecer* develops a fictionalized account of the massacre as it is viewed by a multi-generational family from the windows of their apartment and the descriptive reflections of a group of student witnesses seeking refuge from the violence.

Chapter II turned to the systemic marginalization of indigenous communities and the representation of this violence in testimonial texts by indigenous and mestizo writers. The questions that arose distinctly to this chapter relate to the politics of ethnicity and literacy in the production of testimonial texts and the way the reading and criticism of *testimonio* has situated testimonial work in the panorama of world literature: How does testimonial literature- particularly when it refers to indigenous communities- relate to the history of anthropological study in Latin America? How does this complicate the reader's relationship to the text and its aesthetics? How does the process of producing a text interact with reading? The three texts discussed in detail, Rigoberta Menchú and Elizabeth Burgos-Debray's *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia,* José María Arguedas's *El zorro de arriba y el zorro de abajo* and Domitila Barrios de Chungara and Moema Vizzier's *Si me*

*permiten hablar*, express political urgency in their appeal to the reader and reflect the challenge of (multi)cultural identities in the modernizing "mestizo" state.

While the role of women in marginalized populations, and particularly the work of mothering, figures prominently in the work of Menchú and Barrios de Chungara, Chapter III examined texts that adopt a more introspective focus on the gendered experience of violence under dictatorial regimes. Thoughts of absence, disappearance, witnessing and remembering pervade the novels and fictionalized memoirs in this chapter (Marta Traba's *Conversación al sur,* Alicia Partnoy's *The Little School* and Alicia Kozameh's *Pasos bajo el agua*). In rereading these texts, we explored how the vulnerability of the self is conveyed in testimonial texts and in what ways more personal, intimate stories are also construed as intersubjective.

Theories of affect, and Brian Massumi's formulation in particular, allow for a reconsideration of affect display and narrative in fictional(ized) testimonial film that in part explains the appeal films such has Luis Puenzo's *La historia oficial* and Lúcia Murat's *Que Bom Te Ver Viva* have for contemporary viewers. As with the inclusion of *Rojo amanecer* in Chapter I, which complemented and expanded on the visual impact of the photographs in *La noche de Tlatelolco*, including the study of film in the scope of this project has added visual and aural "reading" to the discussion of testimonial, and required that we locate testimonial work within the cinematic tradition of Latin America. Exploring the invitation—or perhaps demand—these testimonial films issue to the viewer through narrative and extra-narrative elements has helped to clarify how affective interaction informs the ethics of testimonial work.

As we have seen, the question that emerges from the close readings of testimonial texts in each chapter of *how* to communicate to the reader interfaces with theories of deterritorialized energy/affect, reflecting how this rereading of testimonial texts at the distance of several decades contributes to the current conversation. The understanding of affect I have sought to elucidate is based on the work of Massumi and others, but one of the concerns brought to the fore through this project is whether there is a fundamental difference with our discussion of affect in testimonial literature due to its relationship to real-world violence. This project intentionally sketched out a definition of testimonial literature capable of including texts that adopt the generic conventions followed by works of fiction—novels, short stories, melodrama—alongside texts that make more explicit claims to represent real-world referents—memoir, *testimonio*, documentary. This is not to conflate fiction and non-fiction but to inquire into how they operate on readers in terms of narrative, affective engagement and ethical demand; nevertheless, respectfully negotiating the interplay of truth and fiction remains one of the challenges in performing a critical reading of testimonial work.

Of course, as previously acknowledged, the study of affect in Latin American literature has long been explored; however, the difference in more recent studies such as this one is a shift away from a focus on sentimentality and emotion to a more nuanced look at the potential of affect as intersubjective energy that can be interpreted and processed in narrative as emotion. Consequently, as I mentioned in the introduction and elaborated through the chapters that follow, in this project it has

often been productive, if not necessary, to differentiate between affect and emotion. As numerous examples have shown, one aspect of how testimonial texts communicate involves their ability to elicit an affective response and to encourage readers to develop feelings for—or an emotional reaction to—their characters.

I chose to take a fair amount of liberty with generic conventions, and the introduction has already provided an account of how and why I decided to adopt certain terms such as testimonial text, testimonial literature, testimonial narrative, character and reader over other terminology. Such flexibility allowed this inquiry to focus on the dialogue that cuts across various forms of testimonial work. The scope of the field sketched out in this manner, Latin American testimonial literature, is expansive but remains oriented toward the questions of communication, violence and ethics outlined in the preceding chapters. Although this study considered texts from 1969-1991, future projects should be pursued that extend this type of literary analysis to more recent production from Latin America, where new generations of writers and filmmakers have returned to testimonial work in the investigation of violence in the 70s and 80s and its effect on the children of imprisoned or disappeared persons. For example, in Argentina the search for identity by children of the *desaparecidos* received widespread attention in the telenova *Montecristo: Un amor, una venganza* (2006) and the aftereffects of dictatorship are explored in testimonial works ranging from short story collections along the lines of María Teresa Andruetto's *Todo movimiento es cacería* (2002) to semi-autobiographical films such as Albertina Carri's *Los rubios* (2003).

As a manner of conclusion I return to the epigraph, a quotation from Alicia Kozameh: “De la ‘verdad’ no es dueño el escritor sino el lector, el que va a re-interpretar esa interpretación hecha por el que escribió la historia.” Here Kozameh indicates an understanding of reading (and writing) that emphasizes the mediation of (hi)story that occurs in text, and the role of the reader in determining meaning. This is particularly important to bear in mind in the reading of testimonial text, which positions this reader as a potential witness to violence; the continual re-interpretation of texts by new readers demands continued study of the testimonial world.

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