UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO

TRANSITIONAL OBJECTS:
memory in the details of postdictatorial literature of Argentina and Chile

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by

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The dissertation of Zachary Richard Hayes is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically.

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DEDICATION

I might never find the words to express how much I appreciate the support that I have received over the years that have led to this point. For a boy who grew up in the Pine Barrens of New Jersey, I have been blessed with a family (my dad, mom, and sister; Nana, aunts, uncles, and cousins) who has allowed my imagination to wander, and for that wandering to become nearly boundless exploration. I thank the teachers (and my pediatric dentist) who practiced so much patience in answering my barrage of questions about the world (and my dental work). I thank my professors at Villanova University for opening my eyes to a career in academia, and my professors here at UCSD for expecting me to deliver on my potential. I thank my partner, Frantz, and our dog, Hobbs for their love throughout. I have loved so much of this dream so far. It has brought me to new homes and languages, and it has showed me that art still unlocks unexpected connections within our own subjectivities. And while the subject matter of this project has brought many sleepless nights and plenty of nightmares, my dream for the future of this labor is an opportunity to share the lens that has been crafted here.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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This dissertation traces how state-sanctioned violence in the Southern Cone traumatically re-signified common objects (dwellings, food, clothing),in a way that continues to reverberate following the region's democratic transition. I refashion and extend works from memory and trauma studies and queer phenomenology to argue that these memory objects are a key anchor for producing counter-histories and fomenting memory groups amidst dominant pressures from early democratic governments to forget the dictatorial past. Literature, as it were, offered and continues to offer such groups and victims a potent space to highlight the invisible production of memory through interaction with the object world. As such, these reminders offer mnemonic guideposts for reestablishing historical continuity and demanding justice. Throughout the

chapters of the dissertation, I work with three primary categories of memory objects: objects of pain, transitional objects, and testimonial objects. These three categories relate to the weaponization of common objects against so-called subversives, as well as how victims and their affiliations utilized these objects to both conjure resiliency in moments of suffering and contend with widespread amnesia in the years following the democratic transition. I read three types of objects across these categories: housing, food, and clothing. These three objects represent the fundamental pillars of a safe and thriving populace, and each were weaponized by dictatorial regimes to maximize suffering in victims.

INTRODUCTION

"In this detail lies everything, condensed, dense, like a black hole. That was my impression, because one can imagine the rail, and trace its story: the workers who made it, who cut it, who laid it. One can trace the story of the button: the button leads us to a person, a shirt, a situation. Perhaps to Villa Grimaldi itself, and all that happened there. It's a detail that grows and expands, waves that go in different directions. It's the history of Chile, and all events of the dictatorship." Gabriel Salazar, *The Pearl Button*

The 2015 documentary *The Pearl Button* by Patricio Guzman traces the history of water in Chile, from the indigenous populations in the southern part of the country to the death flights during the Pinochet dictatorship. As the filmmaker mentions during his narration, settler Chileans have historically ignored the depths of history contained within the waters off the country's vast coastline. This documentary seeks to make visible the kind of memory contained within those same waters and the implications that relegating the history of Chile's water has on the overall trajectory of the country.

The above quote comes from Chilean historian Gabriel Salazar. Like Guzmán himself, Salazar has a connection to violent moments of contemporary Chilean history. Both individuals were targeted and imprisoned for their connections to the leftist movements of the 1970s; Salazar, who was detained and tortured at the Villa Grimaldi facility for three years, and Guzmán, who was taken to the Estadio Nacional shortly after the September 11th coup of 1973. Both are finely attuned to the potential traumatic history behind a found object like the pearl button.

Immediately preceding the quoted scene, the camera follows a starkly colored room, where in the middle stands a table, atop of which lies a mannequin meant to simulate the body of a soon to be disappeared individual during the Pinochet regime. We watch as various attendants walk us through the process that many engaged in during those times. Of binding the victims' extremities with metal wire, of affixing a steel train rail atop the body, of covering the body in

burlap. The newly deformed image of the individual prepared in this way, who, as we are reminded is now designated as a "package", would have been flown in a helicopter somewhere across the vast expanse of sea off the Chilean coast and dropped, still alive though partially unconscious from being drugged. These death flights, as the reports formally named them, were but one of the many grisly ways that the dictatorial regimes of Argentina and Chile sought to not only persecute individuals who did not subscribe to the ideologies of the dictatorships, but also dispose of their bodies in a way that underscored those same bodies' dehumanization and the regimes' desires to cover up their crimes.

Because of the numerous reports, testimonies, and excavations that have shone light on the countless crimes of these dictatorial regimes in the wake of both Argentina and Chile's democratic transitions, even preparing the disappeared bodies in such a way could not completely erase the traces of that initial violent act. As the scene referred to in the above quote explores, divers eventually discovered one of the rails used in the disappearance of bodies during the dictatorship, in those death flights. Amongst the oxidized surface of the steel rail, the barnacles and other sea life that took root and made their home there, investigators extracted a pearl button. And through the combination of evidence, that the rail was found in the sea, that the button was found on the rail, they inevitably concluded that the button once belonged to a disappeared individual whose body had been liquidated[1] back into the sea by time and tide.

This discovery of the pearl button encrusted in the rail not only points to a specific event tied to the material object memory of the button, but it also highlights the implicit ignorance of the Chilean hegemony in relation to its water systems. To further support Guzmán's own

[1] This connection between the death flights and the history of the coastal seas has also been represented in postdictatorial Argentine art, one example being the Parque de la Memoria's installation of figures partially submerged on the banks of the Rio de la Plata. Additionally, Carolina de Robertis' novel *Perla* explores both symbolically and literally the notion of memory and individuals liquidated during the death flights.

argument made throughout this entire documentary (of water being largely ignored in dominant Chilean culture and history), the dictatorships identified the sea as an adequate place for the material evidence of their crimes to be destroyed and forever forgotten. However, it is these same objects, the rail and the button, that betray the desire for historical invisibility. As Salazar contends in the above quote, the detail of the button encrusted in the rail implicates a much larger story than a mere discovery of a stray object on the ocean floor.

This dissertation seeks to perform a similar style of critical activity as performed in the above quoted scene from Guzmán's documentary. For amid a concerted effort by the dictatorial regimes to cover up their tracks, erasing bodies of victims, dehumanizing them both in the process of erasing their lived existences from official record as well as modifying the stories of their deaths, it is objects like the button encrusted in the rail that provide glimpses of the material object memory of such violent processes. And through the act of historicizing such objects, it is possible to uncover a broader network of connections between the actions of the past, the circumstances and actors which lead to them, and their current bearing in contemporary society. The behavior of the dictatorial regimes, after all, implies an awareness of the danger contained within these seemingly insignificant details. As we will trace throughout this project, the details of these objects were either weaponized and/or re-signified through the lens of the dictatorial regimes' ideologies, in the spirit of progressing their authoritarian projects.

But like the button encrusted in the rail that was found at the bottom of the sea off the coast of Chile, these same objects, read in the broader context of information discovered about the dictatorial period, helps to reconstitute the lives of those who resisted such dehumanization and who were initially marked for eternal disappearance. I title this project *TRANSITIONAL OBJECTS* because following the democratic transition of both Argentina and Chile, the memory

contained in and informed by these objects provide a more nuanced entry point for discussions of how the landscape, especially at the level of material objects, was radically changed and re-signified following the military coups of the 1970s; and how the literature that has been produced as a result of this period in history reflects this lasting mark of traumatic events on the object world of the present. I am guided in the following by two central questions: the first, why might an object be an effective vehicle for reading the past, specifically in the case of difficult and traumatic memories from the dictatorial years? The second, how might one, in the vein of Salazar in the above quoted scene, utilize these objects to trace the past and implicate more meanings and actors by way of this process?

THE OFFICIAL POLICY OF FORGETTING

The response of the commentary in the above quoted scene reflects a larger reaction to the policy and rhetoric of the early democratic governments of both countries. This is a stance that focused on establishing a clean break with the past, and it did not make good on earlier promises of bringing those responsible for the atrocities to justice. In Argentina, despite early professions of seeking out those who committed the atrocities during the junta's reign, President Raúl Alfonsín was pressured in the later years of his presidency to enact two laws that essentially put an end to any criminal proceedings against military personnel and government officials involved in the crimes. These were the Law of Due Obedience (1987) and the Law of Full Stop (1986); the former exonerated personnel who acted under the guidance of a high-ranking military official, the latter ended any further investigations of human rights violations from that point on.

The second democratic president of Argentina, Carlos Menem, took the actions of the previous administration one step further. Between 1989 and 1990, President Menem pardoned all

those convicted during the 1985 Trial of the Juntas, which included General Jorge Videla, Admiral Emilio Massera, General Roberto Viola, Admiral Armando Lambruschini, and General Orlando Agosti. In an announcement following those pardons, Menem remarked, "The past has nothing more to teach us…We must look ahead, with our eyes fixed on the future. Unless we learn to forget…we will be turned into a pillar of salt" (Feitlowitz XI-II). There are various implications to this statement and the actions of the first democratic government in Argentina. From the biblical rhetoric Menem uses to address a focus on the past, it is clear that the hegemonic narrative of the country wishes to create an extreme, and cataclysmic, association with anyone who chooses to continue to pursue justice and processing in the aftermath of the last dictatorship. This, of course, comes from the reference to the biblical story of Sodom and Gomorrah, wherein Lot's wife chooses to look back on the fiery scene that they both had just fled, against the wishes of her husband and God. Though it is unclear how the president sees himself in this Old Testament parable, it is nonetheless ironic and unfortunate for the supposed democratic president of a traumatized nation to once again not only demonize those who choose to interrogate the past, but also to position himself and the government as the source of sage, or even divine, guidance. What is clear, from this statement, is that the official policy of the early democratic governments in Argentina focused on quickly reestablishing a historical continuity with the hegemonic status quo, while forgetting and marginalizing all that challenged it (Taylor 13).

In Chile, a law of amnesty passed in 1978 by the Pinochet regime protected all those involved in the actions that took place between the 1973 coup and 1977, the most active years of the violent repression carried out by the junta, from criminal prosecution. This law was only circumvented in 1998 by a judicial decision handed down by Judge Juan Guzmán Tapia.

Following the 1988 plebiscite, the democratic transition was made in 1990, with Patricio Aylwin assuming the position of the first democratic president after the Pinochet years. He quickly worked to establish a truth and reconciliation commission, despite Pinochet's continued presence as head of the Chilean military and the myriad powers brokered to him as a condition of his stepping down as junta leader after the 1988 plebiscite. The result of the Rettig Report of 1991, the investigative work produced by the truth and reconciliation commission, focused more on detailing the broad nature of the atrocities committed during the dictatorship, as well as the scope of its impact of the population. Similar to the case in Argentina, it did not result in sweeping criminal convictions, in part because of the 1978 amnesty decree, but also because of Aylwin's trepidation related to the continued presence of junta officials within the democratic government. Such was his prudence towards the precariousness of the early years of the transition that he instructed the truth and reconciliation commission to pursue, "truth and justice as far as possible" (Vasallo 163). This sentiment was further underscored by Aylwin's own apology to the people of Chile following the conclusion of the Rettig Report, a gesture that was rejected by the arms of the government still under Pinochet's leadership[2].

To return to President Menem's statement following the pardons of 1990, he mentions that, as a country, Argentina has nothing more to learn from the past. The source of this proclamation, and the sentiment shared in neighboring Chile, comes in part from the truth and

[2] This was also informed by Pinochet's significant involvement in the government as head of military, and then senator, following the 1988 plebiscite and stepping down as junta leader. His continued presence is demonstrated by some of his public statements in the decade that followed, documented by Steve J. Stern in *Reckoning with Pinochet: the memory question in democratic Chile, 1989-2006*: in 1989, ""If they want to go to the homes of officers looking to jail them, submit them to trial, one can also put an end to Rule of Law."…"The day they touch one of my men, the Rule of Law is over!"" (18-9). And later, "The only way to solve the problem is olvido…If day after day we are always returning to the same point, we will continue fighting. Forget it, do not talk more about the issue, then you will forget and I will forget" (161). The sentiments are similar to Menem's statement, and both deal with forgetting the past and are charged with a violent consequence of not heeding this advice.

reconciliation commissions carried out in both countries in the early years of the democratic transition. Closer inspection of the reports produced by these commissions reveals both their shortcomings as well as their own conclusions related to the broader and more widespread facts of those who were affected by the dictatorial regimes.

One of the major issues with the CONADEP *Nunca más* report, delivered upon its conclusion in 1984, was its perpetuation of the theory of *dos demonios*. This is a theory that, "the violence of the state [w]as a response to the violence of the guerrilla forces, the two devils that terrorized society" (Kaiser 8). The report itself acknowledges the presence of this theory during the dictatorial period, explaining that the junta, with its influence over media outlets and erasure of its own violent actions, saturated the public consciousness with either real or fabricated reports of violence from the leftist opposition (CONADEP 6, 448). The main critique of *dos demonios* is that it conflates the scale and proportionality of violence when comparing the left to the junta. As James P Brennan argues:

> The great flaw of CONADEP's theory of 'dos demonios' was not the assumption that the Montoneros and other groups disregard for human life constituted a crime, which it often did, but that these acts were moral equivalents, which they were not. The Left's violence was on a much smaller scale, less premeditated, and responded more to a military logic, however misguided, than did the dictatorship's state terrorism with its egregious crimes of massive and unlawful abductions, torture, and disappearances. Moreover, the vast majority of those disappeared were not members of guerrilla organizations" (Brennan 115)[3]

Like the later actions of the democratic governments that provided further impunity to those involved in the atrocities committed during the dictatorship, this official report provided ideological support for those in the public who wished to follow the government's lead, chalking

[3] Pilar Calveiro offers this additional refutation of the *dos demonios* theory in *Poder y desparición*: "la teoría de los dos demonios no es más que otra forma de reproducir el pensamiento binario. Según esa explicación, se pretende que la Sociedad argentina fue agredida por dos 'egendros', extraños y ajenos, crueles e inhumanos. Otros (dos en lugar de uno), una vez más perfectamente diferentes e incomprensibles, 'locos', que es preciso desaparecer. Como se puede ver, exactamente los mismos elementos y la misma solución: la desaparición" (98).

up the whole period in history as a confrontation between two equally violent sides, and leaving it at that. As the above quote highlights, the actions taken by the left were nowhere near the scale of the actions of the junta. Furthermore, as indicated by the final statement in the quote, as well as the official statistics of the CONADEP report, the majority of those disappeared the dictatorship were not affiliated with the kinds of militant organizations implicated in the theory in the first place. In terms of a legacy for the disappeared, the perpetuation of the theory of *dos demonios* allows for a collapsing of all victims of the dictatorship as being in some way deserving of their punishment. It is a continuation of the long-standing belief among the public, especially those in the middle class, that the *chupados* must have done something wrong if they were taken by junta officials (Carrasai 163).

The Rettig Report from Chile elaborates on this implicit marginalization and bias towards disappeared victims and their affiliative networks. Published nearly a decade after the CONADEP report, the investigators identify the pariah status of those affected by the violence of the dictatorship, writing:

> A la muerte o desaparición de un miembro de la familia, sigue una historia de marginalidad. Las familias son discriminadas en sus posibilidades de trabajo, los niños en el acceso a colegios, universidades e institutos del Estado. El estigma es tan fuerte que las familias al sentir el rechazo del mundo externo se van sumiendo en un aislamiento muy grande. Sólo se sienten a gusto con aquellos comparten su experiencia" (116)

As depicted in the report, the barrier for reentry into society is dependent on whether or not an individual was able to not only escape personal persecution at the hands of the junta, but also that they were fortunate enough not to know or otherwise be connected with someone who was. There is little work to be done to connect the statements of such heads of state as President Menem in his reference to the biblical parable of Sodom and Gomorrah, and this particular flavor of societal animus directed towards those affected by the dictatorship. Like in Argentina,

disinformation campaigns saturated the public consciousness with a narrative that villainized those it had deemed subversive. As the report itself claims, "Las autoridades de la dictadura, en sus declaraciones oficiales, se refirieron a las personas muertas o desparecidas como delincuentes, terroristas, antisociales y sujetos peligrosos para la Sociedad. La Sociedad fue incorporando estos conceptos, despojando a las víctimas de su calidad de tales" (116). Just as they had done during the dictatorial period, the general public continued to treat those viewed as dangerous—even in the sense of marking them too for persecution by association, as was common during the period given the style of intelligence gathering related to the disappearance of persons—as pariahs. And to look upon them and attempt to hear the stories of their experiences would be akin to turning back towards the smote burning cities and risk being turned into a pillar of salt.

The charge against those not willing to make a clean break with the past also assumes that the results of the truth and reconciliation reports were comprehensive. That, in effect, and as Menem proffered, there was nothing left to learn about the misdeeds of the past authoritarian regimes. But the theory of *dos demonios* was not the only issue with such reports. As Marjorie Feitlowitz describes in her book *A Lexicon of Terror: Argentina and the Legacy of Torture*, even victims who voluntarily testified to the commission, despite public and personal pressures to do otherwise, were limited in the content that was deemed permissible for the report; she explains:

> Focusing on the need for proof, the judges employed a protocol by which they would interrupt testimonies of witnesses whenever they included memories of sensations or personal reflections on their experiences. As sensations and reflections could not be proved, in the eyes of the court they were not facts. The judges considered that, had they allowed the introductions of such unreliable elements of memory, they would have put at risk the preservation of historical truth, since impressions or subjective considerations would have cast doubt on the veracity of the testimonies and threatened their main aim: to denounce (16)

The absence of such sensorial memory in the official testimony of the truth and reconciliation proceedings might seem like a logical elision on the part of the administrators of the report. After all, a formal denunciation, one that would potentially lead to criminal proceedings, would require details that aligned more with information that is generally permissible in a court of law. But when read against the other accounts which assert that there is nothing left to learn or that individuals on both sides of the atrocities were equally reprehensible in their actions, this action of revising the testimony in real time of the limited number of victims who opted to testify signals that there was, in fact, much more to learn about this period.

The conclusions drawn by officials of the reformed democratic governments depended on the belief that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission reports determined a comprehensive understanding of the issues related to the dictatorships. However, their error in pressuring the public to avoid looking into the past only proved to further marginalize those still dealing with unprocessed trauma. It delineated past-facing thought as a social sin, and stigmatized those still calling for further investigations, reports, and justice; "the consensus became an admonishment to silence" (Epps 487). This misstep by the government, of attempting to shame the public into silence about the events of the dictatorship, accomplished the opposite of what their rhetoric of simply moving on claimed; as Susana Kaiser reports in her book *Postmemories of Terror*

> studies reveal that memories of traumatic pasts are often repressed or voluntarily forgotten. But repression also seems to produce the opposite effect. Silent events, the shared incidents about which people avoid talking, either because they are afraid or because they perceive them as shameful, may help to strengthen memories. When people are told not to think or talk about something, the repressed event becomes more deeply ingrained in their memory. In those cases, political repression results in silence on the surface but hidden suffering and a consolidation of the memory of the repressed event. Moreover, people also avoid talking about silenced events because they perceive them as shameful. This voluntary forgetfulness predominates in pacific transitions from repressive dictatorship to democracies without sharp breaks with the past, as was the case in Argentina—that is, amnesties and the same institutions and laws. (80-1)

As the preceding lays out, individuals did not just avoid talking about their painful experiences during the dictatorship because of a perception that to do so was shameful, but that they were publicly shamed by the officials at the helm of the pacific democratic transitions. The Rettig report clearly depicts this stigma that persisted in the years following the democratic transition, and the remarks by the second democratic president of Argentina, Menem, prove that there too the dominant discourse sought to shame the impacted populace into silence and adherence to the messaging of avoiding the past. Additionally, The Rettig Report and Kaiser indicate affiliative networks of impacted individuals, which will only grow and evolve in the years following the democratic transition. In an environment that appears to be populated by the same bad actors of the previous violent regime, delineated by the legal legacy of that regime as well, with labelling the victim as an impediment to collective progress, cause exists for shamed persons to seek out other avenues of both expressing their continued hurt and challenging the dominant reading of history. This is where literature comes into focus.

BRINGING THE PAST INTO THE PRESENT

Initial studies of postdictatorial literature in the Southern Cone focus on a response to this overwhelming push for oblivion. Critics gravitated towards texts that reflect certain anxieties over the tension between the dominant narrative of the newly reformed democratic governments, and the incongruous and silent experiences of the still-traumatized public. Idelber Avelar, in his early work *The Untimely Present: Postdictatorial Latin American Fiction and the Task of Mourning* (1999), directly contends with the official memory contained within truth and reconciliation commission reports, writing, “Compilation of data, however, is not yet the memory of the dictatorship. Memory far exceeds any factual recounting; however important the

latter may turn out to be as an initial juridical or political step. The *memory* of the dictatorship, in the strong sense of the word, requires another language" (64). To stick to the facts, the early years of the democratic transition in both Argentina and Chile fail to carry out the supposed benefits of such factual reporting on the memory of the dictatorial periods. The aforementioned amnesties and pardons, decreed by law by the democratic leaders following the transition, all but ensured that criminals who participated in the atrocities committed during the dictatorships walked free amongst their fellow citizens. As we will observe later, the mere news of the presence of these criminals moving about public space is enough to re-traumatize people still reeling from the past.

Avelar also posits in the above passage that such factual, overly rational and juridical, language, even when taken to its ideal application of bringing about justice, fails to capture the existential, lived-in, experience of trauma related to the dictatorship. From an early part of his text, that representation would be the responsibility of literature. He explains, "The literature I address in this book engages a mournful memory that attempts to overcome the trauma represented by the dictatorships. My focus will be those postdictatorial texts that remind the present that it is the product of a past catastrophe" (3). Though written several years following the previously quoted statement from President Menem, it is curious to note the similar rhetoric deployed in Avelar's thesis on a literature that seeks to provide a reminder of past "catastrophe." I am, of course, referring back to the biblical imagery of the pillar of salt. However, Avelar references catastrophe in the vein of Walter Benjamin. The difference between the two is that Menem casts his eyes towards the future while Avelar traces the wreckage of the past to its present manifestations. Memory of the dictatorial past thus becomes mournful rather than

forgetting, which favors a more individualized processing of the traumatic past as opposed to a collective and straightforward oblivion.

Nelly Richard, too, seeks out literature as a source of complicating the memory of the past that was reduced to oblivion by hegemonic forces of the early democratic transition. It is a radical brand of memory, one that does not allow for simplifications in the name of economic progress, as was the case in her native Chile. She writes of her own project, outlined in *Cultural Residues: Chile in Transition* (1999):

> Memory is an open process of reinterpretation that unties and reties its knots so that events and understandings can again be undertaken. Memory stirs up the static fact of the past with new unclosed meanings that put its recollections to work, causing both beginning and endings to rewrite new hypotheses and conjectures and thereby dismantle the explanatory closures of totalities that are too sure of themselves. And it is the laboriousness of that unsatisfied memory that never admits defeat, that perturbs the official burial of that memory seen simply as a fixed deposit of inactive meanings (17)

There are a couple of key images that Richard calls to mind in this passage. The first, the image of sedimentation as it relates to memory. Static facts, narratives that congeal over time and without competition tend to superficially provide the appearance of consensus. The effects and the phenomenon of this consensus were detailed earlier in the quoted material from Susana Kaiser; what lies beneath that superficial consensus is an undercurrent of shame-repressed memories that present more complex depictions of past traumas. As Richard contends, critical memory works to disrupt the "explanatory closures" of the dominant narrative, keeping open possibilities of new memory to integrate itself within the overall narrative, rather than being shamed into invisibility and silence. The second image of this passage is memory as tying and retying knots. The significance of this image will become clearer shortly upon investigation of general trauma theory and processes for recovery from traumatic events.

Richard then turns her focus to the issue of language as it relates to postdictatorial memory, a new challenge to the straightforward language of the truth and reconciliation commission report; she argues:

> Words reduced to the unfeeling language of object certification—the political report, sociological analysis—which tells us something, in the best of cases, of what the past "was," but without any reference to that "having been" of indignity, of having to see its expressive conventions overturned by the insufferable violence that makes up memory. That is, without a trace of the consensus formula being stirred up by the raising of voices that may reveal the paroxysms of fury and desperation (18)[4]

Both Avelar and Richard describe the field of memory following the democratic transition as working against the burial of more complex memories of the dictatorial past. Commentaries that depend on such imagery as ruin, catastrophe, and burial evoke determinations that rely on a dead past, or as Richard defines it here, the "was." This preterit past thus becomes self-contained to its own moment, a phenomenon that is convenient to the narrative that the early democratic governments wished to support, so as to avoid further conflicts of power between the government and the military, and/or to consolidate economic gains made by the neoliberal policies instituted during the dictatorships. Nonetheless, this simple, self-contained past neither captures nor corresponds to the lived present of those individuals impacted by the violence of the dictatorships. Thus, indignant, critical memory seeks to remove the walls containing the once preterit, buried past, allowing its connections to the present fury to be traced.

Critical memory, as proposed by both critics, supposes a process of revision, a lived memory. It is a process that is facilitated by diverse forms of expression. On the one hand, there

[4] Elizabeth Jelin, in her work *Los trabajos de la memoria*, echoes this idea of the past invading the present, writing: ""Y al estudiar a esos hombres concretos, los sentidos de la temporalidad se establecen de otra manera: el presente contiene y construye la experiencia pasada y las expectativas futuras. La experiencia es un pasado presente, cuyos acontecimientos han sido incorporados y pueden ser recordados." (12); and "Sin duda, algunos hechos vividos en el pasado tienen efectos en tiempos posteriors, independientemente de la voluntad, la conciencia, la agencia o la estrategia de los actores…Su presencia puede irrumpir, penetrar, invader el presente como un sinsentido, como huellas mnésicas" (14).

are the officially recognized testimonies and legal denunciations found in documents like the truth and reconciliation commission reports. On the other hand, literature provides an avenue for exploring the details and experiences censored from those more "factual" memories of the dictatorial past. Read against Avelar's critique of such factual recounting, and the need for a different language of memory, Richard offers the following:

> Only a scene of language production allows one both to break the traumatic silence of a complicit nonword of oblivion and to be saved from the manic-obsessive repetition of memory, imbuing it with the intellectual tools of decipherment and interpretation and modifying the lived texture and psychic consistency of the drama. Images and words, forms and concepts, help to transfer the resignification of the experience to planes of legibility where the lived materiality will become part of an understanding of the events capable of unveiling the knots of violence that existed previously as a figure without a face or expression. (27)

As we will see in the following section, articulating trauma, that is presenting the memory of a traumatic event in a way that is more widely legible, is a difficult task. Therefore, for fear of muddying the legal convincingness of the truth and reconciliation reports, emotional details and reflections were stricken from the record. However, to prevent further damage to an already traumatized population, memory must push to articulate the damage of the initial act, and the further harm suffered from the stigma associated with those still "stuck in the past". Where both Avelar and Richard land is on the ability of literature to transfer the emotional memory of a traumatic past onto planes more legible to the general populace. This new lived materiality, or the world in which these traumatic actors and events are foregrounded rather than forgotten, also works to expose the mechanisms of power responsible for impeding healthy processing of trauma related to the dictatorial period. I have outlined the expression of some of those mechanisms above (the statement from Menem, etc.); now it would help to explain how, ideally,

recovery from trauma would progress if these impediments, most importantly the persistent danger of perpetrators of state-sanctioned violence walking the streets, were lifted.

THE LINGERING FOOTPRINTS OF TRAUMA

For fear of turning into a pillar of salt before going further into this project centered on literary interventions into the question of memory in the postdictatorial period without citing literature, I would like to introduce a series of passages from Argentine author Tununa Mercado's 1990 autofiction *In a State of Memory*, written about her many years spent in exile and her eventual return to Argentina. This will provide an appropriate entry point for discussing general theories of trauma and recovery from trauma, as outlined in two works on the matter. In the chapter titled "Embassy," Mercado details the reaction she has to the news that General Luciano Benjamín Menéndez, responsible for La Perla concentration camp in Córdoba which orchestrated the disappearance of 2200 civilians during the last dictatorship in Argentina, walked free through the streets of Córdoba. This series of passages show that even several years after the democratic transition, and the so-called final word from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and government leaders, there are still invisible traumatic memories that can be unearthed in a more intimate, less controlled context. Mercado writes:

> *General Menéndez walks the streets of Córdoba*; this phrase, as part of the account reported to me by someone who had just returned from Argentina, upset me terribly and left me in shock: for the first time in all my years of exile, for the first time since I had left Córdoba in the decade of the sixties, I felt that I was trapped, from afar, in a global and synthetic category that included, in blacks, whites, and grays, my entire past. The narrator added: *And without guaruras*, which is the term used in Mexico for bodyguards. *General Menéndez walks the streets of Córdoba, and without bodyguards*, that said it all. How could General Menéndez walk the streets of Córdoba when the vote had *already* been taken and the military leaders had been publicly condemned everywhere in the country? General Menéndez walked through my city, and as he advanced along the streets,

> he displaced, cast aside, not to say eliminated, my father's footsteps. There was not enough room for the two of them (96)

Throughout the text, Mercado reflects on the innumerable hardships she endures as a result of being exiled to Mexico for her affiliations with the newspaper *La Opinión*, deemed subversive and taken over following the 1976 coup in Argentina. It is noteworthy that amid painful recollections related to food, clothing, and other major life adjustments encountered upon her arrival in Mexico City, this piece of news about General Menéndez walking the streets of Córdoba stops her in her tracks. The words she selects, of feeling shocked and trapped in the entirety of her past, signal an experience of traumatic memory, of being triggered into a state of memory that one cannot control but nonetheless finds themselves in. The detail of the General, walking without bodyguards, illustrates the impunity with which this figure moves about the world, despite his crimes. Mercado further narrows her focus to the footsteps of Menéndez, and how their presence displaces the past footsteps of her father, in *her* Córdoba. Not Menéndez's. It is as if the memory of her home world, which she has been so abruptly rested from in her state of exile, is being rewritten by each step Menéndez takes as a free man.

She then turns her direction to a broader concern, writing, "That ominous image of the general, with or without retinue, strutting along…which came to supplant the image of my father in such a grotesque and intimidating way, was a synthesis of Argentina, and not only of the Argentina of terror that we all thought had come to an end, but the current and enduring Argentina" (96-7). There is a pattern developing here. As Gabriel Salazar mentioned in the scene quoted earlier from *The Pearl Button*, such an image of Menéndez strolling through the streets of Córdoba can be extended beyond its immediate limits of how it impacts Mercado, the individual, to encompass a broader expression of that specific moment in the history of Argentina. Her

distinction between the "was" of the terror assumed to be past, to the enduring shock that continues to haunt her many miles from her home, echoes the grammatical twist theorized in Nelly Richard's work from the previous section. This passage, in effect, performs the kind of critical memory posited in both Richard and Avelar: a recollection that both identifies the unprocessed wounds of the past that continue to derail the present, and the conditions that continue to impede healing. Mercado does not hesitate to extend her pain to encompass Argentina as a whole, because her experience is not isolated. The crush of postdictatorial literature, some of which will be investigated in the present study, provides one such testament to this fact.

In the closing moment of this scene, Mercado reveals the heart of the trauma for her in this seemingly abnormal traumatic response, considering her already traumatic circumstance of displacement. She writes,

> The contrasting image that the phrase stirred up began to hound me: my father in the streets of Córdoba, pausing on various occasions along his way to greet and be greeted by various people while we, his children, followed some feet in the wake of his brisk footsteps. And there was that second, ferocious scene of the general that caused the adrenaline to roil within me and the emotional gastric pain I suffered precisely as a result of my father's death in Córdoba two years before, during my absence, because I was living ten thousand kilometers to the north. (97)

Like the footsteps themselves, she conjures up two competing images in response to the news that Menéndez once more walks the streets of Córdoba with impunity. The first a warm memory of her father, a man who she characterizes as beloved, being followed by her and her siblings; she depicts his movements as harmonious with the soul of the community, equally greeting and being greeted by those who populate the streets. The second image of the general threatens the existence of the first. That Menéndez walks the streets in Córdoba while Mercado continues life in exile in Mexico City does not fully describe the traumatic effect. It is that Menéndez

represents the forces that caused Mercado to uproot her life to Mexico City, preventing her return even to say her final goodbyes to her father, that this news causes her more distress beyond her other distressing circumstances. She is reinjured and experiences the same gastric pain of grief for her dead father, because it is people like Menéndez who kept her from mourning him properly in the first place. Such pain does not go away because of a threat of turning into a pillar of salt.

Mercado's experience that she narrates in the above excerpt from *In a State of Memory* offers both the reflection and the emotional quality of memory that were deliberately absent from legal testimonies and truth and reconciliation reports of the early democratic transition. As alluded to by prior critics, overarching pressures to move on from the past and leave it out of proper conversation led many still suffering from the aftereffects of the dictatorship to repress their stories. The issue, as we will notice in the following two texts, is that traumatic memory does not merely go away if it is repressed. Instead, like in the case of Mercado and the image of Menéndez walking through the streets of Córdoba, it will rear up and trap an individual in a post-traumatic episode, foisting them back into an escapeless encounter with the same timbre of emotions as they suffered at the moment of traumatization. I would like to use the following space to trace a couple perspectives of trauma and potential avenues for recovery. Both texts are contemporary approaches to the matter, and each offers context to the argument outlined earlier that such conditions as those that were established in the early decades of the democratic transition did little to assist in the collective processing of the trauma caused by the dictatorial period.

The first work is Judith Herman's *Trauma and Recovery*. In it, she begins with a description of the traumatic event, moving to strategies employed by therapists to help their

patients reintegrate traumatic events into their life's narrative. In terms of the former, she writes, "Traumatic events have primary effects not only on the psychological structures of the self but also on the systems of attachment and meaning that link individual and community…Traumatic events destroy the victim's fundamental assumptions about safety of the world, the positive value of self, and the meaningful order of creation" (51). Returning to the traumatic event for Mercado, this was initially her forced exile from her home country of Argentina as a result of the dictatorship, which was further deepened by the fact that she could not return home to mourn the death of her father, and once more traumatized by the image of Menéndez walking the streets of Córdoba and essentially threatening the integrity of her spatial memories there that she associates with her dead father. Menéndez's steps threaten the safety of the mnemonic space of Córdoba by allowing for the same type of individual that kept her from her dead father to once more create memories within that space with impunity.

Furthermore, in the same way Mercado extends her suffering to encompass a larger problematic state in Argentina, so too can this destruction of fundamental assumptions of safety be extended to the years following the democratic transition. One of the first steps that Herman outlines for helping an individual recover from a traumatic event is to ensure their safety from being retraumatized; for instance, removing someone from an abusive home and into the care of a treatment facility or safe house. The early democratic governments, despite their professions to the contrary, could not claim that even this initial step was met following the end of their respective dictatorships. In addition to military leaders, and even Pinochet himself, continuing to serve in high-ranking government positions, the lack of investigations or serious criminal proceedings against those who participated in the atrocities of the dictatorship allowed them to walk freely in the same spaces as those traumatized by their actions. Herman goes on to describe

that, "…at the moment of trauma, almost by definition, the individual's point of view counts for nothing. In rape, for example, the purpose of the attach is precisely to demonstrate contempt for the victim's autonomy and dignity. The traumatic even thus destroys the belief that one can *be oneself* in relation to others" (53). Once more, the process of recovery relies not only on reestablishing safety, but of also recovering a person's dignity. The efforts to silence voices of the past, as evidenced in the previously quoted statement from President Menem of Argentina, denies this dignity, instead shaming traumatized victims for feeling that they had lost any dignity in the first place. After all, the country had decided to turn the page on its ugly past. This attitude only deepened the suffering of those attempting to recover from the traumatic events of the dictatorship, and forced others into ignoring their own issues, instead motivating them into complicit shaming of their fellow citizens. As Herman indicates, at the moment of trauma the "individual's point of view counts for nothing." The dominant rhetoric of the early democratic transition can thus be read as not only inaccurate, but re-traumatizing.

The ultimate idea of recovery from a traumatic event is to reintegrate the event into the life narrative in such a way that it reestablishes the narrative continuity of past, present, and future. This allows for the traumatized individual to not find themselves trapped at any given moment back at the time of the traumatic event, but instead create ways to move forward in their lives with newfound insight. An integral part of this narrative recovery involves telling one's own trauma story. As Herman explains, "The goal of recounting the trauma story is integration, not exorcism. In the process of reconstruction, the trauma story does undergo a transformation, but only in the sense of becoming more present and more real" (181). The shame that the dominant discourse continued to cultivate in the years following the end of the dictatorships hinged on this flawed theory of exorcism in relation to traumatic memories. That simply laying

out the factual evidence of the maladies of the dictatorship was a sufficient ritual for breaking with the traumatic past. As we move back towards the literature, Herman hints at possible ways of observing connections to an unprocessed traumatic past amidst the repressed populace, writing:

> The patient's present, daily experience is usually rich in clues to dissociated past memories. The observance of holidays and special occasions often affords an entry into past associations. In addition to following the ordinary clues of daily life, the patient may explore the past by viewing photographs, constructing a family tree, or visiting the site of childhood experiences. Post-traumatic stress symptoms such as flashbacks or nightmares are also valuable access routes to memory. (185)

This passage identifies the cyclical and evolving quality of traumatic memory. Like observed in Mercado, years may pass without a reminder of a traumatic event for it to be suddenly triggered by an encounter with a key person, object, or place. This sensual connection between the world and memory provides clues for even those in denial or unaware of significant associations between the past and the present. Literature, as it were, presents an opportunity to both reflect on and listen out for the moments wherein these specific details of life cause such mnemonic responses; these responses can be critically read in conjunction with other similar interactions to establish a pattern of behavior broader than the individual, subjective experience. In the following, I will further elaborate on the two types of memories triggered by sensory responses, so as to distinguish more clearly between benign and traumatic memory events.

Peter A. Levine, a clinical psychologist, distinguishes between episodic and traumatic memory in his work *Trauma and Memory: Brain and Body in a Search for the Living Past*. Both types of memory reside on the subconscious level and are triggered by specific sensual stimuli. He begins with episodic memory, describing the example of a sweet smelling baked good that transports the individual who smells the scent back to an earlier childhood memory. But episodic

memory does not have associate itself with positive experiences of the past solely. As he explains:

> Any smells, sights, sounds, and sensations associated with these memories can be disturbing, distasteful, aggravating, or even repellant. Such responses compel avoidance of voluntary and subconscious contact with any reminders. Nonetheless, we may find ourselves sharing these painful reminiscences with friends or therapists as relatively sensible and coherent stories—whether describing pleasurable or disturbing past experiences. We are usually able to reflect on these memories, learn something from them, and move forward with our lives. We are potentially enriched and empowered by our mistakes and failures, as well as by our great or little triumphs and achievements (6)[5]

The key concept for understanding the mechanism of episodic memory is that the subject is able to reflect on this memory, and move forward, enriched by the manner in which this specific experience in the past has informed their lived present. Like in Herman, past memories, even difficult ones, normally cohere to the broader biographical narrative of the individual, and they may be updated upon future reflections to add to the wisdom gleaned from the past event. Some, as we will track throughout the project in terms of transitional objects and the memories associated with them, even conjure up an episodic memory to provide them with a connection to a past world of love. This act usually coincides with resisting a traumatic situation, such as living in exile or being held captive.

Traumatic memory, however, is dissociated from the broader biographical narrative. As Levine summarizes, "traumatic memories are fixed and static. They are imprints (engrams) from past overwhelming experiences, deep impressions carved into the sufferer's brain, body, and psyche. These harsh and frozen imprints do not yield to change, nor do they readily update with

[5] For a different perspective of episodic memory from scholarship in the field, Elizabeth Jelin writes: "Están también el cómo y el cuándo se recuerda y se olvida. El pasado que se rememora y se olvida es activado en un presente y en función de expectatvas futuras. Tanto en términos de la propia dinámica individual como de la interacción social más cercana y de los procesos más generals o macrosociales, parecería que hay momentos o coyunturas de activación de ciertas memorias, y otros de silencios o aun de olvidos. Hay también otras claves de activación de las memorias, ya sean de carácter expresivo o performativo, y donde los rituals y lo mítico ocupan un lugar privilegiado." (18)

current information. The "fixity" of imprints prevents us from forming new strategies and extracting new meanings. There is no fresh, ever-changing now and no real flow in life" (7). The fixed and static characteristic of traumatic memory has to do with its inability to be integrated in a more coherent life narrative. The image Levine uses, of traumatic memory as deep impressions carved into the individual, recalls the space Mercado suddenly finds herself upon learning from a friend that Menéndez walks freely in the streets of Córdoba. In her recollection amidst the text, she has fallen into a hole of fresh grief and trauma related to the junta's influence over her ability to mourn her father. That she experiences the same gastric distress as years prior evidences the static quality of her traumatic memory, for those symptoms manifest just as fiercely as they did the first time. Moreover, Levine's distinction between episodic and traumatic memory sheds light on the difficulty faced by individuals traumatized by the actions of the dictatorships. Despite every well-intentioned wish for the traumatic memory to disappear, and under direct pressure from leading voices of their nations to do just that, these memories persist, unexpectedly cropping up from random stimuli[6].

Levine, like Herman before, does offer a glimpse of what recovery from a traumatic experience might look like, writing:

> When we are able to "look back" at a traumatic memory from an empowered stance, the recollection will be updated as though this agency had been available and fully functional at the time of the original trauma. This newly reconsolidated experience then becomes the new updated memory where the (empowered) present somatic experience profoundly alters the (past) memory. *These emerging resources become the bridging of past and present—the "remembered present."* (142)

[6] "Traumatized people have their lives arrested until they are somehow able to process these intrusions, assimilate them, and then finally form coherent narratives that help put these memories to rest; or said another way, to come to peace with their memories" (Levine 8)

He equates this process of looking back from an empowered stance with the Japanese tradition of repairing porcelain pieces with seams of gold; the aforementioned deep impressions left by the once dissociated traumatic memory not concealed, but the entirety of the piece transformed into a different, coherent whole. This is not an embellishment or idealization of the traumatic memory, but instead a symbolic gesture designed to mark the resolve necessary to connect a past disruption with the flow of one's own biography. To further synthesize the trauma theory posited by both Herman and Levine, the empowered stance identified in the above passage depends on meeting certain conditions of process. This includes ensuring the safety of the traumatized individual, giving them the necessary space and tools to observe the development of their trauma and its manifestations in their present moment (noticing pitfalls into flashbacks, traumatic associations/projections, etc.), and devising a method of restoring agency in such a way that the traumatic memory can recalled without the same paralyzing sense of helplessness and despair as during the initial event.

Nonetheless, these two texts provide language and framework to a process that was in no way officially supported in the early years of the democratic transition in Argentina and Chile. Rather, individuals were shamed into believing themselves on the same level as biblical sinners and blasphemers for even daring to engage with their traumatic memories of the past. As such, amidst these broad feelings of alienation and invisibility, those affected by the dictatorship, like Mercado and the image of Menéndez's footsteps, were faced with inhabiting a world that feels unsafe and littered with painful triggers of their traumatic memories. As critics of postdictatorial memory have asserted, cultural artifacts such as literature, film, etc. provide a way to foreground those invisible details of the traumatic world that were otherwise unseen or willfully rejected by

others. It is a medium that works, just as the memory organizations that continued to grow and evolve in the democratic transition, to fully embody and practice the spirit of *nunca más*.

OBJECTS AS AN ACCESS POINT TO THE PAST, the punctum

Both literary examples of this chapter, that of the pearl button encrusted in the submerged rail found off the Chilean coast and General Menéndez's footsteps in Tununa Mercado's traumatic nightmare, depend upon the fixation on a single specific detail of a particular image as a gateway for more profound and broader reflections. This is the first step in resisting the immense pressure related to shame-driven oblivion of the events surrounding the last dictatorships of Argentina and Chile. Of mining the sensual triggers and clues of the object world that one encounters in daily life for glimpses of dissociated and/or otherwise significant memories; this is a notion ratified by the two trauma psychologists of the previous section. The production of cultural artifacts such as literature, film or other media opens space for such reflections to occur, while also providing the audience with an opportunity to better understand the invisible pain projected from the past into the present moment. The specific foci that penetrate the white noise of oblivion build a case for the past to become re-embodied; what "was" becomes what "has been," in the words of Nelly Richard. In the following, I will look to two theoreticians who consider this detail that punctures through the fog of oblivion to be central to better understanding and integrating past traumatic experiences into present concerns. I will start with Roland Barthes' *punctum*.

Barthes' 1980 text *Camera Lucida* is part meditation on photography, part eulogy to his mother who had passed away shortly before the writing of this book. This latter detail is worth mentioning, because the real mourning occurring concurrently to the production of the work

relates to the development of this concept of the *punctum*, or the detail that disrupts our emotional response to an image. In his examination of photography, Barthes distinguishes between the *studium* of a photograph, and its occasional *punctum*. He writes of the *studium*, "To recognize the *studium* is inevitably to encounter the photographer's intentions, to enter into harmony with them, to approve or disapprove of them, but always to understand them, to argue them within myself, for culture…is a contract arrived at between creators and consumers" (27-8). When approaching a photograph, there are certain framing devices that inform our interpretation. Culture, place, explanatory details in the paratext of the photo's frame: all of these work to influence this interpretive process. These expectations depend too on dominant forces, such as in the case of images that have been situated in the context of a specific historical moment. Nonetheless, because of these subconscious and invisible forces, our reading of the image as given by the *studium* coheres with the dialogue we expected to have with the image at hand.

Occasionally, our gaze wanders into a detail that disturbs the otherwise harmonious relationship of the *studium*. Barthes writes, "In this habitually unary space, occasionally (but alas all too rarely) a 'detail' attracts me. I feel that its mere presence changes my reading, that I am looking at a new photograph, marked in my eyes with a higher value. This 'detail' is the *punctum*" (42). Applied to both Guzmán and Mercado, the *punctum* is the footsteps and pearl button that disrupt the expected reading of the submerged rail and the mnemonic image of walking the streets of Córdoba with family respectively. Such details enhance the significance of the image itself, raising it to a level beyond what was already given at first glance. Barthes provides further description of the *punctum* in the following passage:

> A Latin word exists to designate this wound, this prick, this mark made by a pointed instrument: the word suits me all the better in that it also refers to the notion of punctuation, and because the photographs I am speaking of are in effect punctuated, sometimes even speckled with these sensitive points; precisely, these marks, these wounds are so many *points*. This second element which will disturb the *studium* I shall therefore call *punctum*; for *punctum* is also: sting, speck, cut, little hole—and also a cast of the dice. A photograph's *punctum* is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me). (26-7)

The *punctum* encompasses the movements within the detail that alter the reading of the image. It unveils an unexpected sensitive point within the spectator, precipitated by the focus resonating with a particular detail within the composition. Once the gaze rests on this detail, it engages with the spectator in a deeply personal way, unveiling a certain poignancy. Barthes identifies that the poignant detail of the *punctum*, once sprung on the unsuspecting audience, injures to the extent of bruising. But what exactly is injured? For one, the *studium*, and thus the set of values that shape our expectations leading up to the initial reading of the photograph. This is the little hole punched into this interpretive veil. The injury is also a re-injury, in the case of Barthes himself. Studying photos of his mother as a child, being stuck by the *punctum* contained within resonant details of those photographs, causes him to reengage with his own process of mourning her death, of reflecting on his memory of her life narrative.

In the above, Barthes does not merely describe the *punctum* as a fleeting injury but as a bruise. This specific descriptive choice implies that the impact of the *punctum* leaves a lasting mark of injury. With it the spectator is left with the impression of the *punctum*, and even if they leave the image behind, they will have an impression to study in the future. And though the image itself might be a simple encounter with the "that-has-been" of the photographed object, the *punctum* allows for a connection to be foregrounded between the present configurations of our interpretive expectations and emotions, and this fleeting past (77). Reflecting on the *punctum*'s bruise provides the clues that Judith Herman identifies as central to understanding the

relationship between significant memories of the past and their bearing on the present. In short, it allows for understanding to develop between ourselves and the object. The *punctum* thus is a rather subjective phenomena, or as described in the previous passage, random ("a cast of the dice"); it is often dependent on various personal factors. As Barthes explains, "Very often the *Punctum* is a 'detail,' *i.e.*, a partial object. Hence, to give examples of *punctum* is, in a certain fashion, to *give myself up*" (43). The *punctum* is part of the overall composition of the image, but this detail itself is a partial object. The capacity for the *punctum* to prick comes from its resonant poignancy within the context of the spectator. Therefore, we the spectator complete the movement of the *punctum*, filling the detail with meaning that we ourselves had not been expecting upon arrival at the image. Sharing the experience of the punctum, as is the case in Salazar's commentary on the pearl button and Mercado's recollection of footsteps, is to reveal the personal pain that caused these details to produce such unexpected poignancy.

It would seem that the personal nature of the spectator's response to the *punctum* would restrict the phenomenon to the individual. Barthes, however, includes in his description of the punctum that, "However lightning-like it may be, the *punctum* has, more or less potentially, a power of expansion. This power is often metonymic" (45). After all, the mechanism of metonymy allowed him to take his personal experience of reading the images of his mother amidst his grief and develop a general theory of how the photograph might perform a deeper function than was assumed. The *punctum* might be fleeting in its acute resonance with the spectator, but it does leave a more durable impression, a bruise. This trace of the immediate experience with the *punctum* allows for further reflection of the memories reenergized and revealed in its wake[7]. For Salazar and Mercado, the discourse does not end with their respective

[7] This phenomenon answers a challenge set forth by Elizabeth Jelin in *Los trabajos de la memoria*: "Lo que el pasado deja son *huellas*, en las ruinas y marcas materiales, en la huellas mnésicas del sistema neurológico humano,

punctum. Instead, they reflect critically on the history of that detail, how both their personal and broader experiences formed the requisite ingredients to birth the *punctum*. This process of tracing the *punctum* and its aftershocks has become a central concern for the development of critical memory studies. And it is the basis for Marianne Hirsch's argument for utilizing the details of the object world to enrich and enliven an otherwise congealed and dissociated traumatic past.

Focusing on the later generations of survivors of the Holocaust, Marianne Hirsch's *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust* (2012) seeks enduring evidence of traumatic memories that have either not yet been discovered, or such evidence that persists in the lives of those who have inherited their legacy. Early in the text, Hirsch references Barthes and the *punctum* as a source of connection between this distant past and its present implications, proposing:

> Roland Barthes's much discussed notion of the punctum has inspired us to look at images, objects, and memorabilia inherited from the past, like this little picture, as 'points of memory'--points of intersection between past and present, memory and postmemory, personal remembrance and cultural recall. The term 'point' is both spatial--such as a point on a map--and temporal--a moment in time--and it thus highlights the intersection of spatiality and temporality in the workings of personal and cultural memory. The sharpness of a point pierces or punctures: like Barthes's punctum, points of memory puncture through the layers of oblivion, interpellating those who seek to know about the past (61)

With this passage, Hirsch widens the field of the *punctum* to a point of memory, a puncture through what was once lost or forgotten (or forced into oblivion), by way of artifacts inherited from the past. Furthermore, she expands Barthes' notion of the *punctum* acting as metonymy, allowing for the moment of encounter between the past and present to become an intersection of

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en la dinámica psíquica de las personas, en el mundo simbólico. Pero esas huellas, en sí mismas, no constituyen memoria a menos que sean evocadas y ubicadas en un marco que les dé sentido. Se plantea aquí una segunda cuestión ligada el olvido: cómo supercar las dificultades y acceder a esas huellas. La tarea es entonces la de revelar, sacar a la luz lo encubierto, atravesar el muro que nos separa de esas huellas" (30). The type of critical work initiated with the *punctum* with develop further and bring in more sources once the testimonial object is fleshed out in the following.

both personal and cultural memory. This latter type of memory implies the possibility of less individualized, affiliative networks of traumatic memory, such that the *punctum* object reveals a link to the past to not just the lone spectator, but also all those who share similarities with that spectator's culture and lineage. She locates objects, in harmony with the trauma psychologists from before, as a rich source of access points to past memory, writing, "Objects and places, therefore…can function as triggers of remembrance that connect us, bodily and thus also emotionally, with the object world we inhabit" (Hirsch 212).

She continues in reference to the experience of failure and grief associated with this encounter with the past through the *punctum* object, situating it specifically in the context of narratives of future generations returning to the homelands of their ancestors who were displaced as a result of the Holocaust. She describes in the following:

> Worn away not only by time but also by a traumatic history of displacement, forgetting and erasure, places change and objects are used by other, perhaps hostile owners, over time coming merely to approximate the spaces and objects that were left behind. Cups and plates chip, peacock feathers disappear, wooden vases replace glass ones, keys to houses, obsessively kept in exile, no longer open doors. "Home" becomes a place of no return. And yet embodied journeys of return, corporeal encounters with place, do have the capacity to create sparks of connection that activate remembrance and thus reactivate the trauma of loss (212)

These journeys of return are often spurred by a longstanding feeling of unease surrounding certain circumstances of family history. Traumatized individuals inevitably respond to traumatic memories in a variety of ways, many that are incongruous with the implicit understanding of the children and younger generations that are reared under them. Thus, these children seek out the return journey as a way to recompose the missing pieces of the family's narrative. Unfortunately, the complete traumatic memories of their ancestors are inaccessible to them since their ancestor's might be long gone or not be willing to provide them access to those memories. And so, the idealized trip to step into the trauma of their elders fail. But in its failure, those objects

and places altered by time and efforts to move beyond the traumatic past do puncture through to the returnee's sense of loss suffered at never fully knowing the coherent story of their family history. In a way, this experience provides the material ingredients to properly mourn such a loss. After all, the *punctum* of the object cuts to the unexpected emotional connections to the past, which often do not correspond to what the individual initially desires or intends in their journey to seek out those objects; but the *punctum* often speaks to a deeper, more personal truth than our present assumptions about the object world.

The totality of her work, foundationally supported by her elaboration on the concept of the *punctum* as it relates to the world of objects, centers on developing an account of how the memory of a traumatic event can be reencountered by new investigators, offering new clues about the trauma itself and its evolving influence over time. As she establishes early in the text:

> Postmemorial work…strives to *reactivate* and *re-embody* more distant political and cultural memorial structures by reinvesting them with resonant individual and familial forms of mediation and aesthetic expression. In these ways, less directly affect participants can become engaged in the generation of postmemory that can persist even after all participants and even their familial descendants are gone. It is this presence of embodied and affective experience in the process of transmission that is best described by the notion of memory as opposed to history. Memory signals an affective link to the past—a sense, precisely, of a material "living connection"—and it is powerfully mediated by technologies like literature, photography, and testimony. (33)

Like in Barthes, and many of the other sources referenced previously, she draws a distinction between the composed and coherent history that masquerades as fact, and the disruptive quality of the act of remembering. Memory, as opposed to history, depends on the ability of *punctum* objects to signal this affective link, as she calls it, to the past. This, of course, echoes the sentiments of Nelly Richard, Idelber Avelar, Judith Herman, Peter Levine, Roland Barthes et al that call for an engagement with traumatic memory in such a way that it is then processed and reintegrated into a living past, or a "remembered present". It is a memory grounded in the

material aftershocks that populate the object world of the present. And it is a memory that is channeled through the production of deeply personal cultural artifacts. Telling one's story, in this sense, does not merely involve relaying the facts of a traumatic past, but also the specific poignant details that point to the real, though oftentimes invisible to others, embodied effects of an unresolved traumatic memory. The living character of this connection resides in the *punctum* object's presence within contemporary space, offering triggering points for such engagement with the past to occur once more.

She extends the reach of the *punctum* further, particularly in its arrival to the space of cultural artifacts. For, to Hirsch, the spectator too, even given their tangential relationship to the original traumatic event, can be bruised by the process of witnessing the stories of others who suffered trauma. She argues, "If to remember is to provide the disembodied 'wound' with a psychic residence, then to remember other people's memories is to be wounded by their wounds" (174). The perceived risk of this argument rests in the possibility of desensitizing a given public to the acuteness of a traumatic event; moreover, the representation of the event might further traumatize and disturb to the point of paralysis. But Hirsch sees this as a necessary risk to unveil the forgotten and underlying forces of trauma that persist across generations. She writes of postmemorial cultural production, "But this is not an art of endless melancholy and perpetual return. I prefer to see the different images in the series, the recurring dreams and nightmares, the multiple plots and subplots in the novels, as versions, or approximations—drafts of a narrative in process, subject to re-vision. It is an open-ended narrative that embraces the need for return and for repair, even as it accepts its implausibility" (225). Her concept of postmemory does not intend to mine the *punctum* objects for a definitive account of past trauma. It does not seek out a

panacea. Instead, works of critical postmemory dismantle the reductive capacity of dominant history, resisting its pressure to congeal narrative history by reopening remembrances of the past.

This concept of the *punctum*, both in Barthes and in Hirsch, is crucial to the present study in the sense that the examination of significant objects of the traumatic past of the dictatorship opens avenues to explore more nuanced and personal emotional associations with that painful history in a way that does not forget its manifestations in the present. As detailed earlier, the *studium* of the transition for much of the populace, as cultivated by the hegemonic powers of both the military juntas and the early democratic governments, enabled the impunity of criminals responsible for the atrocities committed during the dictatorship and denied claims of traumatic aftershocks from sources that deviated from the reductive and occasionally inaccurate reporting of the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions. The *punctum*, thus, provides a tool for those who wish to depict and narrate their experiences of the past through its present traces. This channeling through cultural production draws in the spectator to witness this revived past in a way that does not reduce itself to the mere pitying borne from references to a self-contained, dead past.

The presentation of dominant objectivity, of the imposition of a collective *studium*, represents a threat to the potential that critical expressions of memory hold for the future shape of a community and nation. Brian Epps signals this in his article, "**"**The Unbearable Lightness of Bones: Memory, Emotion and Pedagogy in Patricio Guzmán's *Chile, La memoria obstinada* and *Nostalgia de la luz*", pointing towards Ernesto Malbrán's remark in *Chile, la memoria obstinada*:

> As Ernesto Malbrán, who appears in such films as *Machuca* (Andrés Wood, 2004) and *Post Mortem* (Pablo Larraín, 2010), remarks in *Chile, la memoria obstinada*, 'recordar', 'to remember', means 'volver a pasar por el corazón', 'to pass through the heart', to prick it even. It is just such an act of memorable poignancy that Barthes describes by way of a *punctum*, a subjective touching that *disturbs* the photograph's more objectively staged *stadium*. (492)

To unveil the *punctum* in a cultural artifact is to challenge the dominant history of the dictatorship and its aftereffects. The turn towards objects and the *punctum* pushes the field of postdictatorial literature towards a place of categorizing strategies for crafting literary works that resonate critically and poignantly with their audience. To remember by way of the objects that remind us of our connection to the past is a political act. As Susana Kaiser declares, "Memory has political value and power. Historical accounts that are reshaped to fit and legitimize a present social order are based on the perception that the past influence actions in the present and the future, that people's memories affect their beliefs and choices. The importance of the past and the political value of memories are precisely their active existence in the present" (6). To truly remember the heart of the past, one must first discover the very *punctum* that shakes the fog of static oblivion. In the following section, I look towards queer phenomenology as to what tracing the arrival of objects as they are given to us offers in relation to the transformative potential of critical memory.

When discussing objects and their connection to memory, I cannot dance around phenomenology. Phenomenology, after all, examines the connection between our lived experiences and the phenomena around us. It is necessarily tied to investigating the object world and the ways in which we as subjects orient ourselves and project our own bodies through space in relation to the objects we encounter. It is the experience of our being-in-the-world. In *Queer Phenomenology*, Sara Ahmed plays with the concept of orientations, exploring its dual meanings (both in relation to phenomenological and sexual orientations) to find new elaborations on the field of phenomenology. This predominantly arises out of the fundamental disorientation that queer subjects face in a heterosexual world where they are perceived as deviant from the dominant conception of human life. As she writes:

> In shaping one's approach to others, compulsory heterosexuality also shapes one's own body *as a congealed history of past approaches*. Hence, the failure to orient oneself "toward" the ideal sexual object affects how we live in the world; such a failure is read as a refusal to reproduce and therefore as a threat to the social ordering of life itself. The queer child can only, in this wish for the straight line, be read as the source of injury: a sign of the failure to repay the debt of life by becoming straight" (91)

There are two key phrases of this passage: line and failure. Ahmed begins the work by examining the more traditional expression of orientation in phenomenology that captures our attractive or repulsive movements in relation to objects given our cultivated responses to them (28). This pattern of behavior is often subconsciously the result of a cultivated sense of the "correct" way of moving about the world. Or, in terms of critical memory studies, this proper orientation is akin to congealing movement towards static objectivity implied by the *studium*. She relates this orientation to the feeling of being home, that, "If orientations are as much about feeling at home as they are about finding our way, then it becomes important to consider how 'finding our way' involves what we could call "homing devices." In a way, we learn what home means, or how we occupy space at home and as home, when we leave home" (9). The inclusion of home introduces the site of inheriting values and perspectives from elder caregivers, and thus the proper orientation is an ideological construct of the dominant forces of each site like home that a developing individual comes into contact with. The homing devices, guideposts that populate the outside world as echoes of this proper orientation, help us in toeing the inherited line in the world beyond the home.

In further discussion of the line, Ahmed takes up the example of a well-trodden path. This extends the influence of the proper orientation beyond its internal configuration within the individual to how space itself becomes signified and congealed with the traces of movements of many other properly oriented individuals; she writes:

> I have always been struck by the phrase "a path well-trodden." A path is made by the repetition of the event of the ground "being trodden" upon. We can see the path as a trace of past journeys. The path is made out of footprints—traces of feet that "tread" and that in "treading" create a line on the ground. When people stop treading the path may disappear. And when we see the line of the path before us, we tend to walk upon it, as a path 'clears" the way. So we walk on the path as it is before us, but it is only before us as an effect of being walked upon. A paradox of the footprint emerges. Lines are both created by being followed and are followed by being created. The lines that direct us, as lines of thought as well as lines of motion, are in this way performative: they depend on the repetition of norms and conventions, of routes and paths taken, but they are also created as an effect of this repetition. To say that lines are performative is to say that we find our way and we know which direction we face only as an effect of work, which is often hidden from view. So in following the directions, I arrive, as if by magic" (16)

The magic of arriving in a way that maintains the status quo of proper orientation signifies a dutiful embodiment of dominant ideological inheritance. Where one fails, as identified in the first passage of this section, is when one's orientation inverts the pressures of the expected, well-trodden path, in pursuit of normally repulsive objects. In effect, when one is queer. As Ahmed argues, "In the case of sexual orientation, it is not simply that we have it. To become straight means that we not only have to turn toward the objects that are given to us by heterosexual culture, but also that we must "turn away" from objects that take us off this line. The queer subject within straight culture hence deviates and is made socially present as a deviant" (21). The queer subject is thus not only deviating from the invisible path set forth by the behaviors of properly oriented subjects, but also poses a real threat to the performative maintenance of the well-trodden paths.

This sense of being perceived as deviant to the dominant ideology thus throws the world of objects into flux for the queer subject. As Ahmed shares of her own experience as a queer subject, "In a lesbian relationship I have had to reinhabit space, in part by learning how to be more cautious and by seeing what before was in the background, *as bodies and things gathered in specific ways*. For me, this has felt like inhabiting a new body, as it puts some things "out of

reach" that I didn't even notice when they were in reach. In a way, my body now extends less easily into space" (101-2). Traditional phenomenology was produced under the invisible assumption of a static, proper orientation. Here, Ahmed experiences these invisible machinations of the dominant ideology because she must find her own way to project herself in the world despite them. After all, as Ahmed contends, the compulsory nature of heterosexuality, "produces a "field of heterosexual objects," by the very requirement that the subject "give up" the possibility of other love objects" (87); additionally, "Repetitive performances of hegemonic asymmetrical gender identities and heterosexual desires congeal over time to produce the appearance that the street is normally a heterosexual space" (92). To illustrate her point, she shares numerous examples of her lesbian relationship being misread as sisters, or friends, or even as husband and wife by strangers and neighbors alike (96)[8]. In that seemingly innocuous misinterpretation of her relationship, the subconscious corrective drive of the proper orientation works to render the existence of queer subjects invisible to the world at large. The queer subject, if they so choose, would have to repeatedly assert their deviant identity to prevent such a disappearance.

Where the queer subject develops a queer phenomenology is in the opportunity provided by this deviant status and the fundamental disorientation that they initially suffer. For one, as outlined above, the queer subject begins to perceive the object world as a "congealed history" of the proper orientation, of compulsory heterosexuality. The magical forces guiding most through their lives is demystified. This is where Ahmed begins to significantly depart from traditional phenomenology. She initially interrogates the quintessential object of phenomenological study, Husserl's table, musing as to what other objects surrounded him in his moment of contemplating

[8] I can also attest to this, being in my own homosexual relationship; innumerable times my partner and I have been referred to as "buddies", sometimes even by people who know we are in a relationship.

the table that he had taken for granted. For example, why are his children not present in his thoughts, or what about the other elements of the very room in which the table resides? The "failure" of the queer subject is one that brings them to realize that their orientation to the object world is a result of an inherited history. Deviating from that inherited history thus opens up the previously ignored items of the object world for study. As she proposes, "Existential phenomenology shows us that the objects that are gathered as gatherings of history (domesticated objects, such as doorknobs, pens, knives, and forks that gather around, by supporting the actions of bodies) are in a certain way overlooked. What makes them historical is how they are "overlooked"' (163). In her personal experience of being overlooked and misread as a queer subject, Ahmed identifies that the history of an object, the way in which it is perceived by our orientation towards or away from that object, relies on the history of the construction of our orientation grafted and impressed onto the object world. Contemplation of the object and its past thus opens the possibility of revealing this underlying structure.

And so, how might this concept of queer phenomenology apply to the present concern of critical object memory expressed by postdictatorial cultural artifacts? The requisite movement to attain relevancy is slight. Ahmed concludes her work with the following call for a queer politics grounded in this particular elaboration of phenomenology:

> In facing what retreats with hope, such a queer politics would also look back to the conditions of arrival. We look back, in other words, as a refusal to inherit, as a refusal that is a condition for the arrival of queer. To inherit the past in this world for queers would be to inherit one's own disappearance...The task is to trace the lines for a different genealogy, one that would embrace the failure to inherit the family line as the condition of possibility for another way of dwelling in the world (178)

In other parts of the text, she mentions a feminist critique of Husserl's table. That a mother contemplating a table would not go so far to overlook or take for granted the ambient presence of

her children in the same way Husserl does. Elsewhere, she incorporates critical race theory from Frantz Fanon in his description of blackness in a white man's world. Both, though not the central focus of the text, highlight the general inclination of the theory towards adaptation. At its core is an account of the deviant subject who contends with the object world as given by the dominant ideology. It is a world marked by the movements of those who conform to this dominant and proper, though mostly invisible, orientation. And in those invisible subconscious movements lies the ability to perform corrective erasure of all traces made by deviant, or queer, subjects.

In this sense, there are countless queer subjects in play both during the last dictatorships and in the early years of the democratic transition. During the dictatorships, the proper orientation towards the object world was violently defined by the rhetoric and actions of the juntas. In the words of General Ibérico Saint-Jean, governor of the province of Buenos Aires under Junta leader General Jorge Rafael Videla (1976-81), "Primero mataremos a todos los subversivos, luego mataremos a sus colaboradores, después a sus simpatizantes, enseguida a aquellos que permanecen indiferentes y, finalmente, mataremos a los tímidos". In the wake of such a declaration of ideology, the pressure to toe the line carved by the authoritarian governments became exceedingly severe, subjecting the whole population to a disorientation of their object world. Furthermore, statements following the democratic transition like those made by President Menem sustained the mark of deviance on those still reeling from the effects of the dictatorship. Though speaking metaphorically, the image of those who dare to dwell on the past as turning into pillars of salt conveys the severe condemnation of this deviant, past-oriented subject[9]. The literature of the present study, a concurrent production to the social movements related to sustained interrogation of the traumatic events of the dictatorships, seeks to utilize

[9] Not to mention it queers those subjects by tying them to the biblical tale of Sodom and Gomorrah. This irony is not lost on me.

memory objects to articulate the history of their erasure, the conditions that led to their being marked as deviant/queer subjects, and the ways in which they can open space for their own being-in-the-world.

OBJECTS OF MEMORY

In the above, we have established that the underlying current of the dominant narrative involved silencing witnesses of the crimes of the dictatorships and urging the public to move on from the painful past without acknowledging continued calls for justice. This silencing included avoiding overly emotional and reflective testimony, and legalizing impunity through pardons and other means for members of the military juntas. Thus, testimony, specifically stories that do include the emotional qualities of the traumatic event, becomes a subversive political act that runs counter to the dominant configuration of the body politic. We have also established that the trauma might persist because the basic conditions of recovery from trauma were never met by the government. Rather, the government pressured the public to continue to enforce the general stigma and shaming of those clamoring for engagement with the crimes of the past, in similar ways to so-called subversives during the dictatorships. And finally, through the *punctum* and the concepts of critical memory and queer phenomenology, we find the political potential of peering into the past through a critical reading of specific objects that populate our present lives, while also having a foot in the traumatic past that involved them. Therefore, it becomes of interest to center these formerly stable objects, both to highlight how their symbolic values were congealed under violent resignification by the dictatorships, but to also emphasize the history of how victims and those connected to victims charged these objects with memory in their resistance to

the violence of the junta, and how contemporary artists and activists draw on these objects to make a place for themselves and a living critical past in present and future society.

In that vein, I further divide the concept of objects related to the memories of the dictatorial period into three categories: objects of pain; transitional objects; testimonial objects. In each chapter of the dissertation, I will examine these three categories of objects as they relate to the specific theme. I will use the following space to describe these three categories of memory objects.

objects of pain

As detailed previously, the violent resignification of the object world, remade in the image of the junta's ideology, resulted in the weaponization of many quotidian objects that were previously assumed to be innocuous. In its most explicit form is the *parrilla*, and the various household implements used in the torture of victims, both in their homes and at clandestine detention centers. Jean Franco, in her work *Cruel Modernity*, describes this as the creation of a parallel world of pain, "In the Southern Cone, the *parrilla*, the barbecue grill on which families prepared festive meals, became a place of excruciating pain where electroshock was applied to the sexual organs and the mouth, the places of pleasure. The detained entered a parallel universe that transformed every familiar object as well as the body into a pain that erased all thoughts" (174). This passage underscores that the appropriation of the term *parrilla* by junta officials represents a perversion of an object normally associated with festive occasions, and of cultural importance to Argentine society. Like the pearl button or the footsteps of General Menéndez, the object cannot be divorced from the painful conditions of its arrival or resignification. The category of objects of pain thus refers to the specific phenomenon that occurs when an object's

original history is overcome and erased by the object's weaponization, designed by the junta to not only eradicate resistance to its cause, but to also cultivate full-throated support among the populace through fear.

The concept of objects of pain arises from Elaine Scarry's work on torture in *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*. In it, she refers to this process of supplanting the original intent of domestic objects in their weaponization as the "de-objectifying of objects", explaining it to be, "a process externalizing the way in which the person's pain causes his world to disintegrate; and, at the same time, the disintegration of the world is here, in the most literal way possible, made painful, made the direct cause of the pain. That is, in the conversion of a refrigerator into a bludgeon, the refrigerator disappears" (41). As in the case of the *parrilla* referenced by Jean Franco, for the individual who suffers the pain caused by the resignification of an object into weapon, the original object ceases to exist in its past understanding. What is identified here as the disintegration of the world implies a fundamental disruption of the individual's orientation to the object world. That which once functioned as homing device, in the words of Sara Ahmed, now appears to the subject as a potential and often very real minefield of pain.

In another part of her work, Scarry interrogates the tendency of torture sites to also assume the identities of places associated with daily life. This echoes the choice to name the electroshock torture technology the *parrilla*, as opposed to any other name. She writes

> In torture, the world is reduced to a single room or set of rooms. Called 'guest rooms' in Greece and 'safe houses' in the Philippines, the torture rooms are often given names that acknowledge and call attention to the generous, civilizing impulse normally present in the human shelter. They call attention to this impulse only as prelude to announcing its annihilation. The torture room is not just the setting in which the torture occurs; it is not just the space that happens to house the various instruments used for beating and burning and producing electric shock. It is itself literally converted into another weapon, into an agent of pain.

> All aspects of the basic structure--walls, ceiling, windows, doors--undergo this conversion (40)

This calls to mind the testimony of César Casalli Urrutia, taken from his home in Argentina by military officials. He testifies, "On 10 June I was kidnapped from my house in Martín Coronado. About ten men broke in and, pressing a revolver to my head, began to wreck the house looking for arms. At one point, they threw me to the floor and began to torture me with the cable from an electrical appliance. My wife was also being badly treated and beaten in another room. After an hour and a half in my house, they took me out and made me lie on the floor of a car while they went to look for a friend of mine" (CONADEP 18). Not only were secret detention centers named innocuous sounding monikers like *La Escuelita, La Perla, Club Atlético, El Olimpo, Venda Sexy,* or *Villa Grimaldi*, but the disintegration of the object world began within the homes of victims themselves. As further summarized in the Truth and Reconciliation Reports, this seemingly improvised method of terrorizing victims of state violence was both deliberately organized and central to executing the larger project of the dictatorships. The report concluded:

> The characteristics of these centres, and the daily life led there, reveal that they had been specifically conceived for the subjection of victims to a meticulous and deliberate stripping of all human attributes, rather than for their simple physical elimination. To be admitted to one of these centres meant to cease to exist. In order to achieve this end, attempts were made to break down the captives' identity; their spatio-temporal points of reference were disrupted, and their minds and bodies tortured beyond imagination. (CONADEP 52)

As Scarry defines," Torture aspires to the totality of pain...So the torturers, like pain itself, continually multiply their resources and means of access until the room and everything in it becomes a giant externalized map of the prisoner's feelings" (55). Both Scarry and the reports indicate that torture centers established a parallel world with the expressed intent of dismantling the humanity of victims who entered that space. It is no wonder that the act of blindfolding victims in both their transport to and their stay in such centers was referred to as "walling up",

because that act of placing the blindfold delineated entry into this parallel world. But as the testimony of César Casalli Urrutia and many other voices represented in cultural artifacts attest to, the parallel world defined by the junta's ideology and actions extended far beyond the confines of secret detention centers. Hairstyles, clothing, books, address books, all took on this same resignification to potentially provide unexpected entry into this parallel world of pain and possible disappearance. As Scarry notes, once faced with the knowledge that these objects contain the potential for weaponization, the object world presents itself not only through the subject's perspective but also the junta's. Calling attention to the objects weaponized during this time, represented in cultural artifacts, offers both a more detailed testimony to the scale of pain experienced because of state-sanctioned violence and an entry point to reflections of the less discussed, more invisible, reaches of these forces in broader society during this period. It also provides the foundation for accounts detailing the resistance of the violent resignification of the object world. These accounts related to the transitional objects demonstrate the ability of even victims kept in secret detention centers to punch through the parallel world created by the junta and preserve the warmth of their past humanity.

transitional objects

Amid the dehumanization that occurred in reference to the weaponization of the object world of the torture facility and beyond, transitional objects function to protect parts of the victim's internal humanity during a protracted traumatizing event. The term was originally associated with early development psychology, and these objects are also known in this sphere as comfort objects. But in later psychology, as is the case in Judith Herman's *Trauma and*

Recovery, the concept has been expanded to include objects that provide hope and connection to the world outside of the site of trauma. Herman writes:

> Prisoners of conscience, who have a highly developed awareness of the strategies of control and resistance, generally understand that isolation is the danger to be avoided at all costs, and that there is no such thing as a small concession when the issue is preserving their connections with the outside world. As tenaciously as their captors seek to destroy their relationships, these prisoners tenaciously seek to maintain communication with a world outside the one in which they are confined. They deliberately practice evoking mental images of the people they love, in order to preserve their sense of connection. They also fight to preserve physical tokens of fidelity. They may risk their lives for the sake of a wedding ring, a letter, a photograph, or some other small memento of attachment. Such risks, which may appear heroic or foolish to outsiders, are undertaken for supremely pragmatic reasons. Under conditions of prolonged isolation, prisoners need "transitional objects" to preserve their sense of connection to others. They understand that to lose these symbols of attachment is to lose themselves (80-1)

If the previous section outlined the intended movements that the dictatorial regimes made to violently resignify the object world, utilizing objects as a *punctum* to transgress the established relationship between those objects and a safe and stable life, the above passage shows that even in its most abject site this process was met with resistance. For, faced with the dismantling force of torture centers, victims grasped at these transitional objects to preserve the very aspects of their identity the centers wished to erase. Furthermore, Herman's reading of these transitional objects echoes the potential of the *punctum* explored in Barthes and Hirsch. "Walled up", that is blindfolded, and held in the parallel world of the torture centers, the narrow point of the transitional object enabled victims to hold onto their connection to the outside world. The *punctum* of these transitional objects, therefore, punches through the creation of a world of abject pain designed by the juntas.

The examples of individuals evoking transitional objects during the dictatorships when faced with the traumatizing reality of torture are numerous. In Jacobo Timerman's *Prisoner without a Name, Cell without a Number*, he directs his imagination towards the object of laying

out a bookstore that his wife and he will run upon his release from the CDC (36). Alicia Partnoy refers to this same imaginative act of dissociating from *The Little School* as “astral projecting”. Accounts like these challenge the dominant histories of the experiences of victims in these torture centers. They do not conform to the silent victims or *dos demonios* interpretations of the dominant history. Rather, they enliven the history with a radically humanized past that both the junta and the early democratic governments wished to either erase or forget. They provide groundwork for future resistance of a stagnant history, demonstrating a strategy for how a persecuted community can utilize specific objects to not only hold onto their humanity in the face of violent forces, but also how these same objects can punch through the dominant world to make space for their perspective. In terms of wielding objects as a vehicle for declarations of change and critical memory, this is where the discussion turns to testimonial objects.

testimonial objects

The first two categories of objects reside in the immediate moment of the dictatorial period. They refer to the additional signification of such objects in relation to the perspective of the perpetrator or the victim, respectively. The final category of objects, testimonial objects, takes the reparative historical work of the previous two categories in presenting the subtler yet altogether critical movements applied to the signification of the object world, and brings the past into the present through a specific object of focus. This term comes directly from Marianne Hirsch's *Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust*, in which she writes that testimonial objects show, “how we inherit not only stories and images from the past, but also our bodily and affective relationship to the object world we inhabit” (24). As alluded to in the discussion of Sara Ahmed’s work on queer phenomenology, strict inheritance

can be a slippery slope, especially for those who do not conform to the hegemonic configuration of the object world. In this passage from Hirsch, inherit refers to the literal transmission of artifacts from past generations that are either physically maintained in possession or through active recollection. But also, inheritance involves a subconscious rearing of relationships to objects that pertain to a significant event in the past. In centering the transmission of orientations across generations, specifically those generations injured by a traumatic past like the Holocaust, she offers a conceptual framework for understanding the material connections to the past that endure in the present, and the very real influence of these objects in the individuals who have grown to possess a similar orientation as the original traumatized generation that preceded them.

Along those lines, testimonial objects were often, at one point, objects of pain and/or transitional objects. The difference between those two and testimonial objects is that testimonial objects provide an access point to remember the pain of the past in a more detailed and embodied way, while the other two refer to the immediate and urgent resignification of an object to either harm or resist harm. Because of the evolution across these three categories of objects, I divide the chapters not by the categories themselves, but by a specific type of object (clothing, food, home). As Hirsch remarks later in the text, testimonial objects, "carry memory traces from the past…but they also embody the very process of its transmission. They testify to the historical contexts and the daily qualities of the past moments in which they were produced and, also, to the ways in which material objects carry memory traces from one generation to the next" (178). She advocates for a similar radical politic based in phenomenology as Sara Ahmed. For the testimonial object is not simply charged with the memory of the past, but it also provides glimpses into the conditions of its arrival. To trace its history, from the traumatic event that caused its resignification into an object of pain and/or a transitional object, to its present state as

a testimonial object, is to foreground the history of its iterations. As mentioned earlier, in a context like the early democratic transition that pressured the public to deny its connection to the past dictatorships, this movement of tracing memory through an object contains radical potential.

But testimonial objects are not presented by Hirsch and elsewhere as being magical. That is, the past is not simply read from the object by way of psychometry or another supernatural ability that imbues the object with an ability to transmit images of the past directly into a subject's imagination. Instead, it is a critical reading of the object world that depends on the context provided by other documents (literature, testimony, legal documents, etc.) related to the memory (186). One salient example of a testimonial object is the photographs of disappeared family members carried and posted during demonstrations against the dictatorships. Early on, these objects testified to the immediate and urgent grief of those who demanded the return of their loved ones. Over time, some of the photographs began to yellow from exposure, or new, lower resolution copies were made to prevent the original from being damaged. In this sense, the object not only testifies to the continued grief suffered by those who may already know that their loved one has disappeared forever, but it also underscores the passage of time since the photograph's initial involvement in that type of demonstration. Following the transition, these photographs attest to the continued dissatisfaction with the governments' handling of the memory of the disappeared.

Within cultural artifacts, I look to instances of reflection, wherein an encounter with an object triggers a specific recollection of its past association with pain or resistance of pain. The present, post-dictatorial, context of this reflection provides a counterargument to the assumption that by then many should have already left the past behind. As the section on trauma theory detailed, such an assumption is both inaccurate and only acts to further marginalize those who

still encounter traumatic memories of the past within the present object world. The inclusion of testimonial objects in these narratives and in postdictatorial memory organizations serve to remind the contemporary public of the unprocessed issues of the past in a more embodied way.

OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS

As previously mentioned, each chapter will contain an examination of the three categories of objects represented in cultural artifacts and associated with developing a method of critical memory in the postdictatorial period in Argentina and Chile. This includes objects of pain, transitional objects, and testimonial objects. In the context of the continued fog of suppression of critical discussions of past traumatic memory following the democratic transitions in both countries, these objects offer the potential to read the past from the material present of the object world. Borrowing from Barthes' *punctum*, historicizing these objects through their inclusion in postdictatorial narratives thus disrupts the hegemonic structure that privileges forgetting, giving space for the past to reconnect with conversations that many continue to advocate for regarding recovery from the trauma of the dictatorships.

In terms of the organization for the chapters of this project, I look to several types of objects that come up frequently in both postdictatorial cultural artifacts and the various testimonies and reports from the period. This collection of objects is by no means exhaustive, and there are more preliminary studies that could be expanded on to further articulate the relationship between the object world and memory during the postdicatorial period. For instance, Jordana Blejmar's analysis in *Playful Memories: The Autofictional Turn in Post-Dictatorship Argentina (2017)* of the use of toys in the recreation of traumatic memories in Argentine filmmaker Albertina Carri's work. But in the spirit of outlining the initial traumatic event of the

junta's weaponization of these objects, the resistance of victims to this violent resignification, and the later inversion of this violent resignification in political acts of critical memory, I have narrowed the focus to three objects. They are shelter/home, clothing, and food. These three mirror the three common objects associated with basic human needs, and they were the primary foci of the junta's persecution of its citizenry. In the following I will expand on these three objects, as well as offer some homing devices/texts that facilitate the historicization of these objects from present to the dictatorial past.

shelter/home

The first object is that of the home. During the dictatorship, the juntas predominantly took people from their homes. According to the CONADEP report, 62% of all victims subjected to processing at clandestine detention centers were taken from their homes (11). As referenced in a previous section, the victim's home was often converted into an improvised torture facility, with the victims and their families being restrained and tortured to varying degrees with household implements. Furthermore, many detention centers were in close proximity to residential neighborhoods. In certain testimonies, neighbors attest to the suspicious and occasionally disconcerting behaviors and noises that filtered through the walls of these facilities into the surrounding neighborhood. Homes, too, were appropriated as detention centers, and deeds for some of the homes of victims or their families were signed over to the junta under coercion. This is not to ignore the thousands displaced internally or abroad because of attempts to outrun persecution from the dictatorships. All these contribute to a traumatic redefinition of the home for many who suffered the violence of the juntas.

I begin the chapter with an examination of a particularly impactful case wherein the ideology of the juntas permeates the domestic space in such a way that cultural representation of this case takes advantage of metonymy, claiming the site to contain a miniaturized depiction of the ills of both the dictatorial period and present society. That is, the case of Mariana Callejas and the house in Lo Curro, which not only served as a headquarters for the Chilean junta's intelligence squadron, the DINA (responsible for coordinating the efforts to assassinated former Allende officials abroad), but also hosted many of the remaining cultural elite for literary workshops and soirees. The scandal that reverberated of Callejas, herself a noted Chilean author, being a DINA agent has influenced a significant cultural production around staging what that house signifies in the memory of Pinochet's Chile. It accounts for discussions that center the home as an object of pain.

The home as a transitional object comes from the narratives of those compelled to seek refuge or convert their own homes into safe houses while under threat of the juntas. This includes a trio of films from Argentina told from the perspective of a child (Marcelo Piñeyros'*Kamchatka,* Benjamín Ávila's *Infancia clandestina,* and Paula Markovitch's *El premio*), as well as life depicted in the Chilean graphic novel *Historias clandestinas* by siblings Ariel and Sol Rojas Lizana. In each, inhabitants work to varying degrees of success to hold onto previous feelings of conviviality and warmth related to the home in the face of displacement and persecution.

For the final part of this chapter, the home as testimonial object, I first look at Carlos Cerda's novel *An Empty House* for instructions of how to reckon with the revelation of a home's previous nefarious use under the Pinochet regime. Then, I examine the *escraches* of the HIJOS movement that began in the mid-1990s. HIJOS, comprised of children and allies of victims of

the last dictatorship in Argentina, performed *escraches* as a way of reclaiming the space of their traumatic memories by marking the houses of unprosecuted criminals of the dictatorship. These demonstrations in particular show an inversion of the tactics that the juntas used to weaponize the home, by in turn resignifying the space as a reminder of work yet to be done to fully restore dignity to those who suffered during the dictatorship.

clothing

In an earlier referenced section of the CONADEP report, the commission expressed that the intent of the officials operating the clandestine detention centers was to strip the victims of all aspects of their humanity (52). Quite literally, this also involved stripping them of clothing, controlling their access to warmth by way of leaving them in cells nude at times, or devoid of dry bedclothes, or substituting out their street clothes for other items mined from disappeared victims so that the military could appropriate the more expensive wares as part of their spoils. This is outlined in the testimonial literature of Timerman and Partnoy, and is depicted in the final scene of the film *Infancia clandestine* and throughout *Garage Olimpo*. In one of the subtler ways that the juntas exercised control through the object of clothing, Nona Fernandez's novella *Space Invaders* and Paula Markovitch's *El premio* depict how schoolchildren's uniforms reflect the underlying violent pressure to conform to the dominant ideology of the juntas.

As transitional objects, clothing provided the reminder of an absent loved one in the throes of alienating violence or grief. This grief expressed through wearing the clothing of an absent loved one can be seen in the interview with Patricia Dixon's sister in Juan Mandelbaum's documentary *Our Disappeared*. In Partnoy's *The Little School*, Mercado's *In a State of Memory*, and Piñeyro's *Kamchatka*, inherited articles of clothing provide a modicum of protection in the

face of the dehumanizing forces of the dictatorship. They also provide a material anchor for the memory of that absent individual.

By the final pages of *Space Invaders*, the now adult protagonists don their school uniforms as an act of critical witnessing to their dead friend's story; the object of the uniform becomes a testimonial object because it traverses the present, tight-fitting state on the bodies of the classmates to the past memory of the time with their murdered childhood friend. Alejandro Zambra, in his novel *Ways of Going Home*, shares this act, advocating for every child to put on their parents' clothes and stare at themselves in the mirror. It is a practice of embodied memory that rejects of the strict inheritance of the previous generations' knowledge. Finally, I look to Lola Arias' play *Mi vida después*, staged by children marked by the dictatorship in Argentina, wherein the actors deliberately wear the clothing of their parents while dramatizing their stories.

food

The third object is food. Food was an integral part of torturing so-called subversives in clandestine detention facilities. Not only were prisoners underfed and malnourished, as evidenced by the testimony provided by reports and other publications, but that being well fed came to be associated with impending death. This, as the reporting has shown, because the officials running the facilities wanted to stage skirmishes between the military and guerrilla resistance to progress the *dos demonios* theory of proportional violence from both sides of the conflict. Thus, prisoners were well-fed for weeks before their executions so that the corpses placed at these staged battle sites did not reveal the real history of abuse suffered by those individuals. For more literary depictions of food-related trauma I look to Jacobo Timerman's

Prisoner without a Name, Cell without a Number, Alicia Partnoy's *The Little School*, and Marco Bechis' film *Garage Olimpo*.

In Partnoy, and to some degree Timerman as well, food also functioned as a transitional object. As she shares in *The Little School*, prisoners fashioned their meager rations of bread into small balls to share with others. This became a sign to convey feelings of community and shared experience, something that the weaponization of food by the juntas wished to dismantle. In a more complex trajectory, the specific dish of eggs, served to a friend in hiding by the protagonist, illustrates his journey from ally to perpetrator in Pablo Larraín's film *Post Mortem*. Finally, I look to the novels *Las voces de abajo* from Pablo Melicchio, Alejandro Zambra's *Ways of Going Home,* and Carlos Cerda's *An Empty House* as entry points for discussing the potential for memory contained within the testimonial object of food. In Melicchio, the dishes Chiche remembers his mother making as a child, and his teacher's musings on the emotionally dependent preparation of the perfect pizza both facilitate more embodied forms of recollection, punching through the veil of oblivion hanging in the postdictatorial moment. Similarly, a long-delayed second date and a poorly cooked dinner unveils unprocessed trauma in Cerda's and Zambra's works, respectively.

There are, of course, more objects to investigate as part of this process of tracing the history of the object world as it relates to the persistent trauma carried over from the dictatorial period in Argentina and Chile. Like the texts of this current project, and as modeled in the examples provided in this introduction from Gabriel Salazar (by way of Patricio Guzmán's documentary) and Tununa Mercado, reading the present iterations of these key objects and tracing their connection to a painful past broadens the potential for subtler and more accommodating representations of traumatic memory. It contests the mnemonic stagnation

initiated by disinformation campaigns of the dictatorships and maintained by the actions of early democratic governments of the transition. It is a way to break through the thickening fog of oblivion, an ever more urgent issue with the passage of time. To make space for the concerns of a still-traumatized sector of the population. For, despite the constantly accruing time and ideology atop these traumas, one can still discover a pearl button at the bottom of the ocean that presents a material challenge to the congealing dominant narrative of history.

chapter 1: REALITY IS IN THE BASEMENT

home as a memory object

PRELUDE

In Marco Bechis' film *Garage Olimpo,* home is a precarious space. From the outset, Maria, a teacher who works in a poorer neighborhood of Buenos Aires teaching literacy classes to adults, is taken from her mother's home by members of the Argentine military police. Faced with the disappearance of her daughter, Diana is escorted by an Olimpo operative named Texas to an attorney to liquidate her assets. The attorney inquires as to why Diana wishes to sell her home to Texas for a price that is under market value. She answers that she simply needs money. Once the transaction is complete, Diana and Texas leave the lawyer. She has handed back to him an envelope containing the money and property extorted from her by the military police in the hopes of her daughter being released from their custody. She reminds Texas of this deal in the elevator of the lawyer's office, to which he replies that they are driving to meet up with Maria. Instead, Texas drives Diana to the outskirts of a city, parking in a small triangular dirt lot between streets. The passenger door opens, and just as the figure of Diana enters into view, two gunshots resound in the scene. Diana is left to die in the parking lot, while Texas recovers her purse from the ground and speeds off.

Shortly after, Texas (or Edu as his wife calls him) is heard talking with his wife about the house, Diana's home, that he recently bought for them. It is an uncanny reproduction of a banal conversation a young couple would have when establishing themselves in a home to raise their infant in. With their baby's cries echoing through the house, Texas comments that if he cries too much, they could return him. His wife chides him for the remark, but the couple moves on to admire the vastness of Diana and Maria's former home. Texas's wife, however, climbs to the

second floor and stumbles upon Félix, another member of the Olimpo force, in his room that he rented from Diana. Texas is surprised to see him there, not knowing that he was a former tenant of the property. Félix also did not know about the deal to have Diana sell the property to Texas. After a tense exchange between the two operatives, Texas demands that Félix leaves by the following day. Texas now holds the deed to the house, and Félix is an unexpected and unwanted presence there.

There is a lot to unpack here. For one, the circumstances surrounding Maria's capture by the military police directly correlates with Félix's presence within her home. He, like many of the other workers at El Olimpo in the film (and the historical place), conducted infiltration missions to identify and eventually eradicate members of subversive groups around the city. Maria was taken for the nature of her work in the poblaciones, and the friends she kept (the tenants who stayed in her mother's home who were taken with her). This put her on a list of those who could at the very least provide the military with more individuals to take, as Maria is tortured to do later.

Once taken captive, the process of extorting Diana under the illusion of paying for the release of her daughter also follows a general pattern which occurred both in Chile and Argentina during the dictatorial period (CONADEP 12; Feitlowitz 196; *Informe Rettig* 45). In Argentina, junta police by decree were permitted to take all property related to the captured individual. Many layouts of clandestine detention centers identify a spoils of war room for keeping these items. Echoing the actions of their militant activist counterparts on the left and right alike, the military also raised funds through methods like what is depicted in the exchange between Diana and Texas at the lawyer's office.

Finally, the consolidation of the force applied to Maria and her family by the military police, seen in Texas and his family establishing themselves in Diana's former home, announces the establishment of a new definition of the home space and even the family itself. Texas is a member of the police force, acting within the modus operandi of the dictatorship to leverage a new and better life for his young family, depicted here in his wife's exclamations at how many bathrooms the new place has. Though brief, his wife's trepidation that comes from her attempts to understand her infant's behavior, coupled with Texas' comment with returning him if he cries too much, insinuates that this child is not biologically theirs. The film makes a point to show a room in El Olimpo that acts as an improvised nursery, given the many children that were caught up in the capture of their parents. These two details played against each other, the nursery shown before the young family tours their new home, provide a glimpse into the early stages of life for the several hundred children appropriated by the junta from families of the disappeared to military families. Félix's presence within the confines of this freshly defined domestic space risks integrating the violent process by which that space came to be. And his expulsion from that space by Texas reestablishes this division between the domestic space and spaces reserved for state-sanctioned violence.

Garage Olimpo, as a work, dramatically collapses many of the transgressive and violent acts committed by the dictatorial regime in Argentina. Though the density of violence is played for dramatic effect, the acts themselves are grounded in historical reality. Given this data exists in different sources, the question that emerges is what is gained through such dramatic/literary/aesthetic representations of the home that cannot quite be captured in other, more strictly historical/testimonial accounts?

On the one hand, the answer to this question lies in the capacity for the home, as a dramatic object, to represent more than its localized and limited context. Many of the works of this chapter, like in the few scenes from *Garage Olimpo* summarized above, collect a large swath of behaviors and agents within the confines of the home. Much of what occurs in Diana's home might have not historically played out in the same space as it does in this fictitious home. But this home compiles the ambient pressures of the post-dictatorial period, the revelations from the truth and reconciliation commission, and stages them within one spatially coherent site. This is home as metonym in postdictatorial art. In it, home becomes an intimate node of circulation in which the dynamics of larger archetypes and actors of society and culture can be observed.

Pushing the argument further, collapsing the agents of state power and the ideology that they wield within the home space contends against the dominant assertion that the home was a safe and stable site, separate and apart from the chaotic public sphere. Propaganda related to traditional family values, martial law, curfews point towards a narrative that idealizes the home as the origin of national stability. Texts like *Garage Olimpo*, and the collection read in this chapter, propose a different narrative; one that reflects the perspectives of those who suffered, endured, remembered, and/or were party to the symbolic and real violence located within the home, both during and after the dictatorships. It is in these artistic representations that the historicizing process of object memory, as it relates to the home, is rendered poignant. The home, thus, operates in many of these works as a nation in miniature, wherein the conditions of arrival to a new, perverse, expression of the home is witnessed alongside other iterations.

As such, the following chapters examine this aesthetic conception of home through the lens laid out in the introduction. I will begin with the home as an object of pain. This, of course, is expressed in the scenes worked through above from *Garage Olimpo*, but I would like to focus

on another, just as pervasive, instances of state violence and violent state ideology being expressed and practiced throughout the home. This section will focus on the case of the house occupied by the DINA agents Mariana Callejas and Michael Townley in Pinochet's Chile. The second category of objects, that of the home as a transitional object, will primarily involve artistic representations of internal exiles. Or the safe house. In all three texts, measures are taken to maintain a connection to love and hope despite the external danger that necessitated establishing a safe house and abandoning the family home in the first place. Finally, in the wake of revelations following the democratic transitions in both Chile and Argentina, I focus on the home as a testimonial object. Here, I begin with Chilean author Carlos Cerda's novel *Una casa vacía* as a call to witnessing the hidden voices within a seemingly banal home, and the *escraches* of HIJOS as an active revival and amplification of those voices within the neighborhood.

Chapter 1.1: UNA CASA DE DOBLE FILO

home as an object of pain

During the dictatorial periods in both Argentina and Chile, the home oftentimes served as a primary site for the initiation of state-sanctioned violence. According to the CONADEP report, over 60% of individuals taken captive and processed by the military police in Argentina were taken from their homes (11). In Chile the numbers are similar. This process often involved operations that were carried out under the cover of darkness, and usually were preceded by electricity being cut off in the area surrounding the home of the target. Many clandestine detention centers were in residential neighborhoods, with certain houses being converted into domestic torture facilities. As a prelude to their experience in the CDCs themselves, military police would occasionally begin interrogating their victims within the home itself, using household appliances to construct improvised electroshock torture devices. This torture

sometimes took place and/or involved loved ones and other residents of the home (*Informe Rettig* 45; CONADEP 12). All this is to highlight that during the dictatorship, many citizens, regardless of their perceived standing in relation to their respective dictatorial regimes, felt and responded to the dangers related to the home space. As an Argentine citizen is quoted saying in Marguerite Feitlowitz's *A Lexicon of Terror*: "In Buenos Aires you are safe in the streets at any time, but you are never safe in your home" (182).

However, and unlike the stories detailed above, of the state specifically applying direct or indirect pressure to its citizenry inside their homes, the following case depicts a subtler, and even more pervasive inversion of the domestic ideal: when the state and its ideology comes to install itself as a fellow inhabitant and agent within the home. The artistic response highlights the far-reaching implications of the actions committed within this specific domestic space. In short, the collection of texts produced around this scandal reflects the nerve that it touched in society upon the revelation that the dictatorship had begun to paint the walls of the home in its own image.

As such, I would like to turn our focus to the house in Lo Curro, Chile. This is the house seemingly occupied by only Mariana Callejas, her American husband Michael Townley, and their two children in the wealthy hillside neighborhood in Santiago. However, upon detonation of a car bomb that killed Orlando Letelier and Ronnie Moffit in Washington, D.C. in 1976, the house in Lo Curro was revealed to be much more. In addition to serving as a social oasis for the cultural elite (writers, artists, socialites still left in the country) of the time, Callejas' home also served as a headquarters for the intelligence arm of the Pinochet regime, the DINA (Dirección de Inteligencia Nacional). There, Townley, Callejas, and associates including Italian fascists, and Uruguayan chemist Eugenio Barrios fabricated wiretapping technology, false travel documents for agents, and sarin gas. This coordinated effort, guided by the head of the DINA Gen. Gonzalo

Contreras, resulted in assassination plots abroad of ex-Allende government heads, including the aforementioned Letelier and Moffit, Carlos Prats and his wife in Buenos Aires, and the failed attempt against Bernardo Leighton in Rome, Italy. When Callejas was not able to be present to assist with these operations, she served as a point person between Townley and Contreras; records show her receiving a call from her husband after the Washington operation was carried out, quickly phoning Contreras to relay the message.

The ensuing international scandal affected the public appearance of the DINA, as well as the regime's approach to suppressing dissent among its citizenries. As noted in the Rettig Report, the DINA was dissolved in August of 1977 because of the Letelier assassination scandal (80). Michael Townley was extradited to the United States for the Letelier and Moffit assassinations, and Callejas gained immunity for testifying against her husband during the investigation. Townley was eventually placed in witness protection in the United States, while Callejas was removed from her DINA-furnished house in Lo Curro, now blacklisted from the writing community that she was a rising star in (having won a contest in *El Mercurio*). The two fell into relative obscurity until Townley decided to give an interview that would air in Chile in 1993 for *TVN*. Such was the situation that even the president of the newly democratic Chile, Patricio Alwyn, attempted to block the interview. His attempt was unsuccessful, and "Confesiones de un asesino" aired, with Townley detailing the scope of the projects pursued by those connected to the house in Lo Curro during the mid-seventies, including his ex-wife Callejas.

This event brought the scandal back into the public eye and coincided with the trial and eventual conviction of DINA leader Gen. Gonzalo Contreras. From Callejas' end, such was the pressure to clear her name that she wrote and published a memoir about her experiences in the house in Lo Curro in 1995, titled *Siembra vientos*. This is the first text of the collection to be

examined in the following. While its implicit aim is to distance herself from the actions her husband was convicted of, since her own name was formally cleared after having provided testimony to the investigation during the late-seventies, Callejas' memoir contains sufficient inconsistencies and egregious falsehoods that it unwittingly triggered a broader literary response over symbolic claims to the house in Lo Curro's place in Chilean history[10].

Siembra vientos was born, in effect, as a distancing device. The distance it creates is as real as it is symbolic. Throughout the text, Callejas confines her work to the third floor living areas. As such, she removes herself from the rest of the property, where the DINA conducted operations. The text divides her interior life from the exterior evil that occasionally intersected her. Furthermore, it constructs a sympathetic persona. She is concerned with writing, her children, and her artistic friends. She had loved a man who went too far with a vision for the country she loved and tagged along to support him. Nothing more.

The following passage comes from the middle point of the memoir. It highlights how Callejas both remembers and interprets her own practices within the space of the house in Lo Curro. She writes:

> Así y todo, en la casa había movimiento constante. Por fortuna, los dormitorios del tercer nivel están casi aislados del resto del a casa, y en ellos encontrábamos tranquilidad los miembros de la familia. Tal era mi convicción de que el tercer nivel de la casa era mi hogar que no vacilaba en invitar a mis amigos y compañeros de taller literario a verme, especialmente cuando mi marido se encontraba fuera del país y las actividades en los pisos inferiores terminaban temprano. Lograba separar en mi mente mi vida privada de lo oscuro de los pisos bajos. Y la prueba de ello es en gran parte de mis mejores trabajos literarios fueron escritos en los momentos gratos que pasaba en mis dominios, encima de mi gran cama, con mis hijos a mi lado, el viento y la lluvia, afuera. (73)

[10] As Jean Franco describes it in *Cruel Modernity*, "In Chile, the name Mariana Callejas came to stand not only for collaboration but also for cover-up of torture and the complicity of the literary institution in atrocity, shattering the notion that literature was, by its very nature, uncontaminated by the dirty work of the state" (114).

On the third floor, Callejas describes a nearly isolated oasis amidst the constant movement around the rest of the property. She explains that she had no issue inviting friends and the literary workshop to the third floor when DINA operations wrapped for the day. But she cements her confidence in extending that invitation by identifying the third-floor space as her "home." In the line prior to this, she uses the word "house." The third line supports this qualitative division further. She describes how she compartmentalized her private life from the dark actions happening below. The final line adds another term to the third-floor space, as she describes it as her dominion, and adds her children to the mix of those protected by that space. The big bed shelters them from the wind and rain outside. To poetically represent the DINA and her husband as a period of wind and rain ties back to the commotion described elsewhere in the passage, but it also limits that commotion to the space outside her home. Because her home is also her private life and mind, the DINA's actions fall outside of her as well.

When she returns to the present, this division between her private life and the DINA deepens. She writes:

> Envejezco sola, en mi propio mausoleo en ruinas. La casa en Lo Curro, que para muchos es un símbolo del Mal y de la Dina, para mí es el hogar donde crecieron mis hijos, donde celebramos sus cumpleaños, tuvimos fiestas de Año nuevo, talleres literarios, ensayos de música. Veinte años de mi vida han transcurrido en esta casa y para mí, los ecos de las pisadas y las voces de la gente que solía ocupar los pisos inferiores durante los primeros dos años, se apagaron hace mucho. (141)

This passage consolidates all the previously discussed elements to what Callejas aims to accomplish with this memoir. The metaphor of the mausoleum implies that she was dead inside the house. However, a mausoleum often holds many bodies, not just one. What other corpses lived with her? From later interviews, one possible entity would be her career as a writer (Peña np). As mentioned in a previous passage, she was even capable of writing her "best literary

works" while in the house in Lo Curro. She alludes in this passage that the extraneous events outside of her home, that is her psyche, were jettisoned with time.

As Callejas frequently asserts in the memoir, she made attempts to separate her private life on the third floor of the house in Lo Curro from the DINA operations outside of that space. However, her husband often breached that separation. She describes one moment when her relationship with Townley nearly reached its breaking point:

> Dos veces estuve a punto yo de irme de la casa, abandonarlo todo, hasta a los niños que no querían ir conmigo porque no entendían lo que estaba sucediendo. La primera vez cuando, bajando la escalera para salir, escuché, en la oficina de Michael, mi propia voz, en animada conversación con un amigo de mi taller literario. Me quedé estupefacta, no entendía lo que pasaba. Luego comprendí que mi teléfono estaba intervenido, que Michael había estado grabando mis conversaciones telefónicas. (122)

Rather than the refuge she described earlier in the text, this confrontation characterizes the house as her own personal hell. And she, its damned soul. She positions herself as an even more pathetic player in this wild adventure during the Pinochet years. A victim of pairing with the wrong man and following him to the wrong end. Her admission of being spied on aligns her with the rest of the victims of state overreach and suppression: the wiretap was not just any conversation, but one between Callejas and a friend from her literary workshop. This intersection between literature and state is impossible to ignore. And Callejas, without an ally to rescue her, suffered the nightmare of her husband, the DINA puppet unmasked. It is perhaps this very act of attempted camaraderie with her fellow Chileans that triggered such a fierce literary response from her critics, the first arriving from Chilean leftist writer, performance artist, and drag performer Pedro Lemebel[11]. In his chronicle, titled "Las orquideas negras de Mariana Callejas",

[11] As Michael Lazzara, in his article "Writing Complicity: The Ideological Adventures of Mariana Callejas", proposes, "If a confessional text is not open to this transformative dimension, if the subject is not willing to become vulnerable or undone through a truly honest reckoning, then the narrative falls short of fulfilling its ethical potential. Where no expiation occurs, where no willingness to accept punishment or consequences exists, an ethical standard

Lemebel directly refutes Callejas' claims to victimhood, instead seeking to unmask the evil lurking beneath her and her house in Lo Curro.

Pedro Lemebel's chronicle "Las orquídeas negras de Mariana Callejas (or "el Centro Cultural de la Dina"), published in 1998 in the collection *De perlas y cicatrices*, was originally read as part of his program for Radio Tierra, *Cancionero*. The collection of chronicles itself responds broadly to the post-dictatorial period. There are two formal elements that distinguish Lemebel's chronicle from the other literary representations of Mariana Callejas. First, he is the only author of the set to preserve her full name. He calls her Mariana Callejas, instead of Maria or Melania. The absence of a pseudonym indicates a direct confrontation between Lemebel and Callejas. This chronicle does not hide behind allegory. It instead provides a critical counter to Callejas' own depiction of herself in her memoir. The second distinguishing element of this chronicle is its genre. As a foil to Callejas' own memoir and other depictions of the events that took place in the house in Lo Curro, Lemebel's chronical intends to be the more authentic version.

The chronicle focuses on the action that occurs at one of Callejas' parties at the house in Lo Curro. Lemebel immediately establishes the basis of his foil to *Siembra vientos* with his narration of the scene. He writes:

> Concurridas y chorreadas de whisky eran las fiestas en la casa pije de Lo Curro, a mediados de los setenta. Cuando en los aires crispados de la dictadura se escuchaba la música por las ventanas abiertas, se leía Proust y Faulkner con devoción y un set de gays culturales revoloteaba en torno a la Callejas, la dueña de casa. Una diva escritora con un pasado antimarxista que hundía sus raíces en la ciénaga de Patria y Libertad. Una mujer de gestos controlados y mirada metálica

cannot be met" (143); additionally, "To be anything more than a perjured subject offering a contrived testimony would imply a willingness to probe this "secret guilt," to recognize the true depth and breadth of her complicity out of responsibility toward her fellow citizens. Callejas, however—a fissured, compartmentalized subject—is unwilling to be undone by her narrative; consequently, she forestalls any chance at self-transformation, at social transformation, in short, any chance of becoming human" (150). Both passages provide further framework for understanding the insufficiency of Callejas' attempt at confession in the memoir, and why there has been such an extended reckoning with this initial document.

> que, vestida de negro, fascinaba por su temple marcial y la encantadora mueca de sus críticas literarias. Una señora bien, que era una promesa del cuento en letras nacionales. Publicada hasta en la revista de izquierda "La Bicicleta". Alabada por la elite artística que frecuentaba sus salones. La desenvuelta clase cultural de esos años que no creía en historias de cadáveres y desaparecidos. Más bien le hacían el quite al tema recitando a Eliot, discutiendo sobre estética vanguardista o meneando el culo escéptico al ritmo del grupo Abba. Demasiado embriagados por las orquídeas fúnebres de Mariana, la Callejas. (14)

He describes the house as quaint and juxtaposes the tense atmosphere of the dictatorship with a house where music emanates through open windows at night. Writers who frequented parties at the house in Lo Curro often mentioned its welcomed existence as one of the few places in the region where such parties could still occur openly at night. With the initial focus on liquor and music, and the light mood set against a tense backdrop, Lemebel depicts a rare site of decadence in the social wasteland caused by Pinochet's curfew.

By contrast, in *Siembra vientos*, Mariana Callejas draws attention to her quieter characteristics. She highlights contemplative and cozy spaces like the bed, and she wraps her children and her literary production around her to shroud against rumors about the house in Lo Curro. Lemebel highlights a more sinister side of Callejas. She is surrounded by cultured gays instead of children. Like Callejas herself, he gives her the role of owner. But he also highlights her anti-Marxist past, and her connection to prior conservative movements such as Patria y Libertad, something Callejas barely mentions in her memoir. He describes her gestures as controlled. The nod to the cultural homosexuals positions Callejas as a diva figure. This detail also ascribes to her character a desire to be the center of attention. The controlled gestures and metallic stare deepen this sense of performance, making Callejas a purposeful diva. She commands her image and can endear herself to many. Lemebel identifies her success in the literary sphere as directly connected to her network of friends and acquaintances who frequented her parties at the house in Lo Curro. Such is the sum enchantment of Callejas and her house that

she achieves publication in a leftist magazine *La Bicicleta*, a subtle condemnation of the elite left.

While this chronicle focuses on refuting Callejas' claims of victimhood, it also turns an eye to the groups of guests who attended her parties. Because of her connection to the elite of Chilean culture and art, Lemebel explores their complicity in supporting Callejas. Culture and elite are the two terms featured in their description in the above passage. In their partying, there is no mention of Chilean literary figures. Instead, elites entertain themselves with discussions of the Western canon: Proust, Eliot, Faulkner. Between these erudite conversations, the elite guests get drunk on whisky and dance to contemporary Western disco hits like Abba. With the line of how these were the same elites who ignored the rumors of corpses or disappeared, a complex characterization emerges. For, coupled with their seeming enchantment at the hands of Callejas and their impulse-less levels of drunken stupor, Lemebel depicts these elites as being dangerously childish and disconnected, not only from Chilean cultural production, but the reality of Pinochet's Chile. Layering Western modernism, corpses, liquor, and Abba mixes high and low culture with escapist denial. The result is behaviors complicit in the horrors committed by the state and individuals like Callejas during that time.

At the end of the short text, he strengthens this connection between art and violence, writing:

> Seguramente, quienes asistieron a estas veladas de la cursilería cultural post golpe, podrán recordar las molestias por los tiritones del voltaje, que hacía pestañear las lámparas y la música interrumpiendo el baile. Seguramente nunca supieron de otro baile paralelo, donde la contorsión de la picana tensaba en arco voltaico la corva torturada. Es posible que no puedan reconocer un grito en el destemple de la música disco, de moda en esos años. Entonces, embobados, cómodamente embobados por el estatus cultural y el alcohol que pagaba la Dina. Y también la casa, una inocente casita de doble filo donde literatura y tortura se coagularon en la misma gota de tinta y yodo, en una amarga memoria festiva que asfixiaba las vocales del dolor. (15-6)

We should not ignore the conflation of literature with music, and sensorial knowledge with its ignorance. Like the music that Callejas uses to drown out the screams coming from her basement in an earlier scene in the chronicle, the elites' focus on Western art in both their production and consumption boosted the image of a modernized Chile[12]. The double-edged sword metaphor applies to the house in Lo Curro, but it applies to the country as well. For while cultural production provided an appearance of refinement and civilization, what resided below that mask was a barbaric extermination of political dissidents. As the Callejas figure remarks in Roberto Bolaño's *By Night in Chile*, it would seem that at the time these were the requisite ingredients for making Chilean literature.

The novella *By Night in Chile* was published in 2000, shortly following Bolaño's return visit to Chile. Though the house in Lo Curro serves as a central dramatic scene in the work, the novella itself traces the biography of Opus Dei priest Father Sebastián Urrutía Lacroix. It is told from Urrutia Lacroix's deathbed, in a conversation between Urrutia Lacroix and his dying conscience, the Wizened Youth. Much like his friend Pedro Lemebel, Bolaño is concerned with the behavior of those in Chilean artistic circles who eventually renounced Callejas, but continued to reproduce and thrive in environments that had previously welcomed her and her ilk. The scene at the house in Lo Curro in *By Night in Chile* operates both as an exploration of the behaviors and beliefs of Chilean intellectual elites and a response to Callejas' own assertions of innocence in *Siembra vientos*.

In Lemebel, the chronicle genre served as an account of the behaviors of Chilean intellectual elites that could move socially during Pinochet. Bolaño, in turn, makes use of the

[12] Furthermore, it highlights how the Chilean ruling class "prefer[ed] to bracket human rights as an issue seemingly disconnected from the country's miraculous economic transformation" (Lazzara "Writing" 142).

novel, penetrating the psyche of elite intellectuals by way of his protagonist Urrutia Lacroix. And just like with Callejas's memoir, the reader can identify contradictions in his memories. He remarks early on that Chilean intellectuals needed social outlets, which led to taking figures like Callejas up on their offers of convivial spaces. But he does not recognize the violence necessary to make those spaces possible. He explains:

> So this is how it happened. There was a woman. Her name was María Canales. She was a writer, she was pretty, she was young. In my opinion she was not without talent. I thought so then, and still do. Her talent was, how can I put it? Inward, sheathed, withdrawn. Others have recanted, they have put it all behind them and forgotten...But I know the story of María Canales, the whole story, everything that happened. She was a writer. Maybe she still is. Writers (and critics) didn't have many places to go. María Canales had a house on the outskirts of the city. A big house, surrounded by a garden full of trees, a house with a comfortable sitting room, with a fireplace and good whiskey, good cognac, a house that was open to friends once or twice a week. (97)

This depiction provides a new perspective: that of the guest. One who, given his stature in the intellectual community of the time, represents metonymically the broader group of elites who attended those soirees. He describes the tastes of the guests in similar fashion to Lemebel. They lean towards more Western drink, music, and art (Bolaño 99). In this excerpt, he also claims to know the "whole story" of Canales, which is further substantiated by his description of Canales as *inward, sheathed, withdrawn*. Read against Lemebel's chronicle, *sheathed* echoes the double-edged sword metaphor; that the house in Lo Curro was a site of both cultural production and state violence. Each of these three adjectives imply a gruesome underside to the cordial, sophisticated mask. Or, in the case of Bolaño's reproduction of the house in Lo Curro: a basement.

The scene involving the basement in the house in Lo Curro locates the violence underfoot. This is a clever way of representing not only the way in which Chilean elites and Pinochet built their collective homes atop the tortured bodies of others, but also that the site of

this violence was in such close proximity to spaces they frequented. What follows from this artistic choice is the elite avatar wandering down into the basement during one of Canales' soirees. Urrutia Lacroix remembers:

> Months later a friend told me that during a party at María Canales's house one of the guests had gotten lost. He or she, my friend didn't know which, but I'll assume it was a he, was very drunk and went looking for the bathroom or the water closet, as some of my unfortunate countrymen still say…Instead of taking the passage on the right, he took the one of the left, then he went along another passage, down the stairs, and before he knew it, he was in the basement…he came to a passage that was narrower than the others and he opened one last door. He saw a kind of metal bed. He put on the light. On the bed was a naked man, his wrists and ankles tied. The man seemed to be asleep, but it was difficult to verify that impression, since he was blindfolded. The stray guest shut the door, feeling suddenly stone cold sober, and stealthily retraced his steps. When he got back to the sitting room he asked for a whiskey and then another and didn't say a word. Later, how much later I don't know, he told a friend, who then told my friend, who, much later on, told me...And months later, or maybe years later, another guest at those gatherings told me the same story. And then I heard it from another and another and another. And then democracy returned, the moment came for reconciliation, and it was revealed that Jimmy Thompson had been one of the key agents of the DINA, and that he had used his house as a center for the interrogation of prisoners. (109-11)

One key element of metonymy is elongation, or stretching a given subject to encompass a greater spatiotemporal zone. In this passage alone, the scene spans temporally from the time of Canales' soirees (mid-1970s) until the reemergence of Chilean democracy (early-1990s); spatially, it covers the intellectual elites, democracy, the DINA, Jimmy Thompson/Michael Townley/the USA. Bolaño uses the rumor of the basement encounter to trace the time from Callejas to democracy. The first retelling of the basement scene and its subsequent revisions and elaborations further envelope a greater degree of detail, and more individuals. The passage amounts to a totalizing landscape of the time, achieved through the lens of the single site of the house in Lo Curro.

The central element to the story told and retold about the curious, or sometimes lost, guest stumbling through the house in Lo Curro ensnares Chilean elites in complicity with the events that transpired at the house. The guest returning to the party and drinking himself into oblivion, after having witnessed an atrocity firsthand, symbolizes the willful denial of such knowledge by elites of the time. But also, the proximity between quotidian spaces and spaces of violence. This shortening of proximity makes it less likely for elites at the time to have neither heard nor seen some evidence of such violence, since it was literally and figuratively underfoot.

What distinguishes Bolaño's method of exposing the role that Chilean elites had in supporting state-sanctioned violence from Lemebel's, however, is a preference for the visual rather than aural. In Lemebel's chronicle, the space of rumors collapses into a simultaneous event. The screams of tortured dissidents are drowned out by the active aural denial device of raising the volume of party music. Urrutia Lacroix in *By Night in Chile*, however, predicates culpability with sight. He wonders following the revelation of the events at the house:

> If María Canales knew what her husband was doing in the basement, why did she invite guests to her house? The answer was simple: Because, normally, when she had a soirée, the basement was unoccupied. I asked myself the following question: Why then, on that particular night, did a guest who lost his way find that poor man? The answer was simple: Because, with time, vigilance tends to relax, because all horrors are dulled by routine. I asked myself the following question: Why didn't anyone say anything at the time? The answer was simple: Because they were afraid. I was not afraid. I would have been able to speak out, but I didn't see anything. I didn't know until it was too late. (111-12)

Urrutia Lacroix claims in this passage that he would not have succumbed to fear like the others. But fear does not excuse inaction. Part of the reason why Chilean elites, especially those like Urrutia Lacroix and Maria Canales, shrugged off rumors of violence, is because they were involved in institutions of counter dissonance. Both Urrutia Lacroix and his real-life counterpart wrote for one of the major Chilean news publications. Their careers thrived at the time, and

rumor would certainly prove ineffective in producing the pangs of guilt necessary for sacrificing such a luxury. To return to the passage at hand once more, it is inferred that Canales, too, knew of these circumstances, and considered her secret safe so long as it was kept in the basement. The easing of vigilance is dispositive of that confidence in the spatial structure of her secrecy.

But the full unmasking of Canales comes at the final scene between Urrutia Lacroix and her. It is a callback to some of the later parts of *Siembra vientos*, both in the haunted quality of the house's description, as well a depiction of Canales in the years following the reinstatement of democracy in Chile. The exchange goes as follows:

> Did you know about everything Jimmy was doing? Yes, Father. And do you repent? Like everyone else, Father…I looked at her sadly and said perhaps that was for the best, she was still young, she wasn't involved in any criminal proceedings, she could start over, with her children, somewhere else. And what about my literary career? She said with a defiant look. Use a nom de plume, a pseudonym, a nickname, for God's sake. She looked at me as if I had insulted her. Then she smiled: Do you want to see the basement? I could have slapped her face, instead of which I sat there and shook my head. I shut my eyes…They're going to tear the house down. They'll rip out the basement. It's where one of Jimmy's men killed the Spanish UNESCO official. It's where Jimmy killed that Cecilia Sánchez Poblete woman. Sometimes I'd be watching television with the children, and the lights would go out for a while. We never heard anyone yell, the electricity just cut out and then come back. Do you want to go and see the basement? (114)

This scene is punctuated by the refrain: "Do you want to see the basement?" The first time Canales asks Urrutia Lacroix this question is after she describes her current state. As is her position in *Siembra vientos*, Canales is troubled by the fact that no one wants to discuss her writing anymore. That her celebrity has been cemented in the details of what occurred at the house in Lo Curro. Canales' literary career is so important to her that she is insulted by the Urrutia Lacroix's suggestion that she use a pseudonym to continue writing and move on with her life. And so, she counters his concern by unmasking herself and inviting him into the basement space. This is what emerges from the previously alluded to quality of *sheathed*. Unprompted, as

Urrutia Lacroix shuts his eyes to the scene, Canales continues her unmasking, revealing what horrors took place in that basement space, tying the acts of torture below to their above ground effects of power outages and flickering lights. Curiously, she negates an auditory rumor of the events, claiming never to have heard the yells of the victim. Simply the visual marker of a power outage was enough to know. Again, she concludes this reminiscence by asking if Urrutia Lacroix would like to see the basement.

This refrain solidifies the connection that both Lemebel and Callejas, up until this point, have progressed. Canales, and by proxy Callejas, is inextricably linked to the house, and as her primary concern is with her writing, that house is also tied up in literature. Canales might verbally repent for the ills she aided or caused. But as she qualifies, she feels no different than any other Chilean who did not take a stand against the Pinochet regime. It seems unreasonable to her that she should be blacklisted from Chilean literary circles. This move to establish commonality with her fellow Chilean rang hollow in the memoir, and it reaches disturbing levels in Bolaño's depiction.

Prior to their final goodbyes, Urrutia Lacroix narrates, "Then she looked around, calm, serene, courageous in her own way…and she said, That's how literature is made in Chile" (115-16). Literature often does emerge out these contradictions, many of which are experienced spatially. This passage from Bolaño aligns him in spirit with Lemebel. By having Canales provide this piece of wisdom, panning the landscape of her home that collapsed horror and high culture into one scandal, Bolaño critiques the established forms of generating literature in Chile. As in Lemebel, the Wizened Youth denounces Urrutia Lacroix's support of Canales' statement. Instead, and with Urrutia Lacroix's death, the generation to which the Wizened Youth pertains wishes to depart from the mistakes of their predecessors.

In his own departure from Bolaño and Lemebel, Carlos Iturra presents a sympathetic Callejas in his short story, titled "Caida en desgracia". Thematically, this text aligns with Callejas' *Siembra vientos*, presenting her arc from DINA agent and rising literary star to cultural pariah. Rafael Osorio, an avatar for Iturra himself, is a young writer who is taken by the older and more established Melania Carreras (Callejas). By the story's end, he, like Iturra, figures himself one of her only remaining friends.

Rafael Osorio, new to the Chilean literary scene in 1975, comes across an advertisement in *El Mercurio* for a literary workshop, and decides to attend. From this place of youthful naiveté, he remarks about Chilean literary workshops, "los talleres literarios, inofensivos para las autoridades, se convirtieron en un apetecido refugio no solo para quienes querían llegar a ser escritores, sino también para muchos que buscaban ejercicio intelectual, intercambio de ideas, amistad inteligente" (183). As expressed in each of the works discussed so far, literary gatherings were safe spaces during those immediate years following the coup. Like the other fictional texts of the set, the older Melania scoops up the young artists of the workshop and invites them to her home for a party. This continues the theme of enchantment from both Bolaño and Lemebel. Rafael and his friends are taken with the minor celebrity of Melania Carreras, and being no more than twenty themselves during the Pinochet regime, also taken with the prospect of booze and music.

And almost like the opening scene of a classic haunted house film, Iturra narrates his first encounter with the fated house:

> Aunque los tres intuían por múltiples indicios que Melania era una mujer de recursos, no pudieron evitar la sorpresa que les causó la enorme casona o mansión con la que se enfrentaron al llegar arriba…Era una voluminosa masa cubica de concreto, más bien fea, con algo de orfanato, hospital u otro edificio público, pero lo que le faltaba en belleza lo suplía con cierta severa imponencias. Solo el piso

> más alto revelaba vida, por la luz y la música que irradiaban sus ventas; todo lo demás estaba a oscuras. (183)

Where Bolaño and Lemebel tend to describe the house in Lo Curro as aesthetically luxurious, despite the horrors it absconds, Iturra leads with the unsettling nature of the house. Despite his wide-eyed admiration of their host, he rejects the appearance of the house. Instead, transforming it from one cold institutional structure to another; from orphanage, to hospital, to any other public building. Immediately, Iturra collects structures associated with the broader Chilean population, establishing the house once more as metonymy. The result is a house that does not conform to its category. The detail of lights and music and life on the top floor, almost lifted directly from Lemebel, foreshadows that during times when the lower, darker floors are enlivened, the building would take on a different, more sinister identity.

The description of the party that Melania Carreras throws at the house in Lo Curro follows the descriptions found in both Bolaño and Lemebel. The guests eat, drink, get drunk, and party to the music of many of the Western hit makers of the time: Barry White, Bob Dylan, Olivia Newton-John (186). But a curious scene arises following the night's close. It recalls the rumor of the playwright in *By Night in Chile*, though Iturra does not allow his proxy to discover anything explicitly horrific. Rafael explores the rooms near the bathroom in search of sleeping place. He is first mentioned as confident in his understanding of the layout of this part of the house, given the number of times he had gone to the bathroom during the party. In the dark corners of the top floor, he opens and checks several rooms, describing what should be sleeping human bodies as *bultos*, or packages (187). This term, coupled with words like immobile or human-shaped, create an uncanny effect to the objects, despite their being decidedly human. The term *bulto* especially recalls a sinister chapter in the Pinochet years of imprisoned dissidents being disappeared by wrapping them with railroad ties and flying them to be buried in the ocean

off the coast of Chile[13]. Though Iturra neither substantiates this at another point in the text, this scene of Rafael's encounter with various unknown human-shaped *bultos* adds to the disturbing aura of the house.

Rafael and the literary workshop community are eventually confronted with the reality of Melania Carreras' involvement with the DINA. This moment of revelation is now a trope, and its development into a trope further confirms that Callejas and the house specifically are its necessary elements. Rafael attempts to process the situation while many of his friends begin to distance themselves from Carreras. But his loyalty does not waver.

Like Bolaño, Iturra allows Callejas the final say in the text. Rafael calls Carreras to check up on her, asking about her feelings regarding all that has happened. After detailing coldly how her marriage is over and her children are safe at her mother's home, she laments the loss of her friends and artist acquaintances. She explains how she feels like a pariah, like a festering source of evil. And she finishes her complaint with the following admission, ""Ahora andan diciendo que en esta casa se torturó y se mató…pero lo que sea verdad o mentira ya nada importa, el asunto se volvió mistificación, y te aseguro que algún día van a hacer la película, con todos nosotros arriba tomando champaña llenos de luz, mientras gente encadenada nos mira desde detrás de los barrotes de la oscura casa del jardinero…" (219). Melania trivializes the response to the scandal as being dramatic. She bitterly complains that she possesses no voice in conversation about her own life and home, and that the mystification of those events have more grounding in a cinematic world than reality. The simultaneous existence of prisoners and revelry calls back to

[13] Pilar Calveiro, in *Poder y desaparición*, notes the impersonality of the term *bultos* as it was used within the CDC she was held at in Argentina: "Todo era impersonal, la víctima y el victimario, órdenes verbales, 'paquetes' que se reciben y se entregan, 'bultos' que se arrojan o se entierran. Cada hombre como la simple pieza de un mecanismo mucho más vasto que no puede controlar un mecanismo mucho más vasto que no puede controlar ni detener, que disemina el terror y acalla las conciencias" (39).

both Bolaño and Lemebel, lumping them in with the other unrealistic and illegitimate dramatizations of the house in Lo Curro.

Iturra writes from a perspective that has already allowed a decade and a half to evaluate the efficacy of Callejas' assertions of innocence. Given the historical moment of 2008-10, Callejas was more vulnerable to legal actions than at the publication of her memoir. This was a time of extradition requests to Buenos Aires for processing, of an eventual conviction by Chilean courts, among other proceedings and sentencing. Both this historical context and the passage of time since the memoir contribute to this final glimpse of Carreras in "Caida en desgracia". She is cynical, in part because Iturra too is cynical about the irredeemable legacy of his friend. As such, this text ends up reading as a plea to pity Callejas. To humanize her, and to allow her another chance to write again in public, despite her unfortunate past decisions.

Nona Fernandez's play *El taller* was published in 2013, five years after the publication of Carlos Iturra's "Caida en desgracia". Fernandez describes the play as a work of dark comedy. It offers an even spatially tighter depiction of the events that transpired at the house in Lo Curro. And from its outset, we are met with the following staging:

> La acción transcurre en el tercer piso de una casa ubicada en Lo Curro, en el Chile de mil novecientos setenta y algo. Los acontecimientos están inspirados en el taller literario que se desarrollaba en el Cuartel Quetrupillán de la DINA, Dirección de Inteligencia Nacional del gobierno del General Augosto Pinochet. El Taller era dirigido por la agente de la DINA Mariana Callejas, escritora con cierto prestigio en la época. Sus talleristas, al parecer, desconocían este rol de agente de su compañera (138).

The play's action takes place entirely on the third floor of the house in Lo Curro. Though Fernandez uses Callejas' real name in this description, she is referred to as Maria throughout the work. This allows for a fictive distancing from the subject. The workshop participants are unaware of Maria's role as a DINA agent, and the various slippages and eventual unmasking of

Callejas in the presence of her workshoppers provide both comedic and dramatic moments throughout. That the action occurs within the third-floor space of the three-story mansion creates a tension that rocks the historically stable third floor.

The play challenges Callejas's assertion that the third-floor space was a refuge. Its first short act hints at this. It contains two cryptic lines: Érase una vez una mujer que vio lo que no debía ver. Siguió el rastro de un grupo de ratitas muertas por el jardín de un palacio y llegó hasta donde no tenía que llegar." (139). The demented fairytale then transitions to the revelry of a literary gathering at the house in Lo Curro. María addresses her workshop participants as "chiquillos" while they dance to Western music and discuss the life of Russian legend Rasputin. Their tastes mimic those of the guests in the other three adaptations of the scandal. This relative calm is interrupted by Mauricio, who appears. announcing himself as a friend of Julia Ilabaca, a workshop member who has not been seen for a while.

Mauricio begins the process of unmasking María through the writing he proposes during the workshop. Mauricio's story ideas drag the machinations of the lower floors into the third-floor sacred space. The first story follows the premonition of Carlos Prats' assistant the night before his boss' assassination. Despite his best efforts, he fails to prevent Prats and his wife's deaths, watching as their car explodes. A later scene opens with María sharing a slideshow of images from her recent trip with her husband to Washington D.C. Mauricio arrives late to the workshop. He informs the group that Orlando Letelier has been murdered in Washington D.C., and that he wishes to write a historic novel about his murder, in the same vein as his novel about Carlos Prats. It is clear that Mauricio operates under the guise of secret knowledge about María, which destabilizes her own grasp on the tenuous division between her two lives. He provokes María, seeking to crack her, revealing the secrets that teem underneath.

The action accelerates once the story about María and her husband's involvement with the DINA breaks in *El Mercurio*. The workshop participants discover this while reading the paper together on the third floor. Maurcio arrives shortly after and reveals to the others that he is seeking information about the whereabouts of Julia Ilabaca, then missing for months. He reminds the members of the final story she wanted to workshop: of a girl discovering dead rats in a garden on a large property. The workshop members put the pieces together, realizing that Julia's story was about the house in Lo Curro, and that Julia was the girl who stumbled upon something she should not have. Before the members can leave the house, María enters, and Mauricio confronts her about Julia. María attempts to steer the group to a traditional workshop, but Mauricio presses her further about Julia. Mauricio then reveals himself to be Caterina Rubilar, the partner of Julia Ilabaca. The group attempts to leave once more, and María responds by pulling a pistol on them.

María forces the group to listen to a story she wishes to submit to *El Mercurio*. It is an unusual moment of intertextuality within a single work, in that María's own text is a response to the one originally written by Julia Ilabaca. María titles her response "Ratas de Laboratorio". It narrates, in fairytale tone, a woman happens to go by the name Julia Ilabaca. She encounters a scene from one side of the mirror, and despite all warning messages, crosses over to the other side. The story ends with Julia trapped on the other side of the mirror forever. After attempts to solicit criticism from the other workshop participants, Caterina interjects, imploring María to tell the truth. With pressure, the mask comes off. María reveals that Julia Ilabaca was tortured and eventually poisoned to death in the same manner as the prisoner she witnessed one day on the property. She goes through great pains to work through every detail of the suffering, down to the toxin used and its particular effects on the body (199-200). Unlike the wanderers in Bolaño or

Iturra, Julia both discovers the horrific secret of the home, and becomes ensnared by its darkness. As María names each corner of the property where sundry bits and parts of Julia's murdered body lie buried, one imagines Julia being consumed by the evil personage of the house, and by its owners. She discovered its ugly truth, and the bodies that police the property, María and her husband, made her disappear to protect its secrecy.

Despite, as María remarks to Mauricio/Catarina, writing towards the truth of Julia's disappearance would not save her, it still would assist in discovering her body. Her scattered remains, in addition to resulting from her crossing into territory that did not welcome her testimony, also signify the disembodied haunting of the post-Pinochet period. For, at every corner, the remains of victims lie underfoot in some way, simply within the distance of an accidental uncovering.

Mariana Callejas died on August 10, 2016. By the time of her death, the house in Lo Curro had long been abandoned, and now sits as a dilapidated shell. The trials, and sentencing, and acquittals of sentences that occurred during the final years of her life may have been brought to a close with her death, but it is hard to envision that her legacy will be left to rest with her. Writing in response to such a legacy, after all, has continued since the publication of Callejas' *Siembra vientos*. With each rewriting a new understanding of the period emerges. Though not capable of resurrecting Callejas so that she may be justly prosecuted, these writings work to understand the circumstances which gave birth to the moment she participated in, and ideally prevent them from occurring again. This is what Nona Fernandez remarks when asked about the relevance of *El taller* to contemporary Chile, stating, "...queremos volver a instalarnos en el pasado. Abrir nuestras antenas y enfocarlas en una época que no ha terminado de ser narrada,

porque de ahí venimos, porque sin darle un lugar en el ahora es difícil comprender los procesos que vivenciamos como país, como sociedad, como personas" ("Guionistas" np).

Beyond revisiting the past because an author feels that the representation of a past event deserves to be changed, or because it was a contested event to begin with, this particular event connects firmly to the ills that continue to haunt contemporary Chilean culture. And that, in essence, is what distinguishes the house in Lo Curro. It was not simply a structure that betrayed its appearance; a house that was not only a house, but also a place of torture and violence. By Mariana Callejas occupying the space, the house also became a node where elite Chilean culture circulated. One would presume the individual guests, with all their talent and intellect, should have picked up on and denounced the evils that occurred at the house in Lo Curro. But they did not, and they exhibited aesthetic inclinations that took them further from their grim Chilean reality. This type of tone-deaf cultural consumption might be innocuous, until it settles into a space that depends on state terror. The works of the present study connect intertextually because each wish to claim their own stake in this battle. Callejas and Iturra, on the one hand, seek to reinforce the status quo, writing their texts as if to say evils happen too, but literature and those who produce it are still inherently redeemable. Lemebel, Bolaño, and Fernandez, on the other hand, cannot make similar claims. They see this behavior among elites as surviving the scandal that virtually silenced Mariana Callejas. They see more perpetrators in the midst of that property than Callejas, and that in her shadow they were permitted to endure, their system permitted to persist. The focusing device of the metonymy here is not only convenient to the parameters of a given text of this set, but it is also the spoke of the whole that writers can affect the most change over. After all, who else is more responsible for the behavior of writers than writers? And how else should they respond to the evils beneath their home?

I do not hesitate to deem what occurred at the house in Lo Curro as a form of weaponizing both the home and the family. The chief actors who brought violent operations into the home deliberately used the model of the traditional family as a cover. For Callejas, this cover was her domestic oasis on the top floor of her home: her writer's den. But the facts remain. What transpired on that property was an extension of the broader schemes enacted by the dictatorial regimes of both countries. The diversity of artistic responses to this scandal demonstrates that the depth of pain inflicted on the object of the home has not been fully understood or processed. From their perspective, those who thrived in the shadow of the dictatorship are complicit in amplifying its reach. As such, the following sections will examine just how pervasive the weaponization of the home was during the dictatorial period. First, I will look to how groups respond to the invisible threat of disappearance. How, despite these pressures from above, they empowered the transitional object of a safe house to resist the totalizing intent of weaponizing the home and degrading affiliative communities. From there, the home as a testimonial object reflects the growing process of pulling together disparate informational sources to reveal the broad network of damage enacted against the home by the juntas. It is a call to both remember the struggle of those who had resisted and continue to resist a legacy that privileges convenient oblivion in the face of mounting evidence.

Chapter 1.2: A SAFE HOUSE CAN ALSO BE A HOME, TEMPORARILY

home as a transitional object

Despite the broad crush of trauma related to the home, leveled against many citizens of Argentina and Chile during the dictatorial period, many still found ways to make the best of an awful situation. As was mentioned in the introduction, transitional objects, or comfort objects, allow a person to endure a difficult transitional period in their life by way of reminding them of

previous comforts. The connection that these transitional objects maintain is one between the present state of duress and a previous remembered state of love and support. While this may seem like a simplistic, or even cruel, addition to the history of the Southern Cone dictatorships, I argue that it achieves the opposite effect. The tendency of early postdictatorial narratives and accounts of the period, like *Garage Olimpo*, focuses largely on either the sheer numbers of victims, the grisly details of their abuse and disappearances, or the inhumane treatment perpetuated by members of the military who committed these atrocities. Calls for justice are without a doubt necessary, but they also run the risk of being unnecessarily one-dimensional in their characterization of victims. In fact, I would call this abject victimization, one that reduces the individuals disappeared to helpless bodies defiled by the military, perverse[14]. Not only does it strip the humanity of the victims' once more by implying that they were unable to resist or maintain their dignity in the face of an authoritarian monster, but that said monster was unequivocally successful in its pursuit. The perversion comes from the hangover of what Borges, among others, referred to as the "gentlemen's coup". This distinction itself a morbid callback to the fetishizing historization of the Nazi's brutal logic in carrying out their project during the Holocaust[15].

[14] Pilar Calveiro also explores the dangers of the total victim: "Aun en esas circunstancias, los hombres hacen cosas, toman decisiones, apuestan, ganan y pierden. Pensar en la víctima total y absolutamente inerme es también cree ren la posibilidad del poder total, que deseaban los desaparecedores. Muchos relatos desconocen los resquicios porque los consideran excepcionales, pero ellos muestran algo fundamental: que el poder, aunque se lo proponga, nunca puede ser total; que precisamente cuando se considera omnipotente es cuando comienza a ser ingenuo o sencillamente ridículo" (128). This passage reflects the urgency for including these stories that emerge from the transitional objects as a way of staving off victims' histories being simplified for convenience.

[15] This ideology is reflected in one of the commentators recorded after watching *La batalla de Chile* in Patricio Guzmán's follow-up documentary *Chile: la memoria obstinada*; this man remarks, "The best proof that the C.I.A. never intervened is that the coup d'etat was a perfect military success. The Chilean armed forces were more effective in the fight against Marxism-Leninism than the US military forces. According to the left, there were only 2132 deaths in 17 years. It's been the least bloody anti-subversive battle in all Latin America…Thankfully, the armed forces were not split up. The coup d'etat was more effective, more surgical. The people suffered less than they were reported to have done. Ultimately, the country side-stepped a civil war" (np).

So, starting here, and continuing into the following chapters, I deliberately muddy the historical waters of postdictatorial narratives by examining how the home functions as a transitional object. Or, rather, how those who were forced to leave their homes and exile themselves internally maintained a sense of hope and love within the home space despite external pressures. That being said, not one of these texts is a comedy. They each reflect an experience that close to a million shared during the dictatorial period. Like the other transitional objects of this project, so too does taking a closer look at the home restore the resiliency of those who may have eventually been disappeared, but who did not completely lose sight of their humanity in the process. After all, while memory groups might conveniently and even inadvertently strip this aspect of the victim's history from the official memory, since it does not cohere to a message that necessarily demonizes the opposing party they wish to bring to justice, transitional object memory also counteracts the long tradition of demonization from the dictatorial regimes. These were the people who were trying to incite pogroms and sell off children for food, according to the regimes' propaganda to the masses. These were the people who, upon disappearance, neighbors assumed that they had done something to deserve it. The importance of the following texts, specifically tied to a conscious reading of the potential (realized or not) of the home as a font of resiliency, is that they return agency to a body of work that had largely begun to settle into traumatic voyeurism of the unfortunate.

Returning to the previous section, one controversial claim from Mariana Callejas, made in her memoir *Siembra vientos*, was that the house in Lo Curro was not all bad, and that she had found a certain domestic oasis in her third-floor space (specifically, in her bed with her children). Such was the potency of that space that amidst all the operations happening beyond her gaze (as she proposes in the text), she remembers producing some of her best literary works of her life in

that house. Furthermore, in the years since, she claims to remember only the good times. Her friends visiting for parties, her children running around, and writing in her big bed. Of course, as detailed previously, she leaves out crucial details of her history and own involvement in the operations run out of the house in Lo Curro. And this is why her memoir triggered such an outpouring of artistic responses countering the legacy she attempted to formalize. Despite the lies that undermine the innocence she attempted to argue in this specific interpretation of the house in Lo Curro, it nonetheless provides an opportunity to begin a working definition of the home as a transitional object.

As Callejas explains, the house itself becomes a microcosm of Chilean society during the dictatorial period. She had her third-floor home, a safe space. But around the rest of the property, many things occurred in a veil of mystery. In her identification with that third-floor space, and solely that space, she incorporates the presence of her children and her friends as actors who signify feelings of conviviality and love across the walls. These parties, workshops, and other mundane activities with her family provide consistent reminders of these warm feelings. Set against the backdrop of all that is exterior to that third-floor space, the assassinations, chemical weapon production, etc., it would appear that Callejas was able to endure the machinations of her husband and his associates because of the transitional object space of what she considered home. To break it down further, the transitional object of the home depends upon a specific tension between external danger/pressures and a safe space buttressed by practices that remind its inhabitants that they still possess a network of support. Callejas herself is a bad actor in this configuration, however. She was not a passive participant in the activities of the lower portions of the house in Lo Curro, and thus contributed to its distortion into an object of pain.

Nonetheless, the following analysis will borrow from this structure, of a tension between external dangers and interior warmth. I will look at a series of texts that depict life in a safe house. That is, narratives about people who fled persecution from their respective dictatorial regimes and became internal exiles. For each text, I will begin by highlighting the invisible external dangers that play on the characters' psyches, and then move onto actions taken within the safe house to resist and counteract these pressures. The texts will include the films *Kamchatka, Infancia clandestina,* as well as the graphic novel *Historias clandestinas*. The danger of persecution is pronounced in all these texts, and oftentimes realized to some extent[16]. But in each, the families do their best to produce moments of respite and protection.

Before I start, a brief detour. I understand that I have not yet justified the choice of solely examining the lives of families in a safe house. After all, texts like Luisa Valenzuela's short story "De noche soy tu caballo" or Pedro Lemebel's novel *Tengo miedo torero*, among others, depict both erotic and platonic affiliative forms that do not necessitate the presence of children, but all the same establish an ephemeral space of respite where the pursued subversive can find comfort and community. Texts like these would provide fertile opportunities to expand this notion of the safe house as a transitional object beyond the present limitations. I have chosen to focus on nuclear families for a couple of reasons. The first is that representations of nuclear families integrate well with the following section on testimonial objects, as organizations like HIJOS were founded in part to deepen the biographies of their parents who were persecuted during the dictatorial period beyond that of a statistic. Additionally, the presence of young children adds a

[16] *El premio*, a film by Paula Markovitch that will be analyzed in the following chapter, also follows this structure of the safe house and attempts at resisting external pressures. As Inela Seminović argues, "*El premio*, set in 1977, marginalizes the violent acts of the historical period in question, thus allowing an invisible and psychosocial presence of such acts to fill the main characters' lives in affectively persistent ways" (25). This narrative structure applies to the following set of texts as well, where mundane comings and goings are juxtaposed against the oftentimes invisible threat of disappearance.

sense of urgency to refashioning the safe house as a transitional object. Children are often a symbol of hope and future, something shared by the concept of transitional objects in general. As such, the adults around these children make a point to provide stability as best as they can for this future generation. At the heart of it, they wish to see as few instances as possible of their progeny being downtrodden by the forces that threaten their future.

Argentine director Marcelo Piñeyro's 2001 film *Kamchatka* follows a family fleeing persecution from the dictatorship. Not much has been written about this film, perhaps because it belongs to a period of filmmaking that was considered maudlin in its depiction of the dictatorial period. Nonetheless, this film centers the difficulty parents faced in protecting their children from being traumatically re-socialized by the pressures faced in those times (Page 40). David, the father, is a human rights attorney who witnesses the disappearance of his friend and colleague. The film opens with the mother of Harry and El Enano, two small children of about ten and five respectively, picking up Harry from school. Following a tense passage through a military checkpoint, the mother brings the two boys to a family friend, where the four will be staying temporarily before taking a trip out to a safe house in the countryside. Along the way, El Enano realizes that they have left without his favorite stuffed animal, a lion. David and Harry stop into a toy store in search of a replacement for the younger sibling, but they can only find a hard plastic lion toy. This detail will come back shortly in relation to the general awareness exhibited by Harry towards the precarious situation the family has been thrust into. Once at the house, the first thing that David shows the boys is a set of hedges at the edge of the property. He instructs them that should the time arise that they must escape quickly, they should burrow through an unseen clearing in the hedges, and head north to the main road. This is one of many instances of the film in which the parents make training their children in survival tactics a game, as both Harry and El

Enano delight in their practice of making a diving pose with their arms and squirming through the tall hedges.

The first night of the safe house begins with a pounding sound that can be heard through the walls of the parents' bedroom. The couple is startled awake, assuming that the noises signal the arrival of the military police. Before either of the adults can get out of bed, Harry opens the door to quickly announce that El Enano is simply beating the toy against the floor to soften it up. There is certainly comedy in the resolution of the scene, with Harry's precociousness momentarily inverting the dynamic between parent and child. But it also highlights the underlying tension of their new life in the safe house. The parents now interpret sensorial details in a different way than before, just like the hedges at the periphery of the property become more than a landscaping detail. The hedges are also an escape route, and banging can also announce potential disappearance. The parents did not vocalize or inquire out loud about the source of the sound that woke them up during the night. All the same, Harry rushed in to assuage their worries. This means that even at his young age, Harry is fluent in the new significations of the object world. He is aware of the invisible forces that could close in on people and rob them in the night, to the extent that he preempts his parents fears and calms them before they have time to react.

This is another benefit to looking at narratives that center the perspective of children. Despite their shortcomings in literally fighting for a side in the matter, children are most susceptible to internalizing the invisible shifts of ambient societal pressures. For the youngest brother, El Enano, this manifests in the reemergence of a nervous habit of bedwetting. In Harry, at an age most associated with the development of an individual identity, this comes in the form of extending his consciousness selflessly to the point of acting in way that makes the lives of his parents easier. Upon his discovery of a book about Harry Houdini, the infamous escape artist,

Harry too begins to obsess over training himself in escape artistry. In fact, the audience never learns the real names of the family members. Instead, the mother goes unnamed, and the youngest son goes by his nickname El Enano; the father borrows the name of a protagonist from the family's favorite science fiction series *The Invaders*, calling himself David Vincent, and Harry names himself after his newfound idol Harry Houdini. The codenames are but a single instance in the various decisions made by the family to protect themselves from the threat of being captured by the military police. Harry's own interest in escape artistry is another offshoot of the subconscious influences of this external danger, and it serves as a running theme for some of the ways that the family works to resist succumbing to the stress of life in the safe house.

Not too long after the family's arrival at the safe house, the mother pulls up in the driveway with a new visitor, Lucas. Lucas appears to be the age of a university student. The mother and father treat Lucas with kindness, encouraging their two boys to welcome him into their home. El Enano is quick to endear himself to Lucas, but Harry, in his newly developed role as protector and gatekeeper, remains suspicious of the new presence on the property. He frequently rebuffs Lucas's attempts to interact with him, even warning El Enano that Lucas could be an agent from the same military police that took their father's friend and precipitated their flight from the city. To Harry, Lucas as a foreign element becomes equated with the other dangerous forces that lie beyond the confines of the safe house. This, however, begins to crack. One night after dinner, Harry takes off for the backyard to resume his escape artist training, this time jogging to build his endurance up to the level of Houdini. He runs back and forth across the yard, growing more and more tired to the point of collapsing to his knees, his mother watching him from the kitchen window. Before she has the chance to leave the dishes she is washing, Lucas appears beside Harry, jogging in place. He tells Harry that the key to running is to regulate

the rhythm of one's breath. Harry initially ignores Lucas, but when he looks to his mom across the yard in the window, she gives him an encouraging nod. Harry gets up, and begins jogging with Lucas, asking him questions about how he learned to run. His unbridled curiosity in his exchange with Lucas demonstrating that he has accepted the newcomer into the fold of the family.

Back to the initial scene at dinner. When Harry leaves dinner to begin training, David and El Enano move into the living room. David takes out a record and begins dancing with El Enano. Harry crosses the screen with a focused posture, determined to get outside and jog. However, once Harry and Lucas return from their outdoor training session, they come upon the three other members of the household dancing together in the living room. Compared to his countenance in his last appearance inside the house, Harry's face instead registers bemusement at the scene. He has decided that Lucas is a trustworthy ally, and that he can allow himself to relax for a moment. First El Enano grabs Harry to dance with him, then eventually the mother breaks with David to grab Lucas to join in. The five individuals break into small groups and pairs, changing frequently as the scene extends and each member of the group is shown in a closeup as relaxed and present in their shared moment of joy. The rotation of couples and groupings, along with the human contact involved in generating the dance underscores that the depth of joy experienced depends on this communal dynamic.

In a callback to a previously reviewed scene, the dance ends with a shot of El Enano picking up a drink from a bookshelf and proceeding to drink it, assuming that it was simply soda. However, as the scene cuts to the boys' bedroom, we find El Enano jumping on his bed irreverently as Lucas and Harry laugh at the fact that the youngest member of the household got himself drunk. El Enano loses his balance, and falls off the bed with a loud thud, landing behind

the bed and just out of the camera's sight. The tension breaks as he recovers back to the bed, drunkenly slurring that he almost killed himself. Just as El Enano returns to the bed, the two parents open the door, urgently asking what has happened. When they see the state of El Enano, they realize what produced the noise, and the entire group enjoys a laugh to close the sequence.

While this does seem like a lengthy scene to follow, I would like to draw particular focus towards both the collective relaxing of the group during the dance scene, and Harry's specific restoration of trust in the adults within the safe house. Prior to the scene the boys are surreptitiously enrolled in a Catholic school in the neighborhood of the safe house; their mother brokering a deal with the head priest of the school to keep the boys' identities hidden. Following the scene, the mother is seen sitting at the kitchen table with a half-finished pack of cigarettes at her side, lost in thought because she has been fired from her lab position (presumably related to the circumstances surrounding the family's escape from their home). These bookending moments narratively position the dancing scene as a departure from the status quo of life in the safe house. Each inhabitant at the safe house is presented with challenges that threaten their emotional wellbeing and conspire to both alienate and destroy their familial bonds. And at various times throughout the film, these forces permeate the home. However, as the dancing scene depicts, acts that strengthen human bonds, call the members together (like the mother drawing Lucas from the periphery into the dancing circle), combat this external alienating pressure. If but for a moment, as the day after scene shows, they reinscribe the safe house as a site of respite and protection. The success of this is evident in the relaxed expressions and behaviors of the inhabitants.

But the significance of this respite does not limit itself to momentarily breaking the consistently building tension of life at the safe house. As it relates to Harry, specifically, it

provides a series of transformative events that mitigate one of the fundamental traumas he exhibits early on at the safe house. That is, his premature aging and distrust in the abilities of the adults around him to provide protection. As highlighted earlier, Harry's quick response to El Enano's banging his toy against the hard floor in the middle of the night reflects a sensitivity towards the multiple interpretations of the act, including the noise being read as the commencement of a raid. And though this is a sweet gesture by Harry towards his already on edge parents, it does show that Harry holds himself responsible to contributing to the maintenance of the other inhabitants' safety. On some level, he confronts the realization that in their failure to protect the family at home in the city, his parents' abilities are not enough to continue to protect them in the safe house. Therefore, Harry must grow up, forgoing his childish naivete in favor of using his skills of observation to the family's benefit.

This shift in behavior is further articulated in his training to become an escape artist, as well as his initially cool posture towards Lucas. In training to become an escape artist, Harry projects his newly developed sense of responsibility for the family onto a set of skills that could prove useful in the future; skills like greater endurance, an ability to slip a restraint, etc. Similarly, he creates the theory that Lucas is an agent sent by the military to spy on the family, despite his parents telling him that Lucas is a friend and can be trusted. Where his younger brother readily accepts this directive from the adults in the room, Harry, with his self-identified elevated position in the family, takes longer to trust the stranger. He spies on Lucas, even looking through his wallet, and interrogates him in their initial contact. Continued without intervention, this arc of development for Harry would see his childhood largely slip away, leaving a jaded prematurely aged individual in its wake. This is where the dinner scene becomes pivotal in mitigating some of the pressures Harry feels since moving into the safe house.

For one, his collapse during solitary endurance training is an exasperated gesture caused by the difficulty of grasping at his goal of becoming as talented an escape artist as Harry Houdini. The urgency in his seriousness, both when he leaves dinner to begin training and in exhausting himself to the point of collapse, expresses a deeper urgency in the training beyond a childhood fixation. He wants to get as good as Houdini fast because his family needs those skills now. When Harry looks up to meet his mother's glance from inside the kitchen window, we see that the mother registers the motivation behind her son's behavior and looks concerned by it. The appearance of Lucas, however, presents an opportunity to tamper the alienation that has coincided with Harry's individual pursuit of saving the family. Lucas shows Harry that he is capable, literally running circles around the exhausted boy while providing tips for how to run effectively. This time, the gentle silent encouragement of the mother's nod from the window is sufficient for Harry to accept Lucas' assistance. In that moment, he accepts that the adults around him can still help in shaping his maturation. That he does not have to go it alone. When the pair, Lucas and Harry, return to the living room, we see the results of this lesson immediately. Harry appears in the room relaxed, and he reacts to the sight of his parents and El Enano dancing in a goofy, childish way not seen since early on in the film.

The consolidation of trust in the adults surrounding Harry comes at the end of the dancing scene. He is shown laughing and talking with Lucas, fully engaged in enjoying their new friendship. Such is the extent of his relaxed vigilance that he does not try to stop El Enano from jumping on the bed so late at night, nor does he chastise his younger brother for accidentally falling off the bed. Furthermore, El Enano's fall off the bed, which produces a thud akin to the noise made by his lion toy striking the wooden floor, does not send Harry running to his parents' room to explain the cause of the thud. Instead, Harry laughs with Lucas at El Enano being drunk,

and allows his parents to arrive to the boys' bedroom to check to make sure everyone is okay. Like how he reverts to an irreverent boy after training with Lucas, Harry defers to his parents' ability to surveil the interior spaces of the safe house and make sure that the family is safe. This change in his behavior is dispositive of the adults imbuing the safe house with the protective quality of a transitional object. More than helping the group relax their tense vigilance against the external forces that seeks to eliminate them, this space helps to mitigate some of the lasting damage caused by exposure to those forces. Harry might not completely relinquish his goal of growing more dependable in this difficult time, but the safe house as constructed by the family and Lucas helps him to not suffer the alienating symptoms of this burden quite as fiercely as before.

But not all parents try to shield their children from the dangers of the world outside the safe house. In Benjamín Ávila's 2013 film *Infancía clandestina*, the Montoneros parents of Juán/Ernesto encourage him to actively adopt their militant ideology while toeing the precarious line of a covert life in a safe house. Much has been written about this film, with many focusing on either the positionality of the director speaking through a seven-year-old avatar (Blejmar 54), the trope of the child witness[17] (Thomas 248), or the general empathetic response generated by watching this "posttraumatic cinematic narrative" unfold through the eyes of a child (Ghiggia 2, 6). However, what I wish to focus on here, like with *Kamchatka*, is the precise ways in which

[17] The trope of the child witness is helpful to keep in mind when reading through the other accounts and texts told from this perspective, as well. As Sarah Thomas explains in her article "Rupture and reparation: Postmemory, the child seer and graphic violence in *Infancia clandestina*", "The common trope of the child witness in cinema here is used to depict the protagonist's view in and of the adults' world, as his uncle, parents and their comrades hold clandestine meetings, or his family members argue about the conflicts between family life and political activism. In numerous scenes Juan/Ernesto hides and spies on the adults unbeknownst to them, or is shown peering out of the family's concealed safe room through bullet holes in the wall" (248).

outside pressures are resisted through the production and maintenance of the safe house[18]. Juán (referred to by his codename Ernesto for most of the film), knew Cuba as his home for most of his life. This, because in the years leading up to the last dictatorship in Argentina, many Montoneros fled to Cuba to regroup and mount a counteroffensive in their home country; Juán's father, specifically, was targeted by the AAA (or a similar extremist right movement), and wwas shot in the streets. Now twelve years old in 1979, Juán is ferried through the Brazilian border by friends of his parents and reunites with them at their safe house in an indeterminant locale in Argentina. Immediately upon arrival, like Harry before him in *Kamchatka*, he is shown the features of his new living situation that distinguishes it as a safe house. This includes a panic room hidden behind a stack of empty candy boxes, Uncle Beto and Daniel's, Juán's father, front for moving supplies to other Montoneros residing nearby. He is shown by his father how to access the safe room and is instructed to take himself and his infant sister there when one of the adults sounds the alarm.

This new life is not easy to adjust to for Juán. Given that he spent his childhood in Cuba, one of his first adjustments is linguistic. In a scene around a table in the garage, his father tells him that in the fictitious biography of Ernesto, the name on his fake passport, he has moved to the new school from Córdoba. His Uncle Beto and his father coach him through practicing the cordobés accent, impressing on Juán that passing as a kid from Córdoba is essential to maintaining a low profile within his school. Even finding his place at his new school proves difficult. He does make friends with some of the other boys in his class, but under the directive of discretion from his parents, hides his face in even innocuous photos that the group takes of

[18] As Geoffrey Maguire notes about the film in his book *The Politics of Postmemory: Violence and Victimhood in Contemporary Argentine Culture*, "within the context of dictatorial repression, the film also poignantly portrays the extreme domestic danger that the dependents of these militants faced on a daily basis" (141).

themselves. This creates a larger tension within Juán's new life: of successfully passing in his simulation of this new identity, while also adhering to the strict guidelines laid out by the adults around him in light of their precarious infiltration mission based at the safe house. Just as in *Kamchatka*, this proves incredibly stressful for Juán, and it plays considerably on his psyche. In the film, he is often depicted as experiencing nightmares. Akin to El Enano's bedwetting in the previous text, these nightmares stem from an inability to cope with rapid and drastic changes to his previously known reality. The nightmares themselves even express this break with reality, lapsing into a comic book animated styling at critical junctures when Juán's subconscious fails in its attempts to maintain verisimilitude processing making sense of the world around him.

There are two key moments that highlight the difficulty Juán faces in his personal attempt to pull off the responsibility shouldered onto him by his parents. The first comes during a morning assembly and flag raising. Because Juán is new to the school, his teachers requests that he raises the flag during the morning assembly in the school's courtyard. Prior to this moment, Juán has a conversation with his father about the difference between the flag on the Montoneros materials that he helps load into different storage areas in the safe house, and the one that is raised every morning at school. His father tells him that the one they use is the original, and the flag with the yellow sun is associated with war times, and currently with the authoritarian rule in Argentina; therefore, the latter flag is rejected by those aligned with the beliefs of the Montoneros. Following this scene, Juán witnesses members of the Montoneros being received discreetly and under blindfold at the safe house; they are given weapons and other relevant materials. Whatever operation they had planned was a failure, however, as his Uncle Beto arrives to the house with a gunshot wound on his leg, announcing that the group fell into a trap. The family hears a noise outside, and snap to action. Juán's father picks up a shotgun while directing

Juán to take his infant sister to the safe room. They wait there until they are given the all clear when Juán's mother enters the safe room to collect her two children. All of this happens prior to Juán's teacher asking him to raise the flag the following morning.

Taking all this into account, the motivations behind Juán's rejection of raising the flag come into focus. It represents the source of his parents' anger and his own upended life. When another boy, Esteban, offers to raise the flag instead of Juán, he confronts Juán, calling him a coward and asking him if he was taught how to be patriotic in the province he came from. This causes a fight to break out between the two boys, which sends them to the principal's office. Uncle Beto arrives to collect Juán, smoothing the situation over with the school's administrators. When Juán tells him why he rejected raising the flag that morning, Beto explains to him that the flag is the least of their worries, that Ernesto (Juán's codename) would not be concerned with that sort of thing. He ends the exchange by play acting a military superior, and Juán his soldier, even making him shine shoes when he returns home[19].

Though Uncle Beto is clearly joking in his putting on the character of a general, this pretending does not emerge from nowhere. Instead, he codes to the type of language that Juán has found himself steeped in during his life at the safe house. He appeals to the type of attention and validation that Juán receives from his own parents, especially his father. Between father and son, Juán is mostly permitted to exist as an innocuous accessory to what occurs within the household. In early scenes, he is shown either apart from the activities of the adults or helping with menial tasks that benefit the movement. In short, the validating, engaged interactions with

[19] Erin K. Hogan, in her book *The Two cines con niño: Genre and the Child Protagonist in Fifty Years of Spanish Film (1955-2010)*, characterizes Juán as a "child soldier for Perón" (186). She repeats this characterization in the following analysis of the scene that comes after Uncle Beto picking Juán up at school: "The body of a soldier of any age is trained in instrumentality; it is a docile body. Not fully cognizant of the sacrifice and danger of the *montonero* endeavor, Juan demonstrates his docility and utility by clicking his heels and answering his remarkably carefree Coronel-uncle and joyfully shining his shoes. There is a sense that Juan is a toy soldier who at first plays at *guerrillero*" (190).

his father are earned by behaving like a good soldier. It is this fixation on the future that limits the parents', especially Daniel's, ability to provide Juán with emotional stability in the safe house. That becomes the project of Uncle Beto. When Juán is surprised at school by the teacher leading the class in an impromptu birthday song, he realizes that they are singing to him, as that day happens to be the birthday listed on Ernesto's passport. In his shock, he disregards his own training, and caves to hosting a birthday party that upcoming weekend. When the scene cuts, we see Juán rush to his nightstand drawer to rummage out his passport, showing it to his curious mother. He explains to her what happened at school that day, about the birthday party, while a bemused Uncle Beto cools the tension by assuring his sister-in-law that there is no harm in throwing the kid's birthday party at the safe house. The mother rushes from the shot, annoyed, while Beto lists off the various things he can do to make the party a success.

The day of the party arrives, and we see Juán in the garage with his father. His father tells him that while he is okay with throwing the party, he needs Juán's cooperation to make sure that his friends do not go into the locked bedroom where they are storing materials (weapons, money, etc.) for the Montoneros. Juán offers a tepid "Sure", to which his father snaps at him that this is important and serious. The emphasis of this interaction lies not in doing something celebratory for Juán, but rather the added pressure of having strangers at the safe house. Beyond his father's knowledge, Juán has taken strides socially to invite his crush, María, to the birthday party. That he does not share this information with his father underscores the emotional distance between the two. We need look no further than the dynamic in this scene and the previous one with his mother to see that Juán's social life is viewed by his parents as a liability. Their fixation on their cause obscures any regard for addressing Juán's needs as a developing young man, and the

potential psychological implications of ignoring those needs. Uncle Beto, however, is not so myopic where Juán is concerned.

When Uncle Beto arrives back at the safe house for the birthday party, he comes bearing a gift for Juán: his grandmother Amalia. Though the reunion between Amalia and the family is initially warm, each member overcome in their surprise at seeing her again after several years living abroad in Cuba, once Beto and his brother Daniel are alone that tone shifts. It is an argument that pits the damage to the relationship with his son that Daniel accepts as necessary to secure him a better future, against Beto's thesis on the safe house as a transitional object. Daniel begins broad, not only accusing his brother of disregarding the protocol they had all agreed on, but also belittling him to the point of shouting that he has always been overly reckless and carefree. To Daniel, his brother's personality is a source of resentment, and now it has threatened the safety of both his family and his whole operation that he is running in Argentina. Daniel goes on to argue for *compromiso*, a tireless commitment to the cause they are fighting for, and that now is not the time to indulge in fleeting happiness or games. Beto rejects this assertion, grabbing a box of party streamers that sits on a table next to them in the garage. He tells Daniel that in all the years he has fought for this cause, he has learned that trivial things like throwing Juán a birthday party are also important. Gesturing to his heart then his head, he argues that matters of the heart mean as much as ideology. That they impact the future just as much. Daniel dismisses his brother as a hopeless romantic, and the two continue fighting until they realize that Juán is standing at the entryway to the garage, having overheard their entire conversation[20]. The

[20] Geoffrey Maguire offers an interesting reading of the garage space that Juán finds himself in again in a dream after playing the trope of the child witness, writing, "This dream sequence—itself occurring significantly in the in-between space of the garage, outside the home yet not quite in public—accurately conveys the difficulties inherent in the triangulation of identity that the young protagonist is experiencing, straining to negotiate his father's militancy…and his own genuine identity" (147).

fight continues with Juán as a visible witness, with Beto eventually storming off after throwing a few remaining barbs, the onus of proving his outlook on their present struggle now resting on his hosting abilities at the party.

Uncle Beto delivers on his promise to provide Juán with an enjoyable and safe party. The party scene opens with a shot of Juán and his friends sitting along the outer perimeter of the backyard patio. Juán and the other boys on one side, María (Juán's crush) and the girls on the opposite side. A scene typically seen at this age, both on screen and off. The camera pans to Beto fiddling with a few cables as he announces himself as the host of the party, a mediating figure, and turns on the music. We see Charo, Juán's mother, sitting relaxed at a picnic table holding her infant daughter, amused by Beto's antics; her mother Amalia is sitting by her side. Daniel, Juán's father, stands next to the picnic table, clapping as Beto shows off some of his dance moves to the seated children. In a moment that recalls the dancing scene in *Kamchatka*, Beto closes in on Juán, first wondering why none of the kids are dancing, then encouraging the birthday boy to kick off the party. He guides him towards the other side of the patio to make a choice of dance partner. Juán quickly picks María. Beto returns to the boys on the other side of the patio, selecting one at random and repeating the selection process. Once all the kids are dancing and laughing on the patio, Beto remarks that he does not want to see anyone without a date, quipping that tonight is a night of love, that couples will be made. The camera quickly cuts to Charo, who is facing the dancing. She playfully slaps Daniel on the knee, as he faces away from the action. He shakes his head, as if to reject the request to join in the fun. But the next cut shows the couple dancing, with Amalia dancing with her infant granddaughter while sitting in the background. There is a call and response to Beto's shepherding of the dancefloor. The kids look to him for

approval of new dance moves that they try, and he amplifies those moves by engaging the rest of the group to join in.

Eventually, this upbeat music transitions to a slower song. The first pair shown is Amalia and Beto, then Charo dancing in a close embrace with Daniel. The camera lingers on how both spouses' eyes are closed and how Charo strokes Daniel's back, a sign that this moment provides the two with enough comfort to relax the most direct manifestation of vigilance: open eyes. This relaxed posture of the parents continues as the camera turns to Juán and María slow dancing. Juán looks over María's shoulder towards his parents, a slight smile registering on his face as he watches his parents dance together. The adult couple turns so that Daniel is now facing Juán's direction. He sees Juán dancing with María, and for the first time in a long while, his eyes widen, and he smiles before he gives Juán a knowing look and a thumbs up. Juán looks back, pleased, as he and María continue turning in their slow dance. The perspective shifts to alternating close shots of María and Juán's face, the audience now allowed to witness the deepening bond of the pair. When the camera pans out, Juán and María are the only ones dancing on the patio, cinematographically disappearing into their own private reality until the scene's end.

This scene, in particular, shows the success in how Uncle Beto's orchestrates the creation of a transitional object space within the safe house. This space, as the scene itself shows, is limited to a specific event: the birthday party thrown for the fake identity of Ernesto that Juán assumes. However, its benefits are nonetheless apparent in the shift in emotional states among both the family and the partygoers. For Juán, the final shot of him dancing alone with his crush María consolidates the effect of respite produced by this particular expression of the safe house as a transitional object. This is no longer the child who wets the bed and suffers nightmares as a symptom of the mounting stress he endures because of the family's decision to move back to

Argentina and mobilize Montoneros forces. Rather, this is a teenage boy who steps beyond that pressure into a pocket space where he is allowed to freely express his innocent desires for a girl from school he likes.

But Juán's entrance into a nested oasis within the safe house does not arise from an individual manifesting. Rather, it is dependent on the support of the adults around him to ensure the requisite safety to pursue an experience with María that is not dependent on mediating it through the lens of maintaining a secret identity or protecting the cause of the Montoneros. It is an incantation within the liminal space of the house that follows a series of steps that, like in *Kamchatka*, evokes a protective quality unseen in prior interactions with the safe house. This starts with Beto's choice to bring Amalia to the safe house to celebrate with the rest of the family. This decision, though maligned by Daniel, reestablished generational continuity within the space, repositioning Juán as the future of the family rather than a soldier peer of his parents. Later, when Beto encourages Juán to choose a dance partner, and further facilitates the kids' dancing, he helps Juán connect with peers in a carefree manner that is sanctioned by an adult whose perspective he respects. Finally, in his father's positive reaction to him dancing with María, Juán receives a rare instance of bonding with his father that is not directly associated with a political cause. In short, the spell works to transport Juán and María to their own private dance floor because the adults around him have bought into the temporary fantasy of the birthday party as a world apart from their present concerns.

Though the tone of my analysis has skewed towards being critical of how Juan's parents treat him, I would like to conclude with a more redemptive reading of the pair. In Charo's bemusement with Beto's hosting and relaxed posture while dancing with her husband, and Daniel's own relaxing while dancing with his wife and elation at seeing his son start to grow up,

the two are shown to be capable of reconnecting with a flavor of love and support within the safe house that does not require coding to the Montoneros. And this is not a revelation for the two. Earlier in the film, we are shown a montage of blindfolded Montoneros being led into the safe house and reconnecting with Charo and Daniel. Once the group enjoys their reunion, the scene continues with Daniel and Charo distributing weapons, money, and other materials to their comrades. The scene ends with the group sitting around a table in the backyard, drinking and singing together while a guest plays the guitar. What has changed between then and the time of the party, is that the operations that Charo and Daniel returned to carry out have not gone as planned. Beto barely survived a thwarted attack, limping back to the safe house with a gunshot wound on his leg. And so, in the mounting pressure that surrounds the safe house, the two have doubled down on their vigilance over the behaviors of all inhabitants of the safe house, including their own son's. This dissolves on the patio during Juán's party. And for a moment, we can imagine Daniel cursing his brother for being on the correct side of the argument earlier that day in the garage. Moments like dancing on the patio, too, are important in resisting the crush of authoritarian forces. Beto recognized this, and after what transpired at the fake birthday party for Juán, Charo and Daniel did as well.

To begin concluding the present section, and transition to the following section on the home as a testimonial object, I turn my focus to Chilean authors/siblings Ariel and Sol Rojas Lizana's graphic novel *Historias clandestinas*, published in 2014. To my knowledge, this is the first critical scholarship produced about this text. Located within this collection of works about the mundane but crucial details of life during the dictatorship, the fresh form and framing this work offers deserves further study. The paratextual elements of the text, specifically, situate its

significance, both to postdictatorial narratives in general and the present concern of transitional objects. The back cover synopsis reads as follows:

> "Historias clandestinas" es la historia real de niños que vivían en una casa de seguridad y cuya familia estuvo intensamente comprometida con la resistencia contra la dictadura militar en Chile. Esta novela gráfica que a través de imágenes emocionantes y maravillosas, da cuenta de los riesgos y actividades diarias que mantuvieron a esta familia a salvo mientras pretendían llevar una vida normal. El libro muestra un fragmento del periodo hasta ahora poco conocido, porque poco se ha hablado de la vida de los resistentes, de su cotidiano, y en tal sentido este viene a constituirse en un valioso material histórico. Con un lenguaje simple y conciso la historia se reconstruye a partir del recuerdo de quienes eran niños en la época, develando el denso y peligroso clima social y político, lo que da mayor relieve al coraje, la entrega y el amor de los que tomaron la decisión de resistir pese a todo. (Rojas Lizana np)

The first couple sentences of the synopsis read in a way that echoes the narrative structure of the other two texts analyzed above: a child (or children in this specific text) who finds themselves growing up in a dictatorship, and who is connected to parents or family members that are being pursued, or are at risk of persecution, by the dictatorial regime. The safe house, the family that is intensely dedicated to resisting the junta, these are both seen in *Kamchatka* and *Infancia clandestina*. Furthermore, all three texts present a dynamic tension between the behaviors and identities contained within the safe house and the public presentation of normalcy and discretion to protect from the surrounding agents of power that seek to destroy them. What stands out about this synopsis is how it acknowledges the historical significance of highlighting the mundane along with the bravery of the resistance. This cuts to the point of the transitional object sections of the current project. As we have seen in the previous two texts, there is a danger in focusing solely on the militant characteristics of the resistance, or to dwell on the external threat of violence that necessitated the creation of the safe house in the first place. Choosing either would flatten the history of those who resisted, which would then provide little insight beyond the stereotypical: either an abject victim of monstrous systematic abuse or a misguided idealist who

stepped too far out of line with the national imaginary and paid the highest price for that infraction. To introduce the mundane into the biographies of the disappeared, or those under immediate threat of disappearance, humanizes them. It is a humanizing act, not simply in the sense of making them more believable and others can envision them walking among us, but rather that it reintegrates their lived existence back into the fabric of history.

The synopsis does not draw these conclusions from thin air. The siblings Rojas Lizana purposefully situate the story of their safe house within the history of Pinochet's Chile. Additionally, visual media like the graphic novel can take advantage of loaded symbolic imagery and visual references as expositional shorthand in their retelling of history. This would not be as easily achieved in a novel. Within a dozen pages, they cover from the election of Salvador Allende through the coup of 1973, adjusting the focus from massive crowds at a political rally to a cropped drawing of a woman's shocked eyes as she watches tanks roll by her home. This use of montage frames the concerns of the private individual as responding to and connecting with the broader political moment. In the case of the home as a transitional object, this means demonstrating how the radical shift in government directly impacted the lives of the two authors when they were children.

One particular series of panel of this opening montage most effectively demonstrates this movement from broad to intimate impacts and considerations that necessitate the creation of the safe house. This is the moment that establishes the necessary tension between external, public danger and an internal, private struggle to ensure safety and resist invasion. It begins with a section titled "Chileno contra Chileno" that utilizes the graphic novel medium to create a doubled prison door, wherein upon turning the page we see an image of one Chilean military officer standing outside a second prison door, with another man staring into his eyes from behind

the second set of bars. The panels in question appear after this image. They read, with images accompanying each shift in focus:

> Muchos celebraron. Muchos lloraron. Los disparos no nos dejaban dormir de noche. Los perros aullaban toda la noche. El toque de queda comenzaba a las seis de la tarde. 'Si alguien pregunta, nos gustaba Frei.' Dos días después del golpe y media hora antes del toque de queda los militares mataron a dos jóvenes en la Plaza Fidel Muñoz Rodriguéz de nuestro barrio. Sus lentes, sus lentes. Nunca lo olvidamos. Nunca supimos quiénes eran. Probablemente están en la lista de los miles de desaparecidos. Fuimos testigos. Silenciados por el miedo. (np)

The first dichotomy presented lies between those who celebrated the rise of Pinochet, and those who mourned the death of Allende. This is depicted in a way that reflects the abstracted nature of the two expository panels; the celebratory are shown laughing with overflowing glasses of champagne in hand, their mouths drawn large with exaggerated detail in the proportion of their teeth to the rest of their facial features. In contrast, those who mourn the coup are shown in silhouette, their heads bent, and the background an irreal, woodgrain-like texture. The repetition of "muchos", a depersonalized expression of many, and the dehumanized or exaggerated forms of the Chileans in both panels reflect the uncertainty of the moment. The world, and its actors, had become fundamentally disturbed by the event of the coup. This disturbance in congealed interrelational social categories breeds uncertainty of who can be trusted. Thus, the "muchos" and the distorted depictions of both who cries and who rejoices in the dictatorship's inauguration are not just stylistic choices to represent the piggish aristocracy and the faceless masses. It is that, but also is borne in the new, traumatic uncertainty of who and/or what to trust while public.

The panels continue to show just how pervasive this shift in public life was, down to the sounds of the city. In the previous two texts, the presence of the dictatorship was relatively invisible, left to a dramatic reveal in the case of *Infancia clandestina*, or offscreen action in *Kamchatka*. Here, the authors make clear the pervasiveness of the sounds of the junta. The noise

of guns firing throughout the night is accompanied by an image of a child hiding beneath bedsheets. He is wincing and plugging his ears to muffle the sound. The descriptor of dogs that howl through the night hangs over an image of three dogs on a deserted city block howling at the moon. Their shadows stretch long into the foreground of the panel. Taken in reverse, the images show a public that is pushed off the streets by a curfew, to the extent that outdoor city life at night has become post-human. The artillery firing and the gunshots serve as a constant reminder to the isolated individuals, displaced from the public, of what has precipitated this shift.

The following two panels establish the immediate reaction of the Rojas Lizana family. How they, and other similar groups, adjust to their new precarious life following the coup. The curfew that is issued limits the movement of bodies through public space. The artillery noise from the previous panel provides a general idea of what occurs when someone decides to break that curfew. This threat of disproportionate violence, renewed regularly as it permeates the most intimate spaces of human life (the bedroom), inspires subtler shifts in the name of self-preservation. In the following panel, a mother instructs her child that should anyone ask, we liked Frei. As a note below the panel explains, Gustavo Frei was a centrist counterpart to Salvador Allende. Within the first moments after the coup, people already hid their prior alliances, aware of the consequences of maintaining public support for the deposed president. But the production of fear does not end with the curfew or the echoes of gunshots and artillery. As the second page of the sequence shows, danger related to the dictatorship was made even more terrifying by its randomness and proximity. Moving from the contextless panel of the mother and child faking a political affiliation for survival, the authors describe the murder of two young people in their neighborhood plaza. The detail of the location of the murders, and the fact that it occurred a half hour before curfew, underscores that even following the rules of this new

world did not ensure safety. And it certainly did not ensure evasion from witnessing the arbitrary violence of the junta.

The memory of the murders in the plaza concludes with a zoomed in three-panel set that shows one of the murdered individual's glasses flying through the air and falling to the ground. This would seem to be an imagined detail, something that the authors reconstructed from the memories of others. But the final panels of the sequence point to something else. The first of the two concluding panels shows a military vehicle being loaded up with unconscious bodies, with one being the body of the young man with glasses from the previous set. The truck fills the frame. Pulling back, the second panel shows the military vehicle pulling away at night. There are silhouettes seen in windows that flank the passing truck, and its shadow extends back towards the silhouettes of the authors as they, too, watch the truck draw away. Even if the specific event of the children being present and witnessing the corpses being loaded into the truck is not historically accurate, including the additional two figures in the windows provides the audience with the knowledge that such witnesses do exist, and that they are numerous. It is not just by way of rumor that the history of the disappeared is constructed. But rather, in the outward and open violence practiced in public spaces, the "many" silent silhouettes of this text gained firsthand testimony of the destructive potential of the dictatorship. It is under these extenuating circumstances that the authors begin to narrate their childhood at the safe home. The first chapter ends with the introduction of Ernesto and Vero, two guests at the home who initially were to stay for a week, but then ended up staying for ten years. As the siblings explain in the final panel, they did not know it at the time, but Ernesto was the head of MIR (Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria). His arrival precipitated another series of changes within the home, in part due to his dedication to the resistance, and the dangers he faced for such a pursuit.

The second chapter, titled “Un nuevo clan”, documents the evolving life under the dictatorship. It strikes a balance between mundane domesticity and the external pressures that occasionally seep into private spaces, a reminder that the mundane is achieved despite the dangers lurking outside. It is the longest chapter of the text, comprised mostly of a series of vignettes related to the many characters who come to occupy the safe house (guests, including Andrés Pascal Allende; aunts, uncles, parents). It begins with an annotated map of the neighborhood that surrounds the first safe house, and the accompanying text:

> Este era nuestro barrio…el lugar donde tuvimos nuestros primeros amigos. El lugar donde nos dieron el primer beso y tuvimos las primeras peleas. Era hermoso. Nuestros vecinos eran amistosos y relajados. Jugábamos en la calle y nunca tuvimos problemas. Vivíamos en un callejón sin salida que de alguna manera nos protegía. Ya adultos, cuando lo visitamos, aún podíamos escuchar el eco de nuestras voces. Veníamos de un pueblo de Chile central. Nuestros padres emigraron a la gran ciudad en busca de mejores oportunidades y estímulos intelectuales. Ambos eran profesores y leían todo el tiempo. Nuestra casa estaba. Llena de libros y discos de música clásica. Éramos niños felices. Éramos felices. (np)

In a child’s world, the immediate neighborhood surrounding their home constitutes the limits of their relation to the space external to the home. As the above passage indicates, the authors’ neighborhood cohered with their childhood home as an extension of its comfort and safety. It was a site of certain rites of passage related to early development and was so comfortable that the siblings could still imagine their voices resonating through the streets. This, despite being transplants from a more rural part of the country. However, as the conclusion of the passage indicates, this happiness did not last. With the events of the previous chapter, the neighborhood was violently resignified by the presence and actions of the military junta. On the map situated above the accompanying text, labels demarcate not just the neighboring plaza, the siblings’ house, and Ariel’s school, but the authors also include a note indicating where the aforementioned murder of the young man in glasses occurred. This short passage, and its

accompanying annotated map, conjure a dynamic representation of their memory of their childhood home. The happy memories there, and the tragic ones that disrupted the extension of the safety of the home to its surroundings.

This external presence of violence, anchored by the siblings' memory of the murder that occurred down the street from their childhood home, does not just affect the authors' ability to play in streets again. It also triggers a significant reconfiguration of the home. Bolstered by the arrival of Ernesto and Vero, the authors' mother Regina further dedicates herself to the resistance. This does not go over well with her husband, and according to the authors, this puts sufficient strain on the couple's relationship that their father leaves a year after the coup. The family then moves to another property to live with Ernesto and Vero, as well as their Aunt Nora, Uncle Guille and cousins Willy and Nela. A drawn portrait of the group bears the description, "y este era nuestro clan ahora. Con nuestro padre fuera de escena, las tres familias se mudaron a otra casa y formaron una célula política" (np). Taken within the context of our previous texts, the mere inclusion of célula política to the framing language of the portrait alters its interpretation. The smiling faces of the group would otherwise not reveal the family's dedication to the resistance, nor the precarious nature of this pursuit. Another family portrait appears two pages later, but this time the smiling family sits atop a barrel of dynamite. Ariel, whose thought bubble frames the new portrait, reflects, "De niño sabia que mi familia estaba involucrada en actividades peligrosas" (np). Like Harry and Juán before him, the siblings deliberately argue that children who grew up in the dictatorship had the capacity to be acutely aware of the danger it presented to their loved ones and themselves.

The second chapter details life within the safe house. Most of this includes the many different activities done in service of the resistance: the production of written materials,

microfiches to covertly disseminate information, digging subterranean hideouts in both the original property and the second one, etc. All of these activities are presented with a plain, historical tone, i.e. this happened in this way, and then this happened. However, there are plenty of minor details that give glimpses into the challenges that the group faced in conducting resistance operations within an authoritarian state. For instance, when some of the adults in the group did not realize that a gardener was knocking on the door. Assuming the worst, a panel is shown with Ernesto and Vero holding guns in their hands waiting for the military to break down the door. This is a scene that echoes the false alarm in *Infancia clandestine*, and it achieves the same effect here; it shows that despite all appearances of mundaneness and stability, the group is consistently in a state of high alert. When military investigators do stop by the house, the tension rises significantly as Nela and Nora are charged with maintaining the appearance of normalcy within their own home. It is moments like this that serve to justify the panels dedicated to outlining "medidas de seguridad". As the authors note, many ask how they could ensure Ernesto's safety when 80% of central committee members of MIR fell victim to the junta. In the authors' answer to this question, they document behaviors like not getting on the first bus that passes, buying the daily newspaper at different kiosks, not attending public protests, and hanging a Chilean flag on September 1. These protective habits are common among this body of literature. And it is not so much a prescriptive set of instructions for survival when the authorities are in pursuit, but rather further elaboration of how the rules within the home have changed in relation to the external world. Such is the sense of caution that following the incident with the gardener, the group does not answer the knock and calls from a visiting Grandmother. The text admits that this was the last time that they heard from her.

The various activities depicted in the bulk of the "Un nuevo clan" chapter rely on an implicit cohesion within the members of the group. They live together, they work towards a shared goal, and they make necessary sacrifices to protect each other. That these sacrifices and challenges are recounted in such a straightforward way also points to this tacit commitment to the cause. It is not until the very end of the chapter, the end of the story about life in the safe house, that we come across one of the family members bristling at his new environment. In an entry that spotlights Ariel, one of the authors, he recounts:

> Cuando tocaba mis canciones de protesta, el director del liceo, el señor Peñaloza me advertía que parara o iba a llamar alos organismos de seguridad. En la Universidad la situación no mejoró. Guardias armados abrían nuestras mochilas en busca de 'material subversivo'. Después de diez años de reglas estrictas en una casa de seguridad commence a sentir que las coversaciones del clan estaban totalmente monopolizadas por la situación política. Empecé a pensar. ¿Por qué? ¿Por qué Ernesto y Vero creen que pueden decir lo que es bueno, malo, o falso para nosotros? ¿Revolución? ¿Para qué? ¿Para cambiar una dictadura fascista por una proletaria? ¿Desde cuándo las ideas políticas son más importantes que una persona o la familia? ¿Por qué las personas deben ser reducidas a entes políticos, económicos o científicos? ¿Y qué hay de la vida espiritual? A partir de ese día dejé de asistir a las reuniones políticas. Ernesto y Vero respetaron mi decisión. (np)

This sequence is one that is present in all three of the texts from the present study, and it is a dynamic common among postdictatorial texts narrated from the perspective of children. *Medidas de seguridad* presents compounding pressure of an acknowledgement of danger that lurks beyond the confines of the safe house, and further alters the norms and behaviors of its adherents to maintain security within. For children, particularly in stages of development when developing independent identities and challenging consistent models of the world as dictated by authority figures is common, this pressure builds to a breaking point. And for the protagonists of these three texts, that results in an action that breaks with the oppressive cohesion of the group. For instance, how Harry in *Kamchatka* chooses to run away to his home city after Lucas abruptly

leaves the safe house; or when Juán does the same after Uncle Beto's death in *Infancia clandestina*. Part of the motivation for engaging in such risky behavior, flouting the *medidas de seguridad*, is that these traumatic events, the loss of a loved one (whether through death or departure), undermine the belief in security measures. If the parents could not protect these people enough to keep them around, doubt arises in the child's mind as to what extent their parents can do the same for them. Thus, with that authority subverted, the child attempts to recover agency over the matter by striking out on their own.

Of course, Ariel's case does not necessitate the same drastic measures as Harry or Juán. Even between the latter two, there is a spectrum in the intensity of their desire to break with the family. Harry wishes to return home for a brief visit to his friend Bertuccio; it is not implied by the film that he planned to permanently leave home. Juán, on the other hand, packs a duffle bag full of money from a hidden safe, and other materials, with the full intention of leaving his family behind for good. He tries to convince his girlfriend María to leave with him; it is only when she rejects his offer that he returns to his family, meeting the limits of his plan in the prospect of running away alone. For Ariel, his annoyance with the family dynamic within the safe home never reaches this critical mass. Early on, he and Wily, his cousin, are enthusiastic contributors to the cause. They are the ones who construct both of the subterranean saferooms and are shown to be extraordinarily proud when they are welcomed into MIR as militants. What occurs in the above passage, and its accompanying panels, is the result of how long he and the rest of the family has lived under these restrictive security measures. At the start of the section, the focus is on the oppression he experiences in his public life. He cannot play the music he wants to at high school, and at university his personal possessions are searched for subversive materials. The pattern that develops here, that spans the time passed between high school and

university, is one of a protracted state of vigilance of one's behaviors in the public sphere. As we have seen in the other texts, the safe house can also serve as a release valve for these compounding pressures; whether it be dance, music, hobbies, or food, convivial experiences within a secured domestic space provide a reminder of a reality that is not entirely mediated by its relation to the surveillance state.

And so, although it is not explicitly stated, Ariel seems to hunger more and more as the years go on for this particular function of the safe house as a transitional object. When he takes stock of what is causing his exhaustion with life at the safe house, he identifies that even convivial experiences within the home have been monopolized by concerns related to the revolution and security measures. This embitters him to the cause itself. His life, as he narrates, is overtaken by the cause, and he does not feel capable or validated in pursuing other interests. In short, he feels alienated by the group because they seem to demand his compliance while not addressing his personal needs. And this is one of the chief causes of all these textual depictions of breaking with the inhabitants of the safe house. The caveat in Ariel's case, however, comes at the end of this vignette. He describes that after reflecting on his grievances, he decides to stop attending political meetings at the safe house. As he writes, the long-term guests at the house and MIR leaders, Ernesto and Vero, respects his decision. The word choice of respect is key here. Not only is it a departure from the hardline stance that Juán's parents take when he falls out of line with the Montoneros' mission, which is manifested in their shouting and occasionally smacking him, demanding that he grow up, but it also highlights a key function of the safe house as a transitional object: providing a dynamic that does not entirely reproduce the conditions of outside life under the dictatorship. Had Ernesto and Vero reacted to Ariel's decision to step away from MIR in the way that Juán's parents had, we can assume that Ariel would begin to doubt the

comfort of the safe house. Such a hard line disregards the needs of the individual. It transforms members of a family into soldiers. During his reflection, Ariel wonders if the same is not starting to happen with his own family. His test of this is to confess to them his wishes of dialing back his participation in the cause. That they respect him and his agency in taking such a decision shows that even the leaders of the operations being conducted in the safe house have not lost sight of their own humanity while pursuing revolution.

This one moment at the end of the second chapter changes the reading of everything that happens before it. Because prior to that moment, it seems that the authors' goal for the chapter is to document what occurred at the house, and not necessarily dwell on the internal or psychological dynamics in play for the individual inhabitants. This is particularly true when it comes to a lack of highlighting specific tactics for providing the inhabitants with comfort against mounting external pressures, something that is more explicitly represented in the previous two texts (with the party scene in *Infancia clandestina*, and the night of dancing in *Kamchatka*). That Ernesto and Vero respect Ariel's choice to explore his own path is clear evidence that the dynamic within the safe house achieves the goal of providing a safe space, not just for physical security but also for personal development. And considering the oppressive environment of public spaces during the dictatorship, this offering within the safe house is a significant achievement in resisting the totalizing intent of the regime's actions. It is clear that the absence of reflection about the safe house's ability to provide this benefit in preceding scenes of the chapter does not reflect an absence of this function, but rather that it was a relatively stable element of the group's dynamic all along. Ariel's initial enthusiasm for the cause was borne internally, meaning that he was not coerced by the leaders of the group to do so. Had that been the case, and if this specific scene had ended with a rejection of Ariel's wishes, the entire chapter

would strike a different tone than the present; it would be a tone that reflected bitter feelings caused by yet another oppressive environment. That this does not come to pass further supports the sentiment proffered by the back cover's synopsis of the text. The text does not simply provide a firsthand account of the daily lives of those who chose to resist the Pinochet regime while living in the country, it provides a necessary counter-history that shows that such a cause was pursued with compassion and humanity. This specific detail pushes back against the demonization that these groups were subjected to by the Pinochet regime, and the risk of simplifying the history of militant groups and their daily behaviors.

And that is effectively the value of examining the home as a transitional object. It is not to argue that it provides a panacea to the diverse traumas suffered because of the dictatorships. Because even in these three texts, many traumatic events occurred. Beyond the trauma of having to flee a childhood home, relatives died, families were broken up, friends and lovers were lost or alienated in the pursuit of safety and in resisting their respective regimes. But amid this noise, each text also demonstrates that a connection to love and compassion can be achieved, if only momentarily, despite the dramatic resignification and weaponization of the home that was part and parcel of the dictatorship's' mission. Calling attention to the ephemeral moments of respite created within the space of a safe house returns agency to these historical actors. And this agency is not undercut by their ultimate fate. It rejects the common assumption that victims had somehow done something to deserve their mistreatment, or that the regimes were successful in their attempt to fundamentally dismantle the lives of so-called subversives. They were not. It is narratives like the ones examined in this chapter, and the following chapters, that buck this theory. And in thinking about the love that was maintained despite these circumstances, it is this artifact inherited from victims that emboldens others to reexamine their dictatorial past and

demand justice. The transitional object is but a strategy to facilitate movement through a difficult life stage, to mitigate spiritual deterioration caused by trauma. As we will see in the following section, the transitional object of the home sets the stage for critical reflection of the past, moving towards deeper processing and reintegration of the past within the national continuum.

Historias clandestinas ends with an image of a disembodied glove. It is accompanied by this passage: "'Historias Clandestinas' es solo un capítulo en la larga historia de los pueblos y sus sueños de justicia, verdad y libertad. Estas historias continuarán dondequiera que haya poderes visibles o invisibles tratando de manipular a las personas. Cualquiera puede ponerse este guante para continuar esta historia sin fin" (np). The proceeding will document those individuals who, following the democratic transition, chose to put on that glove and continue interrogating and revising the history of their communities and their homes.

Chapter 1.3: OPENING THE HEAVY DOOR OF MEMORY

home as a testimonial object

In the previous sections, we looked at the ways in which the home was weaponized against so-called subversives by their respective dictatorial regimes. Additionally, how those same people being pursued by military forces resisted the totalizing pressure to resignify the home as a site of terror and pain. Although the sheer number of victims and perpetrators provide enough evidence of the broad-reaching effects of the dictatorial periods as articulated through the site of the home, these numbers are not nearly sufficient to quell the wave of amnesia pushed by the early democratic governments in Argentina and Chile. As covered in the introduction, early governments following the democratic transition took advantage of already founded notions of suspicion towards victims and the actual impact of the actions taken by the dictatorial regimes to progress a narrative that encouraged the public to deny this history. Furthermore, these same

governments, and the regimes that followed, legalized impunity for members of the military forces who participated in actions that resulted in the harm and/or disappearance of thousands. What occurs, thus, is akin to the passage cited in the introduction from Tununa Mercado's autofiction *In a State of Memory*: that many of the individuals who earned their livelihoods torturing and supporting the bureaucratic processes of disappearance could walk free. For the many still reeling from the dictatorial period, like Mercado, the perceived presence of these criminals going about their daily lives in public and without judgement stymies efforts to both process trauma from the period and seek justice. For this disenfranchised populace, home cannot so easily revert to its former position as a site of security, simply because the government instructs them that it has.

The following section, centered on the home as a testimonial object, contends with this political stagnation. It comes from the perspectives of people who were directly affected by the dictatorships, who are endowed with a finely attuned awareness of the connections between the present object world of the home and its connections to past transgressions of the dictatorial regimes. I emphasize finely attuned, because it is an orientation towards the complex nature of the home borne from the trauma suffered during the dictatorships and heightened in the preceding years by the official disregard for their concerns. I will begin with an examination of Chilean author Carlos Cerda's novel *An Empty House*, and then move to the *escraches* of HIJOS. Both the HIJOS movement and Cerda's novel take advantage of performance as an artistic mode to reveal the invisible history of the home. In the case of *An Empty House*, this relates to the past use of the home as domestic torture facilities, and what happens later when these properties are reintegrated into the broader housing market for private use. For HIJOS, this involves a public spectacle that recalls the behaviors practiced by the military during neighborhood raids.

However, this appropriation of the raid, called *escrache* by the group, aims to reconfigure the neighborhood as a series of signs pointing to the location of an unprosecuted criminal from the last dictatorship. To further extract the progression of concepts in the following, Cerda's novel provides a depiction for how a newly democratic public could reorient themselves towards the invisible voices of the persecuted, even within their own homes and neighborhoods; and HIJOS takes this model a step further to fill public space with an active performance of what they learned from listening to those invisible voices.

Carlos Cerda's novel *An Empty House*, published in 1996, takes place in the latter years of the Pinochet dictatorship[21] (sometime around 1985, when Cerda himself returned to Chile after a long period of exile). Its narrative centers on two individuals, Cecilia and Andrés, two friends from their college days in the department of philosophy in the years leading up to the 1973 coup. Cecilia, a woman largely unaffected by the Pinochet regime, is gifted Andrés's childhood home by her father in a last-ditch effort to salvage the bonds of her failing marriage to Manuel. And Andrés, in a parallel to Cerda's own biography, makes a return trip to Santiago following a twelve-year absence in exile, having escaped persecution by fleeing to East Berlin. The two, along with their college friends, are drawn into a dramatic reunion when Cecilia and Manuel invite the group to their recently renovated property for a housewarming celebration. What was meant to be a joyous occasion marking a new chapter in the young family's life, and a reconnection with their long-lost friend Andrés, swiftly devolves into a series of revelations about what occurred at the house since Andrés left the country. Like other depictions of the

[21] "(In those days the nation, too, seemed like a house that was burning on all four sides, a house about to crumble upon its own embers. Burning barricades blocked roads along which only disoriented protesters now walked, shouting aggressive slogans and fierce threats, which were contradicted by the very arms they carried: a few pathetic brooms contrasting with the provocative excess of their military displays, gestures that seemed like ludicrous copies of other copies, gestures that would have been laughable if they hadn't already been on the brink of disaster.)" (45-6)

home, its metonymic function effectively collapses a multitude of archetypes within the dramatic staging of the home to make it a site of a broader critique of Chilean society during the Pinochet dictatorship. In fact, many scholars have coined various terms for the type of literary home on display in this novel: "depósitos del horror" (Willem 7); haunted like an "immense crime scene" (Gordon-Zolov 64, 69). Furthermore, they highlight connection between home/country and family/nation; that the process to rebuild the home, and therefore the nation, cannot rely on whitewashing or forgetting the dictatorial period (Cisternas 75, 82). In the present study of Cerda, I am interested in tracking the revelation of the home as a testimonial object, from initial invisibility to an eventual call to witness other atrocities similar to what is uncovered at Cecilia and Manuel's home that fateful night.

The novel opens with the promise of the home gifted to Cecilia and Manuel. It also lays the foundation of the peculiarities surrounding the purchase of the home by Cecilia's father, and the potential mysteries that contribute to its availability on the market. The first few lines of the novel read as follows:

> The afternoon when they saw it for the first time, they wondered how such a lovely house could have stood empty for so long. Now at last they could truly speak of a once in-a-lifetime opportunity, an offer they would have to be crazy to turn down. This is the opportunity, darling, Cecilia told Manuel that night, and the man rediscovered a forgotten tenderness in his wife's words. (5)

Up until that point, Cecilia and Manuel had lived a relatively humble life in a downtown apartment, cramped there with their two young daughters. The gift of the home, proffered by Cecilia's well-connected father Don Jovino, represents the young family's ascendance of another rung on the social ladder. A marker of stability amidst a chaotic period in Chile. The availability of the property, presumed to have been abandoned for a surprising length of time, and its aesthetic value, present an ominously serendipitous opportunity for the couple. Both the

tenderness in Cecilia's voice while praising the opportunity to her husband, and the detail of it being a "once in-a-lifetime opportunity", underscore the desperation of the couple to mend their relationship and project their hopes onto the new house. And perhaps this motive of reconciliation is what obscures the couples initial experience of the property. Because the house, despite its curb appeal, is not without its own quirks.

An example of how the couple's perspective of the house is skewed comes during the renovation phase of the property. Along many of the walls, on the ceilings, there are signs of misuse from former tenants, those who occupied the property after Andrés left the country. It takes over a month of diligent work from Cecilia's father's preferred contractor to remedy these issues. Despite this, the couple are relatively unfazed by the state of the home's interior. The novel lets us in on the couple's theories about the potential source of the internal damage:

> More than once they asked themselves why they had found the house in such a calamitous state. Manuel argued that Andrés had been away for twelve years, and you know all too well that some renters don't care, especially if the owner's not on top of them. The people who lived in it for those twelve years had been careless, maybe older people, that's what I think…Yes, horrible, decrepit old ladies, letting such a lovely house go to ruin. No doubt they practiced witchcraft and burned incense in the girls' room—that explains the burn marks on the parquet. (12)

The plot thickens. On top of the once-in-a-lifetime circumstances presented to Cecilia and Manuel in acquiring the home, it carries marks of misuse. But as the initial description of the passage insinuates, these marks do not explain themselves to the couple immediately, and instead draw them repeatedly into imagining their source. Besides adding to the narrative tension of what truly occurred on the property in Andrés' absence, this exchange between the two highlights the abnormal nature of the marks. After all, they were not what one commonly associates with the wear and tear of a property rented out for twelve years. Instead, the burn marks and other damage to the interior inspires the couple to eventually mythologize their

source, with Manuel chalking it up to unruly tenants and Cecilia imagining older women practicing witchcraft throughout the various rooms of the house while it decays around them. Both theories rely on constructing a plausible other, a group that neither pertains to the couple or the property's former owner, Andrés. This allows the couple to assuage their fears about any lingering histories of the home that could affect their successful installment within its walls. These theories, of course, will be disproven well beyond any of their respective imaginative capacities.

The spectrum of perspectives/characters that eventually converge on Cecilia and Manuel's new home present histories that resonate with different hidden qualities of the property itself. That is, certain intuitive senses, borne from previous associations and experiences, that train the subject to perceive that which remains invisible to the home's new owners. One such figure is Andrés. Though a close friend of the group of former philosophy students, Andrés returns to Chile a stranger following a twelve-year absence. He left his wife Marcela and their son, with Marcela obtaining an annulment of their marriage from the Chilean government by declaring Andrés dead. With this declaration, he arrives to his home country a non-entity. Pulling up to the house he grew up in with his old friend Julia, he remarks that everything appears smaller. The street, the park he played soccer in. But the brief exchange between the two reveals this to not be a nostalgic optical illusion:

> "The street's the same, but your eye has grown. You're also going to find your old digs a lot smaller," she said, pointing to the only two-story building on the block. "No," Andrés said, looking with amazement at the place Julia was pointing to. "My house has grown." "Grown?" "Yes, it's gotten bigger. It was only two stories, without that extension from the attic. Besides, there used to be a low wall with a wooden fence. Not that wall. And there was an ordinary door, not that gate. From the garden, my mom used to be able to watch us playing in the street. The only thing that's the same is the tree in the front yard." He pointed out the peaceful swaying of the foliage hanging over the highest portion of the wall. (81-2)

Julia assumes that Andrés's perspective of the neighborhood and the home has been skewed with time. That he has "grown" out of it, which is to say that he has matured, and his world has expanded such that this place occupies a smaller place in the sum of his experiences. And by all the information provided to us, this logic should follow. The place, since Andrés left it twelve years ago, was assumed to have been rented out to various tenants. As Cecilia and Manuel theorize, these tenants did not take good care of the property. But the property that Andrés is faced with in his return to Chile is not one that disappoints because of a disparity between actual scale versus remembered. Rather, the property itself has been altered beyond recognition. As he explains, the house has grown, with an additional floor being added through a renovation of the attic. Additionally, where there was once a low wall and wooden fence with an ordinary door now stands a tall privacy wall with an iron gate. The amazement that washes over Andrés when he first gazes upon his childhood home emerges out of the shock produced by the uncanny façade of the property. If it was merely rented all these years by Andrés's brother, as was initially explained, why would he have ordered such renovations? And why, if those renovations had been ordered, had his brother not provided similar oversight to maintaining the quality of the interior spaces, too?

Once inside, Andrés and Julia join the other friends in exploring the rooms of the newly renovated house. They marvel at how they have restored the place, as per the owners' repeated emphasis about the state of it when it became theirs; Cecilia points out the countless stains, with some even joking to Andrés about being more careful who he rents places to, because as Cecilia puts it, the previous tenants must have had "animals"[22]. The dramatic irony of this statement

[22] "They're exploring the house in little groups, marveling at how well it's been restored, could it really have been as run down as Cecilia says, Marcela wonders, not believing that this miracle could have been accomplished in one month by a single workman. Because it's a miracle, isn't it? And they all agree, yes, Cecilia, it's incredible, and

begins to come into focus as the group descends into the basement to look at Manuel's new darkroom that he uses for his photography. As the group listens intently to the preening of Cecilia and Manuel talking about the basement space, Julia slips into a state apart, triggered by the staircase that leads down into the basement:

> Eight, he said, there are eight steps, and Julia's turned around, she's left the group examining Manuel's photographic material and books, and she climbs up again, step by step: that's right, there are eight, and they're so high and so narrow that she almost loses her balance, she leans against the wall, the rough texture that seems to stick to her hand, that seems to trap her as she hears, like distant voices, the comments about the photos that Manuel is showing his guests; lost at the other end of the basement, she, clinging to the rough cold wall, keeping her memory fixed on the texture of the concrete and the eight counted steps, a count she's repeated twice to avoid mistakes, there are eight steps, while her hand feels the cold, harsh consistency of the wall. And then other voices, no longer the ones that were commenting on the pictures, they're no longer coming from the basement, but she hears them clearly, as if she were hearing them at that very moment, they speak to her of that rough wall, those eight steps, that other staircase, the spiral one that goes up to the second floor, and the noise like a rusty hinge, the strange moans produced by the foliage of the tree when it's pushed against the windowpanes by the wind. (90-1)

The passage starts out with Julia breaking from the group just as Manuel confirms the number of steps. Despite this verbal confirmation, she has already gone back to climb the stairs and count them again. This is when the specific qualities of the stairs begin to demand more of her attention, as the voices of the rest of the group grow distance, though they are the same distance away as moments before. Because of the texture of the concrete wall, she is described as feeling trapped, as if the texture and the number of steps she repeatedly counts drags her consciousness away from the party and towards a different memory that is connected to these two aspects of the

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Manuel tells them that here, in the living room, which looks so spacious and cheerful, now painted a winter white, which accentuates the warmth of the beams—yes, mahogany, of course you can tell, mahogany is unmistakable—well, as I was saying, what you're looking at was unimaginable a month ago: not only were the walls dirty with years of accumulated dust, but also with stains. Lots of stains, Cecilia emphasizes, and in the strangest places. Would you believe, even on the ceiling? As though they'd thrown food at the ceiling—I'm sure the previous tenants had animals. So, Andrés, next time you'd better think twice before you decide to rent a place out, someone says, and Cecilia replies: But the poor guy didn't even know the house had been rented." (82)

basement. Julia experiences an interaction with the *punctum* of the basement, something that disturbs her expected experience of that space, and imposes an experience from beyond its spatiotemporal confines. In this case, a demand to remember.

The repetition of the number of steps leading down to the basement is the detail that triggers Julia's conversation with the voices beyond those of her group of friends. It is the start of her being unveiled as someone capable of recognizing the invisible histories etched into spaces that otherwise appear to be normal. By the end of the passage, she completely phases out the voices of her friends talking about Manuel's darkroom and study. She now hears voices that emanate from the texture of the concrete wall, and the eight steps. She does the critical labor of piecing together some unknown source of knowledge of her past that has now grafted itself onto that basement space, further reverberated through specific architectural quirks of the property. Quirks like the steps, the spiral staircase up to the second floor, and the uncanny noise produced by the large tree in the backyard scraping its leaves against the windowpanes. Unwittingly, something from Julia's past has spirited her into this pocket reality, separate from the phenomenological experience that her friends are having nearby. The crush of these voices soon become overwhelming, manifesting physical symptoms that cause Julia to disappear from the group to a random bathroom upstairs to vomit.

Retching alone, Julia thinks about the cause of her abnormal experience with the home, and why she begins hearing voices that were not there. Sitting there on the bathroom floor, she considers what just happened to her in the basement:

> What was that ominous feeling she had the very moment she saw the house, or more precisely when she placed her eye against the peephole? What triggered that fear? Did she perhaps remember the names of those streets? Did she associate them with some revelation that might explain her trembling? Apparently, she wasn't able to associate the streets on that block with any of the depositions she heard at the Vicaría every day…and yet, very deep down, she felt sure about the

> origin of those convulsions: that house had a past, which touched her more directly and dangerously than anything her consciousness or her memory was in condition to determine. (93)

As the end of the passage indicates, Julia is not yet capable of accessing the memory that has caused her to suffer such a violent reaction to visiting the basement of the home. For now, her feelings are a vague constellation of ominous details. She struggles in this self-analysis to pinpoint the moment that triggered this reaction, drawing her work at the Vicaría into this critical reflection. There, while still under the thumb of Pinochet, she interviewed victims who suffered torture and abuse at the hands of the military. Victims like Chelita, a woman who was blindfolded and taken to a house where she was beaten, electrocuted, and had her head submerged in a cold tub of water to simulate drowning. In the fog of her nausea and swirling memories, the narration shifts from the present Julia in the bathroom of Cecilia and Manuel's home, to the Julia from a year back gathering information from Chelita for her deposition. The dramatic tension reaches its peak when Julia realizes, from the countless testimonies that have crossed her path in her work from the Vicaría, that Cecilia and Manuel's home is where the military took Chelita and other women. The testimonial object has called Julia's collective knowledge into focus and has revealed the hidden past of the house.

Julia's work at the Vicaría with victims of state-sanctioned violence, especially in the latter years of the Pinochet dictatorship, is crucial to her being able to "read" the house differently than the other guests. To tangent about the Vicaría de la Solidaridad briefly, it was a Catholic organization that worked to promote peace during the dictatorial period; beginning in 1976, it provided legal and other services to around 700,000 over its fourteen years of operation. Its record of over 19,000 cases of human rights violations committed by the junta were significant evidence provided to later truth and reconciliation commissions. And though many of

the testimonial objects appear in the postdictatorial moment, Julia's work with the Vicaría puts her in a position to be more intimately aware of the types of invisible narratives that will eventually come to light en masse after the democratic transition.

But there is more to Julia's ability to intuit the ominous nature of the house recently gifted to Cecilia and Manuel. Collapsed in the bathroom from nausea, she continues reckoning with what she has unearthed:

> poor Cecilia, so happy with her new house, poor thing, when she finds out, she's taken such pains with all the details, she thinks, staring at the two towels hanging from the metallic rod within reach of her hand: one's gray, the other pink, she takes the pink one, the other one must be for Manuel, then, just as she used to have one towel for herself and another for Carlos, different colors, colors that say something about the odd chromatic correspondence that designates sex in the world of objects within one's grasp, and just as Carlos's hand for some reason would reach for the gray towel, Manuel's hand must surely reach for it now, he'll reach for it tonight before climbing into bed where Cecilia perhaps will be waiting for him, sleeping, maybe, or pretending to sleep, as she told her. And tomorrow, before breakfast, Manuel's hand, and for many years to come, right there, they think they'll live there for a long time, the gray towel in Manuel's hand, never again in Carlos's, not anymore, she doesn't know how he dried himself in the concentration camp, what the prisoners used, what was thrown over their faces after they were killed in the middle of the desert, what was used to cover their last glance. (95)

Manuel and Cecilia are the couple that can move forward during the Pinochet dictatorship. Their lives, save the friends that have been directly affected by the violent repression of the regime, have remained intact. And as is soon to be revealed, they benefitted from Cecilia's father's nefarious business dealings that actively capitalized on the suffering of others. This is why this text, in particular, applies to the postdictatorial moment. Because the division between those capable of moving forward and those left with the remains of their trauma did not come into existence merely with the historical delineation between authoritarianism and democracy. That line had already been established and exploited to further marginalize and silence people whose futures were destroyed by the dictatorship. What Julia mourns in her expression "poor Cecilia" is

that her friend had unwittingly benefitted from the violent suppression of others, like Chelita and her husband. The care that is evident in Cecilia and Manuel's restoration of the home, and in its decoration, becomes tinged with tragedy. Julia, as a medium for the invisible history contained within the house, now feels responsible for disrupting her friend's source of hope.

But both the knowledge of what occurred at the house prior to Cecilia and Manuel moving in and her own biography prevent Julia from withholding this information from the couple. As the passage continues, Julia's focus drifts towards the hand towels that hang in the bathroom. The detail of the gendered pink and gray towels transport her to imagining the future path contained within that detail. That with the house, and as expressed through the various design details of how it was furnished, Cecilia and Manuel strive to establish a traditional partnership. The specific *punctum* of the gray hand towel captures Julia's gaze because she herself was cast off that life path before. Her husband, Carlos, was among those disappeared in the Chilean desert. Instead of a common gray hand towel hanging in the bathroom, Julia associates both the symbolic value of that object that highlights the future that she lost when Carlos was murdered, and the depth of suffering that she imagines him enduring in the desert. Being thrust off the life path that she witnesses Cecilia and Manuel walking in the present puts her in a position to reestablish historical continuity between the past activities in the house and their present invisibility. Carlos's death was most likely the impetus for her work at the Vicaría, which provided her with the knowledge base to perform the critical work necessary for piecing together the disparate histories that circulate presently within the house. It is individuals like Julia that can recognize the lost voices that persist despite household renovations and buffed out stains.

Once the past of the house is outed, and Julia relays its story, including the interviews with Chelita and others, the group decides to call Andrés's brother, Sergio, who took charge of renting out the property when Andrés fled to East Berlin. When Sergio arrives, he reveals to the group that he rented the property to two military officials that came to him out of uniform. A short time after renting the place out, he came across a magazine of one of the pair in full regalia. About a month after finding out, he decided to drive by to check up on his childhood home, describing that moment to the rest of the partygoers:

> I remember I was driving by slowly, frightened, to tell the truth, and I was so shocked I almost hit a tree. It was as if the house had disappeared. As if it were no longer there, you understand? As if they had skipped over it in the line of houses along the block. It was no longer that house with a half-wall and a fence and a wooden front door. What happened was they had changed the entire front wall and put in this same gate you're looking at right now, walled in with iron or whatever it is, and the door was also metal, with a peephole, and everything was very high with no openings; it was impossible to see anything inside. Then I realized that it had to be…well…what it was, you know? (155)

Like Andrés earlier in the night, Sergio too was initially stunned by the transformation of the brothers' home when he rode by. As he shares with the group the night of the party, after seeing the house transformed in such a way, and realizing that it had become weaponized, he attempted to contact the tenants, presumably to break their rental contract. He is instead visited by the couple one day and threatened with intel on Andrés that they possess. That they know where he has fled to and would rightfully pursue him if Sergio were to try anything that would jeopardize their possession of the house. Sergio relents, eventually turning ownership of the property over to an unknown source.

The inclusion of Sergio into the narrative offers not only corroboration to what Andrés initially intuited upon pulling up to the house with Sonia, but also introduces a similar actor to the guests at Mariana Callejas' soirees. This phenomenon of plausible deniability in the face of

overwhelming evidence. Sergio is threatened by the military police to not disclose what he has figured out about the new function of the house. But all the same, it did not take much to figure it out. As he describes in the passage, he was only able to view the façade of the house, since the interior was obscured by the high property wall and iron door. The fact that he grew up in the house puts him in a position to witness its radical transformation and conclude that such a transformation could only mean that house had become the site of state-sanctioned violence. However, what about Cecilia and Manuel's positionality prevented them from drawing similar conclusions upon entry into that abandoned and scarred property a month before their housewarming party?

Cecilia's reacts to hearing Sergio's addition to the history of her house by collecting her two young daughters from their room, wrapping them in blankets, and discreetly fleeing with them to her father's home.

> Then Cecilia understands that the poor house had been taken apart too, that in some way it, too, had been violated, and Andrés's memory of it had been betrayed, poor thing, so pale and unable to say a word since the moment he found out, such an educated European gesture demonstrating the enormity of our barbarity; perhaps the same gesture as on a Sunday morning in Buchenwald before the deserted plaza of the concentration camp, the interminable barracks, the chimney of the crematorium, as he described it to them over the first round of drinks. And then he sees that the house, the thing that is still his house, was also a victim of such barbarity, a ship that sank with its involuntary crew of supplicants tied to their beds, immersed in the freezing bathtub, capsizing toward a dark sea floor...Suddenly she realized that the most important thing was for her to out how the wounded house, before it was ever wounded, had passed from Sergio's hand to the agents' and then—already converted into the misery they saw that afternoon, filthy with the most repugnant sort of filth—into the hands of her father. (164-5)

The house as a testimonial object, and testimonial objects in general, is not entirely different in function from the other memory objects that are discussed in this project. In particular, the metonymical function that permeates the above passage echoes similar rhetorical strategies

employed in depictions of the home as an object of pain. The goal of both is to utilize the limited space of the home as a miniaturized nation, condensing as many circulating narratives within that narrow space that then can be extrapolated out into broader concerns. The house is but a *punctum* to deeper spatiotemporal resonances. This is precisely what dawns on Cecilia here. Julia opens the group's eyes to the invisible history of the house, and each of them begin to incorporate that history not simply within their own personal or local timelines, but also within a global sense. For Cecilia, she sees connections between the violent treatment of the house, the state that they inherited it in, and the myriad variations of torture and violence that was practiced on the house's inhabitants by the military. She further integrates Andrés and his brother's associations with the house, noting that his memory of the place too has been violated by what occurred there when he left. Her imagination, already proven to be rich in her musings earlier in the text about the previous tenants, takes Andrés's story of his tour of the Buchenwald concentration camp in Germany and sews it into the recent revelations of her own home. And despite her seemingly desperate reaction of leaving the house with her daughters, and the fatalistic imagery of the house as a capsizing, by the end of her spiraling attempts to reconstitute her world she still resolves to dig further into the invisible history of the house.

Cecilia is not the only character who performs this work of taking the metonymical testimonial object of the home and following its spokes to a larger picture. After experiencing an emotional and physical breakdown after discovering, then sharing the secret history of the house, Julia is given dormitol, a sedative, to help her fall asleep. She slips into a restless sleep in Cecilia and Manuel's bed, while the rest of the party receives and listens to Sergio add his perspective to the unraveling scandal. Once Sergio concludes his story, Andrés looks for Julia, and finds her

asleep in the bed. She wakes, and he offers her comfort in the fallout of her distress. It is then that she shares the following about the house, and other similar properties:

> It worked like an office. They showed up punctually, like bureaucrats who knew full well all of us were paying their salaries. And most of them tortured for eight hours. There were lunch breaks. Did you know they ate lunch right here? They had a guy who cooked for them. Or a woman, there are different versions on that point. They also had switchboard operators, secretaries, doctors, electricians, dog trainers. A multidisciplinary team, very efficient. I can't stop thinking that all those people showed up here punctually at eight o'clock to abuse some poor, terrified, blindfolded women crazed with fear. Every day, all those people. And in all the houses that were occupied for that purpose. Imagine, besides, in every one of those houses there was a staff as complete as the one that was operated right here. Hundreds and hundreds of Chileans punctually collecting their salaries, building up years of service, receiving awards, receiving bronze plaques in front of their children. People who seem normal. People who could be sitting next to you in a restaurant, in the movies, or walking down a deserted street at night. People who will always be there. Always. (184)

Her emphasis on punctuality, routine, diversity of roles, and efficiency recall the previous image of the Buchenwald concentration camp. It is the characteristics of a "gentleman's coup", a violent enterprise that did not run counter to the regular bureaucratic processes of government, but rather appropriated those same managerial structures to a more overtly grim end. The sheer banality of the operation is a parallel reality to the product being pushed within its offices. Like Cecilia and Manuel, this polished appearance of civil service awards and salaries obscures the fact that the workers at the property made their livelihoods on the suffering of others. The end of the passage is why this text is applicable to this project, both as a postdictatorial text and an exposition of the testimonial object of the home. In her consciousness of the scope of the actors and settings of this violence, Julia cannot help but live in a world surrounded by reminders of violence and criminality. Not a single profession is beyond suspicion, not after interviewing many hundreds like Chelita who suffered as they clocked in and out every day. And though the text takes place in 1985, five years before the end of Pinochet's dictatorial regime, this

experience of contending with a public life rife with a sense of impending danger did not dissolve when Pinochet was removed. Many continued to walk free and without investigation because of existing measures put in place to provide them with impunity for their participation in the regime. That a diversity of figures would willingly weaponize a house and continue to walk free adds further critique of the inaction of early democratic governments to pursue justice and facilitate collective processing of these violent inversions of necessary spaces of safety and human thriving.

Like the pearl button on the rail, so too does digging at the connecting threads emanating from Cecilia and Manuel's new house reveal a deeper and more intricate network of actors and ideologies that conspire to weaponize the home. For Andrés, the aftermath of learning that his childhood home became one of those sites, like the house in Lo Curro, implicates more than a group of bad actors or a single regime. As he reflects:

> Tonight was witness to the multiplication of the crime. But he also remembers that his uneasiness had begun before he learned of those deaths. It began by reading a large sign outside the airport, promising the opposite of everything he's seen since he's been back: *Chile moves forward in peace and order*…A few hours ago two little girls slept soundly in this room, on top of a restored parquet floor, cleaned of all traces of horror. The girls slept over what had been some black stains etched into the wood, stains that, according to Cecilia, looked like burns. And so it was: there had been burns there. Flogged women. Torture and death. That's why the stains looked like burns. And there, a couple of hours ago, Cecilia's daughters were playing and laughing, just as he and his brothers had done. (211)

Tracing back his steps, Andrés begins to notice that the events at the house, initiated by Julia's reaction to the eight steps in the basement, had not arisen as a total surprise. That, like the others' personal reckonings with the secrets of the house, what transpired there was plugged into a larger concern. As he indicates, that uneasiness was primed upon his return to Chile after so many years. He takes stock of the past few days since his return. Keeping that in mind--the revelation

of what occurred at his childhood home, the firsthand stories of death and torture--the patriotic sign that welcomed him back now reads in his memory as a warning of what he was about to learn. Narratively, the *peace and order* promised by that sign aligns with Cecilia and Manuel's daughters occupying a bedroom in their new house, practicing their stable and traditional family across its walls. This image presents an embellishment that obscures the underside of the house's history, the conditions of its arrival, just like the sign obscures the process of peace and order in Pinochet's Chile. His mind doubles the image of the siblings, overlaying his own childhood memories of playing with his brother with envisioning the young sisters doing the same. The knot tightens and becomes more complex. Now nation is collapsed into family, and childhood into the residue of tortured bodies. To a nation that positions itself under the banner of progress, peace, and order, this brief reflection from Andrés underscores just how unresolved that goal is for many, and the intricacy of the pain they have to process to get there. The *punctum* of the house has precipitated a compounding effect in Andrés's memory. Such is the power of the testimonial object that these characters, once they pull at the string that was revealed in the *punctum*, they weave together more and more salient details of memory that cohere into a potent counter-history.

Julia's conversion of the Cecilia and Manuel's house into a testimonial object drastically alters Cecilia's trajectory. Prior to moving in, she brokered a deal with her father, Don Jovino, to move into a house that he would gift the couple as a last-ditch effort to save a marriage that Cecilia was initially intent on dissolving. Looking at the optics of this decision, it is Don Jovino, the wealthy old guard, throwing objects of familial stability at the couple to disappear their interpersonal issues. This was his habitual method of controlling Cecilia, dating back to providing Manuel with a job at his company to mold the philosophy student into an acceptable

man for his daughter. To him, the marriage was failing because the couple had stagnated in their climb towards the eventual goal of sliding into an ideal married life in a large neighborhood home. This is the same "soft dictatorship" of order and peace achieved through neoliberal economics, as suggested by Andrés's brother Sergio in their final conversation before Andrés departed once more for Germany (232-3). And so, although Julia feared that she had spoiled the party and the couple's dream in revealing the secret past of their house, she also opened Cecilia's heart to recognize the invisible machinations that had driven her to stark unhappiness.

As a result, Cecilia confronts her father after she leaves the party and takes her daughters to his house. She pushes him to unmask himself, in a confrontation that echoes the exchange between Caterina and María in Nona Fernández's *El taller* (Cerda 218-23). And with the puppeteer revealed, Cecilia begins the process of moving forward with her life. She separates from Manuel and reenrolls in philosophy classes. And though her new life is difficult, as evident by a gendered interaction with a real estate agent who instructs her that she needs a co-signer to rent an apartment, she does not express remorse for choosing a life path different from the one her father laid out for her. As the conclusion of the novel narrates:

> One afternoon, during one of her many trips around the city, guided by the ads highlighted in green marker—and although she never deliberately tried to go near that place—she found herself face to face with the empty house. When she instinctively stopped the car, the house was already quite a distance away. But the street was quiet, and she was able to back up to the middle of the block. She lit a cigarette, rolled down the window all the way, and determined to look at that once-again empty house, now plunged once more into abandonment. She thought that while it was unoccupied, the same voices would resound between its walls. But if no one heard the forgotten women, it was as if they had never existed, as if they said nothing. There can be no voice without an attentive ear. Nor words. Nor humanity, she thought. But she also knew that those voices were there before the listening ear. They were there because pain was there. And the cries and tears were there; and the moaning that sounded like a hinge emanating from the corners, and the suffocated breathing on the mattress; and the desperate gasping for breath when, for a second, a head emerges dripping every imaginable misery from the depths of a bathtub. Desperate voices, yes. Voices that came from the

> margins, from the limits, from the end of life and the first throttle of death. Voices no one heard when the house was empty; voices that only they heard that night because one day, waiting for her father at the realty company, she had looked at the photo of such a pretty house, destroyed by weeds and neglect. There was something good in what happened to them then: ears for those voices. It was good that her hand pushed the iron gate, defeated by rust, and for the first time entered that abandoned beauty asking about the reason for that desolation. That's why that night there had been listening ears for those pleas that rose from the basement, and a desire to give refuge to so much loneliness. That ear not only rescued what was living in that house: it recaptured it for her, as well; for Julia; for Andrés, living in the same loneliness so far away; for Sonia, unresigned to her own solitude right here; and for all those who heard those voices, for they made decisions that perhaps would improve their lives. Yes, that's how it is, Cecilia thinks, lighting another cigarette; it was good to enter the house and hear what they were telling us from its corners. It was necessary to do it, not only out of respect for the pain of those who had suffered there, but because that pain had a great deal to do with the loss that kept pursuing her outside its wall. It was necessary to hear those voices. Whoever heard them could find a response to their anguish. Whether they realized it or not, their destinies could never be dislodged from those walls. If there is no ear for the pain, then there's no real ear for anything. We are all vulnerable to misfortune. The only consolation is knowing that our cries will be heard by an understanding heart. Will there be a heart open to the voices of the house? Who will push open that heavy door? (244-5)

The element of a coincidental encounter comes into focus at the beginning of this passage. The coincidence of Cecilia, driving along to look at different rental properties, coming across the scarred house, reminds her of the coincidence of Manuel and her acquiring the house in the first place. It is a similar coincidence that echoes in the texts that relate to the house as an object of pain. That is, the fact that by happenstance anyone could come to acquire such a property, or witness the atrocities within, highlights how the social topography of those regions were littered with these types of sites. From this conclusion, the question arises of just how did all the voices that resounded from these sites in pain go unheard, in so many places, for so long? For one, because most people fall into the same category as Cecilia and Manuel, or even the partygoers at Mariana Callejas' soirees: their paradigm does not acknowledge the possibility of such actions occurring in the home, and so they are not properly oriented to receive that phenomenological

information that circulates at those sites. The three characters in this novel who are capable of at least intuiting the hidden pain of the property, Sergio, Andrés, and Julia, can do so because their lives have been disoriented to differing degrees from the dominant path. Sergio for discovering that his tenants were military and witnessing the violent transformation of his childhood home. Andrés for his time spent in exile, forced to leave his country out of threats to his safety. And Julia, both for her work with the Vicaría, but initially because her husband Carlos counts among the thousands disappeared by the Pinochet regime. These figures all took in the sensual information of the property, once it was weaponized, and recognized it for its intention. They had the imaginative bandwidth to receive the echoes of those voices in pain that once populated its walls, synthesize its jumbled message within a larger context, a derive a substantive history.

But no partygoer or inhabitant at that house was immune to the voices in pain, once that door was opened by Julia and they were heard by the group. As Cecilia notes, their message, transmitted through the stains on the floors and other clues to their suffering, resonates with an alienation that each has experienced throughout the dictatorial period. She attributes this to a certain fundamental humanism that comes from a person in pain hoping that someone hears their cries, and the empathetic response that reciprocates. It is up to the understanding heart, once again the heart like Ernesto Malbrán comments in *Chile: Obstinate Memory*, to open itself to the invisible voices along the margins, beyond the purview of their particular orientations. Cecilia does not mourn the disorientation she suffered that night at her housewarming party, nor has she committed herself to working at the Vicaría like Julia. But with her own response to the voices, of breaking with her father's machinations and pursuing philosophy once more, she is pulling herself out of a state of passive ignorance and re-centering her heart[23]. The final image of

[23] She also meets a standard set by Diana Taylor in *Disappearing Acts* for how to be an educated and responsible witness; Taylor writes, citing Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, "The listener, therefore, is a party to the creating of

pushing open the heavy door shows the effort it takes to follow the *punctum*, as well as the *punctum*'s transformative potential in disturbing the stagnation of oblivion that pervades the postdictatorial period.

And so, in the years following the democratic transition, groups have arisen to refurbish the damage to the home into something that calls others from the community into hearing the invisible voices that call out from homes like the ones of Cerda's novel. One such group, H.I.J.O.S, or *Hijos/as por la Identidad y la Justicia contra el Olvido y el Silencio*, is comprised of children of the disappeared, and other allies (many of the younger generation that grew up during the dictatorship). In the wake of decisions in Argentina that led to the impunity of most of the criminals involved in the disappearance and torture of many thousands, HIJOS does not primarily focus on pursuing legal recourse for their call to justice. Instead, they seek to activate the community with their *escraches*, achieving a *condena social* that roots out, identifies, and publicly condemns the presence of unprosecuted criminals in various neighborhoods around the country. As is the refrain of the group, "Si no hay justicia, hay escrache."

The *escrache* itself is the focus of these concluding remarks for the chapter. I will primarily look to the documentary *H.I.J.O.S.: mesa de escrache*, and a series of interviews and essays from H.I.J.O.S collected by Colectivo Situaciones titled *Genocide in the Neighborhood*, to tease out the ways that the group creatively subverts the past weaponization of the home to bring people together and remind them of the residual injustices resulting from the dictatorship in Argentina.

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knowledge *de novo*…the listener to trauma comes to be a participant and a co-owner of the traumatic event: through his very listening he comes to partially experience the trauma himself…The listener, therefore, has to be at the same time a witness to trauma witness and a witness to himself" (27)

To begin to understand the e*scrache*, and how it realizes the testimonial object of the home in a way that answers the call to witness that concluded Carlos Cerda's *An Empty House*, let us first look at how some of the members of HIJOS themselves approximate a definition of the transgressive act; in *Genocide in the Neighborhood*, an interviewed member shares:

> Like all truly innovative practices, what the escrache *is* is rather difficult to define; it's something between a march, an action or happening, and a public shaming. The escraches are a transformation of traditional forms of protest and were developed as a means to address two problems. The first was that of "impunity"; the second was the loss or suppression of historical memory that this legal reality created. (20)

In the absence of formal legal recourses for prosecuting criminals following the transition to democracy, for reasons explored throughout the introduction to this project, HIJOS grew. The eventual action that would become the *escrache*, as mentioned in this interview, is informed by a desire to not only challenge the pervasive impunity which shielded criminals and those complicit with the atrocities committed during the dictatorship, but also the surrounding hegemonic discourse that attempted to lock the dictatorial past in a self-contained box. That is, like from the speech given by President Menem, to forget the dictatorial past or risk being turned into a pillar of salt[24]. Additionally, this member describes the complex nature of the *escrache*, as well as the claim that the action is "truly innovative". In the following remarks and discussion, we will further unpack how these claims manifest in the *escrache* itself.

Because of the prevailing pressure coming from those in power to move on from the dictatorial past and forget what occurred, it is no wonder that HIJOS was met with plenty of

[24] In keeping with the theme of resisting the dry object of history, considering the following statement from HIJOS, translated by and presented in Luis Martín-Cabrera and Daniel Noemi Voionmaa's article on Machuca: "We don't want an abstract and comfortable memory, but a memory in action, active and for the whole society. We depart from the present, because remembering, the reconstruction of memory, is a living task that cannot be separated from the present and its problems. It is from the present that one remembers and forgets. Otherwise, we run the risk of turning memory into a cadaver, a dry object. If we do that, we will fix memory in an unquestionable past, unable to create a relationship with the present. In other words, we risk denying history as a process of social construction. Memory is an interpellation to the committed social begin as an agent of his or her own becoming" (66).

resistance to their project. The documentary shows this while the members canvas the streets ahead of an *escrache*; one individual even responds to receiving a flyer by wondering why the members are not trying to work and be productive members of society instead of wasting their time with this. In the following two discussions from *Genocide in the Neighborhood*, members detail their responses to this pushback:

> On the other hand, I'm in agreement with what you say, because the truth is that the majority of us are sick and tired of them telling us, "Enough with the past; why don't you think about the present." It's a discourse that they use to avoid you. Exactly because of this, one job of the escrache is to place everything out in the open and say: "This is how it is." It's not finished, you or I could meet this guy on the street. And that's a strong argument against those who say that we are stuck in the past. (83)

> Our answer is that there are thousands like him walking happily through the streets of our country. Our answer is that we're not going to stay at home crying for our fallen, that we'll go to the streets, that we'll take back public space, that sooner or later it's them who won't be able to leave their houses. Already there are many who can't leave Argentina because there are other countries who are willing to pursue them into whatever corner of the world they decide to hide in. Olivera and Cavallo have already found this out. (89-90)

While I do not usually wish to pile on passages before diving into unpacking some of connections to the larger discussion of the project, the following argument drives home the thrust of how HIJOS argues for the *escrache*:

> For capitalism, the past is already gone, it only exists as passive memory, as *Never Again*. The future is a far-away, vague promise that doesn't depend on us. As such, our present is weak, sad: we are alone, awaiting a miracle. In the escrache, on the contrary, the past acts forcefully, the disappeared live in the present. It is a past that affirms that it is a past of the present. Moreover, the future has already arrived, because it is nothing other than that which we are constructing, that which depends on us: it is the future of the present. Thus, the escrache founds a present, decisive and full of potentialities. (44

The first argument proposed in response to the critique that these individuals are unnecessarily fixated on the past involves accepting the utility of such a response. Though the members express frustration at having to face the same position over and over again, they do understand

that it comes from a place of deflection. Of accepting the path of least resistance laid out by the early democratic governments following the transition, and at least publicly advocating for a collective forgetting of the dictatorial past. The operative term here is discourse. What HIJOS sets out to do, then, is to create an event that disrupts the public practice of this hegemonic discourse by bringing the issue to the streets. When they mark the home of a criminal from the dictatorial period, they appeal to the discomfort that many feel from the knowledge that such an individual resides in such close proximity to them. This destabilization, a certain discomfort produced by the revelation that while in the abstract many feel disconnected from concerns of justice, they are not in favor of contending with it at the supermarket or when going for their morning paper. With the *escrache*, HIJOS aims to touch on the very nerve that reinvigorates a personal connection to justice within the neighborhood and beyond.

This nerve is not unknown to us. Already in the introduction, I worked through a series of passages from Tununa Mercado's *In a State of Memory* that followed the contours of how the surprising detail of envisioning General Menendez walking through the same streets she had walked as a child with her late father revealed the ways in which the punctum connected to unexpected and traumatic resonances with the object world. In the second response, the members of HIJOS, too, emphasize this image of unprosecuted criminals walking happily through the streets of Argentina as a reason for why they will not simply move on from the past. Furthermore, that if laws of amnesty create the conditions for these criminals to walk freely and carelessly through public streets, why should those impacted by the dictatorship be shamed into their homes to privately process their own grief and trauma from that time? The second response compounds the hypocrisy of not prosecuting these criminals, highlighting that many of them would be arrested and convicted by foreign governments if they were to leave the country.

Essentially, the earlier democratic governments following the transition created a large holding cell for these criminals to freely terrorize their compatriots with impunity. In this further elaboration of why the *escrache* is necessary in the present, HIJOS establishes themselves as the champions of those who, like Tununa Mercado, want a future where these criminals no longer displace neither their own footsteps nor the footsteps of their loved ones.

And this leads to their third assertion, born from a rejection of these public displays of impunity/amnesty. In the last quoted passage, the members of HIJOS solidify their position as innovative, as counter-hegemonic. Their enemies, so to speak, are not simply the criminals they wish to expose, but also neoliberal capitalism[25] for its amnesia, and *Nunca más* (the CONADEP report) for providing a false sense of resolution despite its well documented shortcomings[26]. In response, the *escrache* is meant to take that locked away past and allow it to be on display in the present. It echoes the call by postdictatorial scholars like Nelly Richard to take the "was" and make it a "has been." Moreover, the *escrache* intends to provide the present with new potential, invigorated by its connection to the past, as it orients towards a bold future.

And while the last comment might smack of idealistic nonsense, it is important to remember the circumstances that surround the production of such declarations. This urgent desire to reestablish chronological continuity can only arise from a populace that has not only

[25] But also for its destruction of social bonds. As the members of HIJOS argue: "If the dictatorship opened the path to neoliberalism, the escrache declares that this was because the repression fragmented the social body. The escrache, then, produces *social bonds in order to counteract their on-going and systematic destruction*. In this way, the escrache can be thought of as part of the emergence of a new social protagonism and of alternative networks of social actors who are looking to shed the rule of capital and the state-mafia. *For us, it is obvious that the escrache produces its own context*" (100).

[26] Rejecting the *Nunca más* report for its impotence is not a new phenomenon. As Christan Gundermann writes in *Actos melancólicos: formas de resistencia en la posdictadura*, Como se sabe, el *Nunca más*es un movimiento que las Madres rechazaron siempre por su aprovechamiento oportunista de la cuasa de los desaparecidos para encubrir con ella la complicidad de la Sociedad civil durante la dictadura, produciendo así para los antiguos cómplices civiles (como, por ejemplo, el escritor Ernesto Sábato, president del *Nunca más*) la corrección política ante la revelación de su pasado." (19). As their name implies, HIJOS maintains a strong connection to Madres and Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo.

been told to amputate a piece of its history from memory; it also arises from a sizable portion of that populace not living in a space that has established the very first requisite condition for processing the trauma they suffered during the dictatorship. Having criminals walk the streets with impunity scuttles any hopes that those who were tortured by them, and the broad affiliative networks that dealt with the fallout of the disappearances they caused, could feel secure. The path towards moving on from a traumatic event is lost if the government fails to ensure that these individuals would not carry out their violent projects once more. The answer, thus, is the *escrache*.

Now that the conditions and arguments for the *escrache* have been established, the remaining discussion will center the specific ways that the event of *escrache* take the testimonial object of the home and establish an innovative form of protest. One that both brings the memory of the disappeared into the present while subversively referencing the types of behaviors common of the military at the time. Consider this pair of passages:

> The march leads the neighbors to the criminal's home where there are then theatre performances and a symbolic "painting" of the house. This "painting" usually involves throwing paint "bombs" or balloons at the building in order to mark it as the genocidist's place of residence. The idea is once again to transform the space of the neighborhood, to make visible that genocidists still walk free. (20-1)

> And the other is the escrache that is above all a project in a neighborhood, talking with neighbors, hanging flyers. Here begins the escrache as we now know it. The point is that the effect is additive, the act of the escrache, the murgas, the theatre groups, and the rest of it. But the escrache is not only this, just going to the house of some guy—afterwards, the escrache continues. (63)

As the documentary shows, the *escrache* itself is not limited to the day of the march. Sometimes months prior to the event, members of HIJOS convene to plan the event. As the second passage mentions, members canvass the surrounding neighborhood, going on the radio and handing out flyers to let the residents know that there will be an *escrache* happening soon to denounce the

impunity of one of their criminal neighbors. Around the day of the event, members replace street signs to signal that a certain distance away lives a genocidist. This is yet another part of the "additive" effect that the members highlight, in addition to the march, murgas, and theatre groups that join the *escrache*.

All of this collected into the single container of the *escrache* begins to mirror the type of diverse, interconnected labor synonymous with the testimonial object. In this case, the home of the genocidist, rather than a burnt home in *An Empty House*, provides the *punctum* for opening space to allow the dictatorial past to reconnect to the present. As the members declare in an earlier passage, to allow for the disappeared to live in the present. And the multitude of responses that rejoin the *escrache*, from differing backgrounds and motivations, evidences how broad of a network of unresolved issues the testimonial object of the home actually reveals. When the house is marked with paint, just like the radio announcements, marches, and canvassing, the neighborhood is forced to witness the house in this new frame: that a genocidist lives there. This is the art of the *escrache*. It takes a practice of marking homes that was once utilized by military officers to conduct raids and *chupar* so-called subversives from their home and transforms it into an act of solidarity against a country that has left this injustice to walk freely in the streets. The *escrache*, thus, disturbs the congealed discourse on memory by forcing past, present, and future into conversation at once. Only then can this newly formed neighborhood collective begin to realize the work necessary to restore their community. This is why the members of HIJOS hope that the *escrache* does not end with the day of the march.

Though certainly a different text from the rest of the set, the *escraches* that began with HIJOS hold an important place in this project. For one, these interviews with members of HIJOS align with a lot of the critical and artistic conversations occurring in the postdictatorial moment.

This is especially true as we go along in the subsequent chapters, reviewing more works by authors from the 1.5 generation. But the *escraches* also expand the understanding of the testimonial object, as it relates to the production of a narrative that does not discount invisible traumatic resonances with the object world. Like in *An Empty House*, HIJOS reconfigures the street signs and even the home of the genocidist in a new narrative frame. Instead of life as usual, the neighbors get a glimpse of what it is like to walk around their neighborhood with the knowledge that a criminal from the dictatorial past, who the country has let walk with impunity or prosecution for years, writes his subjectivity around the space[27]. Though the signs will be taken down and the red paint will be removed, the bruise of the *punctum* shared by the *escrache* will not so readily fade, and hopefully the neighbors, too, take up the charge to open the heavy door of history.

[27] Luis Martín-Cabrera, in *Justicia radical*, writes on this potential for art to produce counter-history, "La literatura, el cine y el arte han sido elementos cruciales para lograr una comprensión diferente de este pasado traumático. Dentro de este contexto, me di cuenta que ciertas formas de cultura popular pueden proveer un rico marco alternativo para confrontar los huecos de la memoria y los silencios que con tanta frecuencia marcaban nuestras conversaciones" (XXI).

chapter 2: A BOX OF CLOTHES BY THE DOOR, A MOUNTAIN ONSTAGE

clothing as a memory object

PRELUDE:

Returning to *Garage Olimpo*, the second full scene of the film begins with Diane coming upon a cardboard box between the staircase and the foyer. She turns to Félix, who is lounging on the couch in the living room, asking him where the box came from. He tells her that it is a box of clothes came from some of his wealthier clients, that part of his work carries the extra benefit of receiving some of their castoffs. Diane turns back up to climb the stairs, satisfied with Félix's response, commenting briefly about the state of the haves and the have nots. Moments later, Maria walks through the entryway, nearly tripping over the box of clothing before grabbing a beer and briefly talking to Félix before bed. The next morning, the camera follows Maria around the ground floor of her mother's house. She eventually makes her way to the cardboard box still sitting between the staircase and the entryway. She opens the box, digging through the various articles of clothing that fill the box seemingly to the brim. We see her turn through the pile a couple of times before pulling out a calf-length Port colored silk dress. She tries the dress on, admiring herself in what we can imagine, but do not see, is a mirror on the wall opposite the cardboard box. She zips the dress up in the back halfway, walking now towards the window to look for someone, calling to her mother, as if she senses the presence of someone else in the home. Her suspicions are confirmed when she turns around, and a strange man in suspenders and a leather jacket is standing some ten feet behind her in the entryway to the living room. He asks if she is Maria Fabiani, to which she replies yes. The strange man then turns to call behind him that "She's here," after which Maria sprints towards another room in the house. A different man gives her chase from behind the strange man in the leather jacket, and Maria is caught in the

backyard of the home. She is handcuffed with her mother to the staircase adjacent to the box of used clothing. We see another man, not Félix, getting his head covered in an upstairs room of the house, with stacks of books behind him and a briefcase filled with wrist watches lying open on the bed. The group leads Maria out to a Ford Falcon waiting on the sidewalk. She is seated between two of the men raided the home. Diane, her mother, watches distressed from outside the car window as they bend Maria's head down between her knees, the car driving off as she screams for her daughter.

We next see the Ford Falcon pull into El Olimpo, the clandestine detention center responsible for processing the disappearance of nearly 700 individuals during its mere five months of operation (between August 1978 and January 1979). Maria, now blindfolded, is led to a processing room, the camera positioned on the other side of the room's threshold. She is instructed by an unseen operative to take off her clothing. After firing his gun out of sight, she begins with the dress, and is instructed to remove everything. The scene fades out as the operative shuts the door, hiding the viewer from seeing Maria remove her undergarments. By the time the film returns to Maria, she is naked and unconscious, in need of a doctor to revive her with electric paddles after having endured a particularly gruesome and imprecise session of electroshock torture.

I choose to open again with this film because, as a representation of the trauma produced by the dictatorial regimes in both Argentina and Chile, *Garage Olimpo* makes a concerted effort to collapse as many violent practices of the dictatorships as possible in one narrative arc. And though relentless in its pursuit of representing the most grotesque of the behaviors practiced by the dictatorships in the broadest way possible, the final effect of such a narrative choice allows for the creation of a dramatic world that broadly intersects the rumored and documented history

of those processed and connected to detention sites like El Olimpo. As in our previous focus on the home, reading the use of clothing in the film in light of other evidence heightens and highlights the subtler references contained within the above scenes. It also acknowledges the weaponization of clothing by the dictatorial regimes in the efforts to eliminate subversive elements from society. In fact, physical stripping of clothing, like the appropriation of property, is born from a both comprehensive and coherent assumption that the victims of the dictatorial period lacked humanity.

chapter 2.1: STRIPPING DOWN OR BUTTONING UP

clothing as an object of pain

A working definition of clothing as an object of pain, thus, can be derived from the above scenes in three ways. The first comes from the act of "walling up", or a blindfold being tied across a victim's eyes (CONADEP 19). The first image of walling up in the film occurs in the raid on Diane's home. We see the man having his head covered in what looks like a pillowcase. It is removed and replaced several times, with the barrel of a gun being pressed into his cheek at one point when the head cover is off, implying that he is being questioned by the Olimpo operatives. The second instance of walling up comes when we next see Maria, as she is led through El Olimpo. From other reports, we can assume that she was blindfolded somewhere between the time that her head was forcibly bent between her knees in the Ford Falcon and her arrival to El Olimpo (Timerman 60). Walling up was done not only to disorient and weaken victims during capture, but to also ensure that the location of the detention center and its operatives remained a secret. From the moment that a victim was brought to one of these facilities, up until to the moment of their release (whether alive or dead), they were walled up.

The final aspects of clothing as an object of pain involve stripping and the (re)appropriation of clothing. On the one hand, stripping, as proposed earlier, achieves a similar purpose as walling up. Rather than a disturbance of the sensorial, that is, of robbing someone of visual information that they could use to orient themselves, stripping physically removes sartorial markers of one's own presentation and therefore place in the world of objects. Before her capture, we see Maria fishing through the box of stolen clothing, eventually landing on the item that she most identifies with. The dress fits her in a multitude of ways, from literally fitting to the contours of her body to fitting her particular state of mind that day and how she wishes that to manifest in her dress. This is confirmed by her satisfied look while gazing at herself with the dress in the mirror, and is memorialized by the act of pulling the dress over her head and zipping herself in (to her best ability). We can project that her search for her mother after was not necessarily because of any particular suspicion, but rather her looking for someone to zip her up fully and complete the look. Stripping is an inversion of this process, both literally and psychologically. It is something that Maria instinctively resists. When she is ordered to remove her clothing, she opts to only take off her dress, something that she had come across that same day. We only see the completed consolidation of this shaming act when she begins to take off her undergarments. The shame of public nudity, in this scene, is leveraged as a weapon to disarm the victim. And the crux of this shame is magnified by the state of being walled up, of not knowing the nature or number of the other's (the perpetrator's) gaze.

The pervasive and violent criminality on display in *Garage Olimpo* extends to the appropriation of clothing as well. In the previous chapter on home as an object of pain, I signaled the arc of Diane's betrayal at the hands of Texas to be the manifestation of operatives within sites like El Olimpo acting in a way that rooting out those connected to subversive political

behavior, were able to literally install themselves within the home space, effectively normalizing by transplantation the ideology of the dictatorial regimes. The betrayal here, inflected through the box of clothing within Diane's home, is revealed later upon realization that Félix also worked at El Olimpo as an officer. He lies to Diane about the origins of the box of clothing, opting to explain its arrival in a language that reflects back to Diane her own class consciousness. And perhaps, Félix's own. In any event, his adept deployment of his opponent's ideology demonstrates his experience in acting as a double agent responsible for infiltrating enemy territory. The final shot of the sequence, of Maria removing the dress she had fished out of the box that Félix had dropped in the entryway of the home, multiplies the impact of Félix's deception. After all, the clothes were not from his wealthy clients, or, at least if the former owners were wealthy, they were not his clients, but victims who had previously been processed by him and his colleagues at El Olimpo (this suspicion is confirmed in one of the final sequences of the film, as we see drugged victims being undressed and loaded onto an aircraft carrier)[28]. The doubling moment of Maria removing the dress forces the audience to hold its image in conjunction with the image of her and the filled box of clothing earlier. The sheer number of articles of clothing contained within that box forces us, retroactively, to reckon with the number of victims who once wore those items.

A similarly grim image is echoed at the end of the 2014 film *Infancia Clandestina*. Ernesto, the codename of Juán, is taken with his infant sister from their garage hideout by the military in a raid of their safe house that Juán lived in with his mother and father. At this point in the film, Juán catches a newscast announcing that his father was killed in a skirmish between

[28] Marguerite Feitlowitz in *A Lexicon of Terror: Argentina and the Legacies of Torture* shares a similar testimony from a woman at the ESMA who was coincidentally offered her own sweater by a guard after having been stripped of it during her capture (196).

Montoneros and military forces. His mother and he act quickly. Anticipating the next step, they collect subversive materials, pamphlets, etc. associated with the family's involvement with the Montoneros and begin to burn them in the garage furnace. By the time his mother shouts to him elsewhere on the property, multiple military vehicles have pulled up to the property. Juán then finds himself in an interrogation room across from an officer who demands information about his family's actions. Juán, well trained by his parents in these matters, keeps tight-lipped throughout. The officer eventually relents, barking to Juán to look for the clothes that had been taken off him sometime during the raid. Instead of a box, Juán is shot contemplating a large pile of clothing set against the concrete staircase of the interrogation room. The camera settles on a green quilted jacket with a photo jutting out from one of the pockets. Juán picks up the jacket, recognizing it as his, and takes out the photo taken of him with his girlfriend María when they were caught kissing by their friends during a weekend school camping retreat earlier in the film. Taken with the final scene of the film, of Juán dropping his disguise and pseudonym to announce himself at his grandmother's doorstep, this shot of the pile of clothes achieves a similar effect as it had in *Garage Olimpo*. Picking his own articles of clothing, as well as a blanket that belonged to his sister, among the relative mountain of other clothes belonging to others who may have not survived the ordeal in quite the same way as Juán, drives home the reality that Juán's life up until that point had been lived on a razor's edge. With his announcement of his real name at the doorstep of his grandmother's house, Juán acknowledges that what was left in that pile of clothing, what was taken by the military during the raid, was Ernesto. For the audience, such an image of the pile of clothing forces us to fill in the gaps by bringing our own knowledge and imagination to bear in contemplating all the other lives that once filled the clothes in that pile.

Like with the home, the overt transgressions of clothing weaponized by dictatorial forces are not the lone sources of pain from this period. On a larger scale, the ideology of the regimes expressed itself through public dress codes, appearance guidelines, and rules for presentation of individuals in public spaces[29][30].

For instance, at the end of Andrés Wood's *Machuca*, the inversion of societal norms following the coup is depicted in the jarring scene of the protagonist, Gonzalo, walking into the entryway of his school to witness lines of his classmates having their heads brutally shaved into a military-style cut. It is an announcement that we have entered a foreign, parallel territory. A clear demarcation between the world prior to the coup, and the world after[31]. Two texts of the postdictatorial period, however, stand out for developing the connection between authoritarian pressures and standards of dress among schoolchildren. These are Paula Markovitch's film *El premio*, and Nona Fernández's novel *Space Invaders*. Both texts utilize the object of clothing, specifically uniforms, to highlight the underlying tensions that drive this type of standardization and policing of individual sartorial expression. It is never just about dressing out of line, but rather the real, dangerous implications of being labeled as subversive for doing so.

[29] Susana Kaiser in *Postmemories of Terror* lists the various fears during the dictatorship: "The fear of address books, the fear of having a beard, the fear of the sound of helicopters and plane sounds" (45).

[30] In *Mi vida después*, a play written by Lola Arias that will be discussed later in this chapter, one actor, Pablo, shares a story his father told him about the dictatorship in Argentina: "Mi padre me contó que cuatro años más tarde, en 1976, el banco fue intervenido por los militares, y desde ese momento se transformó en un cuartel: echaron a todos los empleados que tenían militancia política y dieron préstamos a sus amigos jueces y curas que nunca se pagaron. El jefe directo de mi padre era un militar también. Una mañana se acercó al escritorio de mi padre y le dijo: "Lugones, ¿usted por qué usa barba?". Mi padre le dijo que siempre había usado varaba, que era parte de su personalidad. El militar le respondió que la barba la usaban los terroristas, y que si quería seguir trabajando en el banco se iba a tener que cortar la barba. La mañana siguiente mi padre se levantó, se miró un largo rato frente al espejo y se cortó la barba" (41).

[31] For further analysis related to clothing in *Machuca*, see Luis Martín-Cabrera and Daniel Noei Voionma's article "Class, conflict, state of exception and radical justice in *Machuca* by Andrés Wood", particularly the discussion of uniforms and Adidas sneakers that Gonzalo gifts Machuca (66, 69).

This sort of tension is readily palpable in *El premio*. There has been a fair amount of scholarship produced about this film, with some focusing on the invisible presence of state-sanctioned violence at the margins of the film (Selimović 25). And like both *Infancia clandestina* and *Historias clandestinas,* many note the tightrope Ceci must walk given the difficult circumstances (Hogan 181; Maguire 159). Between Geoffrey Maguire and Erin Hogan, the home takes of particular importance to accounting for the "intrusion of public politics into the domestic sphere" (Maguire 158) and the "biopolitical transformation" of Ceci (Hogan 185). This particular reading of the dress-up scene underscores the need for a more detailed reading of those scenes that will arrive shortly. For, not only does such a reading allow for more detail to be digested, allowing the dynamic of clothing as an object of pain to come forth, but it also more complexly documents the individuals involved in this coercive act.

To begin with the film, Ceci and her mother have fled Buenos Aires or some unknown larger metropolitan region of Argentina for small coastal town of San Clemente del Tuyú in winter. Ceci's father, it is revealed later, was under threat of disappearance and eventually captured by the authorities. He is presumed dead through a coded telegram that is read towards the film's conclusion. Beyond the usual tensions brought about by moving to a new place, adapting to the new environment, there is extra pressure to maintain discreetness despite young Ceci's enrollment in a local school. This tension comes to a head when members of the military visit the small school (it is essentially a one room schoolhouse), announcing that they are holding an essay and drawing contest. They instruct the students to draw a picture of the Argentine flag and write about what the military means to them. Initially, Ceci writes about how the military kills people, kills her family and their friends. This, of course, is framed in her awareness of the circumstances which led to her and her mother fleeing to the coastal town in the first place, as

well as other messages circulating within her familial sphere. When she tells her mother what she wrote, the mother immediately begins packing their things to move to another place, in fear that Ceci's essay will place a target on them once more. Eventually, the two visit Ceci's teacher, who informs them that the essays have not been submitted yet. After a tense exchange, each adult dancing around the knowledge of and initial inspiration for writing an essay critiquing the military, the teacher allows Ceci to redo the contest. Her mother, and teacher, encourage her to praise the military, essentially an exercise in how well she can parrot the military's ideology back to them in her writing. The irony of this act, as hinted at throughout the film by both Ceci's intelligence and her precociousness, is that her essay wins the contest.

Prior to this moment, Ceci's appearance largely reflected the chaotic context that she and her mother had found themselves in after fleeing their home. Her hair is often shown as unkempt, her school uniform wrinkled. To a rigid eye, Ceci seems to exist in a world beyond the norms of the spaces, like the school, that she moves in. Perhaps, even, that she is being neglected at home. This, to some extent, is true. Her mother struggles deeply, as the adults in similar narratives of families fleeing persecution do. Though her actions throughout the film indicate that she cares deeply about Ceci and her safety, she is still operating under tremendous emotional strain and thus susceptible to moments of malaise and inattention. In short, Ceci's appearance may be a conscious elision on the part of her mother, who does not care about dolling her daughter up so long as they are both out of harm's way. However, upon winning the essay contest, she is thrust into the gaze of the very structure that could interpret her unkempt appearance in a way that jeopardizes her family's safety, just as writing her honest thoughts about the military in the first essay had. Bolstered by the praise and recognition of her teacher, the military, and her peers, Ceci enthusiastically tells her mother about the prize and the ceremony where she will be

awarded. Her mother rejects the prize altogether, disgusted by the idea that her daughter would want to be recognized by the military, knowing their bloodlust. This causes a rift between mother and daughter. Ceci's mother, however, inevitably does not impede her daughter from receiving the prize. In part, because doing so would call more attention to the family than not, but also because she had just received news that her husband was disappeared and loses the emotional bandwidth to fight with her daughter. She opts to detach, coexisting with Ceci in silence.

At school, Ceci is subjected to the standards of the world that has recognized her as worthy. There are three scenes that document the training she receives to pass in this world, and each relate specifically to her appearance. The first is a meeting with her teacher during class. As the children are leaving the room, Ceci's teacher calls her to the desk. She talks to her about the prize ceremony coming up and asks whether she knows how to march. In Ceci's non-response, the teacher continues, instructing her to remind her mother that she must brush her hair and style it neatly with a ribbon, as well as iron her clothes. She quickly pivots to the topic of shoes, asking if Ceci owns a pair of dress shoes, or nicer ones than what she wears to school every day, to which Ceci says that she does not. The teacher offers that Ceci can borrow her daughter's shoes, though they will likely be too small. Part of what makes this scene effective is the pacing of the dialogue. Ceci's teacher does not demonstrate the same care when dealing with her students that we have be shown in prior scenes. She runs through her conversation with Ceci as if she is triaging a patient whose life is at risk. After all, this is the student who happened to write an essay that betrayed her true opinions of the military. Regardless of the teacher's own feelings about the politics of the time, and the behavior of the military, she approaches the event of the ceremony with an urgency that implies a protective orientation towards Ceci. The triage

metaphor is appropriate, because the teacher wants to take stock of the raw materials available to her to make Ceci as appropriate to the gaze of the visiting members of the military as possible.

This urgent problem and the more clinical and cold countenance of Ceci's teacher that it precipitates carries into the next two scenes as well. The teacher and student are shown in the patio of the school, where Ceci is being taught how to march. We see Ceci shuffling, struggling to walk in the dress shoes that her teacher lent her. The teacher dismisses Ceci's resistance, telling her that the shoes are only one size too small. The focus pans upwards, showing the two holding hands while moving forward deliberately. It rests on an upward angle close shot of the teacher's face. Her head is tilted upwards, slightly beyond the position expected for proper marching posture. Her expression is unmoving, and her eyes are fixed on something beyond the frame. Like in the previous scene, she focuses on the list of instructions she wishes to impart to Ceci. Back straight, head up, walk heel toe, heel toe. Once the camera pans to a tight shot of the teacher's face, she stops acknowledging Ceci's protestations altogether, mechanically moving forward while repeating her marching instructions. The scene ends with this tight shot of the teacher. The resulting effect of this scene hinges on the progressive detachment of the teacher in relation to Ceci. In the beginning, she holds her hand and gives her verbal encouragement to mitigate some of the discomfort that Ceci experiences while learning to march in unfamiliar shoes. By the end, both her facial expression and the tone of her voice produces a discomforting effect. Though we cannot see their hands by the end of the scene, the teacher's disassociation from the patio entirely implies a conscious choice to focus entirely on the end at hand. The shift in countenance reflects this choice, as she has managed to perform the requisite psychological acrobatics to effectively drag Ceci, her student, into presenting herself in an appropriate, safe way, for the military officials at the ceremony. She detaches from Ceci's needs, overcoming

even her own caring nature as a teacher, because she knows that there is larger threat looming in the future.

The final scene of Ceci's education comes on the day of the ceremony. It is chaotically shot, with the focus jumping around from Ceci to her teacher and the other adult flanking her while she sits in a chair. The two adults are frantically getting Ceci ready for the ceremony, moving from brushing her hair and tying the ribbon in her ponytail to straightening out her dress and white uniform coat. A shot crops all but the hand of Ceci's teacher as she forcibly puts on the black dress shoe and fastens its buckle. All this while Ceci's leg appears bent uncomfortably with her knee near her shoulder and the shoe resting on the foot of the chair. Different from the previous scene, we do not hear any resistance from Ceci. Her face mirrors the indifferent and detached look seen on both her mother at various times in the film, and her teacher at the end of the marching lesson. The scene is disturbing. One can read Ceci's quiet resignation in several ways. Perhaps from the chaos of the cinematography, we can assume that she is simply caught up in the moment, confused and overwhelmed by the rough and frantic movements of the adults around her. But since the movie has taken care to show us that Ceci is keenly aware of her surroundings, and able to perform adaptively to the dominant structures of power, this interpretation of the scene is insufficient. Her look, which indicates emotional detachment, reflects a conscious choice to compartmentalize this experience entirely. It is similarly seen on the face of Maria in *Garage Olimpo*, or even Juán in *Infancia clandestina*, who are violently policed and molded by the codes dictated by the world of the dictatorship[32]. Her trauma, which

[32] This weaponization of clothing to mold individuals to the values of the dictatorial regimes is described in detail by Pilar Calveiro. She writes in *Poder y desaparición*: "La desnudez, la capucha que escondía el rostro, las ataduras y mordazas, el dolor y la pérdida de toda pertenecia personal eran los signos de la *iniciación* en este mundo en donde todas las propiedades, normas, valores, lógicas del exterior parecen canceladas y en donde la propia humanidad entra en suspenso. La desnudez del prisionero y la capucha aumentan su indefensión pero también expresan una voluntad de hacer transparente al hombre, violar su intimidad, apoderarse de su secreto, verlo sin que pueda ver, que subyace a la tortura, y constituye una de 'las normas de la casa'. La capucha y la consecuente pérdida de la vision

registers on her face in this scene, comes from being dolled up for the military. Of being dolled up for the people who caused her to flee to the coastal town and who most likely killed her father. It is an act that fundamentally misaligns with the world once inhabited by the young girl with unkempt hair and a wrinkled uniform.

The violence insinuated by the school uniform and its reception from the perspective of the students is further deepened in Chilean author Nona Fernández's novel *Space Invaders*. It is an entry in the archive of writers and artists who, once having reached adulthood, strive to conjure the memories of their childhoods lived in the context of the dictatorship. Like in *El premio*, Fernández articulates certain subtle manifestations of state authority in the lives of teenage students. And while their rebellion, or mere bristling at the rigid structure of their school lives could be discounted as the complaints of most teenagers, the surrounding atmosphere makes the object of clothing something more than its traditional interpretation. Though the students in the following passages exercise some agency in relation to the restrictive environment they find themselves in, it is worth noting that almost two decades later the object of the uniform continues to stand out for the author (and the schoolmates she consulted with in the production of the work) as inflected by the national mood (Poblet np). The uniform, like Ceci's dolling up at the hands of the adults at her school, demarcates a liminal border between internal authenticity and the presentation of oneself that is safe to the authoritarian gaze.

A common trope among postdictatorial texts told from the perspective of children is the daily rituals at the beginning of the school day. In *Infancia clandestina,* an early scene shows

aumentan la inseguridad y la desubicación pero también le quitan al hombre su rostro, lo borran; es parte del proceso de deshumanización que va minando al desaparecido y, al mismo tiempo, facilita su castigo. Los torturadores no ven la cara de su víctima; castigan cuerpos sin rostro; castigan subversivos, no hombres. Hay aquí una negación de la humanidad de la víctima que es doble: frente a sí misma y frente a quienes lo atormentan" (62). It is testimony like this that grounds this analysis of the more insidious ways that the dictatorship imposed itself in the lives of citizens.

Ernesto/Juán being selected to raise the Argentine flag before the students sing the national anthem. His rejection of this, because the flag hung at the school is a version the one that his father supports, presents a fundamental tension in the film of Juán learning to acculturate himself to his new surroundings and pass as a normal kid from Córdoba, and not one who lived in exile in Cuba with his Montoneros parents for most of his childhood. Here, in Fernández, we see how the daily donning the school's uniform, the smock, connects to a broader pattern of indoctrination ritualized by the school (and presumably influenced by the Pinochet's ministry of education)[33]. She writes:

> We button our smocks, checkered for girls and tan for boys. One button after the other, carefully, so that no buttonhole is missed, the same action six times, from the neckline at the top to the hem at the bottom. When we're ready, we take our places next to our wooden desks. We stand one after the other in a long line across the classroom. Next to ours is another long line, and another, and another. We are multiple columns forming a perfect square, a kind of game board. With our right hands, we cross ourselves at the same time, looking up at a picture of the Virgen del Carmen that hangs over the board, directly above our heads. It's a small painting, slightly faded, but it's the lady with her golden crown and a tricolor sash across her chest, with her child in her arms, the little baby Jesus. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, we recite a prayer to the Virgin to begin the day and we pray for the poorest of the poor, the wretched, the homeless, for those who aren't able to go to school like we do. Voices in unison raised in a prayer identical to yesterday's and the day before yesterday's and tomorrow's. (19)

There are details that indicate a difference in setting of this novel when compared to the school in *El premio*. For one, the emphasis on long lines and multiple columns of desks/students within the same classroom. This is a school in Santiago, Chile, a large metropolis, and not the small classroom in a coastal town of Argentina. There are more students within each classroom, and

[33] As Macarena Urzúa writes in her article "Cartografía de una memoria: *Space Invaders* de Nona Fernández o el pasadonarrado en clave de juego": "La primera escena, que abarca las líneas iniciales de la *nouvelle*, es una imagen en la que varios de los niños que crecieron y fueron a la escuela en los años ochenta en Chile, pueden reconocerse. Imágenes tales como: formar la fila, cantar el Himno Nacional los días lunes, izar la bandera, y comenzar cada semana así, son porciones de una memoria colectiva que es revisitada aquí." (304).

the classes are divided here by grade. The Virgen del Carmen de Chile, which hangs above the classroom's chalkboard, marks the significance of this geographical distance between the two texts. The Virgen is the patron saint of the country, and its military forces. The sash which hangs across her chest bear the colors of the Chilean flag. In moving the focus from the uniformity of the students, lined up in a perfect square within the classroom space, to the picture of the Virgen perched overlooking the students, the policing ritual of buttoning up the uniforms comes better into focus. The expectation of successful completion of this ritual, of lining up properly and buttoning up their smocks carefully, literally ascends in importance to the level of not only satisfying the demands of the rules that regulate their school, but of the heart of the modern Chilean nation itself. The game board image upon realization of the uniform lines of students concretizes the memory of being placed, like pawns, within a system that extends far beyond the limits of the classroom.

Again, understanding the specific impression that the uniform as an object of pain makes on the memory that Fernández narrates demands a close reading of both the clothing and the ambient details of the passage. The students wear separate smocks depending on their gender. They are described as buttoning up their smocks carefully, making sure that no buttonhole is missed. The question that hangs from this particular emphasis on buttoning up the smock perfectly on the first attempt is: what would happen if a student missed a buttonhole? Part of what the uniform accomplishes is announcing entry into a new world. It is a world filled with expectations apart from the internal motivations of the students, and whose rules dictate that they present themselves accordingly and efficiently without error. But is also a world fraught with tensions and trap doors. For years around them they have digested junta ideology along with violence and rumors of disappearances. Even in the list detailing the contents of the students'

prayer, said in perfect unison, show shadows of this danger. The list ends with "for those who aren't able to go to school like we do". Fernández emphasizes the ritualized nature of the prayer, of the whole spectacle, as having imposed itself on their past, present, and future ("identical to yesterday's and the day before yesterday's and tomorrow's"). Taking the prayer and the buttoning of the smocks together, the answer to the question is that failing to properly button a smock could very well lead to eventually becoming one of the wretched children unable to attend a school like theirs. It is a type of shaming that skirts towards an abusive dynamic. And though this is common to agents of authority (like in schools), in the context of this particular school in Pinochet's Chile the cost of being labelled subversive amidst the rigid uniformity of the rest, especially as a young person, carries a much greater potential impact on a student's future than failing a grade or not making it to university.

Despite the pressure to conform and the risks involved in not doing so are high, students in Fernández's novel behave as many often did during the dictatorship, finding unseen ways to allow their desire for individual expression to show. The following three passages highlight the restrictive, and potentially traumatic, climates that these children have grown up in, as informed by their school uniforms. Each details a moment of individuality and release in a sea of conformity, which in turn underscores just how rare and precious those moments were. There is certainly overlap here between objects of pain and transitional objects, and that will inevitably occur. The occurrence of the former often gives birth to the latter. However, even in *Space Invaders* those details that provide a respite from the overwhelming and impactful pressure of their lives as schoolchildren during Pinochet's dictatorship are overshadowed by the urgency and tenuousness of those moments.

I would like to read all three passages in light of how each explores the new liminal space created by donning the uniform, and how that uniform expresses the restrictions placed on the students' behavior while in the school space. Furthermore, how the policing of behavior via the uniform is colored by the broader context of state-sanctioned violence. The first passage begins in the schoolyard at the conclusion of recess; Fernández writes:

> Now, in the schoolyard, the bell rings for the end of recess. The girl shakes the crumbs from her checkered smock and then rises. The children line up by grade. She joins her classmates and waits for a signal from the monitor to walk to her classroom. While she waits she looks at her red painted nails. Her arm is on the shoulder of the classmate ahead of her, to mark the proper distance, and as she stands there she examines the polish, which has started to peel. The girl senses the gaze of the monitor inspecting the lines. Everyone begins to move forward, one after the other. The girl puts her hands in the pockets of her smock. No one notices. (27)

Returning to the *punctum*, we can picture the static image of the girl, cropped tightly so that all we see is her hand—with its fingernails painted red, the nail polish chipped with time or anxiety or both—resting on her classmate's shoulder. While this image itself is rather innocuous, taken within the context of the passage the chipped red nail polish disturbs our expectations of the scene. The narrator provides us with insight into the girl's inner thoughts, revealing that she senses the gaze of the monitor around her. This fear is not confirmed, but the mere sense of the monitor being around is enough to cause the girl to thrust her hands in her pockets once she is given the opportunity to do so.

What's more, the girl is not shown as behaving with the same self-awareness prior to this moment of lining up at the end of recess. Recess, as it were, is a break from the ordinary uniformity throughout the day, which begins with the ritual detailed previously. This is evidenced in the crumbs that she brushes off her smock. Rather than a consistent respect for the cleanliness of the smock, the girl only tends to it, brushing off the crumbs when the bell

announces the end to recess. This act, and the act of hiding her painted nails in her pockets, acknowledges the potential for punishment if she were to be found in line with crumbs all over her uniform and red painted nails. Nonetheless, the time marked in the chipped appearance of the nails shows not only a savviness in skirting the gaze of the scholastic panopticon, but also in a persistent desire to maintain agency over her own presentation in the face of the risks tensely undergirding this and the previous scene.

The girl at recess is singled out by the narrator for her hidden defiant gesture against the apparent uniformity of the other students. The choice to shift focus from a collective we to the individual third person might usually indicate the development of a more pronounced protagonist. But in the case of this text, it sets up the behaviors of an individual that connects to a broader discreet affiliative network of students operating in the shadows of the dominant, adult-regulated world. This is most clearly depicted in the following scene, which takes place after school during a night of parent/teacher conferences:

> The game is simple and we have an hour to play it. Everybody knows and that's why we all show up on time. Our mothers and fathers are in the parent meeting and we shut ourselves in here, in this dark classroom belonging to the grade above or the grade below, never our own classroom…Meanwhile, here, a few yards away, we've changed our own clothes, real clothes, ready to be real and play our own game. The light is off in the classroom and the air thickens. Amid a darkness as black as night or death, we, the usual someones, stop being ourselves. Now no one is who they claim to be. No name is embroidered on the lapel of any smock. We're different people. Shadows, hushed ghosts moving silently with arms and hands outstretched, trying to run into something...Then, in the last seconds of the game, come the clutches, the crushes, the squeezes, the tongues licking and seeking and not speaking, because there are no words, no names, we're just one body with many paws and hands and heads, a little Martian from *Space Invaders*, an octopus with multiform arms playing this game in a darkness that's about to lift. The light suddenly comes on and the monitor is watching us from the doorway. We're all exactly where we're supposed to be, boys to the right and girls to the left. Some are reading books. Others are asleep in their seats because it's late and tomorrow we'll have to get up early to come back to school. (35-6)

The passage begins with a nod to the game from the scene of the morning prayer and uniform ritual. However, in this case, the group of students play a game that only lasts the hour of discretion afforded them by the length of the parents' meeting. The fact that they all arrive to the site of the game on time and that they all know the rules of engagement hints that this is not the first time such game has been played. Furthermore, it signals a tacit understanding among the students that to best engage in the game, all participants must be fully aware of its parameters. It is a narrow tightrope to walk, indicated both by the window of opportunity to play, the proximity of the meeting occurring simultaneously, and the monitor's presence (as revealed at the end of the scene). However, in the dark of a classroom that is not their own, the students enter another parallel world. A world described as more real to them than any other.

There are numerous implications to the repetition of the word real in the above passage. For one, the game that the students play in the dark classroom is an escape from the oppressive nightmare realm that they find themselves in day after day at the school and beyond. It is an opportunity to remove their smocks, which bear their names, and relish in the anonymity afforded to them by this gesture in the darkness. It is as if the characters they have fashioned in school, poured into the container labelled with embroidery on their smock, has strayed significantly from their internal image. They are described as 'ready to be real,' a phrase that deepens the urgency of the game. It signals a need to not be what they wrap themselves in with their smocks on at school, but rather something more authentic. And while these interpretations approximate what it means to be real in this game, the concept becomes more complex as the game unfolds.

Like their arrival to the game itself, the game starts with individuals groping through the darkness under seemingly identical motivations. They are described as hushed ghosts, or silent

shadows, which further deepens the sense that this game satisfies a shared, subconscious need precipitated by the environment of the school (and by extension the nation). The game continues, and the students are described as meeting in pairs first, then eventually coming together into a tangled, orgy-like collective. The subconscious then transforms the mass of groping students into something monstrous. They are a character from the videogame *Space Invaders*, or a single octopus, with one body but many heads, hands, and even paws. Though this characterization of the group of students might produce a certain desired comical effect, read against the previous two scenes I argue that this monstrous transformation is a logical progression of the kind of shame leveraged against the students daily to maintain the appearance of rigid uniformity. Shame, after all, is what girds the morning prayers to the Virgen del Carmen de Chile, what fosters a paranoid awareness of the school monitor during recess, and what inspires students to hide their chipped red nail polish and sneak off to foreign classrooms in the dark to be 'real.' The 'real' here, is not the fact that the students are savvy enough to play the game, but that once they have achieved the real they long desired, they become a monster in the eyes of the figures of authority they have avoided in the first place. Despite becoming something other than the "usual someones", they have also become something they subconsciously know to be dangerous to the world outside the dark classroom. The act of playing the game does not so much empower them to exit the game space with renewed agency, as it draws into focus the impermanence of their ability to be themselves in the world. Upon the intrusion of the monitor into the space, the game ends. Smocks are placed back on bodies, and the students align themselves in the proper way dictated by the rules their more permanent, parallel world. Personal agency, as these series of passages indicate, is monstrous in a world of violently enforced conformity.

The culmination of this desire for permanent escape into the freedom of the game world comes in a collective dream narrated shortly after the scene in the dark classroom. Fernández writes:

> In this dream we're tiny too, the size of the red Chevy, so we can do whatever we want because nobody can see us down here. We can paint our nails, roll down our socks, loosen our ties, take off our smocks. If we want to we can even let down our hair and hold hands. The monitor walks past. We see his giant black shoe. His sole is about to crush us, but the tiny red Chevy dodges him in an incredible maneuver and saves us from being squashed to death by his loafer. The monitor doesn't even notice us, can't see us from above, doesn't suspect what we might be getting up to down here in the backseat of the red Chevy. (39)

There is a fair amount to unpack from this passage. For one, the miniaturization of the group, being driven around in a barely visible toy car, echoes the subconscious understanding that their internal desires are viewed as something inhuman and othered by the world around them. The actual size of the car, the fact that it is shrunk down, also takes the hour window of the previous scene's game in the dark and reflects it spatially. A permanent escape, it would seem, requires being transported and/or transformed into something/somewhere apart from the shapes/spaces permitted by the authoritarian gaze. But that authoritarian gaze does not disappear from the scene. Instead, it is scaled appropriately to its impact on the students' wellbeing and behavior. The gigantic shoe of the monitor, rather than simply ending the game in the dark classroom or pressuring a student to hide her nail polish, presents a real threat to the safety of the group riding in the car. This, again, is the subconscious rendering of the real threat undergirding the rituals and surveilling that the students are subjected to every day. It is represented in an exaggerated fashion, with the students miniaturized and the monitor's giant shoe threatening a fatal blow.

It is curious that in the dream, like during the game in the dark classroom, the presence of the authoritarian gaze does not disappear. Even in their dream world, the idealized space involves being invisible and capable of outrunning the agents of hegemonic power. Once within

the space of the tiny red Chevy, the students can cast off the artifacts of their repression. Outside, one artifact is the giant black shoe of the monitor that threatens to crush the car. Inside, those artifacts are their school clothes. Fernández calls back and adds to the running list of the uniform of repression detailed throughout the novel. In the car painted nails can be openly displayed, while the different elements of the school uniform are either loosened, slackened, or taken off. Just like in the dark classroom, performing this process of undressing and modifying the school uniform ends in an act of communal intimacy; the list concludes with the ability to hold hands now that the restrictions of the uniform are undone.

Though certainly not as near to state-sanctioned violence as the initial reading of stripping in *Garage Olimpo*, the two texts that followed demonstrate that the school uniform can be focused on as another site of the articulation of authoritarian repression. The context that surrounds these uniforms, fleeing persecution in the case of *El Premio* and being in high school following the bloodiest period of the Pinochet dictatorship, heightens the stakes of being seen as not visually conforming to the standard dictated by the juntas. In each of the three texts, clothing as an object of pain can be traced back to this controlling gaze of the perpetrator. Rather than an ingredient in self-expression, dress becomes a weapon to enforce a specific ideology. As hinted at in *Space Invaders*, however, the significance clothing was not fully coopted by dictatorial regimes during their reign. In the following section, I will deepen the understanding of clothing as a comfort or transitional object. There, we will see how despite attempts to weaponize clothing as another arm of the juntas, individuals called on it to protect themselves, endure difficult experiences, and preserve their humanity.

chapter 2.2: WEARING THE SHROUDS OF OTHERS

clothing as a transitional object

In Juan Mandelbaum's 2008 documentary *Our Disappeared*, a random Google search for friends he lost touch with once he fled the persecution of the military junta during Argentina's last dictatorship reveals that a former girlfriend of his, Patricia Dixon, was among the thousands disappeared during that time. This sets off a chain of events leading to Juan's return to Argentina to track the lives of Patricia, and other friends and colleagues affected by the dictatorship. Though he had last seen Patricia a few decades ago, he contacts her younger sister, with whom he had a fleeting memory of meeting in the three months he and Pato dated. To his surprise, Alejandra, Pato's sister, does remember him well. The documentary captures a conversation between the two once they reunite in Buenos Aires. Alejandra remembers her older sister with fondness and a reverence expected of a younger sibling who was cared for by Pato. However, Alejandra carefully distinguishes Pato from a certain Joan of Arc trope despite her participation in militant leftist groups. As Alejandra puts it, Pato was intensely ethical while also "bien pintada," or well-kept. This is the first mention of clothing and appearance in the scene between Alejandra and Juan.

During the conversation, Alejandra also mentions that she and Pato were often told by those around them that the bore a similar appearance. This observation is common in the case of siblings; however, it will take on a new meaning upon Pato's disappearance in September of 1977. After that event, Alejandra notes that her parents were devastated, curiously leaving herself out of that response. Her shock took a different form than her parents'. She talks to Juan of wearing Pato's clothes for a time following her disappearance. At the time, she felt as if Pato was still with her when she was wearing her clothes. Perhaps, too, this was punctuated by the outsider's perspective of Pato and Alejandra being close in appearance. Wearing her clothes, therefore, would produce an uncanny effect of momentarily seeing the visage of Pato instead of

herself in her reflection. While still a theory of the psychological mechanisms at work inside Alejandra in her decision to wear her disappeared sister's clothes, the conclusion of the scene offers further insight supporting this phenomenon. Alejandra mentions that she only wore Pato's clothes for as long as it felt appropriate, and that after then she let go of them. She quotes a reference to St. Augustine from *Ay, mis ancestros*, a work on transgenerational psychology by Anne Ancelin Schutzenberger. In this quote, it mentions that the dead are not gone from our lives, but merely invisible.

In examining clothing as a transitional object, I would like to pick apart the quote cited by Alejandra Dixon a bit further. On the one hand, the quote arrives sequentially at the conclusion of her story regarding her sister Pato's disappearance. By then, she had already moved far enough along in her processing of that traumatic event to cease wearing Pato's clothing. She mentions that in the moment she decided that it was better to remember her with her heart, and that the clothes would only encumber this process. This is, in effect, a quintessential case of the transitional object. In the vein of the previously cited Judith Herman, or the originator of the term, Freudian psychologist Melanie Klein, a transitional object is meant to provide a reminder of former associations with warmth, support, and/or humanity in the midst of or following an event that fundamentally alters the course of one's life. For Alejandra, she does not wear the clothes of her disappeared sister just because they fit, and they are available to wear in her absence. She wears them because she feels incapable of facing the world with the knowledge that her sister does not inhabit it with her. The final quote from St. Augustine, and giving away her sister's clothing, does not necessarily indicate that Alejandra has forgotten her sister's disappearance. Rather, she no longer needs to wear the clothes to facilitate embodying how she wishes to remember Pato.

In the face of the systematic weaponization of clothing detailed in the previous section, many who suffered the effects of state-sanctioned violence also, like Alejandra, took to clothing as a source of maintaining their connection to a shared humanity. The love and support of others, channeled through shared clothing, imbues the object with the ability to counteract the purposefully totalizing dehumanization of the dictatorships. As was the case in the previous chapter, clothing as a transitional/comfort object rejects and works to counteract (if only in a limited sense) this assault on human dignity. Clothing, in its cultural sense, is a tool used to express oneself. This also means that in a social context, clothing facilitates how we paint our memory of others who circulate in our lives. It is a conduit for memory, and thus also mourning (in Alejandra's case). To push the concept further, forensic technologies show that even on a microscopic level, clothing contains certain markers that distinguishes the persons who inhabited those clothes from others. DNA, fibers, hairs, even scents in the case of dog or other animals with a heightened sense of smell, all indicate that even if the person who wore the clothes no longer exists, those clothes bear traces of how they lived in them, and who they were. In a less technologically advanced way, the work that Alejandra performs while wearing her sister's clothes, or even the work being done in this project, takes clothing as a conduit for channeling a more fully realized memory of a disappeared individual. After all, if the dead are merely invisible in our world, they would likely be wearing clothes.

I will primarily look at three texts in this section: Marcelo Piñeyro's 2002 film *Kamchatka*, Alicia Partnoy's memoir *The Little School*, and Tununa Mercado's autofiction *In a State of Memory*. All three works present clothing as a comfort object, though to different ends. In *Kamchatka*, a single t-shirt bequeathed from an older brother figure emboldens the young protagonist Harry to confront the difficult circumstances he and his family must endure because

of being pursued by the military. For Partnoy in *The Little School*, a plastic flower and a jacket recycled from a disappeared friend while held captive in the clandestine detention center provide both a moment of absurdity in the face of unrelenting violence and spiritual protection from torture, in turn. Finally, Tununa Mercado's own profound melancholy during her time exiled from her own country, detailed in *In a State of Memory*, receives some reprieve from a habit of acquiring, wearing, and preserving the clothing of lost friends.

Throughout Marcelo Piñeyro's *Kamchatka*, the character of Harry demonstrates a particular awareness of the dangers facing his family in their flight from their home in Buenos Aires to a rural safe house. This, despite his young age. As summarized in the previous chapter, the family chooses to leave the city upon hearing news that a colleague of David's (the father), a civil rights attorney, has been taken by the authorities[34]. Though not explicitly stated, it can be inferred that David had sufficient connections to secure the safe house. Further confirmation of the precariousness of his network is the appearance of Lucas at the safe house. Lucas, like the rest of the family, is but a codename for someone who is also attempting to outrun the authorities. Depicted as being both precocious and fiercely protective of his family, Harry is understandably suspicious and cold in his early interactions with Lucas. As the film moves forward, however, Lucas wins over Harry. The two bond in a way that echoes the dynamic between Harry and his younger brother, El Enano. This signals a break in the mounting external pressure threatening the psychological wellbeing of the family, punctuated by the relatively irreverent dancing scene analyzed in the prior chapter.

[34] As summarized in the previous chapter, as well, there is not specific criticism written about this film. However, *Kamchatka* can be folded into much of what is discussed and referenced about other texts about the dictatorship with child protagonists. My hope is that its inclusion in this curated set will generate newfound interest in the film, especially given the possibilities of contrasting its narrative with the novelization by the film's co-writer Marcelo Figueras.

This reprieve in tension does not become permanent, however. The family leaves Lucas at the safe house to take a short trip to visit David's parents (Harry and Enano's grandparents) in the countryside. When they return, Harry finds Lucas in the yard after having fled the home when the neighborhood experienced a power outage. At the time, a power outage, though not uncommon in the type of tempestuous weather occurring during this scene, generally announced the arrival of military forces to conduct a raid and collect so-called subversives. Following a conversation with David, Harry's father, off-screen, Lucas returns to Harry in the yard to announce that he must leave. In their brief exchange, Lucas denies Harry's request to see him off to the train station. Harry, growing frustrated, turns cold towards Lucas as Lucas asks him if he will say goodbye, since they are friends. Harry answers with how can they be friends if they will never see each other again, a response that visibly affects Lucas. After taking a breath, Lucas offers to Harry that he has left him the orange t-shirt with a motorbike decal on the front that we first see Lucas in when he arrives at the safe house. Harry rejects the offer, but Lucas simply pats Harry on the back as he walks away. The scene transitions to a close shot of Lucas' orange t-shirt laid out on Harry's bed. The camera pans to Harry standing in the doorway of his room, contemplating the shirt. He is next seen running towards the car containing Lucas and his father. Unable to catch up, Harry is left shouting for Lucas in the street, seemingly remorseful for his earlier rejection of saying goodbye to his new friend.

The next scene shows to what extent Lucas' absence from the safe house has affected Harry. He walks El Enano to school, wearing a red sweater with a white button up shirt and tie. Instead of entering the school with his brother, he takes off for the train station to escape home to Buenos Aires. He attempts to visit his friend, Bertuccio, at his house, but is denied entry at the door by Bertuccio's mother. The shot closes with an ominous image of Harry waiting in the

hallway of Bertuccio's apartment building, the lights cut out and the scene going dark. At night, Harry returns to the safe house. His mother runs to meet him in the front yard and embraces Harry. Both are visibly emotional. They both wear the same color sweater, a filmic cue of the deep connection between the two.

The two scenes, sequentially, connect. But they also connect to the arc of Harry's processing the ambient pressure of his new life in the safe house. Lucas' departure presents a loss in what had formerly been building towards a relatively stable existence. His decision to run away is an understandable response to this, as the game the family and Lucas have been playing has fundamentally ended. Faced with this reality, Harry attempts to return to the original source of stability and care, assuming that this is wholly dependent on returning to a specific location. But in Buenos Aires, he is met with cold indifference from Bertuccio's mother and another reminder of the danger swirling around even once safe places. His inevitable return to the countryside is a not a fatalistic resignation to the circumstances that he finds himself in, but a moment of earned wisdom in understanding where he can find a continual source of love and support. The fact that his mother, coincidentally, is also wearing a red sweater insinuates that off-screen, she too had been grappling with similar pain. Thus, the moment of their reunion does not contain any sort of reprimanding consistent with or expected of a mother who has endured waiting for the return of her runaway child. Instead, the two, like the color of their sweaters, share a poignant moment of empathetic understanding.

The growth of Harry, symbolized by his return to the safe house and matching his sweater to his mom, becomes concretized in the proceeding scene. He is shot at the kitchen table, wearing the orange t-shirt that Lucas left him, seated across the table from his father. The two are playing Risk, a game they are shown playing at various points during the film. In all the previous

games, David resoundingly defeats Harry, an expected result given Harry's youth and inexperience. This time, however, Harry whittles down David's forces to a lone country: Kamchatka. And though he is unable to take the country from his father, Harry shows measured determination. In each of his failures to win the dice roll and take Kamchatka, he does not complain or overreact as he did in response to his misfortunes in previous games. Instead, he spends the next few hours attempting different moves to win the game, eventually falling asleep in the process.

Though the scene could be read as a mere result of Harry having played the game enough to be equally competent at it as his father, the sum of details involving the surrounding context of the film up until that point, the t-shirt Harry is wearing, and where the film will conclude points to something more. The film concludes with Harry and El Enano's parents leaving them with their paternal grandfather. They have run out of resources in their network to ensure the safety of their children while on the run from the dictatorship. This solution seems to present itself rather smoothly, which indicates that the prospect of parting from their children was something the two parents held in the back of their minds. Retroactively, following the final scene where the two parents depart their children, we remember moments wherein the parents, specifically in their dealings with the elder sibling Harry, were training him in some of the skills necessary to confront the world in their absence. The scene in which Harry and his father play Risk for the last time closes with David giving Harry a kiss goodnight. The poignancy of this act comes from both his knowledge that soon he will not be able to be with his children for the foreseeable future, and that Harry has grown to the point of nearly tirelessly working to protect himself against opposing forces. Of course, Risk is a mere game, but like the other games the parents

play with the children, they confer the additional benefit providing them with the capabilities necessary to survive in this new world.

The significance of Harry wearing Lucas's orange t-shirt during this final game of Risk with his father is twofold. On the one hand, Harry accepting the shirt as a gift from the recently departed Lucas is further evidence of his personal development, even since his attempt to escape back to Buenos Aires. Rather than escaping the difficult details of his life in its present circumstances, he dons the shirt as an act of comradery with both his family and Lucas. Just as he reintegrated into the family following his return from Buenos Aires, he literally places the plight of those like Lucas and himself on his shoulders. On the other hand, wearing Lucas' shirt signifies a way that Harry has discovered to assist him in moving through the world despite the physical absence of those he has held dearly. The presence of the shirt emboldens him with the memory that he charges the shirt with, those memories of Lucas acting as a caring older brother figure during his stay. What we witness in the Risk scene, a miniaturized world meant to echo the dynamics of the surrounding one, is Harry's resiliency in the face of conflict. He has already endured a drastic, even traumatic shift in his life by fleeing from his family home. And, as the film's conclusion establishes, will have to endure another fundamental stressor in being split from his parents. The transitional object of the orange t-shirt, and the moment in which it is deployed in the film, provides the viewer with the assurance that Harry is actively coping with these difficult circumstances. He is not a passive victim, nor an ignorant bystander. Instead, his behaviors, punctuated by his clothing choices, offer insight into how he fights to maintain connection to love and support despite adversity.

This maintenance of human connection through the transitional object of clothing extends into the spaces of clandestine detention centers, as well. Despite the military's use of stripping

and the appropriation of clothes to wear down victims' dignity and resolve, as mentioned in the previous section in the analysis of *Garage Olimpo*, precious articles that were somehow retained or even acquired while being held captive contradict the dominant narrative coming from the juntas that their operations were a clean and resounding success. The fallacy of this assertion, that how the juntas carried out their suppression was done so in a surgical and comprehensive fashion, is immediately skewered in Alicia Partnoy's memoir *The Little School*[35]. In the chapter detailing her capture and the first days she spent at the Little School, a CDC in Bahía Blanca, Argentina, she writes:

> She does not remember exactly the day it all happened. In any event, she already knew by then something about the pace of life at the Little School. She knew, for example, that after mealtimes, if they were allowed to sit for a short while on the edge of the bed, she could, without being caught, whisper a few words out of the side of her mouth to Vasquita, who was in the bunk next to hers. She chose her words. "Vasca," she called out. "Yes…" "They gave me some slippers with only one flower." "At last." "Do you understand me? Just one flower, two slippers and just one flower." Vasca stretched her neck and lifted up her face to peek under her blindfold. The flower, a huge plastic daisy, looked up at them from the floor. The other slipper, without flower, was more like them. But that one-flowered slipper amid the dirt and fear, the screams and the torture, that flower so plastic, so unbelievable, so ridiculous, was like a stage prop, almost obscene, absurd, a joke. Vasca smiled at first and then laughed. It was a nervous and barely restrained laughter. If she were caught laughing, it was going to be very hard to explain what was so funny. Then blows would come, with or without explanations. She shuffled the daisy around for more than a hundred days, from the latrine to the bed, from the bed to the shower. Many times she blindly searched under the bed for the daisy in between the guards' shouts and blows. The day she was transferred to prison, someone realized that she should be wearing "more decent" shoes. They found her a pair of tennis shoes three sizes too big. The one-flowered slippers remained at the Little School, disappeared… (27-8)

[35] There has been a fair amount written on this text. As footnoted below, Louise A. Detwiler tends to focus on the metonym as it relates to the "hyper-fragmentation created by the blindfold" (65). This corroborates testimony about the "corporeal" memory as a determining factor in captives orienting themselves while at the CDCs (CONADEP 58). Diana Taylor, in *Disappearing Acts*, highlights how Partnoy intentionally recomposes the disappeared throughout the text, as opposed to simply documenting their destruction (160). And Patricia López-Gay, in her article "'Tenues límites entre la historia y las historias:' Reading Alicia Partnoy's Textual and Visual Testimony, *La Escuelita*" further elaborates on Taylor's interpretation, positing that the polyphony on display in *The Little School* works to restore agency to the disappeared (90, 91). While all of these readings compliment the present study, I am primarily focused on how Partnoy documents the potency of the transitional object of clothing in resisting the dehumanizing intent of her captors.

As previously mentioned, most of the time that individuals spent at a CDC were unseen by these victims. They were "walled up," meaning that their eyes were usually covered by a blindfold. Partnoy's experience at the Little School was no different. She describes in a later chapter that despite this, she had been able to see through the bottom of her blindfold because of her large nose, though she was careful not to reveal this quirk to the guards. In the above passage, Partnoy has already figured out certain rhythms of the space she has been taken to[36]. She uses this knowledge to find an opportune moment to share with her friend Vasca the story of her slippers. Upon entry into the Little School, Partnoy was barefoot. She was given the slippers sometime in the first days of her detainment. Keeping in mind her unique ability to see beneath her blindfold, gives cause to the necessity of sharing such a story with her cellmate. After all, she is given what most likely were slippers recycled from previous detainees at the Little School. Looking down through the empty space in the blindfold made by her nose, Partnoy's perspective would be of two mismatched slippers, with one bearing a large plastic daisy.

Why she would find this comical and why she would risk physical abuse from the guards to tell her friend (in the few words she allowed herself to whisper at mealtimes) about it presents a case study of how a transitional object like the slippers comes to be. Just days prior, Partnoy had been taken from her home, away from her young daughter, blindfolded, and led to a facility that traded in the disappearance of so-called subversives. Amidst the grimness of being robbed of her sight and clothing, while also being tortured and interrogated, she is given this mismatched

[36] Louise A. Detwiler in her article "The Blindfolded (Eye)Witness in Alicia Partnoy's 'The Little School'" provides an interesting parallel reading to the present. She centers metonym as the mechanism for understanding the effects that being blindfolded has on the narration (65). In relation to the plastic flower on the slipper, she writes: "The protagonist's experience of blindly navigating her way around La Escuelita is suggested by the plastic flower of one of her slippers…This metonym also comes to represent her, her companions, and their overall experience. The one-flower slippers capture both the deprivation and defamiliarized quality of the group's existence, which she describes through the use of simile…In these ways, the prisoners at La Escuelita are compelled by the presence of the blindfold to construct a larger picture from the only visual bits and pieces with which they have to work" (66).

set of slippers. Partnoy attributes the one slipper, standard and not bearing the plastic daisy, to "us", meaning that it reflects the parallel world that she, Vasca, her husband, and all the other detainees at the Little School and beyond found themselves in. It is an item that coheres to the brutal context cultivated by the military forces in these CDCs. The slipper with the plastic daisy, however, does not. The slipper with the plastic daisy produces a *punctum* within the limited frame of Partnoy's gaze beneath her blindfold. On the one hand, it disrupts her expectation that the calculated machine of the dictatorship would provide her with mismatching slippers, and/or that she expected a matching pair to begin with. But also, as she narrates Vasca's laughter in response to seeing the slipper, the gaiety and garishness of the item breaks the brutality of the details within the surrounding world of the facility.

The plastic flower, thus, opens the possibility for thinking beyond the limits of the parallel world of the Little School. Sites likes this aspired to prevent such opportunities from arising, working instead to relentlessly dismantle detainees' connections to comfort and the outside world. An ironic coincidence like the slipper with the plastic flower, coupled with Partnoy's physical quirk of a large nose, undermines the guards' ability to achieve this goal. She feels compelled to assume risk of physical abuse from the guards to share this *punctum* with Vasca because they occupy the same context within the Little School[37]. Vasca's unrestrained laughter when she finally cranes her neck to peek at the slippers confirms Partnoy's own response. She grafts a warm memory onto the aberrant slipper that Partnoy shuffles around in for the hundred days she is detained there. In her shuffling, not only does she carry the memory of this warm moment between friends with her, but she is able to signify the contours of the site in

[37] Diana Taylor also acknowledges the *punctum* presented by the plastic flower on the slipper in her book *Disappearing Acts* (168). For Taylor, however, the *punctum* allows for an expanded acknowledgement of the horrors Partnoy suffers at the CDC.

light of this memory with her movement. The slipper with the plastic daisy becomes a potent transitional object for Partnoy in her time at the Little School. As she describes, she seeks out the one-flowered slippers in times of distress, when her surroundings turn violent.

This is not the only time that an article of clothing provides comfort to a distressed Partnoy. She begins the chapter titled "The Denim Jacket" by establishing the context for how she obtained the denim jacket becomes a second transitional object. She writes:

> When I got into that denim jacket the night before yesterday, I felt really protected. It was like snuggling in my mother's arms when I was a little girl. This was the first time I felt safe since the military arrested me. Earlier that night I'd been trembling out of rage and impotence because they had taken away Benja and María Elena, Braco and Vasca. To kill them, I was sure. I felt that even my bones were frozen the day before yesterday. It was April 12th; today's the 14th and the denim jacket is still magic. But maybe there's no reason to believe in magic. After all, Vasca, who used to wear it, was taken away. (109)

Her distress in this recollection is still palpable. She describes herself as trembling beneath the helplessness of her fellow detainees and friends being taken away and presumably killed. She repeatedly reminds herself of the time that has passed since that event, evidence of the traumatic shift she has suffered because of her friends being taken away the day before yesterday. Concurrent to this, she is given Vasca's denim jacket by the guards, something that she initially admits provided her with protection, but whose magical protection she questions because it failed in keeping Vasca herself from death.

The knot of emotions circulating the jacket tightens. Partnoy provides her audience with a deeper reflection of her response to inheriting Vasca's jacket following her disappearance:

> The night before yesterday I asked for a blanket and they brought me this jacket. I immediately recognized it. I put it on and breathed deeply. The burden on my heart shattered into a thousand pieces that are still running through my blood today, a thousand drops of bitterness. I immediately recognized the jacket. While touching the thick fabric and the cold metal buttons, I recalled the times when I peeked under the blindfold to see Vasca. Then I cried again. That was the night

> before yesterday, after they'd taken her away. To kill her, someone had told me. The day before yesterday was April 12th. I hardly slept that night. (109-10)

Although in the previous passage Partnoy describes Vasca's jacket as a transitional/comfort object, she did not immediately recognize it as such. The overwhelming effect of the guards giving her the jacket, instead of the blanket she had asked for, is profound sadness. There is an interweaving of sensorial memory that allows for Partnoy to recognize that the jacket had belonged to Vasca. She begins by stating that she immediately knew, describing how she put the jacket on and breathed deeply. This triggers the banked olfactory memory of her cellmate's jacket. We can also assume that she was able to peek at the jacket when it was given to her, just as she remembers peeking to look at Vasca wearing the jacket. But this memory mixes with the present action of tracing her hands across the jacket, feeling the fabric and its metal trimmings. The sum of the information Partnoy takes in while wearing the jacket for the first time confirms the ultimate fate of her friend. Taken alone, this passage positions Vasca's jacket as an object of pain, presumably a sick joke played by the guards to further terrorize her.

However, Vasca's jacket does not remain simply an object of pain, as the guards might have intended. Like Lucas' orange t-shirt in *Kamchatka*, and Pato's clothes worn by her sister Alejandra in *Our Disappeared*, Partnoy finds comfort in the artifact of her lost friend. At the end of the chapter, her husband is moved to the bed where Vasca once slept. Following a silent awareness of each other's presence in neighboring beds, the two share a brief conversation, assuming that they had left them alone. She writes:

> We exchanged a few words in that short while. I can't remember all that we said, but I recall he mentioned that he'd liked all the meatballs I had cooked the day of our arrests…Meatballs! Our last meal in freedom, no blindfolds on our eyes...no blows…Suddenly we hear steps in the room. When had the guard come in? He was right there. "Were you talking?" "No, sir." "You were talking!" screamed Peine. And they took my husband out of that room. I heard how they beat him. Afterward, the guard came and started to hit me with the rubber stick. Then, the

> magic power of the denim jacket came true: the blows almost didn't hurt. It was not the jacket's thick fabric, but Vasca's courage that protected me. (112)

The progression of this scene tracks with the purposefully erratic rhythm of life in CDCs like the Little School. In the first passage, Partnoy expresses some familiarity with her new life at the site. However, surprises such as the disappearance of Vasca and other friends, and the sudden appearance of the guard in the above passage, still occur. Here, she and her husband incorrectly perceive the guard's movements, believing they have enough time to speak to each other in the cell. Their belief in their opportunity for discreet, yet open, conversation evidenced by the topics they choose to discuss: meatballs, the last meal they had before being captured, and how they were taken by the military. Both topics relate to their final moments of support and conviviality, and the event which ruptured that continuity. Like in the earlier conversation with Vasca about the one-flowered slipper, this conversation with her husband focuses on economically reconnecting to agents of support, despite the violence that brackets these moments of respite. The guard interrupts this reprieve, first punishing Partnoy's husband in another room before turning his blows on her.

The act of separating the pair before beating them is meant to emphasize the alienating effects of such torture. Again, the overall design of the guards' behavior in the Little School and similar sites centers on dehumanizing the detainees. In wearing Vasca's jacket, however, Partnoy is surprised to find a font of resiliency amidst the blows from the guard. Rather than succumb to the blows as is their design, she can dissociate from the experience. It is as if every time a blow lands on Vasca's jacket, the memory of her friend is triggered, and she is no longer alone in her pain. This, after the guards removed her husband from the room before beating her. Partnoy attributes her internal resistance to the psychological effects of the beating to Vasca's courage contained within the denim jacket, not its tough material. It is an evolution in her perspective in

relation to the jacket from earlier in the chapter. She gives no indication that the deep bitterness which reverberated through her upon receiving the jacket has waned. Rather, she has found within herself a concurrent use for the object that channels her anger into a newly resolved resistance to the psychological warfare waged against her by the guards. As a transitional object, Vasca's jacket gives Partnoy a reason to carry on. It is a material memory of that hope. In addition to her family, it is clear by the mere presence of this memoir that she fought to preserve the memory of those dear to her to tell their real stories. Not the "official" ones staged by the military and reported in the news during the dictatorship. Vasca's jacket, like the one-flowered slipper and the other transitional objects described in the text, lays the foundation for this type of testimonial work.

But not everyone immediately derives courage or even comfort from clothing. Despite this, clothing can still serve as a transitional object, as in the case for Tununa Mercado in her autofiction *In a State of Memory*. Throughout the text, Mercado grapples with a state of critical melancholy produced by her two stints in exile fleeing persecution from the Argentine dictatorship (Avelar 217). As scholars have pointed out, this text presents a counter-memory that, according to Patrick L. O'Çonnell "starts with the particular and the specific and then builds outwards toward a total story…looks to the past for hidden histories excluded from dominant narratives" (107). Others note her invocation of the past into the present (Giordano 114), and her resistance to neoliberal obsolescence (Rojnsky 59). In general, the text deals with themes of displacement, alienation, anxiety, and anachronism are interwoven with personal reflections about living in exile and eventually returning to Buenos Aires. It ends essentially at the point of origin of the text itself, with Mercado envisioning a pathway for writing her traumas. Keeping this in mind, we can read the following passages in light of the work Mercado is doing, through

the transitional object of clothing, towards articulating what ails her and impedes her life, rather than searching for the more ecstatic moments of relief from external aggressors.

When it comes to clothing, Mercado finds the concept itself another disturbing reminder of her position on the periphery of life. She writes in an early chapter of the text:

> Clothing horrifies me, skirts bunch up, collars fail to cover the hairline at the nape of my neck; lapels fail to resolve the banality of clothing; there are no dresses for the ill-favored waistline; no footwear corrects bowlegs or knock-knees; no garment confers height or grace or frightens away nightmares; buying clothes is a miserable way to patch up one's life. Very rarely in my personal history have I ever felt what might be termed gratification from wearing a garment on my body, no one could ever convince me that something actually looked good hanging from my shoulders. (36-7)

Her relation to the act of putting on clothing is akin to the pain and discomfort that registers on Ceci's face when she is dolled up for the military in *El premio*. She responds to the magical thinking proffered by modern advertising that clothing can correct any and all physical imperfections of a given individual. That clothing itself is an embellishment in its purest sense, elevating the quality of its wearer. But for Mercado, this promise is one that only elevates her existential crisis of being ill-fitting within the world and her own psyche. The passage is a series of failures related to wearing clothes, beginning with the failure of bunching up or covering up perceived physical imperfections, to warding off nightmares. This list hints at the depth of her trauma related to wearing clothing, as she even experiences the physical symptoms of fainting when trying on clothes in front a store mirror (36). From this passage alone, it would seem that Mercado does not hold a place within this project, as she rejects the symbolic importance of clothing altogether.

However, because her aversion to buying clothing for herself, she shares that her friends would often gift her clothing. They tell her that she has a "poor person's body," which is their way of saying she is able to fit into most anything they give her (37). This is a creative fix for the

crisis of agency she generally feels at having to buy clothing. Oftentimes, though, she is given the clothes of a recently deceased friend, which produces an experience entirely distinct from the act of wearing clothing that Mercado bought herself. She writes:

> When I inherit, or keep as a souvenir, the clothing of a friend who has recently died, I dress myself *with them*; I have the feeling that I am wearing them, that I am sharing their shroud; however, I do not feel fear or apprehension but, rather, consolation, as if, by some sort of ingenious transmigration of the soul, they had left part of themselves in one of the sleeves, in the waistband, or in one of the cuffs. (37)

As the passage emphasizes, the act of dressing in the inherited clothes of dead friends signals a shared experience of being with that person, despite their physical absence. The first line of the passage establishes that she experiences this effect of wearing the clothing regardless of whether she was given the item or chooses to keep it as a memento of her friend. She also demonstrates an awareness of the perceived morbid nature of the act of wearing the clothes of the dead. For one, her reference to the clothes as her dead friends' shrouds, or burial cloths. Additionally, in acknowledging that despite the assumed feeling towards the act of apprehension, she derives consolation. The curious aspect of this sentiment comes from comparing it to the previous passage. There, design elements of clothing seemingly worked to deepen her sense of alienation from both herself and the external world. Here, the memory of her dead friends grafted onto different elements of the garment frees her from this complex. For example, the mismatched waistline of the previous passage becomes a site for transmigration of the soul of a loved one. Wearing clothes, in this sense, provides a ritualized communion with the memory of the dead, an inversion of her longstanding trauma related to dressing herself.

Her habit of taking on the clothes of her dead friends and wearing them with her does present a few complications. One such complication is that she now assumes the responsibility for these pieces that outpaces the responsibility felt towards common clothes. She reflects:

> The drawback of these pieces of clothing belonging to the dead is that one hardly dares to discard or make gifts of them, and so they eternally clutter the wardrobe. When one first adopts these garments of absentee owners, one cannot fathom the space that they will take up; they hang limply from their perches, conforming to the shape of the hook or hanger, and, eventually, becoming permanently misshapen; they cling to this cold, dark life with the same stubbornness they previously held to that other, perhaps warmer and more luminous, lifetime. I still have a gray coat, on the end hanger in my Mexican wardrobe, that, without her knowing it, was left to me by my friend Silvia Rudni, whose family let me have it as a keepsake; I wore it often because it was a pleasure to wear Silvia on me, but suddenly, with the passage of time, pointy collars went out of fashion and, viewing us together in the mirror, I had a stroke of self-pity: we were from the sixties living in the eighties. (38)

Mercado conjures up a potent image of her wardrobe transformed into an archive, which nearly approximates a mausoleum. In reverence to her dead friends, she allows for their clothes to populate this space, accepting each new article in turn without thinking about its impact on the clutter in her wardrobe. The items have been with her for many years, as indicated by their becoming misshapen by the hanger or hook she uses to store them. However, there remains a tension between communion and mourning. For while she feels as if she is failing to provide the clothes with a life that equals in quality to what was provided by its original owner, she recognizes the benefit she receives by wearing the memory of friends like Silvia Rudni with her. This tension presents itself in Mercado's reflection as she wears Silvia's out of fashion coat. In that moment, her self-pity arises out of realizing that both she and the memory of her dead friend Silvia live in a time that does not correspond to the present.

This moment of self-aware anachronism extends to the relationship between aging, worn-out clothing, and the aging process itself. As Mercado describes:

> Clothing begins to wear out of its own accord, the flanks droop and disintegrate, exhausted; although this happens to everyone and everything in unequal measure, they all succumb over time. Few people perceive the fatigue of their fabrics because they usually abandon them before this occurs; it is a rare coat indeed that survives the social pressures that define it as being out of fashion, and it requires a strong ethic to accompany a coat through its fall from grace. I have lived my life

> dependent on my clothing, on the clothing of others that has become mine, the clothing of my dead friends, the clothing that others have given me through capricious benevolence or so as not to condemn it to oblivion; and this destiny, to go around wearing your clothing and at the same time to feel the horror of this relationship, is a misfortune whose significance is fair game for analysis. (38-9)

Although the tone of this passage tends towards the melancholic, with lamentations of how everything succumbs to time and the horror of her relationship to the disintegrating clothes of her dead friends, I would like to propose a more reparative, less dismissive reading of the above. And of this collection of passages from Mercado, in general. While she identifies the details in this relationship that cause her harm, and cause her to confront her own mortality, she also acknowledges the rarefied quality of this experience. In connecting the act of continuing to wear clothing past its socially acceptable expiration date to an ethical concern elevates the experience beyond the mundane. It reflects the responsibility for the souls/memories that she feels still inhabit the objects. These objects were provided to her for the purpose of their not being lost to time, and it is her ethical duty to hold onto them despite the fading memory of their previous owners and their physical deterioration with wear. What emerges from this passage, rather than simple indulgent self-pitying, is a tool of critical melancholy that grounds the internal suffering of the author in physical reminders that populate her wardrobe and are worn in her daily movements. Considering the project of the text, these objects provide countless *punctum* to access the lineage of her pain, rather than merely floating in a sea of nebulous and disconnected memories. Though this state of living with physical reminders of lost friends surely causes Mercado to access difficult and painful emotions, the fact that these objects belonged to someone dear to her allows them to mitigate feelings of alienation, both because of past traumatic associations with clothing, and/or because of her state of living in exile. In short, the clothes of

her dead friends serve as a transitional object, reminding Mercado that she is not alone in her pain. This moves her closer to her ultimate revelation at the end of the text.

While Mercado's own deployment of clothing as a transitional object does not reach the same rosier conclusions of Alejandra in *Our Disappeared*, or of Harry and Alicia Partnoy in *Kamchatka* and *The Little School*, respectively, that is not the point. Like the safe house, clothing as a transitional object is not a magical oasis that builds itself apart from the external pressures that threaten one's well-being. At its heart, it is a physical manifestation of a connection to community that spans beyond any present suffering. It is a *punctum* that, even in the most relentlessly painful of circumstances, reminds the sufferer that they are not alone. That someone did care for them, even if they are gone, and that this care exists somewhere else for them in the future. To dismiss the radical potential of these objects would only further inscribe these figures within the dominant perspective that has systematically sought to invalidate their agency and their history. In the years following the democratic transitions in Argentina and Chile, clothing will once more serve as a potent connection to the past. That is, when clothing becomes an object of counter-history, or a testimonial object.'

chapter 2.3: HAND-ME-DOWNS
clothing as a testimonial object

Towards the end Patricio Guzmán's 1997 documentary *Chile, la memoria obstinada*, the filmmaker shows an interview with Hortensia Bussi, the widow of Chilean president Salvador Allende. The film in general is an exercise in counter-history, as the filmmaker arranges for audiences of varying classes, political ideologies, and ages to view his landmark documentary about the events leading up to the 1973 coup that resulted in the death of Allende and marked the beginning of the Pinochet dictatorship. For many of the audience members, it was their first time

viewing the film. It had been banned during the dictatorship, and even after the completed democratic transition in 1990, had not been picked up by distributors for screening in the country. During the interview, Guzmán highlights that Bussi could not hold a formal funeral for her husband until 1990, but one aspect of the protracted processing the country would slowly begin reckoning with in the years following its democratic transition. At the time of her interview, however, Bussi laments that the personal effects taken by the military from a home she shared with Allende have never been returned to her, despite her ability to hold a funeral and her repeated requests to the authorities. She frames her complaint in the context of wanting to possess these items again so that she can show them to her grandchildren. To show them who their grandfather was and how he lived. She adds that she will never be able to give her grandson one of Allende's watches, or sweaters, or ties, and tell him that this once belonged to his grandfather. She concludes that she misses those items, that their return is a debt owed to her and her family.

As the years grow between the dictatorial period and the present moment, artifacts of the past, like the personal possessions of Allende that Bussi wants returned to her, become crucial elements to ensuring that the history of the dictatorial periods is not oversimplified or forgotten. As Bussi expresses, she does not merely want to reclaim those items for herself. Rather, she wants to pass them down to her grandchildren, providing them with tangible representations of a connection to their ancestors. Why might she feel the need to do so with her husband's possessions? And why does she feel that the return of these items is a debt owed to her family? The answer to these two questions will form the basis for examining how clothing can function as a testimonial object, or a material bridge between the present and the past.

In the previous two sections, we have looked at the way in which authoritarian ideology sought to weaponize clothing as a method of control and persecution. Uniforms (and dress codes), stripping, and pillaging of clothing all worked to comprehensively suppress and eliminate so-called subversives within society. We have also seen how clothing, specifically the clothing of others, can be used as a mode of resistance to these same dehumanizing forces. The transitional object of clothing centers on the memory of human connection that can be donned and projected into the world as a protective, though impermanent, force. Here, Bussi lives in a present that, although able to return to live in a democratic Chile once more, denies her the chance to recover her husband's possessions. In essence, this denial maintains the state of those objects being objects of pain, since they were taken as a result of military pillaging. It rubs salt in the wounds of a woman who waited seventeen years to formally mourn her husband. And it is yet another manifestation of the official policy of forgetting adopted by the early democratic regimes in the country, a policy that de facto makes permanent the damage to history that the dictatorial regime caused. The debt that Bussi refers to is not limited to recovering the objects stolen from her house with Allende. It is a debt that seeks to reestablish the continuity between the past, present, and future. She does not necessarily believe the empty words of political leaders who advocate for a clean break with the dictatorial past, or the promises that it will never occur again. What she wishes for is something more human and tangible: the ability to envision showing her grandchildren personal photos of their grandfather, or to envision her grandson wearing one of his grandfather's ties, sweaters, or watches, and embodying the connection to his past. As it stands, that ability has been disappeared, re-erased by the democratic government. What Bussi aspires to, in essence, is to reinscribe these possessions as testimonial objects, material witnesses to a history counter to one that seeks to forget.

In this sense, Bussi herself is not of central concern for this section, but rather her grandchildren and those who will grow into power within the region. Testimonial objects, thus, become essential gateways and foci for those who wish to make visible the cast aside personal histories that continue to bear on the present. As the testimonial object relates to clothing, we can look back to Tununa Mercado to get a sense of what insight putting on the clothes of the past offers. In the scene where she reflects on wearing a coat inherited from her friend Silvia Rudni, she is struck by a moment of self-pity at the realization that the style of the coat was suddenly outdated for her present moment. As she explains, the uncanny experience of anachronism, of looking like she is still in the 1960s with Silvia despite living in the 1980s, encourages her to reflect on both her past associations with her friend and how she continues to carry these memories on her back contemporaneously. Mercado's wardrobe, cluttered with clothing acquired from dead friends, is a personal archive. It is a way for her to continue calling on the memory of her friends whenever she wears their clothes, as well as a material device to facilitate a particular reckoning with her own mortality and place in the world.

Like the original testimonial object of this project, the pearl button on the rail documented in Patricio Guzmán's *El botón de nácar*, the object itself is merely a string to begin pulling at to reveal a greater network of processes and ideologies that color its object history, and thus history in general. In the documentary, Gabriel Salazar muses about the button's connection to a shirt, which was worn by the person tied to the rail, flown from a CDC like Villa Grimaldi to be disappeared in the sea. In the following, I will examine those authors and artists who play with the concept of wearing the clothes of the past. This will include Alejandro Zambra's novel *Ways of Going Home*, wherein trying on his father's shirts underscores the narrowness and inadequacy of his own intervention into postdictatorial narratives. Along similar lines, in Nona

Fernández's novel *Space Invaders*, the same students restricted by their school uniforms will don them once more in adulthood to conjure the memory of their murdered friend. And finally, the embodied processing of Lola Arias play *Mi vida después*. There, actors wear their parents' clothes to tell the stories of their diverse fates as a result of the last dictatorship in Argentina. Each text is produced by individuals who share similar generational positionality as Hortensia Bussi's grandchildren. They are people who grew up during the dictatorial periods in their respective countries who now, as adults, grapple with their place in shaping the legacy of its impact.

Alejandro Zambra does not necessarily fit the mold of a postdictatorial author. He comes from a family, and a childhood, that was not directly affected by the Pinochet dictatorship; in fact, he grew up in a neighborhood in Maipú that can be characterized as part of the apolitical suburb boom of the 1970s (Willem "Metáfora…" 30; Caballero 107). He also does not have any compelling war stories from the time. He did not outrun the authorities, or was tortured at a CDC, or even work with revolutionaries to distribute contraband. In short, the common narratives of first-wave testimonial fiction (like from Jacobo Timerman or Alicia Partnoy) in the postdictatorial moment both misalign with and cause those from the 1.5 generation like Zambra to view their own experiences growing up in the dictatorship as insufficient or invalid (Page, "Introduction" 10, 11); as Philippa Page argues in "Reaching Childhood, Unlearning the Transition: The Space of Memory in Alejandro Zambra's Novel *Ways of Going Home*", "Literature is just one form of cultural expression that plays a vital role in the transmission of such affective resonances that have the power to write those secondary characters, to whom Zambra gives a voice in his novel, in the collective memory of dictatorship" (77-8)[38]. Other

[38] Macarena Garcia-Avella, in her article "Escrituras de la ausencia: las novellas de los hijos de las posdictaduras de Chile y Argentina" writes about this generation of authors, in relation to Marianne Hirsch's postmemory: "Hirsch se

critics note the specific positionality of Zambra, differentiating between those who were relatively unaware of the dictatorship as children and those who were (Franken 68). Nonetheless, this whispering voice of Zambra, a secondary character in this collective memory himself, enriches the discourse by measuring the depth at which the dangerous climate of the dictatorship penetrated the psyches of even children being reared in apolitical suburbs (Belén 57; Castro 112). What is of central importance for this present analysis is how Zambra's meditation between his friend/lover's history with the dictatorship and his own provides him with a specific orientation that allows for critical reflection on the history he has inherited by way of old clothing handed down to him from his father.

Ways of Going Home, as a project, presents several ethical concerns that the author contends with in his own intervention into the genre. This includes coopting the story of Eme, who he fashions into the fictional Claudia, a friend and occasional lover who was directly affected by the Pinochet dictatorship. Claudia/Eme's dad was forced to assume the identity of his brother (Eme's Uncle Raúl) to remain in Chile and live near his family. Zambra shares that as children, Eme had once asked him to spy on her "Uncle Raúl", a figure that Zambra assumed was some kind of dangerous man. This, for instance, is one of his closest connections to the types of violent operations carried out by the Pinochet regime to suppress so-called subversive individuals.

Additionally, Zambra spends a fair deal of time in novel (which oscillates between the fictitious retelling of his childhood in relation to Claudia and the production of the novel itself)

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centra en el análisis de las segundas generaciones que manifiestan síntomas propios del trastorno postraumático, con la diferencia fundamental de que el trauma no forma parte de sus vivencias personales, sino que se ha transmitido por vías indirectas de una generación a la otra. En las novellas de los hijos se produce un desdoble entre dos tiempos, el pasado recreado de la dictadura y el presente del narrador desde el que se trata de recuperar el pasado, ya sea por medio de la imaginación, de huellas de la memoria o, en la mayor parte de los casos, mediante recuerdos diluidos y atravesados por la imaginación" (2).

reckoning with his burgeoning adulthood, especially in relation to the adults of his childhood. In a conversation he has with Eme during the production of the novel, she talks to him about a scene she witnessed during her childhood. He writes:

> She was seven or eight years old, in the yard with other little girls, playing hide-and-seek. It was getting late, time to go inside; the adults were calling and the girls answered that they were coming. The push and pull went on, the calls were more and more urgent, but the girls laughed and kept playing. Suddenly they realized the adults had stopped calling them a while ago and night had already fallen. They thought the adults must be watching them, trying to teach them a lesson, and that now the grown-ups were the ones playing hide-and-seek. But no. When she went inside, Eme saw that her father's friends were crying and that her mother, rooted to her seat, was staring off into space. They were listening to the news on the radio. A voice was talking about a raid. It talked about the dead, about more dead. "That happened so many times," Eme said that day, five years ago. "We kids understood, all of a sudden, that we weren't so important. That there were unfathomable and serious things that we couldn't know or understand." The novel belongs to our parents, I thought then, I think now. That's what we grew up believing, that the novel belonged to our parents. We cursed them, and also took refuge in their shadows, relieved. While the adults killed or were killed, we drew pictures in a corner. While the country was falling to pieces, we were learning to talk, to walk, to fold napkins in the shape of boats, of airplanes. While the novel was happening, we played hide-and-seek, we played at disappearing. (41)

As Eme remarks upon telling the narrator, Zambra, about the scene, the dynamic in play during the passage is one that is told and retold in many other iterations of the perspective of those who grew up during their respective dictatorial periods. It recalls the silent eavesdropping of Juán in *Infancia clandestina* or Harry in *Kamchatka*, of being a presence that is momentarily invisible to the gaze of surrounding adults to the point where the adults forget to code their language and behavior around their children. The scene begins with Eme playing hide-and-seek with some other girls, and their parents calling them back inside because the day is getting late. At the time, night was marked by a curfew, and synonymous with external danger; though parents commonly are more vigilant of their children at night, the circumstances of the dictatorship place added weight to the emphasis in the passage of the calls to come inside becoming "more urgent".

However, something even more urgent than their children's' safety intercedes, and the parents' calls stop. The girls' initial response of laughter to the parents' calls relays the habitual nature of the act. That the girls are familiar with the game and are willing to push their parents' boundaries if it means that they get to play with each other a bit more. They fully expect a moment to come when their parents have waited long enough and escalate their demands to get the girls to finally return inside. When this conclusion is not reached, the girls are unnerved. Initially they believe that their parents are teaching them some kind of lesson; that they are hiding somewhere in a novel escalation of their demand that the girls come inside. Again, this belief is grounded in the expectation that their parents' pattern of behavior will be concluded shortly; a behavior that is generally predicated on a sustained and fundamental concern for their children's wellbeing. When Eme finally goes inside, now due to her curiosity at her parents' irregular silence, she comes upon the cause of their absence from the nighttime ritual. The parents are lost in listening to the radio, as an announcement of a military raid alerts them to more deaths. Given Eme's age at the time of the scene (7 or 8), and the fact that she had been born days after the coup, this dates the scene at around 1980-81, already several years into the Pinochet dictatorship. Despite this length of time, parents like Eme's who are connected to and affected by the raids, that is, involved in political movements targeted by the regime, continue to fear for their safety and the safety of those around them. The emphasis placed on the radio reporting "more dead" coupled with Eme's commentary that this scene repeated itself "so many times" underscores a shift in the parent/child relationship precipitated by the events of the dictatorial period. Rather than expecting the calls to come inside to continue, children like Eme began to understand that there were more pressing matters at hand. That she could be of

secondary concern to her own parents, but that the children would largely be kept in the dark as to why.

This veil of ignorance as to the dangers that plague the adults around them would eventually lift, leading children like Eme and Zambra to confront their assumptions about the world developed in their childhood against the realities exposed nearing and after the end of the dictatorial period. Nonetheless, a foundational divide between the needs of the adults and the needs of the children had already been established. As Zambra extrapolates on Eme's anecdote, the feeling of being unimportant grew into a feeling of one's own personal history being unimportant as well. He likens this pervasive feeling to the novel. The reference to the novel belonging to the parents, and not them, signals a lack of agency on the part of the children to articulate their interpretation of the dictatorial period. Of not feeling like their voice belongs in the discourse. As children, this provided an excuse to get better at hiding in the background. Zambra likens this to disappearing, a loaded callback to the game of hide-and-seek that begins the scene. We can interpret this word choice as touching on the depth of invisibility, or the incongruence of the child's perspective against the dominant novel of the parents, that he senses upon pursuing this book project.

This incongruence, of both feeling like the parents' perspective does not mesh with his own interpretation of the dictatorship while also experiencing a crisis of agency in relation to adding his own voice to history, manifests in the physical plane. Shortly after suffering through remarks by his father that the country was more orderly under Pinochet, Zambra is gifted some of his father's shirts. He writes:

> I kept my Father's shirts in a drawer for months. In the meantime, many things have happened. In the meantime Claudia left and I started to write this book. Now I look at those shirts, I spread them out on the bed. There is one I especially like, with an oil-blue color. I just tried it on, it's definitely too small. I look at myself in

> the mirror and I think how our parents' clothes should always be too big for us. But I also think I needed it; sometimes we need to wear our parents' clothes and look at ourselves for a long time in the mirror. (113)

This scene recalls the reflections of Tununa Mercado in the previous section. Both individuals inherit clothing from those close to them, and they allow these clothes to take up space in their lives. However, there are a few immediate differences between the two. For one, Zambra does not fit well into his father's shirt that he tries on in front of the mirror, while Mercado is blessed/cursed with the type of body that fits any and all clothing that is gifted to her. Additionally, Mercado describes hanging her inherited clothes in the closet, while Zambra stores his father's shirts in a dresser drawer. The two spaces are both designed for storing clothes, however the wardrobe presents a greater degree of visibility for the clothing. It also coheres to Mercado's subconscious desire to encounter the clothing in its original form, perhaps preserving the shapes imprinted there by its original owners. In a drawer, which requires clothing to be folded, these shapes are inevitably deformed with creases.

The two authors, Mercado and Zambra, both take some time to look at themselves in the mirror while wearing the clothes of others. For Mercado, this results in conjuring the memory of her dead friend and feeling a sense of kinship in their collective anachronism. In Zambra's case, he is struck by how his father's t-shirt is too tight for him. His remark about how he still assumes that his parents' clothes should always be too big for him indicates that the act of trying on the shirt forces him to confront deeper feelings of incongruity in relation to his father. The "many things have happened" in the passage could be limited to the events between his and Eme's visit to his parents' house, but it also describes the long history between a time when his father's clothes were too big for him until their present snugness on the son's body. It is an effect that connects to feelings of not being protagonists in the novel of their parents. Now adults, that novel

still doesn't fit, which in turn necessitates a new writing to emanate from those of Zambra's generation. Nonetheless, his prescription encouraging his generation to try on their parents' clothes and look at themselves for a long time in the mirror acknowledges the potency of clothing as a testimonial object. After all, it demands that the wearer pours their adult bodies into containers once occupied by the adults of their childhood. And, in Zambra's case, realize that their bodies, both physically, emotionally, and ideologically, do not always fit that container. That perhaps, like the t-shirt, their parents are smaller than they once assumed.

In the section on objects of pain, we looked at how Nona Fernández's draws a connection between the policing of dress articulated through the school uniform and the broader violent repression that informs such dynamics. For the collective voice that was sourced and expressed in her novel *Space Invaders*, the pressure for uniformity (both physical and ideological) left an indelible mark on the memories of Fernández and her childhood friends. Throughout, the mysterious figure of Estrella González Jepsen looms in the dreams of each of the narrators. She was, after all, one of their fellow classmates and friend for a time. That is, until she suddenly departed for Germany under mysterious circumstances. These mysterious circumstances only deepen, in an event towards the end of the text that hints at the reason why these now adult students find their subconscious invoking of Estrella. The collective voice of the narrator remembers reading in the crime pages how nearly six years following her disappearance from their school, Estrella was shot and murdered by the father of her child while she worked at a rental car company. A few years after that, Estrella's father, and the man who drove her to school every day in the Red Chevy Chevette (Don Claudio) that invaded the students' dreams as well, were convicted of a 1985 kidnapping and murder of three communist militants. The mystery of their absent friend, both her ultimate fate and the cause of her disappearance, is revealed.

And so, Fernández mounts a final collective dream at the end of the text. This time, to show the new subconscious orientation of the group in relation to their shared past. She writes:

> We're standing one after another in a long line down the middle of the streets. Next to us is another long line, and another, and another. We make a perfect square, a kind of game board. We're pieces in a game that we don't know how to stop playing. We spread out, each of us resting a right arm on the shoulder of the classmate ahead to mark the perfect distance between us. Our uniforms neat. Top button of the shirt fastened, tie knotted, dark jumper below the knee, blue socks pulled up, pants perfectly ironed, school crest sewn on at proper chest height, no threads dangling, shoes freshly shined. Around us the street is silent and empty. There are no cars, no buses, no people. Just us and the guerrilla logic that we can't wake up from. We could take attendance, staring with Acosta and moving on to Bustamonte, then Donoso, but it's not necessary. We're all here. We were scheduled to meet here. We've risen from our sheets and mattresses scattered around the city to arrive precisely on time. As always, the dream summons us. A pay phone rings on the street, right by the school entrance. We look at each other. Somehow we've been expecting this call. Fuenzalida steps forward. She's an expert in voices, so she'll have no trouble recognizing who's speaking. Hello? Somehow we know that it's a female voice on the phone. Fuenzalida doesn't say a word, but we can tell who it is from the look she gives us. A woman or a child is breathing nervously at the other end of the line, waiting for a reply. Fuenzalida realizes this telephone call is fated. We have to take it. Without hesitating for a second, she answers and starts to talk. Standing in the street, uncomfortable in our old uniforms, now too tight and faded, we listen attentively. (69-70)

If you can remember, the special organization described at the beginning of this passage echoes the special organization of the morning prayer and anthem ritual staged in an earlier part of the text. That daily ritual of the earlier scene ingrained itself into the memories of the students, enough so that symbolically it related to both the constricting nature of their lives at school, and in Santiago as a whole. Here, they slide back into their designated positions without any prompting. There are no monitors or other adults looming to make sure that they perform the requisite movements to ensure uniform spacing. That they create the game board perfectly once more. Their uniforms are donned appropriately, every inch of them presents precise coherence with the standards of that childhood world. It would seem, by the lack of agency insinuated by the line "We're pieces in a game that we don't know how to stop playing", that the students have

been dragged back into the nightmare world of their childhood traumas. After all, every instance of their temporary escapes (whether real or dreamed) narrated earlier involved undoing the physical rigidity imposed on them during the dictatorship. Why would they willing choose to perform these ritualized acts of repression once more?

The passage complicates this initial reading as it goes on. The allusion to "guerrilla logic" that persists in driving them to this reunion, feels incongruous with the interpretation that these students have found themselves in a status quo nightmare. Instead, their collective arrival to the same site of subconscious processing orients itself towards a different goal. This new objective reveals itself in the interruption of the game. The pay phone ringing at the entrance of the school. Though it is never explicitly revealed, the students' reaction and the organization of the novel makes it certain that the speaker on the other end of the line is their late classmate Estrella González Jepsen. With this revelation, the dream begins to evolve and update. The students turn their focus to being witnesses to the conversation between Estrella and Fuenzalida. In this shift of focus, they exhibit rumblings of self-consciousness, with the emphasis on the group standing in the middle of the street, and their uniforms becoming worn and tight. It would seem that the students have transformed back into their adult selves since the beginning of the passage, now wearing a physical embodiment of the time that has passed since they last wore those uniforms. Despite this discomfort, they privilege listening in on the conversation with their former classmate.

What does the students' eventual transformation into adults by the end of the dream signify? For one, it rebuffs the simplified, armchair analysis of these being individuals experiencing an instance of being triggered into a posttraumatic flashback of sorts. From the outset, this is what appears to be happening, since they mechanically recreate the rigid conditions

imposed on them as schoolchildren. However, the clothes and the students both age, indicating that the present dream is not a stagnant repetition, but rather something new. With their focus shifted to the conversation with their dead friend, they seem eager to hear her story. After all, Estrella was noticeably absent from the group when she abruptly left for Germany. It was only after her murder and the story that revealed her father to be a military officer who had murdered three young revolutionaries, that they learned the true cause of her flight. Therefore, what occurs here is akin to what is advocated by Cecilia at the end of *La casa vacía*: that of being witness to the invisible voices of the past. In line with Mercado and Zambra, here too do the students perform a conjuring ritual. They don the clothes of the past, these memory objects that provide a gateway into the processes that continue to affect their collective present, as a way of opening themselves towards untold histories. As the image of the worn and too tight uniform implies, this act of remembering is imperfect. They are not the same size as they were as adolescents; they cannot use this act to travel back in time to precisely remember those events leading up to Estrella's exit. Nevertheless, the act itself, articulated through the uniforms, represents a collective focus on confronting the past that literally reestablishes continuity between its physical remains and the present bodies who contend with it. The uniform, as a testimonial object, enables a reengagement with the types of dynamics and processes that were born in the dictatorial past but persist in the present. The students were not trapped in their collective nightmare. They choose to re-inhabit that shared space of pain to dream of learning their lost classmate's story, and thus reimagine their own place in history.

The confrontational dimension of the act of donning the clothes of the past, as performed by members of the 1.5 generation like Fernández and Zambra, takes on an even more intimate and provocative nature in Lola Arias' play *Mi vida después*. Some critics focus on the element of

remake of the work; how, in the spirit of postmemory, each actor draws from an amalgamation of references to not just testify about the history of their parents, but about the nature of testimony itself (Hernández 121, 123; Eva Perez 11). Others pull out the place of this text within the genre of children's autofiction in the post-dictatorial period (Blejmar 203). What is centered in this present study, however, is teasing out the specific mechanism that ties the past to the present through the object of clothes, and how this very connection demands broader critical investigation beyond figuring out who the article of clothing belonged to.

Arias herself points towards this deeper connection between clothing and the past lives of their parents in the introductory material to the play. She writes of the inspiration for the piece:

> Hay una foto mía en la que debo tener nueve of diez años. Esto vestida con la ropa de mi madre, tengo sus anteojos de leer y un diario en la mano. En esa foto estoy actuando de mi madre y representando mi futuro al mismo tiempo. Soy una lectora, una intelectual: tengo el ceño fruncido, en un gesto de concentración extrema completamente posado. Siempre que miro esa foto me parece que mi madre y yo estamos superpuestas en la imagen, como si dos generaciones se encontraran, como si ella y yo fuéramos la misma persona en algún extraño pliegue del tiempo (9)

What is significant about this inspiration is not only the admission of how prescient the act of dressing up as a child can be. That we occasionally become the things that we played at as a child, and perhaps that is debt owed to the material conditions of our upbringing; the world of objects that we become acquainted with. But also, that in playing as her mother as a child, as depicted in the image, reminded the playwright of the looming afterimage of her mother throughout her life. We have previously encountered this dynamic in Mercado, of communing with the presence of a lost friend through the act of donning their clothes; even Harry summons the bravery of Lucas through his orange t-shirt. In this section, this relationship between the parents' generation and that of the artists has been largely depicted as an uncomfortable fit, with both Fernández and Zambra describing the effects of squeezing themselves into the clothes of the

past. Here, however, Arias places for us an image of her in a time when the clothes she played in were never meant to fit her. Not only does this complicate previous discussion of this phenomenon, but it additionally complicates the idea that many children play at their parents as an expression of their desire to become them. When we fold in the circumstances of children like Arias's childhoods, this simple photo which captures a moment of dress up becomes fraught with the tensions of the 1.5 generation in relation to their parents' legacy.

It is no surprise, then, that Arias situates this piece as a depiction of both her personal history with her parents and the dictatorship and that of her peers. She writes of the work:

> *Mi vida después* es un retrato de mi generación. Una generación nacida bajo la nube de la dictadura militar, cuyos padres lucharon, se exiliaron, desaparecieron, fueron torturados o fueron indiferentes a la política. Una generación marcada por los relatos -a veces épicos, a veces poblados de secretos- de lo que hicieron nuestros padres en ese tiempo del que casi no tenemos recuerdos. (10)

One element that unites the work of the 1.5 generation is how the list of relevant actors in the history of the dictatorship has grown. For example, a film like *Garage Olimpo* deliberately centers the victims and victimizers, a direct product of where Argentina was in taking account of the depth and breadth of its public's traumatization. In a later work like *Mi vida después*, we can imagine that even the slight amount of critical distance that these children are able to take amounts to a more detailed map of national scarring (Willem "Lugares" 1). This is both an argument for the value of these later encounters with testimonial objects by individuals who may have not been personally targeted by the dictatorial regimes (as laid out by Judith Hermann), while also establishing the unique position that these actors and dramaturgs place themselves in. As Arias characterizes it, "En *Mi vida después*, los hijos -ya adultos- se ponen la ropa de los padres para reconstruir su juventud, como si fueran dobles de riesgo dispuestos a hacer las escenas más difíciles de sus vidas" (9). Alejandro Zambra in *Ways of Going Home* mentions his

own confrontation with the shape of his father's clothes when they are gifted to him. Arias similarly acknowledges the specific opportunity presented as the adult children of the dictatorship, since the actors physically can fit into the adult clothes of their parents. This, in turn, begins the process of making costume of inherited clothing, and characters of their past parents. The 1.5 generation, from HIJOS to Arias to Zambra, takes the *punctum* presented by the testimonial object (in this case clothing, but this is flexible) and explores the interconnected nature of its trauma to recall the past more precisely as it bears on the present. This thrust of bravery witnessed in these children comes from not only a desire to honor the legacy of their parents, but to create the conditions necessary for their own subjectivities to thrive and take root in society.

It is also crucial to highlight Arias's use of stunt double in the above passage. As we will later see in the two scenes to be analyzed, this doubling contains the potential to overwhelm the actors whose stories contributed to the creation of the play. The dramatic tension between the stunt double who takes on this risky assignment in the stead of their elders and the danger of the performance itself both reveals previously unknown contours of the elder generations' past, as well as the precariousness of the 1.5 generation's task to take on its legacy. Arias writes in the prologue:

> A medida que las entrevistas avanzaban, empezaba a formarse en mí una idea: el hijo cree saber todo acerca de sus padres, hasta que en algún momento se da cuenta de que son unos perfectos desconocidos. Es en ese instante de perplejidad cuando el hijo empieza a escribir la historia de los padres. Yo quería poner en escena esa historia: la historia de los hijos que escriben la historia de sus padres. (10)

The process detailed here certainly follows the general pattern of the type of counter memory produced by the 1.5 generation. It is one that builds community through collective examination of the past. Since the parents themselves may be absent, either through disappearance or

discretion or shame, the task is to investigate and source from a variety of places to better understand this complex history. To gain more insight into how working towards presenting a play about children writing their parents' history, let us look to the following:

> Pero como no eran personajes sino personas, participar del proyecto implicaba para ellos un salto al vacío. Tenían que querer contar su historia, hacerles preguntas incómodas a sus padres, confrontarse con la historia de los otros, mostrar sus secretos familiares ante un público distinto cada noche. Al principio, los ensayos eran como un grupo de terapia experimental en el que el terapeuta-director daba consignas como: 'Vístase con una prenda de su padre y reconstruya su muerte usando a sus compañeros'…En el proceso mismo de trabajo, las historias -a veces dolorosas o traumáticas- se fueron convirtiendo en un material literario, y ya lo largo de los ensayos los actores fueron tomando distancia, hasta que pudieron ver sus propias vidas como si fueran ajenas. (11)

This provides a glimpse into how the creative process behind the production of the play benefits both the public and the artists alike. To call back to the previous passage, Arias highlights how she wants with this work to lay bare the process of attempting to write about parents from the perspective of children at similar ages to their parents during the dictatorial period. Part of this creative decision might reside in general trends in playwriting and postmodernity; nonetheless, this decision demands that the actors not only reach a point of critical distance with the histories of their parents, but also with their own position in relation to crafting that history for the stage. It is for this, let alone the difficult material involved in the play, that these actors and playwrights can be characterized as stunt doubles. As the passage relates, however, there is a payoff for this risky endeavor. Coming together, playing theatre games that blur the line between improv and therapy, these several actors produce a work that takes the object of clothing and critically explores the *punctum* which it opens. As we will see in the first scene to be examined, the mere act of donning clothing allows the players to access a more complex past. And the recounting of this was not only helpful for the actors themselves, but also the audience who will further learn

how to similarly consider the material world as an entry point into critically reflecting on the difficult past of the dictatorial period.

From the first moment of the play, we as an audience get a keen sense of the preferred ingredients and steps for this staged collective retelling of the past. Let us review the opening stage directions and monologue from Liza:

> *En el fondo del escenario, una batería en una plataforma con ruedas. A la derecha, una larga mesa con una cámara en un trípode, artefactos técnicos de video y varios objetos (fotos, mapas, autos en miniatura, un santo negro, etc.). A la izquierda, una fila larga de sillas de todas las épocas y una guitarra eléctrica con un amplificador. Cae ropa del techo sobre el escenario vacío. Entre las prendas, cae también Liza y queda cubierta por la montaña de ropa. Se levanta, saca un jean del montón y camina hacia adelante con las manos en los bolsillos.*
>
> **Liza:** Cuando tenía siete años me ponía la ropa de mi madre y andaba por mi casa pisándome el vestido como una reina en miniatura. Veinte años después, encuentro un pantalón Lee de los setenta de mi madre que es exactamente de mi medida. Me pongo el pantalón y empiezo a caminar hacia el pasado. En una avenida, me encuentro con mis padres cuando eran jóvenes no vamos a dar un paseo en moto por Buenos Aires. Mi padre adelante, después mi madre y detrás yo, agarrada de su cintura con el viento golpeándome tan fuerte como si quisiera borrarme la cara. (21)

To address the stage directions, the first object highlighted is a drum kit on a mobile stage. Along the periphery lies various object, artefacts as they are referred to, as well as more musical instruments. Even the seats are noted for their eclectic periodization. In short, this collection of objects on the stage dramatizes the seemingly disparate collection of memory objects that will coalesce to tell the intended story of the piece. This randomized mixture of objects, many from the past, reaches its apex when a mountain forms from falling clothing at the center background of the stage[39]. And with that falling clothing, Liza, too, becomes part of this collection. This

[39] Cecilia Sosa, in the brilliant article "Queering Kinship. The Performance of Blood and the Attires of Memory", says of the pile of clothes on the stage, "A pile of clothes works as medium to step into a time-machine. The premise is simple: to put on their parents' clothes so as to re-enact the experiences of their youths. As if it were a science-fiction film, the actors alternate between motor racers, priests, guerrillas, and bank employees to perform the most spectacular stunts of their parents' lives" (222). Furthermore, Sosa argues that the sundry objects around the stage

sequence is the resulting associative network built by the work involved in unpacking the transitional object. In the peripheral hemispheres of the stage exists objects that have appeared in other texts of this very project: musical instruments like the *murgas* who provide music for the *escraches*; toy/miniature cars like in *Space Invaders*. The difference in this text, compared to the others that reference similar objects that swirl in the zeitgeist of the 1.5 generation, is that the staging necessarily prioritizes the mountain of clothing, both in the sequence of actions that open the play and its location center to the spotlight. This signifies that the clothing itself presented the *punctum* for these actors to reflect on the past, to bring in these disparate objects in the hopes of better understanding and representing their relationship to their parents' history.

All this is to establish that the initial stage presentation forms the basis for evaluating how this work treats clothing as a testimonial object. What completes the presentation of the transitional object of clothing, and how it functions within this play, is Liza's entrance. She drops into the half-formed pile of clothes and is subsequently buried by the continually falling clothes from above the stage. This locates her on equal footing to the objects collected around the stage. In many ways, her existence, both on the stage and in general, traces back to the original source of her mother, whose history she introduces in the above monologue. On its face, Liza is an artefact, too, a child of the dictatorship. The difference between her and the clothes and other artefacts around her is that she can emerge from the pile, an adult who is capable of critically reflecting on the conditions that dropped her into the pile to begin with.

The opening lines of her monologue mirror the initial inspiration for the play shared earlier by Arias. That of a younger version of the player dressing up in her mother's clothes. In

amounts to a counter-narrative to the spoils rooms of appropriated property of the disappeared that was a staple at CDCs during the dictatorial period (223).

the dramatic present, Liza pulls a pair of jeans from the mountain of clothing she has recently emerged from. This pile of clothing, as touched on earlier, is rife with meaning; itself a reference to the chaos of material portals to the past, but also of the piles of spoils that punctuated life during the dictatorial period. We discussed this earlier with Juan from *Infancia clandestina*, and Maria in *Garage Olimpo*. Now, Liza shows us, the audience, how she has picked out the pair of jeans that belonged to her mother in the 1970s (or a similar cut to the ones she remembers her mother wearing back then). Trying them on, she describes herself as walking in them towards the past, the jeans now fitting her because she has an adult body similar to her mother's body from the seventies. This moment of the jeans fitting is the *punctum* of this particular scene. Up until this point, narratively, Liza describes her relationship to her mother in terms similar to other children: that she once played in her clothes and now she has inherited some of her things as an adult. The operative word that breaks this stagnation twenty years after playing dress-up is *encuentro*. Liza comes upon the jeans, trying them on to find that they fit her precisely because she is the same size as her mother. It is this new doubling, one that fits in shape more so than the childhood play in oversized dresses, that draws her back into contemplation of the past. She can now begin to witness the whole of her mother's complex and difficult past because she has grown into a life stage better capable of empathizing with it.

Liza practices this empathy earned twenty years after her days of dressing up in oversized clothes in the following skit:

> 1972. Dos años antes. Mi madre a punto de salir al aire en el programa de noticias *Telenoche*. Su compañero, César Mascetti, está tranquilo, imperturbable. Pero en ella podemos ver un gesto de duda, como si no supiera bien qué decir. Cuando era joven, mi madre tenía dos caras. Por un lado, militaba en Montoneros, y por otro, era la chica bonita que dice las noticias detrás del escritorio. En el programa, muchas veces tenía que decir noticias distorsionadas por la censura. Yo no sé qué noticias le habrá tocado decir, pero cuando me quiero imaginar busco los diarios de la época y leo los titulares. *Entran Carla y Pablo, visten a Liza con ropas de*

> *conductora de TV y la sientan en una silla delante de la pantalla. La cara de la madre de Liza se proyecta sobre la cara de Liza. Liza habla como una conductora de noticiero*. Buenas noches César. Buenas noches país. Las Fuerzas Armadas asumen el poder, se detuvo al presidente. Habrá pena de muerte por delitos de orden público. En otro plano de la información: reabrieron teatros y cines. Toda la familia puede disfrutar nuevamente de las funciones para grandes y para chicos…*Mientras Liza dice las noticias, una lluvia de ropa cae sobre su cabeza hasta que la tapa totalmente.* (33)

In this scene, Liza narrates a typical night for her mother in the years leading up to the military coup that inaugurated the last dictatorship in Argentina in 1976. She does so in front of an image of her mother taken moments before her news show was set to air for that night. Liza contrasts her mother's tell, that small gesture of anxiousness, against the cool posture of her co-anchor, César. If we were to view a clip from this broadcast that Liza references, we might have never known what lies beneath that nervous gesture. However, because Liza is opening the *punctum* for us, the detail that pricks up to show the interconnected complexities that disturb the relative calm and stability of the composition, we too understand that her mother's nervousness arises from her attempts to balance a double life. Of on the one hand being a news anchor charged with relaying information that has been distorted by censorship; and on the other hand, a member of the Montoneros.

What further fills in the contours of the testimonial object is the admission from Liza that she is unaware of the headlines that her mother read on that night. This type of knowledge gap is common in studies of postmemory, and it has cropped up several times throughout this project. Therefore, it is crucial for Lola Arias to make the distinction that this play is not a faithful recreation of their parents' past, but rather a dramatization of them as children struggling to write the history of their parents. Thinking back to Marianne Hirsch from the introduction, this type of roadblock of not knowing the news headlines from the night of the projected image does not present a non-starter for critical reflection of a difficult past. Rather, it motivates an individual

like Liza to think creatively about how to best approximate a multidimensional account of the past. For her, this begins with piping in the internal tension behind her mother's nervous gesture. She then adds in archival research of headlines similar to the ones her mother would have read that night. Headlines that fulfill the standard she establishes in the monologue of often being distorted by censorship. The final element of this historicization is donning her mother's clothing. Or, being put in her mother's clothing.

This nuance of being put into the costume rather than dressing herself, as she did with the jeans, is not to be missed. We have seen this dynamic play out before. From the many instances of individuals being stripped of clothing in the objects of pain section, to Ceci being dolled up for the military in *El premio*, to the classmates in *Space Invaders* finding themselves in a collective dream that places them in the tightness of their old school uniforms. Each of these involves an outside imposition acting on the subject. Here is no different. Liza is dressed in clothes her mother would have worn for television, a costume that approximates the image projected on the screen behind her. She is then sat at a table, such in a way that her mother's face becomes projected over hers. It is at this point that she reads the news headlines, now the stunt double of her mother in a moment potential fraught with conflicting emotions and anxiety. To bracket the scene with the one that Liza opened, clothes begin to fall atop her as she reads off the list of headlines, eventually covering her entirely as the stage lights cut out. The question that remains is: how does this mountain of clothing compare to the initial mountain of clothing Liza dropped into? For one, it evidences the phenomenon of the testimonial object. What began with a pair of jeans amidst a pile of random clothes turned into a researched approximation/reenactment of a complex scene from her mother's past. The *punctum* of a pair of jeans, or the like, is simply a string to begin to pull at. As the button (bookend) to the sequence acknowledges, there is

literally a crush of other items of clothing that would facilitate similarly rich meditations on her mother's past. And while the number of lines of inquiry available to her might be overwhelming (and drown her), at the very least she found momentary clarity to examine the history triggered by a single object among the pile.

To further explore this phenomenon of how a single testimonial object reveals the multifaceted, complex nature of painful memories, let us move onto the final scene of this present text. This scene centers on Vanina Falco, who during the initial run of the play was petitioning the court to testify against her own father in a case of appropriating a minor. Vanina's brother, Juan Cabandié, was appropriated by Luis Falco following the disappearance of his birth parents. Vanina was denied her request to testify, but this real-life intersection with the stage further highlights the broader impact of critical memory work**.** In her own scene, Vanina contends with the different versions of her memory of her father. The scene plays as follows:

> ***Vanina:*** Mi padre en su placard tenía una colección de trajes similares a este, todos azules. Azul eléctrico, azul Francia, azul marino, azul cielo, azul policía. *Vanina desplaza un perchero repleto de trajes azules, le da un traje azul a cada uno de los actores y ellos salen de escena*. Todas las mañanas mi padre se ponía su traje y se iba a trabajar con una valijita con remedios y un revólver. Él nos decía que vendía remedios para un laboratorio. Durante toda mi infancia yo fui la preferida de mi padre. Era la mejor alumna, la mejor nadadora, la que lo acompañaba a todos lados. Pero cuando cumplí veintiún años, me fui de mi casa con un ojo morado porque me padre se enteró de que estaba enamorada de una chica. Y cuando tenía veintiocho años, mi hermano me llama y me dice que tiene muchas dudas de pertenecer a mi familia. Así descubrimos que mi padre era un oficial que trabajaba en el servicio de inteligencia, que mi hermano no era mi hermano sino un bebé nacido en el centro clandestino de detención de la Escuela Mecánica de la Armada, hijo de una pareja de jóvenes que tenían diecisiete y diecinueve años y que están desaparecidos. Mi padre se había robado a ese bebé porque mi madre ya no podía tener más hijos. Toda mi vida se transformó en una ficción. Mi hermano no es mi hermano, mi madre no es la madre de mi hermano y mi padre tiene muchas caras para mí. *Los actores vestidos con trajes azules aparecen de a uno en un entrepiso en el fondo del escenario*. Luis 1, el hombre que vendía remedios y me curaba de la fiebre cuando yo estaba enferma. Luis 2, el policía que trabajaba en el servicio de inteligencia. Luis 3, el hombre deportista que me llamaba delfín y al que le gustaba nadar conmigo hasta que ya no veíamos

> la orilla. Luis 4, el hombre que posaba como un playboy en todas las fotos. Luis 5, el hombre al que le gustaba romper vasos, muebles y huesos cuando estaba enojado. (45-6)[40]

In the first lines of her monologue, Vanina establishes the stadium of her father's history; the congealed memory of him formed over time by this morning habit. He dresses in a suit that is roughly identical every morning, leaving with the same two accessories, a suitcase and a revolver. As an audience aware of this history, the revolver appears to us a curious item to be regularly included in the morning ritual of Vanina's father. She, too, underscores this strange detail by only sharing with us her father's words about the suitcase full of medicine. This morning ritual of her father leaving the house with his suitcase and revolver, dressed in a blue suit, was most likely the simple memory Vanina carried of her childhood prior to the key events detailed soon after. It is these two events that necessitate the clothing rack of identical blue suits, and Vanina both wearing one herself and doling one out to five of her fellow actors onstage. This fragmentation of the memory, from a single subject to five or six separate contemplations is the result of the consolidation of this newfound perspective of who her father was and the various roles he occupied at this moment in her childhood.

To dip back into the waters explored in the introduction, Vanina's ability to take critical distance on the image of her father seems to have begun once she became a queer subject. The violence inflicted on her by her father, the same father who dressed similarly every morning and favored Vanina for most of her life, revealed the limitations of his love. That the ideology he practiced, then largely unknown to Vanina, was capable of not only rejecting the warm bond

[40] Pilar Calveiro, in *Poder y desaparición*, shares a similar connection to this type of uniform and state-sanctioned violence: "Sin embargo, los uniformes, el discurso rígido y autoritario de los militares, los fríos comunicados difundidos por las cadenas de radio y television en cada asonada, no son más que la cara más presentable de su poder, casi podríamos decir su traje de domingo. Muestran un rostro rígido y autoritario, sí, pero también recubierto de un barniz de limpieza, rectitude y brillo del que carecen en el ejercicio cotidiano del poder, donde se asemejan más a crueles burócratas avariciosos que a los cruzados del orden y la civilización que pretenden ser" (24).

between father and daughter that had been cultivated over the course of two decades, but was also capable of violently expelling her from the family unit. In the previous chapter, we discussed how Julia's position in *An Empty House* as a widow of someone who was disappeared and an attorney working with families of the disappeared queered her to the point that she became oriented and open to resonate differently with the burner home purchased by Cecilia and Manuel. Similarly, Vanina's identity as a lesbian placed her in opposition to the life path that her father so staunchly wished her to follow. Being pushed out of that lineage and off that life path makes her more receptive to the types of revelations about her father and her brother that will come several years later.

The image of five doubles of Vanina's father standing in nearly identical blue suits on an elevated platform upstage is a potent one. Freed from the restrictive precision of her former memory of her father, she can play with his past. And in that play, she introduces the five actors to the stage as stand-ins for her father's many faces. This act breaks with the usual reverence expected of children when speaking about their parents. She airs his secrets, stages his contradictions one after another until the dramatic space captures them as a cohesive set. The message of this being that to write the history of her father, Vanina must reckon with the fact that this disjointed set of stand-ins all exist within the body of the man she is trying to testify against in the criminal appropriation of her brother. And when she dons the same suit to narrate this scene, she too acknowledges her place within that history. How she spent many days of her childhood part of that ritualized morning departure. To wear the testimonial object of the suit is to accept its conditions. That Vanina was once surprisingly ejected by an unexpected version of her father for being a lesbian, but upon further review, was already one of many suits in his closet.

And this is the benefit conferred by the testimonial object. The ability to take a specific and individual pain and explode its parameters to implicate a much broader and more complex network of actors and phenomena. The hand-me-downs that do not fit quite right, or even those that fit perfectly or were lost altogether, open examination into the conditions of their arrival. To center these testimonial objects is to orient ourselves to reflect on our relationship to these relics of a former generation. What they inspire us to remember as adults, and how we plan to bring them with us, or not, in the future.

chapter 3: FEAST OF PLENTY, FOR A FEW: food as a memory object

PRELUDE

In the penultimate return to Marco Bechis' *Garage Olimpo*, I would like to direct our attention to the object of food. As was previously covered, María, the eighteen-year-old volunteer literacy teacher, is captured by the Argentine secret police and brought to El Olimpo, a clandestine detention center responsible for torturing and processing the disappearances of many citizens during its few years of operation. As is customary in the first moments upon arriving at a CDC, María is blindfolded, stripped, and subjected to various forms of torture. The first example of physical torture that we witness is the *parrilla*. As a reminder, the *parrilla* is a torture device that resembles a bed, instead of a grill, and is at least involves flat surface (often made from steel or another durable metal). It is outfitted with cuffs to restrain specific parts of the victim's extremities. Once restrained, the victim is electrocuted in targeted areas to induce the most pain possible. In María's case, we never see the torture itself occur. Instead, the film presents the action at its bookends; María's naked and bound body stretched across the metal slab. The first time that she is shown to have been tortured comes when the operative responsible for administering electroshock goes too far. He has called in one of the doctors on staff to revive María. Ironically, this is done with an electrical current delivered through paddles that the doctor places at strategic points on María's chest.

The second electroshock torture sequence is at the hands of María's former housemate, Félix, who has been revealed as a plant to root out so-called subversives who were living with María at her mother Diane's large home in the city. Before the scene cuts away, we see Félix on a security camera looming over María's naked body with a wand that is connected to a car

battery. The other end of the cut shows María in her cell with another operative. She is wrapped in a blanket in the background of the shot, which deliberately highlights her detached positioning in relation to the operative. He, however, engages her. The scene opens with him blowing cigarette smoke in her face, asking her what brand she thinks the cigarette is. She guesses wrong, so he repeats the game. The second time she guesses correctly. He then moves on to ask her if she is thirsty. He is drinking from a mug. She replies yes, and despite the presence of the mug that would indicate that he asks to gift her with a sip from his drink, he tells her that she cannot drink anything right now. That if she were to take a drink, she would end up a "pollita frita" because of the residual electrical current running through her body post-torture[41].

When the film returns to el Olimpo, María sits with a cup of broth in her lap. She removes a pair of strange looking objects, one appears to be a clump of hair, the other a different object that is not supposed to be eaten. Texas, the aforementioned operative at Olimpo that murders Diane and takes her home, interrupts María's "meal." He asks her questions about her family, whether her mother lives alone in that large house. His attention soon shifts to María's appearance. He mentions that at this place no person is one man's property, meaning that he does not abide by Félix's claims to María. He nearly initiates an act that would most like end in the rape of María, but Félix happens to pass by. He and Texas shout each other down, and Texas eventually leaves the frame, saving María from harm for the moment. Félix sits down with María on the bed in her cell, and gifts her a rotisserie chicken that he is seen buying earlier in the city. The two eat the chicken silently, tearing into the flesh and sorting through the bones for

[41] Catherine Leen, in her article "City of Fear: Reimaging Buenos Aires in Contemporary Argentine Cinema", seconds the disturbing nature of this scene: "Even more chilling is the casual nature of the relationship between torturer and victim, with one guard asking María about her age and her studies and joking that if she drinks water after being electrocuted she will end up like fried chicken" (475).

remaining meat with disturbing voraciousness. It is an uncanny callback to the *pollita frita* line from earlier.

The rotisserie chicken is but one piece of evidence in the developing intimacy between Félix and María. From his end, upon being kicked out of Diane's home when Texas takes the place, Félix begins to build a makeshift home with María in her cell. First, he gifts her with paintings and other artifacts from the home they both used to live in. Then, he sleeps in the cell with María, sharing mate with her and bringing her flowers. But even in the dynamic of their mate drinking, there is something slightly off. María makes the mate, and hands it off to Félix, who then hands it back to her. She is not just the *cebador*, but she is also in control of their intimacy. She is the one who initiates their first kiss, at a crucial moment when Félix's loyalty towards her seems to wane. This act consolidates his desire to protect her from the others at El Olimpo. María's ultimate plan is revealed when Félix takes her outside the compound to have sex with her in a hotel room. He allows her to make several attempts to call her now dead mother. This lax attitude towards his love interest almost leads him to losing María. At a crosswalk, she breaks from his hand and attempts to run across the street just as the traffic light is about to change in favor of her escape. She is unsuccessful, however, and Félix drives her back to El Olimpo, now aware of the intentions behind her behavior towards him.

It is worth restating that the film *Garage Olimpo* efficiently collapses as many of the atrocities committed by the junta in Argentina as possible. Previously, we looked at how the plan to annihilate so-called subversives was articulated through the objects of home and clothing. That these objects were weaponized within the totalizing project of dehumanizing and disappearing, mind and body, the victims who were processed in El Olimpo and similar clandestine detention centers. Here, the memory object of food is no different. Like the prior

foci, food is an essential component of human life. Its function ranges from the basic necessity of maintaining requisite biological functioning to the emotionally and historically informed process of refining a recipe or crafting high cuisine. The weaponization of food at the hands of dictatorial regimes coded this object in pain, which in turn created a parallel signification that persists in the present day. Looking at the above scenes from the film, we can tease out preliminary considerations for just how the object of food was inverted during the dictatorial period, as well as possible points of intervention for processing food-related trauma in the present. As in previous chapters, these interventions begin with a focus on the strategies of resistance employed during the dictatorial period (transitional objects), and their further elaboration following the democratic transition (testimonial objects).

Returning to the scenes from *Garage Olimpo*, both the sequence of her resuscitation and her moment of aftercare with the agent show the painful doubling the object world experienced within the CDC. For instance, the *parrilla* itself. In the film, it refers to the setup used to torture María and other victims with electrical shocks. But it is also a term appropriated from *asado* culture, a deeply rooted tradition in the Southern Cone that is associated with intimate experiences of conviviality. The irony of her being resuscitated using a different application of shock therapy, is that it underscores this targeted perversion of an existing technology. These examples are the essence of the object of pain. The knowledge that charges the electric paddles with intention to resuscitate can be wielded to break down a victim's spirit, just like the *parrilla* can be more than a tool to cook food.

To take this line of thinking further, there is the exchange between her and an Olimpo agent following her shock torture. When he asks her if she is thirsty, it first appears that he is making a rare gesture of charity between perpetrator and victim. This would follow somewhat,

since the game that he plays with her, of guessing the cigarette brand based off the smoke, could be read as playful in different circumstances. Additionally, the composition of the shot makes a point to show the cup of water that the agent drinks from and holds in his lap while playing the guessing game with María. However, he is not simply being kind. Because, instead of giving her water when she confirms that she is thirsty, he warns her that she cannot drink anything at the moment because she still has a strong residual current running through her, and she would most likely die from the shock. The implications of this are twofold. For one, what presents as concern for her wellbeing is negated by the true intention behind his aftercare. Like how the agent who had to call a doctor to resuscitate María on the *parrilla*, this agent does not wish to be responsible for the accidental death of his charge. The god-complex of those who work at CDCs like El Olimpo require that even death is under their control. María's death due to grabbing at the agent's cup and sipping water, just like a miscalculated voltage dial during shock torture, would be a failure of their death machine.

The second implication of this scene of the agent inquiring about María's thirst shows the inversion of the object of food as a source of sustenance into an object of pain. It is a danger that is specifically an aftereffect of the processes delineated by the weapons of the dictatorship, and it extends beyond the immediate pain inflicted during torture. It undermines any emerging feeling of security implicit in the directive that electroshock torture may approach but should rarely cross into a fatal act. I say implicit security because upon conclusion of a session strapped to the parrilla, a victim like María might think that their hell has temporarily relented. In the scene after her session with the agent we see her finally turn to face him when he asks her if she is thirsty. This indicates that she has relaxed her guard predicated on dissociating from the world entirely and turns instead to acknowledge the presence of her captor. That he rejects her desire to quench

her thirst leaves open the duration of her experience with the pain of torture. She cannot piece together a self that is not informed by the pain suffered during torture because of the invisible presence of a residual electrical current that continues to circulate throughout her body. Therefore, the torture does not end once she is moved to another room. Water becomes yet another potential threat to her life.

But the depth and scope of how food becomes weaponized into an object of pain presents itself more overtly in the scenes that follow. The broth she is shown drinking before Texas arrives to attempt to rape her is clear. The only solid objects that she scoops into her spoon and throws on the floor look to be nothing but inedible garbage that was added to boiling water. Outside of the beer, *mate*, and chicken that she earns through her compliance with the authorities and relationship with Félix, this broth is the only thing that she consumes throughout the film. Thus, removing those extra items, that clear broth comprises most of the diet controlled by the agents at El Olimpo. Even in the gift of beer, chicken, and *mate*, these luxury food items within the walls of the CDC come at a price: providing information that leads to the capture and subsequent death of a close friend. When she consumes those items, relief does not register on her face. That would imply that the possession of such items would override an uneasiness related to the conditions of their acquisition. Instead, like is shown when she eats the rotisserie chicken with Félix, she maintains an unblinking dissociative expression. The abnormal additions to her diet at El Olimpo do not quell her fear, and instead adds another flavor to her experience of pain at the hands of her captors. This time, a pain caused by betraying her personal ethics to survive.

The final scene mentioned undercuts the potential application of a romantic interpretation to the relationship between Félix and María. From Félix's end, it appears that he wishes for

something more with María and considers the circumstances ripe for meeting his intimacy needs within the walls of his workplace. It as though he has forgotten his fundamental betrayal of his love interest by guiding the military to her home and capturing her. María, however, behaves in a way that does not forget this betrayal. At a pivotal moment, she chooses to kiss Félix after he expresses displeasure at her not possessing any further information to help delay her inevitable disappearance. She utilizes Félix's attraction to her, established at the beginning of the film before her capture, to grasp at a chance for survival and escape. The confirmation of her hunch arrives when Félix chooses to move into her cell with her, helping furnish the place with decorations, bedding, and other items that simulate cohabitation despite their surrounding context. When the scene with the *mate* opens, it is shot from an overhead perspective from an upper corner of the cell wall. This angle provides a panoramic view of the transformation of the cell from a single bed to a perversely improvised domestic pastiche. It is a miniature world within the broader realities (El Olimpo and Argentina) in which it nests. And while it would seem that Félix is the sole authority in signifying this pocket reality, because he is able to authorize and procure the necessary objects for its construction, both the kiss that initiated its creation and the *mate* tell a different story. Here, María has earned enough trust from Félix to prepare the drink for the two of them. In manipulating him to this extent, she has successfully established an ally from within enemy territory; one who aids her in openly breaking the rules of the CDC. Had the romance been sincere for María, the conditions of its spark would have been different. But most importantly, she would have stopped looking for opportunities to escape, which she attempts on two separate occasions. The comforts of home, which manifest in gifts of food and drink, do not mask or mitigate her focus on fleeing for her life. Instead, with each subsequent gift, she picks up momentum towards pursuing survival.

This is all to say that like clothing or the home, food offers a rich site for examining how memory is articulated through our interactions with the object world. In the following sections, we will look to the production of memory in the dictatorial period and beyond by way of food. As detailed in the above, combing closely through instances that center food reveals a broader set of implications and actors that go beyond whether the food itself provides adequate nourishment for the continuing biological function of human life. But food is more than that, in the general sense, but specifically both during and after the dictatorial periods in Argentina and Chile. Diet was weaponized, while abundance was suspicious. And the emotional, mnemonic labor in nurturing conviviality through food a potent source of resistance and counter-memory. As was the case with the other memory objects of this study, food is insufficiently considered in the field of postdictatorial literature as a potential entry point for expressing a more precise measure of the enduring impact of the dictatorships. By centering food, I work to further trouble the dominant assumption that the dictatorial past is self-contained by revealing yet another object of contemporary daily life that is informed by its past traumatic resignification.

chapter 3.1: WASTING AWAY, FATTENING UP
food as an object of pain

Like in previous sections, the weaponization of food by the military dictatorships in Argentina and Chile depend on who controls the appropriation of property. Whether it is Diane's home, Alicia Partnoy's mismatched slippers, or María's cup filled with clear broth and garbage, the conversion of these critical objects of daily life into instruments of torture begins with the fundamental intention of the dictatorial regimes to undermine so-called subversives and thoroughly dehumanize them. The "spoils of war" that are amassed in dedicated spoils rooms in clandestine detention centers like the ESMA, are not restricted to the physical limits of those

rooms, however. As mentioned in the chapter about Mariana Callejas and the house in Lo Curro, as well as *Historias clandestinas*, complicit and/or unwitting beneficiaries of neoliberal economic policies throughout the countries grew wealthier on the backs of disappeared bodies. So too, then, does the high cuisine and foreign liquor of the elite become implicated in the violent conditions of its arrival.

With that in mind, the following chapter will examine the contours of food as an object of pain. In other words, how a critique of food as a memory object can tease out a particular set of traumas produced during the dictatorial period, and how these traumas can endure after the democratic transition. I will primarily center testimonies written about the weaponization of food within CDCs. This is the most explicit use of food in enabling the dehumanizing processes carried out by the dictatorships. Both Alicia Partnoy's *The Little School* and Jacobo Timerman's *Prisoner Without a Name, Cell Without a Number* offer longer form glimpses into the suffering precipitated by a radically altered and cruel diet during their respective stints at a CDC. Whether it involves a rare feast or persistent hunger, their experiences show that to a large extent their perception of food within the CDC is mediated by the presence and violent intentions of their captors[42].

The first text I will examine is former *La Opinión* editor Jacobo Timerman's memoir *Prisonor Without a Name, Cell Without a Number*. Published in 1980, it details his capture and

[42] Pilar Calveiro writes the following on her diet while at a CDC: "La *comida* era solo la imprescindible para mantener la vida hasta el momento en que el dispositivo lo considerara necesario; en consecuencia, era escasa y muy mala. Se repartía dos veces al día y constituía uno de los pocos momentos de cierto relajamiento. Sin embargo, en algunos casos, podia faltar durante días enteros; por cierto muchos testimonios dan cuenta del hambre como uno de los tormentos que se agregaban a la vida dentro de los campos. 'La comida era desastrosa, o muy cruda o hecha un masacote de tan cocinada, sin gusto…Estábamos tan hambrientos, habíamos aprendido tan bien a agudizar el oído, que apenas empezaban los preparativos, allá lejos, en la entrada, nos desesperábamos por el ruido de las cucharas y los platos de metal y del carrito que traía la comida. Se puede decir, casi, que vivíamos esperando la comida…la hora del almuerzo era la mejor, por eso apena termin;abamos y cerraban la puerta, comenzábamos a esperar la cena." (49-50)

internment at a clandestine detention facility in Argentina for a year between 1977-78. As is common for many who were spirited to such sites, Timerman relates the profound disorientation he experienced because of being held in a cramped cell in dismal conditions, oftentimes with his vision cut off by a blindfold or hood.; literary critic Alejandara Carballo, in her article "Preso sin nombre celda sin número: inversiones simbólicas y el mundo al revés", likens the disorienting experience to inverted carnivalesque of Bakhtin (591, 594)[43]. During this period, a grasp of the passage of time slips, and the sum total of the torture and dehumanizing experiences accumulates in a way that evades recognition. In Timerman's account, like in Partnoy's *The Little School* and other similar testimonies, certain revelatory moments within the CDC allow the victim to notice particular changes that mark the damage they have suffered while incarcerated. Such a moment comes for Timerman when he is approached by the guards at his facility with an offer of taking a bath. As he writes:

> They ask if I'd like to have a bath, and suggest I take advantage of an opportunity I may not have again for some time. I hesitate slightly because of my great fatigue. I don't realize, they say, how bad I smell. Indeed, I haven't washed for almost a month. I accept the bath, with a guard posted at the door. In the mirror, I see how thin I am. I must have lost between twenty and twenty-five kilos, but there are no signs of torture evident on my body. The scent of soap and water…I discover them perhaps for the first time. I'm overwhelmed by a forgotten sensation, and am frightened, for until now I'd avoided memories as much as possible. (Timerman 57)

[43] Further scholarship, like that from Stacey Skar, examines the potential of testimony from someone who survived their time at a CDC. She writes in her article "Jacobo Timerman's *Preso sin nombre, celda sin número* and the Reconstructing 'I'", "When the prisoner is not destroyed…there exists the possibility of repositioning the self within the physical and verbal realities of that subject's world. ..Furthermore, this rebirth of language, the formation of the world after the traumatic experience is only possible through the use of the imagination and the reconstruction of the subject in relation to that world that he or she remakes" (14); and, "While testimony cannot erase memories of the horror, while it cannot bring back from death those who are gone, while it may not eradicate the continuing crimes against humanity in our postmodern globalized world, it can attempt to remember voices and reconstruct psychological subjects who have suffered. Any remembering is ultimately partial. It will leave open spaces and silences that may be too dark to recollect, but any reconstruction is a beginning to fit the pieces of the puzzle together" (24). Both Carballo and Skar offer complimentary analyses to the present focus, despite not explicitly homing in on food as either an object of pain or a transitional object (as it pertains to the next section about Timerman's memoir).

The thing about food as an object of pain is that it does not endure quite in the same way as the other memory objects. An item of clothing will lose form, or tear, as we saw in Tununa Mercado's *In a State of Memory*. A house can be altered beyond immediate recognition. But short of a deliberate act to raze a property or discard clothing, they maintain their physical form much longer than a piece of food. With that in mind, this passage allows us to witness the residual traces of malnutrition that is part and parcel of the mistreatment of detainees at CDCs.

He begins with his lapse of hygiene. The guards tell him that he smells, which he intellectual recognizes given the fact that he has not had the opportunity to bathe for nearly a month. However, despite this rational deduction of time, he does not sense his own odor anymore. His senses have been displaced by a deep focus on survival and the disorienting effects of the torture and mistreatment he has been subjected to so far. It is for survival that he initially rebuffs taking the guards up on the opportunity to shower. As he remembers, conserving energy is of more pressing concern than his body odor and cleanliness. The guards convince him, however, to take a shower. For whatever reason, perhaps for the very effect that it has on him, the room where he bathes contains a mirror. Viewing himself in its reflection, he is struck by the uncanny image of his emaciated body. He had lost around fifty pounds in that month alone. Within the same sentence that remembers his extreme wasting, Timerman observes that there are otherwise no visible signs of torture on his body. The connection between these two details is not arbitrary. The general stress of the concentration camp and the deliberate malnutrition that he endures are visible signs of torture. But like food itself, weight can reasonably fluctuate. Even a prisoner who is released into exile can theoretically gain back the weight they lost while detained; and with that weight gain remove any physical evidence of mistreatment at the hands of the military. In this passage, the key term is visible. Timerman has suffered a tremendous

amount of pain, but the invisibility of that suffering highlights the pains that the agents of the dictatorship took to develop techniques of inflicting pain that cohered to their violently disruptive and deceptive project. Had he disappeared like the many thousand other bodies that wasted away during their time in captivity, this weaponization of food would be unknown in his legacy. Only through the expectation of his past self-image in contrast with his reflection a month after being captured can we fully grasp the severity of his starvation.

The final part of the passage inverts Timerman's earlier ignorance towards his sense of smell. Once in the shower, the scent of the soap that he is using invades his consciousness. It triggers vibrant recollections of a time before his capture, something that he consistently rejects as a threat to his steadfast resolve to survive his present circumstances. This intent to shut out his connections to the world beyond the CDC will appear again when I turn to food as a transitional object. But here, the episodic memories triggered by a reactivation of his olfactory sense is not a welcome novelty amidst the pain and grime of the prison. It instead presents a distraction to a man intent on steeling his nerves and dissociating as much as possible. This is not easy to do, especially when it relates to the scent of food and the soothing presence that it transmits, often regardless of its context and especially when an individual is experiencing starvation. In a later memory, he writes:

> It is hot. They seat me on a chair and take the blindfold off my eyes. It's handed to me. We're in a spacious kitchen. Before me are some smiling men, big and fat, dressed in civilian clothing. Weapons are everywhere. The men are drinking coffee, and one of them offers me some in a tin cup. He keeps smiling. Tells me to sip it slowly, asks if I want a blanket, invites me to come close to the stove, to eat something. Everything about him transmits generosity, a desire to protect me. He asks if I'd like to lie down a while on the bed. I tell him no. He tells me there are some female prisoners on the grounds, if I'd care to go to bed with one of them. I tell him no. This gets him angry because he wants to help me and, by not allowing him to, I upset his plan, his aim. In some way he needs to demonstrate to me and to himself his capacity to grant things, to alter my world, my situation. To

> demonstrate to that I need things that are inaccessible to me and which only he can provide. I've noticed this mechanism repeated countless times. (40-1)

From the outset of the passage, he is met with the disturbing vastness of his surroundings upon the removal of his blindfold. The kitchen is spacious, the men are big and fat, there is an abundance of food and drink available to him. Like the scent of the soap in the shower, these stimuli are undergirded by the intentions of the guards who led him into this scene. At every juncture there is an act that reflects the intent to bend Timerman to their will and remind him of their power. It is not just a generous gesture of offering him coffee or food; it's also the subtle policing of telling him to drink the coffee slowly. And he recognizes the dynamic behind this facade of conviviality. The scene itself is yet another technique to disorient him, to break him down by reminding him of what he lacks while in captivity[44].

Despite his awareness of the machinations that placed him in that chair in the kitchen, he is still momentarily swayed by being gifted coffee and in the presence of cooking food. The offer of sleeping with one of the female prisoners is met with a simple no; that offer does not appeal to Timerman, though he has experienced plenty of alienation and a lack of intimacy while in captivity. It would be understandable that he could be manipulated into such a moment of weakness. On the other hand, he does not reject the cup of coffee, and he does not remember rejecting the food, either. Like the previous passage, what follows these sensorial eruptions related to food, and specifically scent, reveals the sinister nature of how food was weaponized by the guards. For, all the while being intellectually aware of their intent to manipulate him, and the memory of the torture he has endured, the mere presence of food leaves him disarmed. He knows

[44] Erin Hogan echoes this sentiment in her analysis of a scene from *El premio* where the schoolchildren are given a snack by the visiting military officers; she writes, "Bribed with hot chocolate amidst the damp cold and the opportunity to in a prize, the docile and dutiful schoolchildren comply with the mechanisms and calculations of the military regime" (185).

the violence that the man who offers him coffee and food is capable of, but he still cannot help but interpret his gestures as generous and protective. Fortunately, the man offers Timerman something that he can refuse, snapping him out of the trance that was orchestrated by the scene in the kitchen. This rejection precipitates a return to the abusive dynamic that ran concurrently with this fleeting moment of simulated warmth and conviviality. Even these luxuries, which are presented as gifts to a compliant detainee, rely on the totalizing violence of the perpetrators. This rare feast cannot escape the parallel world of pain established by the torturer[45].

In *The Little School*, Alicia Partnoy endures similar conditions as detailed in Timerman's memoir, though she is not as high profile of a detainee. Not having served as editor for a national newspaper, her experience is more closely aligned with the general victim. As such, her experiences are more broadly applicable than Timerman's, which reflects a greater degree of interest from the authorities in keeping him alive and extracting information from him. Nonetheless, Partnoy too addresses the issue of food within the facility. She writes of her diet:

> Lunch was at 1:00P.M. and dinner at 7:00P.M.; we went without food for eighteen consecutive hours daily. We were constantly hungry. I lost 20 pounds, going down to 95 pounds (I am 5 ft. 5 in.). Added to the meager food, the lack of sugar or fruits, was the constant state of stress that made our bodies consume calories rapidly. We ate our meals blindfolded, sitting on the bed, plate in lap. When we had soup or watery stew, the blows were constant because the guards insisted that we keep our plates straight. When we were thirsty, we asked for water, receiving only threats or blows in response. (15)

One aspect that appears consistently throughout the first half of the above passage is an emphasis on calculations and figures. She begins with the reliability of her eating schedule at the Little

[45] Furthermore, as the CONADEP report details, such preferential treatment often was misleading; the report mentions: "Numerous testimonies have been collected concerning the special treatment received by those who were later to be killed in gun battles. Days before they were to be shot, these prisoners would be given better food, and were made to wash and have a bath, since it would have been difficult to explain to the public the appearance of 'extremists killed in shoot-outs' with skinny, tortured, bearded and ragged corpses. This constituted an indescribable cruelty, since it raised a person's hopes that he would live, whereas his real fate was death" (67).

School. And though the number of hours that she and the other prisoners go without food is implied by the schedule itself, she deliberately shows her work to her reader and highlights the fact that they consistently went eighteen hours a day without any food. In a modern time of diets, intermittent fasting specifically, this might not resonate completely with those who adhere to a strict eating schedule. But, as she remembers, this was not a healthy regimentation of meals. Instead, it caused the detainees a great deal of stress by way of hunger. To further drive her point home of the misery of starvation at the Little School, she, like Timerman, signals the severe wasting she underwent while there. In this description, she provides the figures for the reader: 20 pounds lost; down to 95 pounds; 5 ft. 5in. The parenthetical aside of her height seems to call the audience into performing a calculation similar to the fasting period before. That she presents this information parenthetically hints that there is something about weighing 95 pounds that is abnormal for someone of her height. And, upon doing a quick calculation of her body mass index, she went from a healthy weight to one that is associated with being extremely underweight. This more clinical way of describing the effects of malnutrition on her body, in comparison to Timerman's direct acknowledgement of how thin he had gotten, presents a different intervention to the weaponization of food. It is as though she acknowledges that the guards who torture her had intended on developing this diet as yet another tool to inflict pain on their captives. And in response, she too shares an account that attempts to ascertain the biological processes behind her suffering caused by food.

Partnoy's own calculations and clinical narration of her experience of hunger and wasting does not come from nowhere. As the latter half of the passage indicates, in a similar way as in the previous passages from Timerman, the guards too were deliberate in how they structured the victims' relationship to food so that it cohered to their goal of constructing a world of sustained

pain. Though it was subtler in the Timerman scene with the guard directing him on how to sip the coffee that was given to him, here the guards seem to barely relent in their policing of the detainees' behaviors. Their requests for water to quench their thirst is met with threats and beatings. This is also the punishment they received when eating soups or stews in a way that was deemed improper by the guards. Given the state in which they ate these dishes, of being blindfolded and only capable of holding the plate in their laps, the mere arrival of this food in particular signals an additional danger, rather than a welcome meal. Coupled with the aforementioned state of being exhausted, underfed, and lacking necessary nutrition for optimal functioning, balancing these plates in their laps would be an insurmountable challenge. Another torturous process. Thus, the choice of serving these dishes to prisoners in such a condition telegraphs that they are setting them up to fail. They are creating a scenario in which the food connects directly to violent punishment.

The guards' violence that articulates itself through the object of food is not limited to starving or doling out punishment for improper eating manners. Treats, too, become filtered through the vision of creating a totalizing world whose objects are steeped in pain. Partnoy narrates about the rare times they were given treats at the Little School. She writes, "They gave us quince jam and cheese today, a small piece. I saved the cheese: there were too many good things together. I'd been dreaming of something sweet for so many days! But not this way…When the guards give us a 'treat' they say it is to 'celebrate' the capture of new prisoners. There was also music today, the radio blasting, to screen the cries" (Partnoy 45). What this passage demonstrates is that the scene from Timerman's memoir where he is offered coffee and freshly cooked food is not a luxury restricted to detainees who carry the same reputational weight as he. Rather, these treats are part of a larger plan to outpace and corrupt any and all

positive associations with food that the victims had. In the midst of establishing a diet that produces crippling hunger and wasting, the guards further pervert the object of food by appealing to the silent cravings of their victims. In the experience of hunger, small treats produce a disproportionate response that overwhelms the defenses of the prisoners. As Partnoy remembers, the small portion of quince jam and cheese that she receives realizes the dream of tasting something sweet that had pursued her for a while. By the time of this particular scene, she has acclimated to life at the Little School enough to ration this minimal snack, perhaps to add much needed variety to her diet, or to prevent any gastric issue that could arise from eating a type of food that has been removed from her regular diet (29). Nonetheless, this rare snack disarms Partnoy in a similar way to Timerman

But the snack, like the coffee or food cooking on the stove for Timerman, subverts the initial feelings of excitement over its novelty and the pleasure of eating something that she has missed since being captured and brought to the Little School. Because the conditions of its arrival is predicated on the introduction of new victims to the CDC. The fleeting moment of joy is interrupted by the announcement and subsequent realization that the cheese and jam are tied to more bodies who will be subjected to pain and possible death. In Timerman, the coffee and other food offered to him signals a desire on the part of the guards to reinforce the dynamic that they are in full control of the world around him. That, depending on his degree of cooperation, these luxuries could be escalated or taken away, but that the ultimate decision of their disbursement rests in the hands of his captors. This memory from Partnoy, too, provides further evidence of this god complex as experienced by a different class of prisoner. But it also reveals a subtler form of inflicting psychological pain on the victims. As she states, she had dreamt of tasting something sweet, but not under these circumstances. One interpretation of this is that she does

not want to engage with objects or experiences that trigger pleasurable emotions. This is frequently referenced in the Timerman text. That indulging in objects or thoughts that provided pleasure in the outside world can only weaken one's defenses against the ever-present threat of the world within the CDC. And to a certain extent, there are limits to what Partnoy will allow herself to indulge in to find comfort in her difficult circumstances; for one, she denies herself the act of remembering her daughter's face, because she would rather not bring the image produced by that memory into the liminal space of the Little School (79). However, this interaction with the snack is not an indulgence that Partnoy denies on the grounds of steeling herself against her perpetrators. As we will examine in the next section, food for her was also a gateway to communicating affiliative feelings without speech to her fellow detainees. What spoils this treat for Partnoy is that it signifies more people like her being brought in to suffer like she is currently suffering. The guards, in their desire to color the object of food with a violence on equal footing to the other forms of torture they employ, weaponize the temptation of a treat and the guilt produced by the conditions of its arrival to further spoil whatever nourishment or pleasure could have been derived from it. The cries of the newly arrived prisoners are a seasoning that overpowers whatever excitement, on an inadvertent level, had initially accompanied the gift of the treat.

As detailed in the above analysis, the concept of food as an object of pain takes on a diverse set of forms, both within the CDC and beyond. Within CDCs like the Little School, food becomes another piece of the puzzle that converges in a totalizing violent suppression of prisoners. From deliberate starvation to crucial introduction of treats, the guards aimed to break down past associations to nourishment and pleasure, replacing them with hunger and guilt. It would seem from the passages of this section that the guards were resoundingly successful in

their attempts to cut off any resistance to this resignification of food as an object of pain. After all, both Timerman and Partnoy acknowledge some form of emotional manipulation that would indicate that they, if only initially, fell for the trap laid out by their captors. However, as the following section will examine, prisoners were able to find ways to circumvent the totalizing project of pain enacted by their captors to retain and even cultivate networks of support and communication through food. This transitional object of food, at its core, represents the creative work of victims who sought to maintain warm associations with food through their own adaptive reimagining of its practice. As the accounts suggest, these are memories that in large part evaded the gaze of the perpetrator, thus providing an integral piece of reconstructing a history of the dictatorial period that does not entirely rely on the dominant perspective pushed in the early years of the democratic transition.

chapter 3.2: BREADBALLS AND CANDY

food as a transitional object

In Pablo Larraín's 2010 film *Post mortem*, the simple act of carefully frying an egg goes a long way in easing the suffering of a neighbor. But in the creation of this transitional object, its decay by the end of the film also reflects the impermanence and fragility of such objects that bring momentary comfort. The film follows the life of Mario Cornejo, a lonely and quiet clerical worker who records and transcribes autopsy reports at a state hospital in Santiago in 1973. When not at work, he pursues the attention of his neighbor Nancy Puelma, a locally famous dancer at the burlesque house that Mario regularly attends. One night, after returning home from work, he spies that there are people around inside Nancy's home across the street. He sets the table for two, and then goes over to knock on her door. Her brother, who has helped Mario transcribe autopsy reports at home, tells him that she is upstairs sick. Mario is invited to stay at the home,

where they are holding a meeting for a revolutionary group. He stays for a while, not engaging with the lively political discussion, and leaves when Nancy does not appear. As he sits to eat his dinner alone, he hears a knock on his door, and it is Nancy. He lets her in and invites her to dine with him. She comments on the simplicity of his dinner, rice, and a fried egg. He offers to fry up an egg for her, too. The camera then shifts to an over the shoulder perspective of Mario, the stovetop and lone frying pan filling up the frame. We see him carefully add oil to the pan, then a single cracked egg. Because of the strong flame underneath the pan, the whites of the egg quickly bubble and froth. But the egg does not burn. Mario's hand hovers over the pan, tending to the oil. He used a spoon to move and coat different parts of the frying egg, making sure to cook it evenly. When the shot cuts, Mario serves Nancy a perfectly fried egg on a plate. She goes to serve herself rice, and glances between her plate and Mario as he contentedly begins to eat. Her gaze drops, and soon comes undone in sobs. Without prompting, Mario joins her. The dinner scene ends with the pair crying at the kitchen table.

Towards the middle of the film, the coup of 1973 occurs. Mario's workplace is taken over by military officials, who oversee a stream of murdered bodies killed in the initial executions following the coup. Mario's team conducts the autopsy of the body of Salvador Allende, a detail in the film that draws on its real-life inspiration; Mario Cornejo was the third signatory on Salvado Allende's real autopsy report, and Larraín interviewed his son during production of the film (Lucca np). Amidst this mounting pressure at his workplace, Nancy's home is raided, probably due to the political activity Mario witnessed there earlier. Looking through the ransacked property, he eventually meets again with Nancy, who has taken to hiding in a storage closet off the backyard patio. Mario looks after her, bringing her cigarettes, food, and other supplies to help her survive and maintain contact with the outside world. One morning,

however, he goes to Nancy's hideout and discovers that she has been there the whole time with her lover, a man shown both at the meeting in Nancy's house and at an earlier political rally. The two thank him for his help. The boyfriend asks him to bring them some food. Mario stares at the couple silently. The scene cuts to the same close shot of the stovetop as before. This time, Mario is absent from the frame. The single frying egg is already brown at the edges. The camera remains while we watch the egg char, first at the edges then further towards the yolk, a large puff of smoke accompanying the abruptly shut off burner[46]. Mario brings the food over, placing it atop a dresser that covers the hideout. Nancy emerges. No words are exchanged between the two. She masturbates him in silence and asks him to bring her cigarettes after he finishes. He replaces the dresser in front of the hideout door, and to conclude the film, proceeds to stack various pieces of furniture together, trapping Nancy and her lover[47].

Nancy's ultimate fate had already been foreshadowed early in the film. Mario is the attending secretary for her autopsy, which reveals that she died from a combination of malnutrition and severe dehydration. The blockade that Mario constructs at the end of the film is the act that kills her. Though both scenes are informed by the release of pent-up emotions, whether in a calming or destructive direction, they are also notable for a lack of explicit

[46] Tzvi Tal comments that this specific cinematographic technique is common of "cine chileno melancólico", writing, ""Entre los recursos cinematográficos que caracterizan el cine chileno melancólico esta el tiempo que transcurre lentamente, como los planos secuencias prolongados que parecen transmitir el transcurso de la vida misma, obligando al espectador a experimentar junto con los personajes. Otro recurso destacado es el primer plano que detiene la mirada del espectador sobre los objetos, expresando la relación del melancólico con el pasado a través de las cosas." (4). Both the lingering shot and first-person perspective are used in the discussed scenes to entrap the viewer in Mario's life.

[47] Robert Wells, in his article "Trauma, Male Fantasies, and Cultural Capital in the Films of Pablo Larraín" writes of this finale, "Frustrated, if now empowered by his position in Pinochet's regime, Mario closes the door to the pantry, ignoring their cries for help. He piles up countless pieces of furniture and other everyday objects, thereby incarcerating Nancy and Víctor in a makeshift, domestic death camp. The pile that accumulates in front of the unseen couple being buried alive parallels the pile of cadavers at the morgue. That the final shot, which goes on for some five minutes, does not show Mario's face anonymizes him and suggests that he is not the only Chilean who will imprison – and kill – his neighbors. That is *the* scene in Larraín's cinematic oeuvre that makes most visible the traumas of the dictatorship. It also images how *Post Mortem* is a horror film" (513).

verbalization of these emotions. Nancy seemingly bursts into tears without any verbal indication as to the source of the pain she wishes to share with Mario. Likewise, Mario's construction of the blockade is carried out in silence. The only indication of the immediate emotions which run beneath and precipitate both external eruptions is the two scenes that direct us to watch an egg fry on the stovetop. The care with which Mario prepares the first egg is a detail that is not lost on Nancy. She, for whatever reason (losing her starring role in the burlesque show for becoming too thin, dealing with the pressure of her activity with a political group, etc.) feels deeply acknowledged by the care transmitted by Mario's preparation of the fried egg. Despite not actually eating the egg, the effect of the gesture generates a feeling of safety in Mario's presence, which in turn allows her to uncork her tears in front of him.

The second egg, on the other hand, is prepared with as little care as possible. This neglect and the slow burning of the egg reflect Mario's own intensifying rage stewing inside after realizing that Nancy was living in the hideout with her lover. His eventual decision to murder the two is not beyond the realm of possibilities under normal circumstances. And it does feel generally unsavory to speculate as to what caused him to suffer such a break in behavior, turning from a quietly generous individual to one who was capable of enacting such a cruel murder on his love interest. The film certainly makes the case that despite his lack of reaction to the perversion of his workplace, with bodies littering hallways and other common areas, an internal degradation was occurring in Mario. And perhaps the decision to murder Nancy came from an awareness of his own futility in protecting her from the same party responsible for filling his work with corpses. Or possible, he gives into a new paradigm that condones the violent erasure of those not willing to bend to the responsible individual's every whim. That Nancy does not reciprocate Mario's desire for a relationship triggers in him a rage that ultimately decides that

she is not worthy of life if she cannot be his[48]. There is certainly a narcissism and fatalism behind such a decision that expresses itself in the common register of Pinochet's Chile.

Nonetheless, the transitional object of food offers furthers examination of what exactly is communicated by its transit from raw material to served dish. In the previous section, the overall project aimed at tormenting and dehumanizing so-called subversives at clandestine detention centers was articulated through and in part depended on the object of food. Guards and military officers weaponized food in order to consolidate the mnemonic associations of hunger and satiety under their control. The above example from *Post mortem* presents a different emotional expression of food, one that values fostering connection and support rather than undermining it. The food itself is relatively unchanged. What shifts is the intention behind its preparation and deployment in diet or the like. That detail can make the difference in whether the food provides comfort or additional pain. Just as is the case with the simple fried egg in Larraín's film. When an object of daily life is charged by the intention of acknowledging the struggle of the other, and wishing to show them comfort, then the object itself provides supplementary amplification of that sentiment. However, like the safe house or lent clothes from previous chapters, this soothing effect is relatively fragile and impermanent amidst the constant barrage of pain and stress that was common for many in the dictatorial period. As we witness with the egg, a transitional object is but a few unsupervised seconds in a frying pan away from an object of pain, which is to say that the transitional object is one that not only conveys a feeling of connection and security

[48] Robert Wells draws a stronger connection between Chilean history and this display of toxic masculinity: "Finally, Larraín does help his viewers to potentially work through trauma by forcing them to see themselves as implicated in trauma, along with the injustice, impunity, and consumerism that obscure and sustain its indelible wound. Michael Rothberg has coined the term 'implicated subject' to characterize this position, wherein 'We are more than bystanders and something other than direct perpetrators in the violence of global capital'. As Larraín makes visible, the capital's violence is all the more traumatic, in Chile if also worldwide, because of its inherent link to the naturalization and weaponization of male fantasies" (517).

between parties, but that the conditions of its preparation, too, acknowledge and work against the external pressures that attempt to resignify the totality of the object world with violence.

And so, the following section will examine the transitional object of food. Like the above example from *Post mortem*, this does not mean that the object itself will succeed in providing permanent comfort to its recipient. In fact, as is the case for Mario in the film, and Jacobo Timerman in his own encounter with a gift sent to him by his wife, a transitional object can open painful spaces within a person's consciousness that they do not want to access while under extreme duress. This, however, does not undercut the fundamental mechanism that births the transitional object in the first place: the intent to remind the recipient that they are loved and have experienced this love before their present suffering. I will turn first to Alicia Partnoy's *The Little School*. This text provides a competing interpretation to the relationship detainees had to their diet, one that was not necessarily mediated by the violence or pain injected into those objects by guards at the CDCs. Furthermore, as she did with the transitional object of clothing, Partnoy highlights surreptitious exchanges of food among prisoners that subvert the totalizing violence of their environment. From there, I will move to Jacobo Timerman's *Prisoner Without a Name, Cell Without a Number*. True to the stoic masculinity abound in this memoir, he does not react well to a gift of candy provided to him by his wife from outside of the prison. As we will explore in his particular confrontation with the transitional object of food, he acknowledges its ability to signal a deeper connection to comfort that lies beyond his present struggle, but that this particular way of accessing that comfort does not cohere to his specific plan for resisting the dehumanizing conditions of his detention. The example from Timerman offers a contrast to the remedy prescribed by Partnoy in her own interaction with and deployment of the transitional object of food. After all, the idea that the transitional object is a panacea for the ills suffered both

within the walls of clandestine detention centers and beyond is a fallacy. This holds true both for this section and the project as a whole. Even when the transitional object causes a different type of pain to its recipient, this pain does not come entirely from the perpetrators, the guards themselves. Therefore, it still conveys the benefit of momentarily establishing distance between the victims and the world that has been established by their aggressors. This crucial distance allows them to take stock of their position and prioritize survival tactics. And sometimes, as is the case with Timerman, this means recognizing that gifts of food from loved ones are presently unwelcome.

But let us start with the more uplifting example. In Alicia Partnoy's *The Little School*, she confirms what scholars like Pilar Calveiro have described about the role of food in the daily life of detainees at clandestine detention centers. That food, despite the extreme hunger that victims experienced leading up to their release or disappearance, was often viscerally received as a welcomed arrival. For Partnoy, certain sensorial markers of what she was served by the guards functioned as a balm to her bludgeoned soul; it also formed the basis of an additional marker of stability amidst a chaotic new reality. As she 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. We don't know when it is time for screams, time for torture, or time for death, but we do know when it is time for bread. At noon we wait to hear the sound of the bread bag sweeping the floor, that smell purifying everything; we wait to touch that bread: crunch outside, soothingly soft inside. We wait for it so we can either devour it with greed or treasure it with love. One day I was given two extra pieces of bread and an apple. I kept them under my pillow. That day I felt rich, very rich. Every now and then I lifted the edge of the pillow to breathe that vivifying mixture of scents. By the time that happened I'd already been at the Little School some three months. (83-4)

While the above passage might seem like a sad attempt at making the best of a horrible situation, it lays the groundwork for evaluating how, internally, victims were able to rework the oppressive

and violent design of their perpetrators and look to strategies that could help them find comfort and resist the dehumanizing elements of their environment[49]. At the beginning of the passage, Partnoy draws a comparison between the reliability of their resolve to risk their lives to fight against the dictatorship and the daily offerings of bread at the Little School. This type of analogy between the mundane and the idealistic is common in this text from Partnoy. On the one hand, it is birthed from the same sense of humor that blesses having a large nose so that she can peek out from underneath her blindfold in captivity. On the other hand, this is Partnoy at her most potent. The resistance and bread are equally reliable, as she aims to convince the reader latter in the chapter titled "Bread". The mundane, for her, does not have to be ignored when considering options for how to resist being dismantled at the hands of the guards. When many other options, including the function of sight, are stripped away upon capture, she creatively examines the micro moments of agency amidst suffering.

In this sense, Partnoy chips away at the overwhelming sense of hunger deliberately orchestrated by the guards at the Little School. Instead of the theoretical dread that is expected to always accompany the arrival of any food, bread produces an almost ecstatic memory for her. The smell of it purifies the air, which in a sense signals that the mere prelude to its consumption helps her momentarily forget the randomized torture and death that has pervaded her daily life. The latter half of the passage is littered with similar romantic descriptions of bread: it is "vivifying", "rich", "soothingly soft". The erotic undertones in her narration create an uncanny pocket world within the CDC where such sensorial ecstasy could be achieved and banked in

[49] Pilar Calveiro also reflects on this complex relationship to food while being held at the CDC: "Por la escasez de alimento, por la posibilidad de realizar algunos movimientos para comer, por el nexo obvio que existe entre la comida y la vida, el momento de comer es uno de los pocos que se registra como agradable: '…poco a poco commence a esperar la hora de la comida con ansiedad, porque la comida volvía la vida a través del ruido de la ollas, con el ruido de la gente. Parecía que la cuadra donde estábamos los prisioneros despertaba entonces a la existencia." (50). Here, too, we notice the "cleansing" quality of eating, despite the circumstances.

memory. How this could be remembered in such a way, however, is dependent on the absence of the perpetrator almost entirely throughout the scene. The sound of the bread bag sweeping announces its arrival, as if it were spirited to them without the implicit hand that carried it in. Even the memory of how she was given an extra serving makes use of the passive voice to drain as many traces of the perpetrator as possible from the frame. After all, the decision of whether to stow away extra pieces of bread under one's pillow or devour them ravenously is dependent on the individual prisoner. That intimate relationship, between bread and its consumer, is memorialized here as a closed circuit, one that temporarily displaces the presence of the perpetrator within the victim's consciousness. This is the foundation of bread as a transitional object.

The creative manipulation of bread as a tool of resistance continues on in the chapter. In the following example, Partnoy shares another individual interaction between herself and her food. This interaction, however, reimagines the potential conferred benefit of her internal positive associations with bread. She writes:

> In the beginning, when I was a new arrival I almost didn't eat. I passed my portion of bread to other prisoners. I did that until the fellow in the bunk on top of mine told me to stop. He told me to eat so I wouldn't lose strength. But once, when I still wasn't desperately hungry, and lying on that mattress that made me unbearably impatient, I cut twenty-five little pieces of bread and made twenty-five tiny balls out of them. I played with the balls, rolling them around in my palm. Vaca passed by, and noticing such an unusual activity, he asked: "What's that?" "Little bread balls." "What for?" "To play with." He kept silent for two minutes while he meticulously calculated the danger level of that toy. "It's okay," he said solemnly, and left, probably convinced that I was one step closer to madness. You were wrong, Mr. Vaca. (84)

It is worth noting the shift between Partnoy's relationship to bread early on at the Little School compared to the later reaction documented in the previous passage. Here she derives little pleasure from the arrival of bread. She does not suffer from any specific hunger that would

heighten her olfactory senses, which is in part the cause of the overwhelming presence of bread when it makes its arrival to the space of her containment. Instead, she offers her bread to other prisoners, even balking at taking care of herself when a fellow prisoner instructs her that it would be in her best interest to maintain her strength. Even after receiving this advice, food remains a secondary consideration to the restlessness she experiences waiting blindfolded on her bed. And so, rather than immediately eat her portion of bread, she makes them into bread balls to fidget with. When Vaca, one of the guards, observes her with these bread balls in her palm, he evaluates the danger they pose to maintaining control over the prisoners. Weighing the situation, he decides to allow her to continue, with Partnoy noting that he probably assumed that she had begun to lose her sanity. Taking this interpretation into account, Vaca erroneously saw the act as evidence of his conquest as a guard over his prisoner. That he had successfully worn down her psyche to the point that she was childishly playing with her food. This is the interpretation given by the paradigm of the dictatorship.

But, as Partnoy concludes this anecdote, Vaca could not be further off base in his read of the little bread balls. From an audience's perspective, we too might be concerned by this behavior, if only as an echo of her bunkmate in believing that she should worry more about not succumbing to malnutrition than staving off boredom. This conclusion, however, is also insufficient. The power of the bread balls is not limited to fulfilling a need to entertain or simply pass time, though that in and of itself would provide a necessary benefit in protecting the psyche from feelings of insecurity and anxiety produced by a protracted waiting period where the most present unknown is further suffering and death. But the cleverness of the bread balls is how it subverts the dynamic between victim and perpetrator. Vaca assumes that Partnoy has lost her mind, which allows her to continue playing with the bread balls. But underneath this, Partnoy has

successfully been able to identify a present need and creatively figured out a way to meet that need. She finds a way to practice agency in a situation where the guards and her other aggressors scheme to violently remove any possible agency from their victims. Making the bread balls might seem like an unnecessary act in the context of survival, and it also is not universally applicable in a practical sense. But for Partnoy, in her specific experience of being detained and tortured at the Little School, she provides an account of cleverly undermining the structure of the world of pain devised by her captors.

As alluded to in the scene with the bread balls, Partnoy also recounts the exchange of bread among prisoners. She writes in a later part of the chapter:

> Bread is also a means of communicating, a way of telling the person next to me: "I'm here. I care for you. I want to share the only possession I have." Sometimes it is easy to convey the message: When bread distribution is over, we ask, "Sir, is there any more?" When the guard answers that there isn't any, another prisoner will say, "Sir, I have some bread left, can I pass it to her?" If we are lucky enough, a deal can finally be made. Sometimes it is more difficult; but when hunger hits, the brain becomes sharper. The blanket on the top bed is made into a kind of stage curtain that covers the wall, and behind the curtain, pieces of bread go up and down at the will of stomachs and hearts. (84-5)

In the previous section, we looked at how the guards, from their own vantage point redefined the function of food. Food became a source of hunger, an announcement of coming blows, or a celebration of the misery of newly arrived prisoners. The plasticity of this object of memory is exposed when what beyond the walls was innocuous becomes a weapon. In the wake of the weaponization of food, the internal work of the prisoners seeks to move past immediate hunger. In accepting the failure of the food, they are given to satisfy that pressing need, and in peeling back the layers of new definitions of the object's function, prisoners invent new modes of resistance and comfort that can be derived from that same item. Knowing the other side, the weaponized definition of food within the Little School, provides a greater depth of appreciation

for the potency of Partnoy's own definition in the first line of this passage: "Bread is also a means of communicating". This moves the pleasure derived from bread beyond her earlier ecstatic relationship with its sensual qualities. Because in the absence of sustained conversation, or even the potential for exchanged glances being robbed from prisoners because of the blindfolds, bread develops into a vehicle for conveying feelings of affiliation and support.

How this message is transmitted demonstrates the ingenuity of the prisoners. The first way, which involves passing leftover bread through the guards, displays an awareness of the behaviors of the guards. Though not always successful, Partnoy refers to this exchange as a deal. In employing this term, she recovers some agency for the prisoner, since a deal necessitates the negotiation between two parties whose values are articulated and brokered to a given degree of success. Whether the bread can be shared or not is irrelevant. The engagement itself signals strategic thinking on the part of the prisoners in gauging how far they can make space for their own way of being in their new world. And it is this methodical creation of a pocket reality within the larger context of pain and suffering that makes bread an effective means of evaluating the transitional object of food here. The concluding part of the passage solidifies this sentiment. Partnoy explains that hunger fuels their strategic thinking, that they become sharper. With this sharper thinking, they figure out how to circumvent even the denial of publicly sharing bread with their fellow prisoners. Creatively adapting their bedsheets, she describes this setup as a stage, behind which bread is circulated from those who are willing to share and those who could use it. The bread itself is a source of comfort, but the way in which this exchange occurs out of sight and staged behind an improvised curtain coheres to the value of food as a transitional object in momentarily reminding a prisoner that the world of pain they find themselves in is not necessarily permanent. That there are spaces that can be fashioned there, too, that subvert that

weaponization. As Partnoy herself summarizes at the end of her meditation on bread and bread balls: “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).

As reviewed in the previous chapters and earlier in this section, there are limits to the transitional object, both in its duration and its range in bolstering resistance against ambient violence. The safe house can be raided, a borrowed jacket lost. Beyond the ephemeral quality of the transitional object, it is important to understand the complex dynamic that establishes the connective support via the object itself. Sure, on one side of the exchange there are the types like Harry’s parents in *Kamchatka* or Partnoy, who find solace in these commiserative gestures. However, as hinted before, the intended recipient of the transitional object does not always accept or even share in its comfort. One example of this is how multiple children in artistic depictions of safe houses consider and/or attempt to run away. In those cases, the children felt that their personal needs were insufficiently fulfilled by the new environment managed by their parents. Along those lines, the recipient’s perspective is absent from Partnoy’s own memories of sharing bread at the Little School. She accounts for the intention behind this act, but perhaps there was a prisoner, like Jacobo Timerman, whose personal survival strategy does not include building networks of support with fellow victims. This is especially true of disruptive reminders of his past life outside imprisonment. Let us look at the following passage, taken from Timerman’s memoir *Prisoner Without a Name, Cell Without a Number* about a letter and two candies that are dropped into his world of pain one day:

And that is why I am startled now. The sound that just dropped into my cell has destroyed the puzzle and doesn't fit into the despair of the cell, nor into my effort to compensate for that despair by my slow, laborious, ardent reconstruction of the exterior architecture, the blind man's stubborn obsession with his puzzle.

I pick up a letter and two candies. The letter, a few brief lines, is from my wife. Dated May 20. 1977. We've been married today for twenty-seven years. I leave everything on the bed and go back to my task as blind architect: She's undoubtedly contacted one of our army friends, one of those who came to our house so often, or one of the retired officers who came to our house so often, or one of the retired officers who worked on my newspaper, perhaps someone who spent vacations at our beach house…And yet, this doesn't fit into the heightened sensibility of a blind man whose sightless eyes are gazing at an unknown world. No military man nowadays would dare to speak to my wife. More likely one of the policemen, the ward guard, went to visit her and offered, for a sum of money, to bring something to me. At this point the blind architect starts reconstructing the scene. My house, the entrance, the doorbell, my wife's face…But no, the image of my wife's face is unbearable in this place.

How I cursed my wife that day! How many times I told myself I wouldn't read her letter, I wouldn't eat the candies. After so many efforts to forget, to refrain from loving and desiring, to refrain from thinking, the entire painstaking edifice constructed by the blind architect collapses over his head. Already I'd begun to belong to the world around me, the one I actually belonged to, the imprisoned world where my heart and blood were installed: this world I've already accepted and that is real, that corresponds to the inscriptions on the wall, the odor of the latrine matching that emitted by my skin and clothes, and those drab colors, the sounds of metal and violence, the harsh, shrill, hysterical voices. And now this world, so heavily armored, so solid and irreplaceable, without cracks, has been penetrated by a letter and two candies. Risha, why have you done this to me?

She tells me that if she could she'd give me heaven with all its stars and clouds, all the air in the world, all her love, all her tenderness. She says that she'd kiss me a thousand times if she could. But that is what she fails to understand: she cannot. In a rage, I throw the letter into the latrine, and with equal rage stick the two candies into my mouth. But already I'm lost, for the flavor is overpowering, as is my wife's face, her scent almost; and my realization that I've been married today for twenty-seven years and have been sequestered for forty days.

How can a blind architect fit into his unknown edifice—that structure he can neither see nor touch—the face of his wife, the taste of two candies, his wedding anniversary? Anywhere I place them, the structure collapses. Then, once again, I sit down on the stone bed, and when the guard opens the peephole to ask me my name, once again I arouse myself from the submerging debris, grasping for a life jacket to reconstruct my reality. I don't reply, and the guard kicks the steel door with his heavy boots. "Name, son of a whore!"

The blind architect goes to work trying to fit the meaning of this insult into his world. He no longer needs to remember. At this juncture I feel as if I've

> passed the first serious test, worse than torture, and that I'll survive. For it is here that you must survive, not in the outside world. And the chief enemy is not the electric shocks, but penetration from the outside world, with all its memories. (84-5)

Timerman's own rejection of gestures meant to comfort him or memorialize support among people suffering common circumstances is readily present, both in this passage and elsewhere in his memoir[50]. He generally views these as acts of pity, though he does not necessarily exclude himself from the ranks of the pitiful. Rather, as the beginning of this scene indicates, he holds a complex relationship with both the person he has become while in captivity, and how that duality relates to warmer considerations of the past or anything beyond his present suffering. It is for this that he finds himself so jarringly interrupted by his wife's letter and the two candies that she includes to commemorate their twenty-seventh anniversary. With the introduction of these foreign objects into the parallel world he coins "his puzzle", Timerman is shaken awake to reckon with a failed compartmentalization of his more tender self apart from this survivalist shell. The entire scene involves his attempts to reconsolidate the random intrusion of the outside world into his cell, and steel himself once more against the regular violence he faces.

Timerman refers to the world at the CDC as a puzzle because he was robbed of his sight by the guards. From under his blindfold, he compiles various stimuli and patterns of behavior, just as many blindfolded prisoners do, to find surer grounding amidst the orchestrated disorientation they suffer at the hands of their perpetrators. By this stage, he exhibits relative confidence in his imaginary reconstruction of the CDC. And yet, the letter and two candies do

[50] "When two prisoners shake hands it's an act of pity, as is the apple once given me and which I subsequently threw, while walking in the corridor during recreation break, into someone's isolation cell whose peephole was open. A cake of borrowed soap, a gift of underpants—that is pity. Listening for hours to the babble of someone who has been tortured to force him to reveal the hiding place of his son, who he later discovers has "disappeared"—that is pity. To show interest in the plans of an architect who may soon be released and who still retains intact his ideals on urbanization, housing developments, creativity in support of neighborhood groups—that is pity." (Timerman 87-8)

something to shake that schema to its core. This is subtly signaled by the end of the first part of the scene when he describes his reconstruction as a "stubborn obsession." It is not as though he champions his own rejection of camaraderie or acts of charity within the CDC. Rather, he is acutely aware of their effect on him. That allowing himself to consider his own need for love and kindness would leave him open to a much deeper wound from the ever-present threats of the guards. Despite this perspective, I would like to use the following to examine the penetrative mechanism of the transitional object, showing that even though the letter and two candies cause Timerman to work through a painful realization about the frailty of his own defenses, this wisdom might not have been earned otherwise. It took his wife's loving words and kindness to disrupt his monotonous, if regular, pattern of suffering and bring him to a place of reinvigorated resistance.

His rejection of the letter and two candies is first shaped by his suspicion about the conditions of their arrival. He understands that his wife wanted to commemorate their anniversary, though he himself cannot reasonably keep track of time in the CDC to have realized this independent of her letter. But he starts to envision how she managed to send him a letter from the outside. His initial assumption is that she called on their connections to military officials, since Timerman elsewhere in the memoir recounts how they socialized with various powerful figures in Argentina. However, as he acknowledges, this theory of a benign exchange no longer coheres the new paradigm of the "blind man." That persona, created under the conditions of duress outlined in the previous section, understands the world in terms of constantly evolving strategies for inflicting pain. Therefore, he concludes that his wife was most likely fleeced for money by a guard from his CDC; that she was told she could communicate with him by letter if she paid the guard in some way. This is not an inaccurate or paranoid

fantasy. From previous recreations in *Garage Olimpo* and testimonies remembered in documentaries and truth commission reports, guards at CDCs did seek to capitalize on the networks of their prisoners in novel ways. This could be to reward compliant prisoners who provided information that led to the capture of more so-called subversives; or, it could be to emotionally manipulate them into softening their defenses. Nonetheless, Timerman's attempt at imagining the scene of his wife on the outside world interacting with a guard from his parallel world is enough to make him break. Like Partnoy with the image of her daughter, this is the limit to which he wishes to blend the external world and the world of the CDC within his consciousness.

The third paragraph of the scene shows a weakening of his defenses in the wake of receiving the letter and two candies from his wife. His narration grows more desperate, and repetition abounds. He cannot come to terms with how her gift has fundamentally disturbed the consistency of this new reality he has accepted. The uniformity of this new reality is on full display. Beyond referring to it as something that he assumed to be "so solid and irreplaceable", his descriptions of it reflect an acceptance of being fully integrated into the material configuration of its world. The sounds resonate with the pain he feels, the odors of his body match the odor of the latrine; even the colors correspond to the drab and brutal rhythms of his daily life. As Timerman notes towards the beginning of this passage, this coherence is predicated on not simply an experience that was designed by his aggressors, but by his own deliberate acceptance of it as a means of survival. The "so many" efforts he takes to deny his memory of a time beyond the CDC, of feelings beyond pain, describe to the reader a ritualized indoctrination. He has convinced himself of his place and the rules that govern this new reality to the point that former rules no longer apply. And by all accounts he remembers this approach being tantamount

to his survival. Which is partly why he struggles to reconcile how his wife's brief letter and candies could undermine this effort so swiftly.

The issue here is the potency of the transitional object itself. Like the object of pain, the transitional object relies on an appeal to episodic memory, which is triggered by a material interaction with an artifact from the object world that pulls the subject inadvertently towards a deeper engagement with their own memory. As Timerman himself admits, the letter and two candies are a *punctum* to his own seemingly congealed acceptance of the world of pain. In its disturbance of the frame, images and sensations invade his imagination despite his desperate attempts to stave off their invasion. He tries to reject them with proportional violence, intellectualizing the futility of his wife's words, throwing the letter in the latrine. But the taste of the candies once more leaves him vulnerable. Their sweetness blends with the loving words and the event of his anniversary to overwhelming effect, enough to make him collapse two significant milestones of his own biography: the number of years he has been with his wife and the number of days he has been imprisoned. In his obsession to reconstruct the world of pain that he cannot fully observe, he is unable to incorporate this intrusion. It is only when he is met with the presence of his aggressor that he snaps back to the prior survival mindset. This present threat displaces the disturbing effect of the failed transitional object and leads him to the conclusion that the most fatal threat that he can imagine is memories of the outside world.

Despite his critique of this particular transitional object, that in fact his wife's motives worked against his own ability to optimally endure the pressures he is subjected to while detained, I contend that the original benefit of the transitional object is preserved here. This is not a situation that replicates the conditions witnessed in *Post mortem*, where Mario's own emotional state shifts in relation to Nancy, charging the fried egg at one juncture with unspoken comradery

and care, while at another reflecting his murderous intent. Risha, Timerman's wife, could not have intended to send her husband a letter and a small gift on their twenty-seventh anniversary to weaken him against his captors. And Timerman himself does not deny the heart behind the gesture. What undoes his defenses is his inability to reconcile the warmth transmitted by the gesture with the overarching logic he has constructed about the unknown world around him. And while his conclusion of the scene is that outside memories are more dangerous while under threat of disappearance than any action taken by his perpetrators, this too demonstrates a successful deployment of a transitional object, if only in a different way than previously examined in this project. Rather than provide needed comfort, the transitional object of the letter and two candies shocks Timerman out of the totalizing fatalism that has characterized his approach to survival. The flavor of the candies, an overwhelming detail that amplifies the sweetness of his wife's generous act, pushes him to reengage with the fact that despite his best efforts the Timerman that existed prior to capture still occupies a timeline to the hollowed-out shield that exists in the present.

Furthermore, he learns of his deepest vulnerabilities. Early in the scene, his disgust with himself for being so disoriented by the letter and two candies is evident in the narrative repetition. His thoughts spiral because he had in bad faith believed that his defenses were airtight, that he among all the others had figured out how to best survive this impossibly difficult situation. On some level, his strategy involved a literal self-effacement in front of his aggressors, fully accepting their terms without question and without scruples. While this is a valid defense mechanism, it still privileges the perpetrators perspective over his own, ceding agency readily in the name of self-preservation. By the end of the scene, however, he regains some of that agency, negating the soothing words of his wife and figuring out that there is something out there that

threatens his core being more so than the guards that call him names and beat him. Though this is not a rosier outcome in the vein of what Partnoy recounts about sharing bread, this conclusion allows him to step outside of his world of pain long enough to gain valuable perspective. By knowing that the guards cannot wound him in quite the same way his wife can, his defenses become more adept and precise in protecting what matters most to him.

Whether it is a fried egg, a pair of candies, or various iterative shapes and circulations of bread, food offers a complex glimpse into the supportive potential of this transitional object. One element that each of the above examples shares is the intention behind the creation of the transitional object. Like any of the memory objects, the production of the transitional object of food cuts through any superficial assumptions related to the object itself, revealing a more intimate connection to how memories and emotions are communicated through the world of objects. And the intention to either harm or comfort is articulated through the object, creating a more coherent image of a world of pain or love. The takeaway is that highlighting such seminal objects in these artistic works reveals more of the unarticulated, invisible intentions that circulated during the dictatorial period. Going back to the original thesis of the section, the problem presented with food is that save recipes for its specific preparation or still life images or a really good pickling, a dish itself will be broken down and disappear into a form unrecognizable to its intended presentation. This impermanence makes food one of the more vulnerable items of this memory object set. It is susceptible to the kind of disinformation campaigns legalized in the early democratic transitions in Argentina and Chile. Former detainees claim to have been starved? Perhaps several years following their release they bear no traces of their former emaciation; or, the general public could easily air on the path of least resistance and claim genetics or some other ahistorical variable. The role of this body of literature, thus, is to

document the impact of food as it pertains to the legacy of the dictatorial period. How it was weaponized as much as how it was wielded to resist[51].

I end this section with a nod to the intention behind food, because this will be one of the chief determining factors in evaluating food as a testimonial object. With intention comes deliberate preparation: bread fashioned into bread balls to stave off crippling boredom; a pair of candies as a sweet avatar for a couple on their anniversary; cheese and jam to mark new bodies for disappearance. Each of the preceding texts have maintained the connection between directing subject and the food that becomes an extension of their will. The originator of this intent is sometimes an unknown quantity, as was the case with Jacobo Timerman and the disorientation he experienced when his defenses were compromised by two candies and a letter from his wife. Continuing along these lines, food becomes a point of entry for various individuals to begin to excavate suppressed and invisible memories that resonate with certain food-related interactions. In a set that spans from making a pizza, to eating at a familiar restaurant, the testimonial object of food is one that works to reestablish a line of communication between the past and its persistent, unresolved echoes in the present.

chapter 3.3: SHUT UP AND EAT…PIZZA
food as a testimonial object

[51] And not to further complicate the discussion, but rather offer a couple passages that ratify the type of complex survival tactics on display in these two texts. In short, to justify what seems like a cold move by Timerman to reject his wife's gifts. In *Poder y Desaparición*, Pilar Calveiro presents these difference sides, first writing on solidarity: "La solidaridad es un valor que aparece en la experiencia concentracionaria, como clave para la subsistencia. Compartir la comida, cigarillos, un dulce en condiciones de auténtica desnutrición, regalar objectos útiles y siempre preciadísimos por la carencia total de los mismos, como un lápiz, consolar o tranquilizar a otro preso para que no se descontrole y evitarle así un castigo, informar o prevenir a alguien sobre posibles peligros, coordinar acciones para distraer a los guardias y permitir cierto contacto entre prisioneros, son algunos de los muchos gestos solidarios que se encuentran en los testimonios" (112). And on ruthless acts in the name of survival: "En los campos el hombre se convierte en ese animal capaz de robar el pan de un camarada, de empujarlo hacia la muerte. Pero en los campos el hombre se hace también ese ser invencible capaz de compartir hasta su última colilla, hasta su ultimo pedazo de pan, hasta su ultimo aliento, para sostener a los camaradas." (113). As we have seen in Partnoy and Timerman, the transitional object is not a panacea, and does not protect victims from succumbing to the dehumanizing effects of their aggressors' machinations. This does not, however, negate their attempts at maintaining solidarity.

Testimonial objects tend to intervene in scenarios where significant and oftentimes traumatic memories go unrecognized by a subject for a variety of reasons. It could be that these memories have not been fully processed, and so are triggered instead by certain interactions with the object world. Or as is the case following the democratic transitions in Argentina and Chile, painful or difficult memories are buried underneath a larger public rejection of their validity. Faced with an awareness that perpetrators of criminal acts during the dictatorial periods walked free because of amnesty laws and other legal buffers, and the broader messaging of the transition that supported a clean break with the past rather than active acknowledgment of the ills that persisted, many who continued to suffer despite the return to democracy felt compelled to disbelieve or minimize their suffering publicly. In the following, I look to examples of how food facilitates different individuals to engage with the past, whether it be through mindful observation while sitting down to an unappetizing meal, inadvertent repetitions of convivial behaviors prior to the moment of traumatization, or a full-throated and generationally informed defense of channeling warm memories into pizza. Each of these encounters with the testimonial object of food both aid in processing stickier, painful memories and provide further evidence to the counter-history that grows in the years following the democratic transition.

To begin to flesh out the origins of this dynamic of going along with the dominant approach to forgetting the past, I would like to turn again to Alejandro Zambra's novel *Ways of Going Home*. Here, a lack of appetite and the failed preparation of a dish provide an entry point for discussing a nagging memory. Zambra writes:

> Afterward, we make noodles and put together a sauce with a little cream and some scallions. The sauce turns out a bit dry and the truth is neither one of us is hungry. "Sometimes, when I look at the food on my plate," says Claudia, "I remember that expression, the answer my mother and grandmother would always give me: Shut up and eat." They'd made something new, something unfamiliar

> stew that didn't look good, and Claudia wanted to know what it was. Her mother and grandmother would answer in unison: Shut up and eat. It was a joke, of course, a wise one, even. But that's how Claudia felt as a child: that strange things were happening and they were living with the pain, they struggled with a long and imprecise sadness, and nonetheless it was better not to ask questions. To ask was risking that they would answer the same way: Shut up and eat. Later the time for questions came. The decade of the nineties was the time of questions, in her opinion, and right away she says, "I'm sorry, I don't want to sound like those quack sociologists you see on TV, but that's how those years were: I sat down and talked to my parents for hours, asked them for details, I made them remember, and I repeated those memories as if they were my own." In some terrible, secret way she was seeking her place in their story. "We didn't ask in order to know," Claudia says to me as we collect the plates and clear the table: "We asked in order to fill an emptiness." (93-4)

One primary element of the transitional object, as outlined by Marianne Hirsch, is that its efficacy depends on the critical labor that pieces together a broader context that resonates clearly with the detail of the object and establishes a resonant connection between the past and the present. As mentioned before, the testimonial object is not viewed as a magical item; nor do encounters with the testimonial object require supernatural abilities to literally embody the past through a sort of touchstone or psychometry. Rather, the detail of the testimonial object disturbs the static expectations about the object world enough for the subject to begin to critically reflect on the possible source of that disturbance. Take the above passage. The studium, or frame of normal expectations that govern a given interpretation of a context, is that the narrator and Claudia prepare a meal that ends up unappetizing; the pair also arrive to the meal without much of an appetite. In the countless times we as readers, and they have fictionalized individuals, have encountered a similar scene, the expectation would be a comment about the quality of the dish, perhaps a joke, or even a dramatic fight revealing deeper interpersonal issues that ran beneath and caused the dish to fail. But for Claudia, whose life was indelibly marked by coming of age during the Pinochet dictatorship, her own lack of appetite and the sight of unappetizing food drives the conversation in an unexpected direction towards a painful memory. This is the

underlying mechanism of how the testimonial object comes to be discovered. The role of literature, effectively demonstrated in the above passage, is to set the expectation of mundane normalcy and reveal how within even this context reminders of the dictatorial past persist and color the perception of memory objects like food.

The other piece of the critical labor called for by the transitional object involves situating the detail that disturbs a previously stable context within a larger framework or narrative. In the case of this failed meal, and in the case of many testimonial objects in this project, this means articulating the invisible lingering impact of the dictatorship. Since the object itself does not magically reveal this significance, the kind of anecdote that Claudia shares in relation to the dinner initiates a synthesis of a diverse set of sources that are to be read against a personal relationship to the emotions stirred up in her by the object. These sources will come from various historical periods, cultural spheres, and alternate between the deeply intimate and the politically abstract. With that being said, I will use the following to tease out these different considerations within the passage and examine how a simple meal precipitates a meditation on the relationship between parent-child dynamics during a dictatorship and an overarching political amnesia.

Speaking to the historical chronology covered in this short scene, the immediate point of origin is the present. Claudia and the narrator cook dinner and dine together in the narrative present, which takes place in the first decade of the twentieth century. This means that there is a significant distance between both when Claudia was a child growing up under the Pinochet regime, and when she was a young adult following the democratic transition. When the dinner scene triggers a recollection, the narration jumps to the distant past, her childhood, and the common refrain she heard from her mother and grandmother when they perceived her to be unnecessarily picky at mealtime. This is then extrapolated to the recent past, following the

democratic transition. As she notes, this was when her questions about the dictatorship were, in fact, answered to some extent. The end of the passage moves the narrative chronology back to the present, with Claudia reflecting on the motivation behind interrogating her parents when she had the opportunity. Not only does this bring the chronology into a full circle moment, but the fact that she characterized that search for meaning as one "to fill an emptiness" implies its persistence in the present. Which is not to say that she has not already reflected on and learned from these more difficult memories. Simply that by way of the testimonial object, she can establish a biographical timeline that connects the initial "shut up and eat" with the present scene of an unappetizing meal. That in itself creates a foundation for observing and better understanding the lasting impact of that time in her life.

In addition to how the passage jumps around in time, it also engages with different modes of cultural communication. One mode of cultural communication is the joke, and how the text plays upon the notion of the joke to examine deeper interpersonal dynamics. "Shut up and eat", said by a mother or grandmother to a young child could very well be accompanied by a laugh track in a network sitcom; it is the type of refrain common to comedic tropes involving families, and the narrator does acknowledge this in the passage. However, the anecdote Claudia shares provides her own experience of the joke, one that indicates that the joke itself is but a manifestation of a deeper dynamic that limited her ability to understand what was occurring in the world during the dictatorship. For Claudia, specifically, the threat of violence from the Pinochet regime had forced her father to assume the identity of her uncle so that he could at least live in the same neighborhood as his family while evading the authorities. It is no surprise that a seemingly limited remark like "shut up and eat" would bleed into other aspects of her behavior, and therefore form an enduring memory beyond a light joke.

Another mode of communicating the mark left on food by what occurred during the dictatorship resides in Claudia's awareness of clichés that have developed since the democratic transition. When explaining to the narrator how the nineties were a time when she began to finally ask her parents the questions that she felt she was not entitled to ask them as a child, she immediately makes a joking reference to "quack sociologists". On the one hand, she does this to acknowledge that the sentiment that the nineties were a time of questioning had since become trite. Because despite the authenticity of her experience, it is one that she shares with many in the nation following Pinochet's ouster. On the other hand, she jokes about the media personalities who dominated the airwaves during the nineties as a way of both undercutting the severity of her anecdote (after all, she is having a conversation over dinner with her intermittent boyfriend) and distancing her own history from the disingenuousness that is implied by touching on a topic that has already been overtrodden. In the impetus of the testimonial object, Claudia is extrapolating on that initial feeling of being locked out of some greater truth by her gatekeeper parents. This, in turn, produces a deeper sensitivity to other similar forces that have molded the vocabulary she uses to describe her memories. Though seemingly unrelated to her desire to find her own place in the history of the nation, a desire many in the 1.5 generation share, this trope of the questioning nineties is one that she rebuffs for fear that it would prevent her from recounting the past in her own voice. Her characterization of the sociologist on TV as a "quack" speaks to her rejection of another voice of her elders that is instructing the public how to interpret the raw data of her experiences.

The trope of labelling the nineties as a time of questions reveals but one of the dominant pressures that circulate in this passage. Once Claudia begins the work of pulling at the string illuminated by the ill-prepared meal and her lack of appetite, she further moves between the

intimate memories of the past decades and their broader resonances with the national discourse. "Shut up and eat" initially seemed like a strategy employed by her parents out of annoyance. That they did not want to indulge their daughter in explaining every little detail of their complicated and precarious life because they already were dealing with so much as it is. But once the democratic transition occurred, Claudia was able to successfully glean information about that period from her parents. This signifies that her parents' primary motivation for denying her that information was protecting her, which was understandably borne out of fear of violence from the Pinochet regime. So "shut up and eat" becomes an echo of the paternalism wielded by Pinochet to control not only the behaviors of the public, but the shape of its discourse. Shut off from that information, Claudia makes another connection between herself and her generation in describing the ravenous search for information in the nineties. Once the veil had been lifted, and children like Claudia could begin to inquire about the gaps in knowledge from their childhoods, these searches revealed just how deep that hole in their histories had stuck in them. Her move to the we in this concession shows that she identifies with a broader community beyond her limited biography. And that they, collectively, seek stories of the past not just out of a hunger for knowledge in and of itself, but also because they feel stunted in the incompleteness of their own childhood histories. That all this, the time skips, the diverse references, the shifting perspectives, was precipitated by a badly cooked meal points to how strong these unresolved memories run underneath the daily life of those who suffered during the dictatorship. The testimonial object of food, like the other testimonial objects, show the invisible trigger for these types of recollections by way of a poignant interaction with the object world. In revealing this interaction in its totality, the text exemplifies the counter-history that denies the dominant narrative that the nation has fully moved beyond its dictatorial past.

But food does not always have to trigger accidental recollections in the present. We examined in the past sections how food memorializes a relationship or a specific interpersonal dynamic. With transitional objects, this involved the memorialization of a still open channel of support. The object of pain memorialized a desire to destroy that channel, in addition to any such connection to human dignity. And the broader staging of the ultimate act of consummating that memorialization, literally enacted by the consumption of food, provides a wider interpretative frame for how testimonial acts become punctuated by food. In Carlos Cerda's novel *An Empty House*, the testimonial object of food comes into focus by way of a failed attempt to recreate the past to the letter, to somehow make up for lost time by retracing one's steps. Or, in this case, retracing one's dinner plans. This flawed approach comes in the reunion between Andrés and Sonia. As previously mentioned, Andrés returns to Chile following twelve years living in exile in East Berlin. On the night of September 10, 1973, he and Sonia met up at the university where Andrés worked and Sonia attended, discovered their mutual attraction, and went on dinner date at a nearby Chinese restaurant. Unfortunately, the next day was the coup, and shortly after Andrés had to flee the Pinochet regime for Berlin. The two did not stay in touch and were left to wonder about the unrealized potential of their feelings for each other. Prior to the events that transpired at Cecilia and Manuel's house later in the novel, Sonia and Andrés coincidentally come upon each other at a market. The pair catch up, and the following exchange occurs the day after their reunion at Sonia's, setting the stakes for the how they intend to pick up where they had left off:

> "Let me look at you." "…" "You haven't changed." "I've got some gray hair now." "And a few little wrinkles, which are what I like best. And your eyes are filled with everything you've seen. I could stay here talking to you for days and days." "We'll have to do that, Sonia. We'll figure out a way." "There's not that much figuring to do. I'll take care of it." "What are you doing tomorrow?" "I've got classes till one thirty." "And then?" "Then? I was hoping you'd take me out to

> lunch." "Where would you like to go?" "Where would you?" "To one of our little dives from before." "Ching Peng. Do you remember?" "Are you serious?" "…" "Are you serious, Sonia?" "Yes, completely serious. I thought I was the one who kept everything locked up here inside. Why didn't you ever call me? Why didn't you ever let me know where you were?" "…" (62-3)

The two feel each other out. Andrés shows some hesitation against Sonia's gaze as she studies him. This is evident in his offering that his hair has grayed considerably in the twelve years since she last saw him; as if he is giving her a chance to close off the possibility of renewing their interrupted courtship. But to her, the years that show on his face and in his features only deepen her interest. As the exchange goes on, it becomes apparent that Sonia has thought a lot about Andrés and how she might reconfigure her daily responsibilities to incorporate him at a moment's notice. Once Andrés mentions Ching Peng, the Chinese restaurant they dined at before the coup, we learn that he too carried on a precious memory of what could have been with Sonia had Pinochet not attacked the Moneda the day after their first date.

What is interesting about the latter part of their interaction is the way in which the two confirm that they are on similar wavelengths when it comes to the memory they have of how deep their previous connection really was. Prior to the mention of the restaurant, both played a typical game of feeling the other out when planning the details of their date, providing cagey responses that barely expressed a hidden eagerness to reconnect. It is not until Sonia suggests Ching Peng that the floodgates of these compartmentalized emotions open, and both lay bare the anguish they have suffered because of their truncated affair. The wash of memories causes Sonia to be momentarily rendered speechless, signaled by the ellipsis between when Andrés pleads to confirm whether she is being serious with him or not in suggesting dining at the same place they did that fateful night. This exchange starts the work of unlocking why this restaurant fits with the focus of this chapter, and why it means so much to these two characters. In part because it

confirms to them that they have locked themselves, and a part of their hearts, inside a memory that primarily takes place in that restaurant. The clues to what could have been, the then apex of their intimacy, all reside in that specific location. It is striking to Sonia that Andrés too, despite living in exile on another continent and not reaching out to her for twelve years, maintained that memory and revisited it frequently enough to remember the significance of Ching Peng. And upon quickly adjusting to the new connection established between a disrupted past and a potential-laden present with Andrés standing in front of her, Sonia's first questions pick up a dialogue that assumes deeper intimacy than two lovers who have not spoken in twelve years.

What is confirmed to Sonia by Andrés remembering Ching Peng is that he too carried a fully realized and grounded memory of their last encounter for all these years. I say grounded memory because there is a difference between the remains of a memory, with its abstract insinuations, and this type of memory that is remembered with enough regularity to maintain an intact location for the acts and dynamics remembered. The problem with this, however, is that memory does fade over time, and incremental revisions of fantasy take the place of slackened or forgotten details of the original event. Both Andrés and Sonia might wish nothing more than to reembody the night of their last date, down to the restaurant they ate at, but this does not mean that they will be able to surmount more than a decade of time that has passed.

But they try despite these risks, going to Ching Peng two days after initially reconnecting at the market. They are met with a swift realization that stepping back into the past is not quite as straightforward as returning to the original site of a memory:

> The place was the same, but logically it wasn't, couldn't be, the same. They were the only customers at an hour when, years before, it would have been filled with patrons having lunch. It wasn't just the neglected condition of the place that disturbed them, but also the barrenness and deterioration, which added to that sensation of solitude and emptiness. Something smelled stale, like unventilated space, like lingering poverty. The tablecloth revealed a few dark stains that had

> survived countless washings. The flower that languished in a small vase—a green glass vase—was yesterday's. (65-6)

The novel depicts the lives of individuals who were young adults, university students and young professionals, prior to the time of the coup. For them, their adult lives were fundamentally upended by this event. Nonetheless, given their age, they can distinguish and experience the difference between the Chile they lived in prior to Pinochet, and what is left of it in 1985. In the previous discussion of *An Empty House*, we covered how Andrés serves as a disruptive presence in the lives of the characters who remained in Chile for the duration of the dictatorship. Here he inspires both himself and Sonia to confront the reality of what they had assumed would remain a stagnant fantasy.

What makes this scene one where the testimonial object of food emerges is in the production of reflection on the deterioration of memory. Or, the emotional toll of holding onto a sweet memory for a painful amount of time. For Andrés and Sonia, their last date at Ching Peng had been a moment that they had carried in their hearts unscathed for twelve years. Surely, in the rosier intentions of keeping that memory safe and comforting, their imaginations boosted the details so that they would cohere to these intentions. This is the expectation that leads to the type of disappointing reality that meets them in 1985 when they return to Ching Peng in the text. In the ensuing reflection, details are weighted more in the comparison between what they remembered the place being and its current state. The lack of patrons, the aging of the interior, a stale smell. The restaurant becomes a projection of the time that aged Andrés and Sonia. Though they were able to brush aside their own physical aging, this place provides yet another reminder of how long it has been since they last met and spoke. It begins to take the shape of a projection of the difficult process of mourning the unrealized potential that they both felt in their pairing. Moving in towards even smaller details, the table settings also cohere to this mood. The flower is

yesterday's offerings and languishes alone in a small vase. The tablecloth is stained. The stains on the tablecloth particularly jump out because of the description that they have survived countless washings. When we think about the ritual behind a tablecloth, it mimics our daily embodiment in the world. Sleep washes away certain memories of the day, and we inscribe ourselves once more into the world upon waking. Over the years, despite our best efforts, there are memories like stains that persist on the shroud we don to face the day. For this pair, the stains on the tablecloth include the memory of their last date at Ching Peng in 1973; it has endured the many launderings of their consciousness since. But it is also, all the same, faded through the many revisions necessary to maintain their memory of each other.

And yet, in viewing the tablecloth with its stains, the pair is reminded of the worn quality of their memory. The stains were made by a former meal. It is the trace of that meal, just as their memory of Ching Peng is the trace of their potential love affair that was disrupted by the Pinochet regime. This is both the difficulty and the potency of food as a testimonial object. It disappears shortly after it has made its mark on memory. To seek it out as a source of memory requires an acknowledgement of the fragility of memory against time. Sure, there are stains left or menus that can approximate fully embodying an act from the past. But the fact that those dishes from twelve years ago cannot be equally rendered now, for a variety of reasons, underscores the degradation of even the strongest memories when they are maintained for so long. Once they settle into the same table they had dined at twelve years prior, the pair reflect:

> "If we're going to be so meticulous in the art of remembering, I hope we'll recap everything that happened that night." "That's what we're doing, isn't it?" "But not just verbally,"…"Not just verbally, of course. We're in the same place as that night. I suppose we'll eat the same things. If you really think about it, we're even talking about the same thing"…Looking at the flower, she added, with a sad smile: "It even seems like that flower was left over from that last night. And I can accept the fact that we're here ourselves, just like that flower. We've been stuck in a thick, green glass vase since the night of September 10." (68-9)

It is curious that Andrés characterizes their performative re-embodiment of the past as a meticulous art of remembering. Obviously, this character in particular is an approximate avatar for the author himself; both were exiled for some time as a result of the Pinochet dictatorship, only to return in the mid-80s. Furthermore, adding to Andrés background the title of philosopher allows Cerda to engage in this kind of theoretical discourse by way of him (and most of the other characters, too, who met while getting philosophy degrees). This initial statement from Andrés, thus, captures the meta debate about the process of remembering, already in process as the violence of the early years of the Pinochet dictatorship wane and the purported *dictablanda* gives space to the public's move towards the fated *plebiscite*. However, the question remains: what is the art of remembering? It would seem from the outset that they acknowledge the passage of time that registers on their physical form, but that they hope to engage fully with the past once more, returning to the site of their last and most potent memory. Andrés here offers the qualifier "meticulous", meaning that he shifts the focus towards finer details in their practice of the art of remembering. This entails, on his end, recapping the events on the night of September 10, 1973. And when Sonia questions whether they were not already doing that, Andrés adds that a recap entails more than a verbal articulation of the past. Knowing what eventually comes to pass, that Andrés and Sonia sleep together after their dinner, it would seem that Andrés was insinuating a more physical and sexual element to the art of remembering.

But Sonia's misreading of Andrés flirtatious suggestion opens a deeper vein in the experience of stepping back into the past. She takes his comment as an excuse to continue pulling at the string set forth by their encounter with this site of numerous testimonial objects; really, the entire restaurant is a parallel world of testimonial objects. She expects that they will talk about the same things as that previous night and eat the same things, too. This is because

they have decided to slip back into the memory, to give into its rules and see where it takes them. It is a different practice of memory, one that although we have not seen it in this chapter has been examined in others. It is similar to how Lola Arias dressed actors in their parents' clothing (or clothing that mirrored what their parents wore in the seventies) in *Mi vida después*. And like what Arias concluded in the prologue to that text, the act of re-embodying the past reveals more about the person in the present than it does confer wisdom about the past. For Sonia, the sad smile that appears on her face before making the comment about the old flower in the vase reflects how she has realized the impossibility of fully recovering the relationship that she lost when Andrés had to flee the Pinochet regime. And that sad smile on her face knowingly accepts Andrés' inevitable flight to Berlin by the end of the novel, the ultimate closure to a twelve-year question of what could have been between them.

Which begs the question: what does this scene have to do with the transitional object of food? The answer to this emerges in Sonia's comment about the other ways they will practice the art of remembering. She mentions that they will likely eat the same food as their last night together at Ching Peng, in addition to going there again in the first place. Returning to the initial argument about the testimonial object of food, this statement supports the idea that amidst an intention to remember, food completes the function of memorializing that act. If, as Andrés asserts, they are doing their best to be meticulous in how they practice the art of remembering, then making sure to eat the same food and drink the same drink becomes a part of this practice. Like any of the previous testimonial objects, food aspires to not only open a connection to the past where it might otherwise not be possible, but it also allows the individual remembering to reflect comparatively on the conditions that have brought them to remember in the present. For Sonia, stepping into Ching Peng again with Andrés forces her to confront the difficulty of the

long delay between their meetings, and all that has changed in her life since the first night they spent together. Her revelations spill out into the object world, grafting the sense of having aged onto the interior spaces of the restaurant, perhaps even where there would not be any noticeable change in appearance otherwise. The art of remembering, it would seem, depends on the failure of the material present to conjure the past. It is this failure that underscores the trauma suffered as a result of the dictatorship, the original break in the pair's timeline that cannot be remedied by a recreation of material circumstances. That recreation, however, does at least provide them with a path towards closure at what was once a locked away and static aspect of their emotional core. And for that wisdom, the encounter proves beneficial to both Andrés and Sonia.

To review this section on the testimonial object of food, we started with how a poorly cooked meal triggered a recollection of how a child's relationship to food during the dictatorship mirrored her relationship to the historical truths that swirled for years just beyond her reach. Then, how an attempt to recreate a dinner date at the same restaurant as one a night before the fated 1973 coup helped former lovers reopen a locked memory and revise it to reflect the unfortunate passage of time. To further break down the framework of these two examples, the first proposes the testimonial object of food as a reflection of a dynamic, while the second a crucial detail in staging the art of remembering. The third example, taken from Pablo Melicchio's 2013 novel *Las voces de abajo*[52], highlights another function of the testimonial object of food: its ability to aid in the intergenerational transmission of personal memory. How might the transmission of memory between generations factor into the production of counter-history in the postdictatorial period? For one, social movements related to memory have arisen

[52] At the time of writing this project, there is no available scholarship on this text. Like *Kamchatka* before, I include this text in this study to begin to amass a variety of approaches to the practice of evaluating literature involving the testimonial object of food.

from a disparity between the dominant account of and attitudes towards the dictatorial period, and the lived experiences of individuals. Thus, the coordination of private, personal memory becomes the foundation for larger movements of counter-history. Additionally, intergenerational transmission of memory reflects how younger generations, including the 1.5 generation who grew up during the dictatorship, might find personal resonance and opportunity for reflection when they encounter a testimonial object. In short, the *punctum* that presents itself to them might be so because of an inherited orientation.

This is where pizza enters the scene[53]. The plot of the novel centers on Chiche, a man who lives in an assisted living facility. Chiche has an unknown intellectual disability, exacerbated by witnessing at a young age the murder of his mother at the hands of his father. Since that event he has been in the care of the state-run facility, and has remained there until the present day, around the time of publication. One of Chiche's main daily responsibilities involves caring for the chicken coop. While sweeping the floor of the coop, he begins to hear voices underfoot and discovers that he possesses an ability to speak to these disembodied voices below. From their conversations, both with Chiche and with each other, we glean that the voices belong to the disappeared, buried there beneath the chicken coup during the dictatorship in Argentina. This detail alone provides fertile metaphorical ground for exploring the transmission of memory between disappeared subjects and those available to witness their stories. But the voices of the disappeared encourage Chiche to seek outside council in hopes that he could help them in their quest to discover more about the world above and reconnect with their families. In the following conversation Chiche has with his cooking instructor, who is identified as *el maestro/Maestro*

[53] I have to say, being from New Jersey, I miss my home pizza frequently. Writing this now (which is to say now was April 2020), when I have no idea the next time I'll be able to safely travel back to visit family and eat pizza, is painful.

throughout the text, they talk about what makes a good pizza maker. This is the basis for why Chiche intuits the *Maestro* as being an appropriate ally for the voices below:

> —Maestro, ¿Chiche es un buen pizzero? –Sí, querido Chiche, y por eso te voy a contar un secreto—dice el maestro y se acerca hasta al oído de Chiche--. Para que la pizza salga bien rica, el ingrediente más importante está en tus manos y en tus pensamientos, no lo olvides. –Maestro, perdone, pero en las manos de Chiche solo hay masa pegada—dice y exhibe sus manos enharinadas. –Querido Chiche, hay que amasar con mucha energía y con buenos pensamientos, porque la masa se carga con lo que pensás. Mientras vas amasando, con todas tus fuerzas, tenés que conectarte con un recuerdo lindo y vas a lograr la pizza más rica del mundo, ¿me entendés? –Ahora, Chiche entiende mejor, maestro, fuerza y pensamiento bueno, fuerza y pensamiento bueno…Entonces Chiche piensa en su mamá cuando le hacía la torta de chocolate y dulce de leche. Ese es un recuerdo lindo. –Muy bien, Chiche, es un hermoso recuerdo, un pensamiento muy positivo. –Sí, maestro, aunque es un poco triste, porque Chiche ya no tiene a la mamá. --¿Recordás mucho a tu mamá? –Sí, maestro, pero de eso Chiche no quisiera hablar. –De acuerdo, Chiche, pero te aseguro que recordándola siempre estará con vos. El pensamiento, los recuerdos, son la forma que tenemos de mantener presente a las personas que ya no están—dice el maestro, quizá pensando en su propia madre, suspira y regresa al centro del salón. (62-3)

While it might seem difficult to make the connection between the construction of critical memory and baking pizza, I will do my best here. Though slightly mystical in his advice on and inclinations towards pizza-making, the instructor essentially believes that the quality of the pizza lies in the ability of the baker to conjure up positive emotions and memories that guide their hands in the process. This is understandable, given our previous discussion of transitional objects and objects of pain. There, objects were utilized to convey either violent or comforting intentions. Here, the instructor argues that a delicious pizza is one that brings joy to the people that the pizza maker intends to eat their pizza; whether it is family, friends, or even the pizza maker themselves. And to achieve a pizza that produces this satisfying response, the baker must draw on past associations with effect itself, as these memories can orient the baker towards the goal of communicating that through the final product.

This interpretation is insufficient, however, since it relies on more of the magical thinking related to object memory that I wish to avoid in this project. At the heart of the instructor's advice, he shares with Chiche that to make a delicious pizza, the pizza maker must be personally invested in its quality and the future experience of consuming it. That is what distinguishes delicious pizza from technically good pizza. But the instructor also informs Chiche of a habit he has built into this ethic, one that promotes a connection between memory and cooking. This is especially relevant to Chiche, who suffers from memory loss because of the trauma he suffered from witnessing his mother's murder; this painful relationship to the memory of his mother is alluded to in the above passage. In conjuring up a positive memory of his mother while preparing pizza, the instructor is helping Chiche form a practice that encourages him to approach the memory of his mother not merely through static reflection, but as a necessary aid in the production of delicious food. Telling him that making a good pizza depends on good memories assists in Chiche's own processing of his mother's death, encouraging him to seek out his own techniques for maintaining her memory that do not cause him further suffering. In many ways, this scene illustrates an instructional model for memorializing lost individuals through the art of cooking.

The way the instructor connects with Chiche and demonstrates that he cares for him inspires Chiche to reach out to him and request his help with the disappeared voices that speak to him from below the chicken coop. Using Chiche as an intermediary, the instructor gets to know the voices, trading stories about what their lives were like during the dictatorship and in the ensuing years. At one critical juncture, prior to initiating their plan to bring authorities to exhume their remains, the instructor shares the following with the voices:

> Perdonen la perorata, pero estoy tan emocionado que mientras esperamos lo que va a suceder, quiero compartir con ustedes algunas ideas. Esto de los sentidos es

> tan importante…Los sentidos tienen memoria; yo por el olfato recuerdo lugares a los que fui de niño, comidas que hacía mi madre, situaciones. Creo que por esa razón estoy enseñando cocina. Los olores y los sabores son el resumen de la vida. Mi abuelo hacía una pizza alta y rellena con orégano, única. Yo trato de repetirla, pero es imposible, no tengo su mano. El tuco y el pastel de papas de mi madre, los asados de mi padre; cada uno impone lo suyo, su mano, su secreto. Cosas mínimas que no cambian el rumbo de la patria, del mundo, pero sí la memoria personal. Mi teoría es que en la buena cocina el secreto está en la mano y en los buenos pensamientos. No sé por qué salí con esto…ah, sí, la voz. Cada voz es la emisaria del alma que así sale de la prisión del cuerpo, de la tierra, en el caso de ustedes, para expresar, para decir lo que debe ser dicho. Durante muchos años, desde ahí abajo, escucharon el andar y las voces de aquellos que pasaban por sobre este territorio. Pero solo Chiche pudo escucharlos y establecer contacto. Luego, la voz de Chiche que yo pude escuchar. Y ahora ustedes, escuchándome para que pueda ayudarlos a salir. El circuito se está integrando, al fin. Voy a ser el cuerpo que ustedes ya no pueden ser, y mi cuerpo y mi voz serán la prolongación de ustedes en el afuera—dice el maestro, emocionado, y apaga el cigarro pisándolo sobre la tierra, en el centro de su garabato. (124-5)

This discussion adds to the instructor's previous advice to Chiche during cooking class. He understands the strong ties between memory and the senses, himself remembering particular scents that trigger specific memories of his past. The path that he takes in describing his own interpretation of this concept once again demonstrates the critical work initiated by and required of a testimonial object. For this thread of thinking about the relationship between senses and memory takes him from dishes he ate as a child to the reason why he teaches cooking in the present. It makes sense that such a broad stroke of his biography becomes implicated in the testimonial object of food. As we have seen, both in this chapter and elsewhere, the testimonial object is often a detail which appeals to the senses, drawing the subject into critical reflection about what memories or other experiences lead them to experience a deeper attraction with this detail. As a subject, like the instructor, continues to practice this critical reflective work, the network of connections develops into a more intricate and coherent narrative, such that within the same breath the instructor can extrapolate his positive associations with dishes that his family cooked for him into a origin story for his career as a cooking instructor.

The instructor is modest about the power behind his art of remembering through cooking and teaching cooking that follows this ethic. Though he mentions that smells and flavors can provide a summary of life, and therefore preserve its memory to some extent, he undercuts this by describing his concept as dealing with *cosas mínimas*, little things that have no bearing on the world or nation. But as the author of this project subtitled "memory in the details…", I cannot help but make the case that his minimalization of this act is undeserved. For one, there is the aforementioned coalition built out from personal memory that was widely threatened by early governments following the democratic transition. Where else does counter-history come from if not from these personal accounts that have resisted large-scale erasure? Additionally, the instructor fails to see the wisdom he intended to impart to Chiche in the previous scene. Accepting food as a sensual portal to the work of critical memory is a practice that opens the subject to witnessing other voices and memories that they otherwise would have been ignorant to. Chiche describes to the voices below that he trusts the instructor because he has a good scent; what this means is that the instructor's general orientation, informed by his beliefs related to food and memory, make him available to believe in Chiche and listen to the voices below. This personal connection to food memory enables him to advocate for those invisible voices, bringing them back to the light, and by the conclusion of the novel, exhuming their physical remains so that their loved ones can mourn their deaths. It is not a stretch to claim that this initial orientation towards food precipitates an event that does change the fabric of Argentina as a nation in some way, because it provides visibility for the disappeared in a space that would otherwise have left them buried and forgotten.

And though Melicchio's tale about the voices burid below is a fictitious one, it, like the scene at Ching Peng in *An Empty House*, stages the critical process of accessing new

perspectives on the past through the narrow *punctum* opened by the testimonial object of food. Like the other texts from this project, taking the time to draw focus on the memories produced by this process provides a model for others to practice, as well as further support for growing memory movements. After all, food itself is ephemeral, but its connection to our somatic system makes it a powerful ally in the desire to mine the object world for reminders of the past, both episodic and traumatic, alike.

epilogue: THE PEARL BUTTON ON THE RAIL RETURNS

In the final moments of Marco Bechis' *Garage Olimpo*, a plane departs from an air park in Buenos Aires. Moments prior, Maria, having failed in her attempt to escape Félix after he took her on a date outside El Olimpo, is brought back to the clandestine detention center. The two step out of the cab outside the facility, entering through the small, inconspicuous door at the center of a large rusted corrugated steel garage door. Inside is bustling. What appears to be a hundred people or more are gathered in the passageway; two covered trucks are parked alongside the administrative offices where a blindfolded Maria was first processed. This same scene has been repeated for the viewer several times. The military guards inform the detainees that they are going to be moved to a different location, injecting them with a strong tranquilizer that they tell the victims are inoculations for their new destination. Félix and Maria arrive in the shadows of the depot, and after witnessing the spectacle, Maria pulls back on Félix's arm towards the small door they just entered in a final attempt to save herself. This brief struggle draws Texas' attention, who had been processing detainees in the foreground. He doubles back to collect Maria, drawing her towards the remainder of the group marked for disappearance, informing Félix that the party is over, that the general has decided to "transfer" Maria elsewhere. He directs Maria to take off her shoes; she is injected with the tranquilizer and loaded onto one of the trucks. The agents retire to their offices, and the depot is empty once more.

The next cut is the final shot of the military aircraft flying over Buenos Aires. Though the processing of the drugged bodies is not shown this time, we have seen it before. The officers would have stripped Maria and her fellow disappeared, loading drugged and unconscious body after body into the aircraft. Once the last body has been loaded, the hatch would close, casting a moving shadow along an awkwardly arranged pile of victims splayed across the cargo hold; as it

had done earlier in the film. What we are shown at the film's conclusion is the aerial shots of the plane, moving from flying over land to over the Rio de la Plata. The aerial shots interspersed between scenes comes into relief. What had previously seemed like transitional moments to provide respite from the surplus of narrative tension on the ground now reveal themselves as the ultimate consolidation of that same tension: the flight of bodies marked for disappearance in the sea.

The camera follows alongside the cargo jet until it abruptly cuts to the interior of the cargo hold. The darkened silhouette of a military officer operates the hatch, the shadow now moving in reverse as the center of the frame unfolds to open air. A cut to the exterior of the plane shows the hatch opening fully; then back to the interior, where the silhouette of someone lilts with the movement of the plane, its head jerking downwards unnaturally to signal that it belongs to one of the drugged disappeared. We cut back to the exterior, and downwards to a close shot of the churning brownish waters of the Rio de la Plata. The film fades to black, concluding with a title card reading: "En la dictadura militar argentina entre 1976-1982 miles de ciudadanos fueron arrojados vivos al mar".

Across the continent, above a different ocean, Chilean military officials carried out a similar mission. Preparing another drugged body in a different ritual, wrapping it in canvas after tying a length of steel rail to its chest. Like Maria, this *paquete* would be flown, potentially with other similarly prepared victims and dropped, still alive, into the sea. The conclusion to *Garage Olimpo* presents an ellipsis that is picked up towards the end of Patricio Guzmán's *El botón de nácar*. After decades of disappearance, long after the organic memory had slipped into the surrounding waters, divers find the surviving length of steel rail. Amidst the rust and barnacles that have grown in the victim's absence, the pearl button stands as the only surviving evidence of

its previous owner's final moments. That someone had been tied to the rail, and that they had been thrown into the sea to die. And thus, the *punctum* emerges. The ellipsis demands closure, a critical means to search the past in disparate sources for an approximate history of how the pearl button came to be found on a steel rail at the ocean floor.

Garage Olimpo, like *El botón de nácar*, is but a single spoke along this continuum that the *punctum* of the pearl button on the rail opens. It is a thread exposed by the question: who belonged to this button? And what was their life? But as this project has proposed, the thread does not end here. For the ideology that birthed the death flights that disappeared Maria or the individual who was once affixed to the steel rail, now encrusted with the pearl button, did not limit itself to that practice. From the cross section of texts analyzed in the preceding chapters, the three memory objects (home, clothing, and food) outline a broad and traumatic reconfiguration of the object world at the hands of dictatorial regimes in both Argentina and Chile. To begin closing the ellipsis bracketed by the death flights and the discovery of the pearl button on the steel rail is to begin restoring continuity to the willfully truncated official memory of the dictatorial period. It is to begin narrating the counter-history that has buttressed memory movements which developed in the vacuum left by insufficient government response and outright denial of residual damage following the democratic transition.

What is captured by this body of literature is not something novel or invented in fiction. Rather, it is a more accurate integration of the traumatic resonances that individuals suffered because of the weaponization of their respective object worlds. It is this enduring legacy that was largely left unprocessed in the years following declarations of an end to dictatorial regimes in the region that fed memory movements and the production of counter-history through art. Each artist, from Alicia Partnoy to Nona Fernández to Lola Arias, and even Mariana Callejas,

demonstrates what happens when the narrative space opened by art turns its focus to the *punctum* revealed through these memory objects. It is a moment when past comes rushing back towards the present, demanding a reckoning with the interconnected quality of memory.

This project does not necessarily uncover a new set of lost material that challenges previously held assumptions about the history of this moment. The field of postdictatorial literature is far too examined for that to be possible within the limits of time and travel during the production of this dissertation. I hope, however, that what is readily evident throughout this manuscript is the potency of this very specific method of approaching literary scholarship surrounding mass events of traumatization. That micro moments and seemingly insignificant, personal details provide a glimpse into the ways in which specific needs of the public remain unmet in its recovery, and the ways in which individuals can begin at their intimate relationships with the object world and critically extrapolate the interconnectedness of their subjective experience with a broader horizon. To reiterate a final time, I have structured this project in a way that begins to reflect a more complex literary history of postdictatorial literature. One that does not reduce the disappeared to abject victimhood, even in their most dire moments. As Ernesto Malbrán remarks at the end of *Chile: la memoria obstinada*:

> It was a dream of justice, I think. That dream failed. I was happy to be part of the crew, on that boat full of madmen. But I'd like to say today, now that these models and ideologies stand for nothing: it's our job to be the memory, the living witnesses for the young people looking everywhere for something to hold onto. They ought to know that the coup d'etat wasn't a shipwreck but a little earthquake, nothing more. (np)

Even Malbrán himself could not entirely recognize the swell of counter-history contained within those deceptively quieted waters; where the personal, like a pearl button encrusted on a length of steel rail, opens new paths to combatting a seemingly overwhelming tide of amnesia.

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