Stories of Memory / Memory in Stories
Remembrance and Identity in Contemporary Jewish Argentine Cultural Production

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the past and to the future, and to the bridges necessary to connect them.

To the memory of Gerda Elias de Frohmann, Jorge Frohmann, Roberto Dvantman, and Barbara Goldfine. And to the inolvidável Isabel de Sousa Ramos.

To the future: Alexander, Maximilian, Benjamin and Sebastian Goldfine. May you always know where you come from to know where you need to go.
Abstract

This dissertation examines contemporary cultural production (mainly literature, film, and visual arts) by self-identified Jewish Argentine artists. In my research, I seek to analyze the different and varied ways memory and identity are formed and reflected in works of art produced in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries within this community and how these contested categories differ in art produced in previous cultural production. I pay special interest to the events that marked Argentina during the last dictatorship (1976-1983) and how those events are depicted in the art of those who lived through it, utilizing either their own memory or second-generation postmemory. I also delve into the role of transmission from generation from generation and how multiple identities evolve and transform in the Jewish community as time goes by in Argentina.

One more aspect I consider is the gender variable and how it is reflected in the aforementioned multi-layered identity, as well as how the role of transmission of memory is regarded. I contend that analyzing the ways identity and memory are utilized and reflected in contemporary art allow for a deeper revision of recent history and memory that, ultimately, demand an evocative compromise with the human sense of worth, as well as the human conciliation with what lies behind and ahead. Employing memory as an accepted fallible substance that connects past, present, and future, works as a demand of the conservation of certain sensibility without providing illusory neutrality and without abandoning the attempt to confront established interpretations and narratives.
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Chapter 1 - Introduction: *Ha’avar ze ha’hove*  
(Our past is our present)

_The past that has not been tamed with words is not memory, it is lurking._  
(Laura Restrepo *Demasiados héroes*)

When delving into issues of memory and identity it is challenging, if not evidently impossible, not to be aware of the ever-changing nature of meaning and the impossibility of fixing memory, especially when questions of unstable identity and differing modes of attachment to past events are inevitable. The quest to try to grasp such unstable categories easily brings us to the principle that one has to make the effort to remember under these precarious circumstances. There is a saying from the Pirkei Avot that resonates: “It is not your responsibility to finish the work, but you are not free to desist from it either.”

I contend that it is impossible to finish this work, the work of memory, but I do emphasize it is our responsibility to participate in it. The authors, filmmakers, and visual artists studied in this project are all engaged in the work, as are all of us, as citizens, audience members, critics, and part of society.

This project focuses on the contemporary work of self-identified Jewish Argentine artists (mainly in the fields of literature, film, and visual arts) and traces the paths that led them to certain works of art that deal with issues of memory and identity. These ever-changing categories provide a platform from where to examine the routes

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1 “Pasado que no ha sido amansado con palabras no es memoria, es acechanza.” (All translations here and throughout are mine unless otherwise noted.)

2 Pirkei Avot (Chapters of the Fathers) is a compilation of the ethical teachings and maxims of the Rabbis of the Mishnaic period. It is part of didactic Jewish ethical Musar literature. My thanks to Amy Kaminsky for bringing this up to my attention.
chosen by this diverse community and also provides clues as to where it is heading when it comes to the culturally-loaded self-identification in this Latin American country. We could talk about a collective memory, as well as a collective language of memory and identity, in which cultural intelligibility has been challenged by the violence experienced in the last dictatorship of the 1970s and 1980s and which goes back to the Shoah and the Eastern European pogroms. However, there is also a new language being created at the moment (and for the last few decades) where these events, even though acknowledged, are not the main part of the story. This alternative language frames the conditions of the expanded meaning of the Jewish community in Argentina, and vibrates with the whole citizenry as well after the two terrorist attacks in the 1990s which involved every national that felt affected by them. By considering the works of art from a multidirectional and intergenerational approach we observe the scope of change that has been produced in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Overall, this project untangles—and can be read against—the traditional politics of memory, not so much to provide concrete answers, but to ask new questions and expose new challenges by seeking to contribute to expanding the vocabularies available for memory and identity in an specific context. This could be especially the case when critical interventions encourage spectators/citizens to embrace more complex forms of cultures and the blurring boundaries of history and memory offer a glimpse of what might be coming in the future.

The Beginning
Intersections. There are a thousand and one ways of looking at the topics presented in this research project, but all of them come about the intersections of delicate, separate disciplines academia has dissected throughout the years. Within the so-called Hispanic Studies we find the separation of Peninsular and Latin American Studies. Within Ethnic and Minority Studies, we find Jewish Studies. However, what happens when we intersect Latin American Studies with Jewish Studies? Is that possible? Is there such a thing as Latin American Jewish Studies? The answer is: yes.

More intersections. Cultural and Comparative Studies have presented big themes such as Memory and Identity. Film Studies and Literature allows me to borrow from them for my own research. Gender Studies is a constant presence in the way I view the contents of the cultural production I study. Visual Arts Studies also lends its strategies. This research project does not constrain itself to just one of these disciplines, but respectfully borrows from all of them to analyze cultural production from different points of view. Texts in the shape of novels, films, and artwork are examined to delve into the potent forces of memory and identity in one specific community: the Jewish Argentine.

We could start from the iconic Alberto Gerchunoff’s *Jewish Gauchos of the Pampas (Los gauchos judíos)*, which symbolically marked the beginning of Jewish Latin American literature in 1910. Nevertheless I am interested in the processes that took place

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3 *The Jewish Gauchos of the Pampas* by Alberto Gerchunoff is considered to be the first piece of literate written by a Jewish Latin American author. Although Gerchunoff was born in what is now the Ukraine, he migrated with his family to Argentina when he was six years old. This semi-autobiographical text contains short stories of life in the Argentine grasslands at the beginning of the twentieth century and it depicts the lives of Jewish immigrants in that land. For an accurate and complete analysis of this work see *Parricide On The Pampa?: A New Study And Translation Of Alberto Gerchunoff's Los Gauchos Judíos* by Edna Aizenberg (Iberoamericana Vervuert, 2000).
in the last half of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first centuries. Starting with the generation born in the 1940s and 1950s, the one which participated and lived through one of the most controversial and painful episodes in Argentine history: the 1976-1983 dictatorship. The legacy of their reflections on that subject and, in this case, the influence of their Jewish heritage which makes it unrealistic not to formulate a connection with the Shoah and, further back in time, with the Eastern European pogroms, provides an excellent entry point to start thinking of what it means to be Argentine and Jewish. In the case of the authors studied it is also contended that their gender informs their writing/filmmaking. The following generation, the one born right before and during the so-called Dirty War, creates art from a different standpoint: this generation is still influenced by past events, but their reality is shifted by a more profound connection to their nation, a slight (but deep) distancing from their families’ culture/religion, and two terrorist attacks on Argentine soil in the 1990s. Their identity and their responsibility in the transmission of memory reallocate its meanings and evolve, as it will happen with the next generation.

In her novel The Book of Memories (El libro de los recuerdos), contemporary Jewish Argentinean writer Ana María Shua tells the story of her wandering family mixing reality and fiction. She creates this “Book of Memories” as a platform from where to launch her project: to tell the story of one Jewish immigrant family in Argentina and, at the same time, to tell the story of any Jewish (and immigrant) family in Argentina. The playfulness and duality of her writing does not hide the very concrete fact underlying her

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4 I am aware that that it is impossible to analyze texts without considering the history that has informed them.
text: the transmission of memory and the creation of postmemory through stories, gestures, and silences is a complicated and fraught process that includes the formation, as well as the obliteration in some cases, of identity. The author ends her novel with the following sentiment echoing the liturgy and its reflection of thanksgiving—in the midst of her search for an identity of her own, Shua pays tribute to the endeavor embodied by her ancestors, herself, and her descendants:

For the ship that brought my Polish grandparents to Argentina, for the one that brought my Lebanese grandfather, for the airplane that took my sister to the United States, for the vessels in which maybe, my daughters or the children of my daughters, wandering again, will embark, for my Argentineity and my contradictions, for keeping the identity in the Diaspora, for the vessel of the immigrants I toast. (237)

Ana María Shua celebrates the unpredictable and sinuous road that led her to be who she is: Argentine and Jewish. There is no contradiction—as she shows throughout her text—but a way of looking at her life through the prism of the stories of her grandparents and the ones she is now crafting for her daughters. Shua, like many other Jewish Argentinean artists, (re)produce the inherent Jewish pursuit of questioning: in her case, she explores the intergenerational memories (both inherited and newly formed) and the composition of her diasporic identity and memory.

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5 The concept of *postmemory* was conceived by Marianne Hirsch in her text *Family Frames. Photography, Narrative and Postmemory* (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1997). There will be more about this discussion in later chapters.

6 “Por el barco que trajo a la Argentina a mis abuelos polacos, por el que trajo a mi abuelo libanés, por el avión que se llevó a mi hermana a los Estados Unidos, por los navíos en los que quizás se embarcarán, otra vez errantes, mis hijas o los hijos de mis hijas, por mi argentinidad y mis contradicciones, por mantener la identidad en la diáspora, por el navío de los inmigrantes brindo” (Shua 237).
The “M” Word

Memory Studies is an extremely vast academic field. There are numerous variants and subfields and that is why I have chosen to stay close to the Latin American—and, more specifically, Argentine—analysis of memory, as well as utilize iconic European authors, such as Maurice Halbwachs and Paul Ricoeur. By framing an approach to memory informed by the intersection of well-read Western authors and perhaps lesser-known Latin American theorists I plan to expand the boundaries of what a project related to memory can achieve. “Indeed, memory is precisely one of those modes, nodes, or nexuses where otherwise disparate or contradictory discourses intersect” (4), affirm Russell Kilbourn and Eleanor Ty in their prologue to The Memory Effect. In this project there are several discourses which crisscross where the contradictions fuel the study of these junctions—and their influence is reflected in their respective overlapped worlds.

One concept that is revised in many sections of this project is Maurice Halbwachs’ collective memory, a concept that blurs the borders between history and memory (Daniel Levy’s concept of “mnemo-history” will also be widely used).7 Halbwachs understands collective memory as a way of bridging the gaps between history and memory, and he emphasizes the social character of modern collective memory. Kilbourn and Ty borrow from John Storey to say “what is provisional in our own memories is confirmed by the memories of others. […] We often remember with others what we did not ourselves experience firsthand” (Storey 101-2; Kilbourn and Ty 15).

7 This concept can be found in Levy’s essay “Changing Temporalities and the Internationalization of Memory Cultures” in Memory and the Future. Transnational Politics, Ethics and Society (Ed. Yifat Gutman, Adam D. Brown, and Amy Sodaro. Hampshire, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).
This more expansive assessment of memory as an essentially social and cultural phenomenon provided a multiplicity of ensuing theories: Marianne Hirsch’s concept of “postmemory”, the aforementioned Daniel Levy’s (via Jan Assmann) notion of “mnemo-history”, the concept of “prosthetic memory” developed by Amy Kaminsky, as well as Alison Landberg, and so on. This breadth of concepts born out of the core of memory prompts the thinking that the intersectionality that traverses this project is fundamental to the study of memory these days. What could be seen as a limited focus on cultural production (literature, film, and visual arts) to delve into memory topics, has strategic value in terms of a perceived need for certain disciplines in the academic world, to stake out their own territory within this growing field. This project seeks in part to demonstrate what intersectionality can do and can mean: that memory as an object of study does not belong to one discipline and that studies that incorporate cultural production deal with texts, representation, mediation, language, and style, as well as narrative subjectivity, and identity. That is, to investigate the links between memory and identity, the limits of the theories widely accepted and utilized, the ways in which memory is used as a way of resistance in and by a nation and a group of people within that nation, the way personal memory connects to collective memory and, at the same time, to national memory. In sum, how memory, as well as the different approaches to its study, presents itself as a malleable substance that allows for various and different—and sometimes contradictory—interpretations.

In Elizabeth Jelin’s often-cited work about memory in the aftermath of Latin America’s dictatorships in the 1970s, State Repression and the Labors of Memory (Los
trabajos de la memoria), the author contends with the plurality of memories as opposed
to one singular, definite memory. She states:

Though not involving a logical contradiction, asking what memory is (in
singular) may seem at odds with offering to study processes of memory
construction, of memories in the plural, and of social disputed over
memories, their social legitimacy, and claims to “truth”. […] Dealing with
memories entails paying attention to remembrance and forgetting, to
narratives and acts, to silences and gestures. Knowledge and information
are at play, but so too are emotions, lapses, voids, and fractures. (8)

It is this acknowledgement of the plurality of memories—as well as the
connection between memory and identity, and memory and narrative—what gives the
necessary liberty to this project to exist and the underscore the numerous connections
between the arts and a nation, between the arts and a specific self-identified people, and
between the artists and their representation of memory and identity.

Likewise, Michael Rothberg in Multidirectional Memory argues: “Against the
framework that understands collective memory as competitive memory—as a zero-sum
struggle over scarce resources—I suggest that we consider memory as multidirectional:
as subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing; as productive and
not privative” (3). Later he asks the same question Jelin and numerous other memory
studies scholars ask in order to start their thinking process: What is memory? Rothberg’s
answer: “memory is the past made present” (3). That is, the author thinks of the notion of
“making present” as a way for memory to be seen as a contemporary phenomenon and as
a way of work (such as Jelin’s text’s title) in which memory involves labor. One of
Rothberg’s most appealing assertions is of seeing the intercultural dynamic of
multidirectional memory with “the potential to create new forms of solidarity and new
visions of justice” (5). Following this author’s thought process this project comes out of
the limited space given to memory in the public sphere and establishes a dialogue with
various disciplines (in academia) and various identities (in the Argentine nation) where
the notion of memory as something that is individually “owned” is disregarded for a more
collective form of thinking of memory’s time-unrestrictive quality as a source from
which to build something new out of the old material memory brings about. Thinking of
memory as malleable material that dynamically transfers between space and time during
the act of remembrance and that reaches beyond the one specific historical moment to
connect diverse histories and identities, it could be argued that the act of remembering
has the potential of dividing as well as connecting spatial, temporal, and cultural sites.

More about Memory in Argentina

Returning to what memory signifies in the Southern Cone—specifically in
Argentina—it is impossible to tackle this topic without acknowledging the lasting and
massive impact of the political, social, and military involvement in societal life in the
1970s, referring specifically to the dictatorship of 1976-1983, but which encompasses a
process that began decades before and whose legacy still influences Argentina to this day.
This violent past and the struggles to infer what to remember and what to forget, plus the
search for recognition of certain memories by key agents like the family members of the
desaparecidos, human rights activists, concentration camps survivors, the media,
politicians, military personnel (active and retired), converges into a seemingly parallel
universe within the realm of memory studies, where this subject is caught in a never-
ending battle of entitlement and claims. These battles’ influence in the approach to
memory studies are to be recognized when analyzing contemporary cultural production
(Jewish and non-Jewish) in Argentina. As Ana Guglielmucci explains

The public consignation of the category memory, to refer to the past as a
social problem in the present, has been the product of a complex social
process in which various groups have participated. […] In this sense,
memory’s positioning as the dominant way to refer to the recent past has
been the product of activities and interaction among different interested
actors, albeit with divergent goals. Such actors, through street
mobilizations, commemorative events, debates, academic conferences,
encounters of specialist and politicians, positioned the phenomenon of
memory in the public agenda as “a social problem of every Argentine”.
That is, as a common place where we would all be involved. (335-6)⁸

As the events that transpired in the last decades of the twentieth century were
intended to be positioned as “a social problem of every Argentine”, so is the intention of
the artists studied in this project: in every text analyzed there is an effort (conscious or
otherwise) to connect to the past—both Argentine and Jewish—and make it their plight
to convert the issues dealt with in their art into a social problem for all. Even so, the need
to ascribe certain memories to a specific group of people and, therefore, circumscribing
the possibilities that those memories have in the present and future is tempting. As for the
experiences of the last Argentine dictatorship, there seems to be a tacit cultural rule in the
post-dictatorship era that requires that only those affected directly by the military
repression can be entitled the right to remember. However, lately there has been a

⁸ “La consagración pública de la categoría memoria, para referirse al pasado como un problema social en el
presente, ha sido el producto de un complejo proceso social en el que han participado diversos grupos. […]
En este sentido, el posicionamiento de la memoria como el modo dominante para referirnos al pasado
reciente ha sido producto de las actividades y de la interacción entre diferentes actores interesados en ella,
aunque con objetivos divergentes. Tales actores, a través de la realización de movilizaciones callejeras,
actos conmemorativos, jornadas de debate, congresos académicos, encuentros de especialistas y políticos,
posicionaron el fenómeno de la memoria en la agenda pública como “un problema social de todos los
argentinos”. Es decir, como lugar común donde todos nos encontrariamos involucrados.”
movement of displacement from the center of these families to a collective sense of co-ownership (if we may it call so) of these memories. It is crucial to look at what younger generations are working on as they are able to bring “to light new vocabularies and images to relate to suffering and loss” (Sosa 170). These younger generations “have also hosted wider audiences within non-normative narratives that intersect, twist and displace conventional acts of mourning” (Sosa 170). The seeming fluidity now presented in the politics of memory in contemporary Argentina allows for an expansive realm of contention of the act of remembrance, while not leaving behind issues of legitimacy and authority. Cecilia Sosa talks about “the surreptitious pleasure of being together in the aftermath of loss” (174) and, while it may be more painful than pleasurable, her assertion does contain the awareness of a period in this nation’s history when there is no claim over one memory or another, and when all are responsible for the joy and burden of reconstructing and understanding the past in this present.

It is this demand that links acts of violence—by no means to be compared—that were perpetrated against the Argentine society that brings us to the decade of the 1990s. Two terrorist attacks signaled the beginning of different era in the act of remembrance, as now an act that did affect each and every Argentine was forced—by some segments of society—to be affixed with a label, in this case, Jewish. On March 17, 1992 the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires was attacked and two years later there was another bombing in the city. Edna Aizenberg best describes what happened:

On July 18, 1994, at 9:53 a.m., a powerful bomb blew up a square block in downtown Buenos Aires. The immediate objective of the explosion was the destruction of the Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina, known as the AMIA, the building housing most of Argentina’s major Jewish
organizations. I say the “immediate objective” because, despite its primary intention to murder Jews and burn Jewish property, the bomb did not discriminate. Jews and non-Jews—some eighty of them—were killed that day, and apartment houses, schools, and stores in the area were destroyed. (1)

The connections are there, of course: going all the back to the Eastern European pogroms, to the Holocaust, the unsolved AMIA and Israeli Embassy bombings, the disappeared of the 1970s and 1980s, there is a long thread of memories that shape the Jewish identity in Argentina. Aizenberg asserts that that “the bloody explosion at the AMIA exemplifies the prejudicial blind spots and xenophobic mindsets that over the course of the twentieth century hindered Argentina and other Latin American countries from creating truly pluralistic societies in which difference is celebrated, not merely tolerated” (2). Many of the younger artists studied in this project go beyond their Jewish roots and the processes in their art to reach the memories that are contained in the national sphere. In many cases the AMIA bombing influenced those processes. In all cases the post-dictatorship with its struggles of memory and oblivion cast a sphere of influence over them all.

Memory and postmemory in contemporary Argentina: Fragmented selves, unbridgeable gaps

The questions bounding this project are not meant to restrict the topic, but to give a sense of the vastness of the issues related to memory and, to some degree, postmemory,

9 More about the AMIA bombing in chapter Two a).

10 Concept developed by the Argentine writer Alicia Kozameh.

12
in post-dictatorship Argentina. As Ana Forcinito says, “Memory as a social practice in the Argentina post-dictatorship continues to be open to new meanings, new questions, new recollections, sometimes conflictive, or even irreconcilable” (2). We are pressed (and we may fail) to find clear answers when it comes to memory due to the nature of the subject itself: the ones who lived through and survived are now fragmented selves. Whether because they endured life in concentration camps or whether they knew what was going on and did nothing to change it; whether they committed the crimes or whether they are related to the desaparecidos. These subjects convey a fragmented sense of being, incapable of representing whole selves in a society that is still trying to put the pieces of the puzzle together. The unbridgeable gaps that memory leaves behind not only affect the ones capable of remembering, but also the generations that follow and receive only the recounting of events—the postmemory of the experience. This questioning is complicated yet worth asking. Abandoning the past in order to recover it—as Jacques Hassoun proposes in his text Les contrebandiers de la mémoire (The Memory Smugglers)—provide second generations the necessary space to function as more than

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11 The idea of postmemory was coined by Marianne Hirsch and it entails the idea that generations carry within themselves memories of acts they did not live through. Their parents lived through traumatic events and their children were marked by the memories of these events and live their lives as if they had also been witnesses of the atrocities. (Beatriz Sarlo is not in complete agreement with this concept of postmemory in her book Tiempo Pasado and analyzes the implications of the use of this notion. I will address Sarlo’s discussion later on.)

12 Ana Forcinito talks about these unbridgeable gaps in relation to the work of Alicia Kozameh (see Pasos bajo el agua –Steps under Water—and Nosotras, presas políticas: obra colectiva de 112 prisioneras políticas entre 1974 y 1983). Forcinito states: “These gaps are pointing to the fact that the exercise of memory must inevitably go through areas that cannot be recovered” (8). And in a footnote clarifies: “Again I want to underline that the questioning of memory and the acceptance of what she [Kozameh] calls ‘unbridgeable gaps’ does not erode the reliability of the witness account. On the contrary it affirms that the narration of facts can serve to the prosecution of repressors or to reconstruct the conditions of life and the violations of human rights suffered as by political prisoner but is never a complete narration.” (19).
mere listeners: now possessors of the remnants of memory their role changes and evolves with them.

One way roles change throughout violent experiences that leave their mark in a nation, is the way Pilar Calveiro chose in order to abandon the place of victim. Pilar Calveiro’s theoretical and critical analysis in *Poder y desaparición: Los campos de concentración en Argentina* (*Power and disappearance: Concentration Camps in Argentina*) would merely be one of many studies focused on one facet of the dictatorship in Argentina (in this case, the concentration camps) if not for the prelude by the Argentine poet Juan Gelman. Upon reading it, we learn that the text is written by a former *desaparecida*. There is no mention in Calveiro’s text of her personal experience, except as part of a list of names and numbers, which exemplifies the violence of having one’s name taken away and being recognized only by a number. In her case: “Pilar Calveiro: 362” (5). We could talk at length about this type of violence which has been examined by many theorists and writers, but we should consider the formation of Calveiro’s subjectivity and memory in her work. After all, the questions that surface are: How does the author keep the neutrality of her speech throughout the text? Is this a strategy to perform the act of remembering? Gelman suggests that this approach allows Calveiro to discard the place of victim with which the dictatorship wanted to encase her and, by avoiding making the text autobiographical, she manages to construct a selfhood and, by avoiding making the text autobiographical, she manages to construct a selfhood...

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13 One of these authors is the Argentine writer Nora Strejilevich, whose semi-autobiographical book *Una sola muerte numerosa* (*A Single, Numberless Death*, University of Virginia Press, 2002) starts and ends with this issue: “Cuando me robaron el nombre fui una fui cien fui miles y no fui nadie” (13). (When my name was stolen I was one I was a hundred I was a thousand and I was nobody.) In the second to last page she re-affirms her personhood: “Un microfón pronuncia mi nombre: no mi código sino mi nombre” (149). (A microphone pronounces my name: not my code but my name.)
that defies time and space. Calveiro is writing specifically about a time (the 1970s) and a space (Argentina and, more precisely, the Junta’s camps), but her academic investigation and neutral writing do not connect her own subjectivity with the memory she has of her experience in the ESMA. However, the minute trace she leaves in the 174-page book becomes massive and extremely meaningful when one considers that by inscribing her name in the text, she is not only disavowing the process that took place in the ESMA as soon as she was kidnapped (being given a number and forcing her to renounce to her name—an indelible mark of subject formation), she also makes sure to be part of the postmemory for the generations that follow: she is not only the author of the book, she is—if somewhat minor—one of its subjects.

When talking of postmemory, it is critical to define the term coined by Marianne Hirsch. As it is of great importance, allow me to employ a rather extensive quote:

> In my reading, postmemory is distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection. Postmemory is a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation. This is not to say that memory itself is unmediated, but that it is more directly connected to the past. Postmemory characterizes the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events that can be neither understood nor recreated. (22)

Although the term is extremely useful, there are a number of questions that arise:

What do we understand as “deep personal connections”? Who can judge what that
implies? How do the concepts of “imaginative investment and creation” affect the acts of remembering, forgetting and transmitting? How imaginative and creative can we be when talking about memory? Is postmemory only related to what happened before an individual is born? What happens with the ones who were too young to remember a certain event? Hirsch only talks about the second generation but, can we also talk about a third one? What would deter us from doing so? The author emphasizes the fact that postmemory has an indirect and fragmentary nature. Nevertheless, isn’t all memory fragmentary? For the purpose of this project I prefer to utilize postmemory as a fragmentary way of transmitting memory to second and third generations, who were alive at the time of the event or not. The imprint of the event being so deeply embedded in the familial history, that escaping it becomes impossible. Therefore, these generations turn to ways of dealing with this load—one such way is what is studied here, the use of art as a means to understand and reflect the responsibility of the postmemory. (Whether that postmemory is tacitly transmitted or surrounded by silence will be discussed in chapter three).

Hirsch’s concept is helpful when acknowledging the fact that there is more to memory than the well-known observations of collective and individual remembrances. How postmemory is transmitted should be of special interest, as one of the usual allegations in the Argentine society is what happened to the millions of people that were not directly involved in the violence of the 1970s. Basically, the individuals who played the role of bystanders—what memory/postmemory do they transmit to their descendents? In relation to the Holocaust, Dori Laub states,
it was not the reality of the situation and the lack of responsiveness of bystanders or the world that accounts for the fact that history was taking place with no witness: it was also the very circumstance of being inside the event that made unthinkable the very notion that a witness could exist, that is, someone who could step outside of the coercively totalitarian and dehumanizing frame of reference in which the event was taking place, and provide an independent frame of reference through which the event could be observed. One might say that there was, thus, historically no witness to the Holocaust, either from outside or from inside the event. (81)\textsuperscript{15}

Therefore, if there are no witnesses, how can we make sense of the possibility of engaging in a productive working through (and not just acting out) of the acts of remembering/forgetting so that present and future generations can start (re)assembling the fragmentary postmemory of the 1970s?\textsuperscript{16} Eluding the topic in the eighties and pardoning the military officers and sub-officers who were already found guilty in the nineties did not facilitate this process. Therefore, what are we left with? Are the fragments of memory/postmemory a combination of individual and collective memory? Maurice Halbwachs states: “[S]ocial thought is essentially a memory and that its entire content consists only of collective recollections or remembrances. But it also follows that, among them, only those recollections subsist that in every period society, working within its present-day frameworks, can reconstruct” (189). Hence, we realize the necessity of

\textsuperscript{15} Amy Kaminsky brought to my attention that there are two meanings of witness. One is the kind of bystander Laub names. On the other hand, there is the witness (especially as a verb) that is a participant. Testimonio as a genre is precisely about that kind of witnessing. It is also present in Christian practice—believers bear witness to others in order to convert them.

\textsuperscript{16} Both Freudian terms can be thought through the reading of Kelly Oliver in her book Witnessing. Beyond Recognition: “For Freud, the goal of analysis is to turn acting-out into memory by providing interpretations and allowing the patient to ‘work-through’ his or her resistances to interpretation (1914, 154-56). As Edward Bibring concludes in his elaboration of Freud’s theory of repetition, acting-out alone does not leads to change (1943, 501)” (77).
laboring from the present to work through memory and transmit it as postmemory—as incomplete and fragmentary as it can be—to future generations. What happened is part of every Argentine whether s/he lived through it or not and, if no direct memory is present, there should be a need to process the memory with its own lacunae. We can think of these unbridgeable gaps as the “in-between” space that exists in the course of transmitting memory—they are intrinsic “mémoire trouée” (Henri Raczymow’s “memory shot through with holes” ) that form part of the process, as forgetting is an inherent part of remembering.\(^\text{17}\)

The memory of the parent’s memory (now gained by their children), or second generation memory, is the topic of one of Beatriz Sarlo’s discussion in her book Tiempo pasado (Past time). The Argentine writer takes issue with the notion of postmemory, which she explains as “[T]he case of children who reconstruct their parents’ experiences, sustained by their (the parents) memory but not only by it. Postmemory, which has memory in its center, would be the memorialistic reconstruction of memory of recent events that were not lived by the subject who reconstruct them…” (129).\(^\text{18}\) While this coincides with Marianne Hirsch’s notion of postmemory, however, Sarlo attempts to dissociate the personal postmemory from the collective one by emphasizing the fact that

\(^\text{17}\) Hugo Vezzetti adds to this idea: “No hay ni memoria plena ni olvido logrado, sino más bien diversas formaciones que suponen un compromiso de la memoria y el olvido; y es preciso reconocer que la memoria social también produce clichés y lugares comunes, es decir, sus propias formas de olvido” (33). (There is not complete memory or an achieved forgetting, but diverse formations that suppose a compromise of memory and forgetting; and it is necessary to recognize that social memory also produces clichés and common places, meaning, its own forms of forgetting.) In Vezzetti, Hugo. Pasado y Presente: Guerra, dictadura y sociedad en la Argentina. Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 2002.

\(^\text{18}\) “[E]l caso de los hijos que reconstruyen las experiencias de sus padres, sostenidos por la memoria de éstos pero no sólo por ella. La posmemoria, que tiene a la memoria en su centro, sería la reconstrucción memorialística de la memoria de hechos recientes que no fueran vividos por el sujeto que los reconstruye…”
the personal postmemory is underlined by a subjective interest (hence, the importance of family photographs in Hirsch’s work). Therefore, Sarlo proposes a more forthright way of thinking about postmemory by taking into account the subjectivity of the listener (in this case, the children who listen to their mother’s or father’s testimony of events). Sarlo does appreciate the credence given to the issue of the fragmentation of memory. This fragmentation comes from the vacuum between the remembrance and that which is remembered—“entre el recuerdo y lo que se recuerda” (137). This lacuna seems to be a productive space in which to think about the figure of the desaparecido and how this figure is represented in cultural production. These artistic representations seem to offer an array of questions that, most of the time, do not and cannot provide an answer. The figure of the desaparecido exists in the space left by “entre el recuerdo y lo que se recuerda” and it projects its fragmentary and unfinished subjectivity to the ones who survived—the beholders of memory or postmemory. Therefore, this figure—as representative of the real human being who was kidnapped and murdered—is a tentative reconstruction of the desaparecido that pretends to fill the void. This is, after all, an unachievable task as the difficulties that it encounters are, on one hand, the inaccuracy of memory (part of its nature) and, on the other hand, the impossibility of forming a complete figure: The non-memory of a subject becomes as crucial as his/her memory; it all works to achieve completeness, but ceases in the same empty space. The materials used for the reconstruction of this figure cannot support “the” memory, but “a” memory that is then (re)constructed again in lieu of postmemory for another generation.
Consequently, when talking about memory—and postmemory—in contemporary Argentina we can embark on a project that articulates the fact that there is no completeness, there is no whole, there is no remembering it all, there is no transmitting it all. There are fragments, gaps, and holes. There is forgetting and oblivion. Elizabeth Jelin asks: “What are the ‘lessons of history’? What is at issue here? A re-presentation of the past or other means by which past experience is captured?” (92). She adds: “Who does the transmitting, and what is being transmitted? To whom? What do those who are supposed to receive the transmission incorporate?” (96). We could venture that the mere fact that there is a space for all these questions and ideas in a society that went through a difficult experience in its recent past and that now shows a willingness to try to answer them inter-generationally is definitely a step in an acceptable direction…wherever that direction may lead us.

**Looking Back, Looking Ahead**

Taking into account Derrida’s idea that “[t]he archivization produces as much as it records the event” (Torlasco 76), the writers, filmmakers, and visual artists considered in this project produce talented art while archiving memories, feelings, and histories that touched the Argentine nation, as well as their cultural (if not religious) heritage. This project seeks to problematize the way memory is presented and divided in the realm of academic disciplines, while utilizing artistic products created in recent decades by members of a diverse group: all the artists have a connection to the Argentine nation and all have a connection to their Jewish heritage. However, the way these connections are
made in their identities varies greatly and it is how they showcase their own search for personal, as well as collective memory, and how they decide to shape their identity that is reflected in their work.

In the first chapter, I utilize Levy’s concept of “mnemo-history” to look into the relationship between memory and history in two of Sara Rosenberg’s novels Cuaderno de invierno (Winter Notebook, 2000) and Contraluz (Backlighting, 2008), as well as in Argentine/German filmmaker Jeanine Meerapfel’s 2012 film My German Friend. The overt utilization of historical events in these works underscores the influence and limitations of the artists’ memories when constructing their stories. How the tension and overlap of history and memory are presented is what emphasized claim that “inside and outside, speech and writing, perception and memory, are mutually implicated, rather than hierarchically ordered” (Torlasco 76).

The second chapter is centered on the Jewish concept of l’dor v’dor, which looks at the transmission of memory “from generation to generation”. To that end I analyze three novels that are intrinsically connected to the last Argentine dictatorship in which their main characters struggle to understand and relay the crudeness of those confusing and violent years, while maintaining a keen awareness of their responsibility (chosen or otherwise) to portray a legacy for generations to come. The weight of that accountability is also preceded by previous generations and their experiences in the Shoah: the difficulty of transmitting unspeakable events does not start with the protagonists of the novels; it merely continues. In Liliana Heker’s El fin de la historia (The End of the Story, 1996), Sara Rosenberg’s Un hilo rojo (A Red Thread, 1998), and Manuela Fingueret’s Hija del

Chapter three continues working with the concepts of memory as they shape identity in younger generations of Jewish Argentines. Analyzing two films, Gabriel Lichtmann’s *Judíos en el espacio* (*Jews in Space*, 2006) and Ariel Winograd’s *Cara de queso-Mi primer gueto* (*Cheese Head-My First Ghetto*, 2006) provides the opportunity to observe a scaffolding of memories, where layer upon layer is built to obtain a better understanding (or, a profound confusion) of the identity informed by the history of the families projected on the screen. Both films are semi-autobiographies that dig deep into generational memories to bring back to the present a quasi enlightenment of the families’ comings and goings through decades of exile, survival, (in)stability, and overall struggle. The acute marks of both *argentinitidad* (Argentineity) and Jewishness sustain the main characters’ identities, but a slow imbalance is starting to show the many years spent in one nation towards the younger generations versus the compliance with traditions in the older ones. That imbalance does not pose a threat, but rather an observation by both filmmakers: this where we are now, they seem to say, and we wonder where we will be in the future. Another film, Marcos Carnevale’s *Anita* (2009), is included to talk about the transactive memory system and the many ways a work of art (in this case a film) can intercept the archive.

The fourth chapter focuses on these same themes from the perspective of visual arts in the works of Gabriela Golder and Verónica Fradkin. By thoroughly dissecting the
consequences of having enjoyed a seemingly happy and untouched (by violence) childhood while living in a bloody dictatorship, Golder strives to understand not only how her life happen to be, but also how her post-dictatorship being (as well as her generational fellows’) now deals with those facts. Her work in *En memoria de los pájaros* (*In Memory of the Birds*, 2000) is a search for all, but it is foremost a search through the artist’s memory to briefly and fleetingly grasp a slip of elusive comprehension. Fradkin’s work also utilizes memory as a major theme when collaborating for the AMIA to commemorate and remember the 1994 terrorist attack. Her contribution to the book *Una mañana de julio* (*A Morning in July*, 2012) and the project called *MemoTest* (a memory card game, 2014) dig deep into her ideas and representations of the Argentine, as well as Jewish identity and is at all times self-aware of the possibility to connect both through her personal memory and through the country’s history. Not only does she reach back into the past to reflect on the AMIA bombing, she also investigates a rarely mentioned event in Argentine history: the 1919 Semana trágica (Tragic Week), the only pogrom to ever take place in Latin America.

The connections these authors, filmmakers, and visual artists display in their work between memory and history, and between narration, representation, and reality are what Hayden White acknowledges below:

> Recent theories of discourse, however, dissolve the distinction between realistic and fictional discourse based on the presumption of an ontological difference between their respective referents, real and imaginary, in favor of stressing their common aspect as semiological apparatuses that produce meanings by the systematic substitution of signifieds (conceptual contents) for the extra-discursive entities that serve as their referents. (x)
If, as White mentions, the questioning of the nature of narrative is to invite a reflection on the nature of culture and humanity (1), then the work studied in this project invites one to reflect on what culture means, how it is related to identity, and how memory informs both. These intersections bring us full circle to the possibility of recognizing processes that affect not just one field of studies, but the overlapping of those fields within a nation and within a specific self-identified people in that nation.

Employing memory as an accepted fallible substance that connects past, present, and future, works as a demand of the conservation of certain sensibility without providing illusory neutrality and without abandoning the attempt to confront established interpretations and narratives. This project aims to revise recent history and memories that, ultimately, demand an evocative compromise with the human sense of worth, as well as the human appeasement with what lies behind and ahead.
Chapter Two a) - Transgressive Remembrance: Jewish Memory in the Argentine “Mnemo-Historic” Context

...maybe we only write so that the beasts cannot devour our hearts.
(Sara Rosenberg A contraluz 156)

The only form of translation that memory has at its reach is language.
(Myriam Moscona Tela de Sevoya 90)

She knows that that is exile: not knowing where to go back to.
(María Teresa Andruetto Lengua madre 45)

Introduction

At the end of the nineteenth century the Jewish German Baron Maurice de Hirsch funded the migration of hundreds of Jews from Eastern Europe who were escaping pogroms, persecution, and an extremely difficult economic situation. Even though it has been argued that the first Jews who migrated to America came with Christopher Columbus after the Spaniards established the Inquisition in 1492 and there is proof of a few Jewish families distributed throughout the Caribbean region, it is this wave of immigrants sponsored by Baron de Hirsch that is seen as the start of Latin American Jewry—specifically in the South American nation of Argentina. After a hundred years of seeming peaceful coexistence marked gravely by the 1919 Semana Trágica (Tragic Week), described as the only pogrom in Latin America, Argentinean Jews were truly shaken by the severe response by the Military Junta during the last dictatorship (1976-1983): even though one percent of the population was Jewish at the time, ten percent of...

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19 “...quizás sólo se escribe para que las bestias no puedan devorarnos el corazón” (Contraluz, 156).

20 “La única forma de traducción que la memoria tiene a su alcance es el lenguaje” (Tela de Sevoya, 90).

21 “Sabe que el exilio es eso: no saber adónde regresar” (Lengua madre, 45).
the desaparecidos (disappeared, meaning kidnapped, tortured, and most murdered) were Jewish. Following this dark period in Argentine history, there was a transition to democracy marked by the awareness of the barbarities committed during the dictatorship, followed by a turbulent decade of neoliberalist reforms. It was during these years of stretching the gap between the “haves” and the “have-nots” that two terrorist events marked Argentine Jews as outsiders yet again: the first was a terrorist attack on the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires in March 1992. The second occurred in July 1994 and its target was the AMIA, the largest Jewish community center in Argentina, also located in Buenos Aires.

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23 I utilize the categories Jewish Argentine and Argentine Jew indistinctively, although there are some scholars who have differentiated between the two in their writing, like Raanan Rein in his text Argentine Jews or Jewish Argentines? Essays on Ethnicity, Identity, and Diaspora (Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 2010).

24 There are scholars who have recently contended that the Jewish community was not targeted during the last dictatorship in Argentina. One of them, Emmanuel Nicolás Kahan argues in his essay, “‘Memories That Lie a Little.’ New Approaches to the Research into the Jewish Experience during the Last Military Dictatorship in Argentina”, that Argentine Jews were not particularly tracked by the Military Junta and explains that there is an issue of overrepresentation of the Jewish victims among the detainees-disappeared. Kahan states that this “‘overrepresentation’ lies in the fact that young Jews were overrepresented in political-military, student or social organizations, that is, the objects of the persecution carried out by the Military Junta” (302). Nevertheless, it is fundamental to recognize the deep impact the so-called Dirty War had on the Jewish community in Argentina and how this historical period produced a division within the aforementioned community regarding the response it had when faced with the atrocities committed. For further analyses of the experience of Jews during the Dirty War, See The Jews of Latin America by Judith Laikin Elkin (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1998), “Deconstructing Anti-Semitism in Argentina” by David Shein in The Jewish Diaspora in Latin America and the Caribbean: Fragments of Memory edited by Kristin Ruggiero (Portland, OR: Sussex Academic Press, 2005), and Nunca Más: Informe de la Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas by the CONADEP (Buenos Aires: Eudeba, 1985). For testimonial accounts, refer to The Little School: Tales of Disappearance and Survival by Alicia Partnoy (San Francisco, CA: Midnight Editions, 1998), A Single, Numberless Death by Nora Strejilevich (Charlottesville: U of Virginia P, 2002), and Prisoner Without a Name, Cell Without a Number by Jacobo Timerman (New York: Vintage Books, 1981).
The first bombing was almost disregarded as a non-Argentine event as the attack was perpetrated on—technically—Israeli soil. However, the second bombing brought the attention of the whole citizenry when the total number of Jewish and non-Jewish victims reached 85. (There were also more than 300 wounded and millions of dollars in lost infrastructure.) Moreover, after the fiasco of the first trial against the supposed “national connection”, where corruption and bribery, the fabrication of false testimony aided by the judge in charge of the case at the moment, and an overall dishonor of the Argentina judicial system, the families and friends of the victims were left with little to no hope of ever seeing the perpetrators in jail. (The State Prosecutor who was in charge of the case, Alberto Nisman, had accused Iran of establishing terrorist networks throughout Latin America since the 1980s and had released warrants for the arrest of nine suspects in the case—eight Iranian and one Lebanese.)

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25 AMIA stands for Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina (Argentine Israelite Mutual Association).


27 This news came out on May 29, 2013. Nisman was found dead in his home on January 19, 2015, and there is an ongoing investigation about the causes.
As Argentina is home to one of the largest Jewish communities in Latin America (approximately 200,000), it is also a site where the perception of Otherness and the place in the national archive are still contested. Therefore, there is the present issue of how to incorporate the memories and history of this people, how to insert a wedge that cracks open the record and allows the incorporation of the recollection that shapes a certain identity and reveals a place in a society that works against the very admission of part of its citizenry. For this to happen there is a need for different venues to safely challenge and contest the so-called official history and the collective memory. Maurice Halbwachs (the well-known scholar who has extensively studied collective memory) explains—referring to the reconstruction of the past:

> We preserve memories of each epoch in our lives, and these are continually reproduced; through them, as by a continual relationship, a sense of our identity is perpetuated. But precisely because these memories are repetitions, because they are successively engaged in very different systems of notions, at different periods of our lives, they have lost the form and the appearance they once had. (47)

This is what the Jewish Argentine author Sara Rosenberg (Tucumán, 1954) does in two of her novels *Cuaderno de invierno* (*Winter Notebook*, 2000) and *Contraluz* (*Backlighting*, 2008). She re-thinks the negotiation of the way the past is acknowledged and remembered, while aware of the kind of repetition Halbwachs talks about: as memories are repeated they lose the form and appearance they once had. Rosenberg utilizes this loss to tell the story of individuals marked by the 1970s dictatorial Argentina. The author reshapes both the fictional accounts, as well as the official history to create a new space in the Argentine collective memory. Those painful years are engraved so
profoundly into the main characters’ sense of self that their futile explanations to their peers in exile are confronted by the memories trickling through their lives while they seem to drown in a sea of hesitation. Still, their survivorship—informed by the previous generation who escaped the Holocaust and started anew in Argentina—is revealed by the determination of breaking their decades-long self-imposed silence while making their voices heard and their histories known. Utilizing Daniel Levy’s concept of “mnemo-history”, I propose to rethink the way the past is remembered and recorded in an unlikely venue like these two novels by Sara Rosenberg—a venue where history and memory collapse and produce transgressive remembrance.

“Mnemo-History”

As Maurice Halbwachs’ approach to collective memory and the intentionality behind the never exact appearance of memories in their repetitions, Daniel Levy’s take on the concept of “mnemo-history”—based on Jan Assmann’s exploration on the subject—further develops this notion by explaining that “mnemo-history”

is not about the exploration of the past per se but rather concerned with how particular pasts are being remembered over time and how the conditions for their appropriation are subject to changes. […] [T]he past is invented, shaped and reconstructed in a dialogical relationship with the present, past constraints and future possibilities. How histories are remembered (and by extension distorted over time) emerges as the main focus of our analytical pursuits. […] By historicizing memory as a contingent phenomenon, this process-oriented approach suggests ‘memory is not only storage of past “facts” but the ongoing work of reconstructive imagination. In other words, the past cannot be stored but always has to be “processed” and mediated’. (21-22)

Levy, then, explores the concept of how memory and history are intersected by the mediation of the reproductive view of memory and emphasizes the interconnectedness that is established between past, present, and future. Memory does not happen in a vacuum, but instead represents the cultural and epochal distinctiveness of its time. It is the fairly recently conceptualized global worldview that allows contesting the notions of nation and culture—challenging the space these two concepts encompass allows for an alteration of memory. In Levy’s words: “This transformation of memory corresponds to the fragmentation of memories and their related privatization, a process which manifests itself in a changing relationship of memory and history” (26).

As a “mnemo-historical” approach is developed and further validated, it is Sara Rosenberg’s strategy to undertake history from the standpoint of fictional accounts imbued in factual memory resulting in a most productive discourse: “mnemo-history” presents itself as remarkably dynamic and with basis to destabilize the static notion(s) provided by history. The subversive narration allows for a space where an exiled Jewish Argentine feminine subject (as in the case of these novels) is allowed to think about and, much later, talk about the terror that encompassed her nation for many years. Therefore, the issues surrounding what/who remembers (or forgets) are fraught from the beginning. Analyzing Sara Rosenberg’s texts provides a space to recognize the relevance of re-creating a people’s memories and having access to the national historical archive.

Remembering in Exile: Struggling Against Oblivion and That Which Cannot Be Told
Sara Rosenberg’s novels work to recuperate a language that gets lost during the last dictatorship in Argentina and is continued to be silenced in the first years of post-dictatorship. The overwhelmingly falogocentric and Catholic discourse left little to no space to display alternative representations. However, it is in the post-dictatorship space that this former prisoner of the Dirty War finds strategies to re-write from a subversive literary and feminine discourse. Her work also reflects the decisive value of the transmission of memory within Jewish tradition, by the imperative to remember, and to provide an area to preserve the names of those who disappeared.

In Backlighting (Contraluz) Rosenberg creates a flawed character that starts a difficult relationship with the present when the past catches up with her. Griselda Koltan is an Argentine actress who has been living in exile for many years (in Madrid, Spain) and who utilizes alcohol to numb not only her pain, but any possibility of remembering. When her partner, Jerónimo, a former political prisoner and theater director is found dead at the Astor hotel, she is forced to admit that history is not as far away in time as she would like it to be. Griselda has to struggle to make her friends aware of the situation (she suspects that her apartment has been searched, and there are minute details that support this, but her friends attribute this to her paranoia and heavy drinking) and she

29 Sara Rosenberg knows first-hand about these experiences, as she was detained when she was eight months pregnant, gave birth to her son while in prison, and was kept in the basement of the prison with thirty other women (Bayer).

30 The day before dying, Griselda’s partner, Jerónimo Larrea, tells her he is going to meet a friend of his he thought had been killed during the dictatorship. This will be the definite link Griselda needs to know those times are not just part of the past. Nevertheless, the autopsy states that he committed suicide by taking barbiturates. At the end of the novel, Griselda reads a letter Jerónimo had written to his brother Nicolás (now a Representative in the Argentine Congress) telling him he was ready to give testimony and that he allowed archaeologists and a forensic team to have access to their estate (154). This letter confirms the fact that Griselda is not paranoid and that Jerónimo was killed—and that the dark period of the Dirty War is a very present matter.
finds herself alone admitting the fear and persecution of the 1970s is still a reality. She
demands an investigation for kidnapping and murder given her certainty that both she and
her partner had been followed for some time by a task force whose objective was to
eliminate any incriminatory witnesses. While this takes place, the trials against torturers
have begun in Argentina. However, this death shows how the impunity and the lack of
justice continue to chase those who survived. It is also the awareness of the fact it that
happens during the democratic years and that it happens far from Argentina. Another
character, Checo, a traitor who now works for this task force but once was an
acquaintance of Jerónimo, is a sad reminder of how extreme the legacy of those dark
years remains.

Eventually, Griselda is hospitalized in a psychiatric clinic, where her doctor
(Doctor Barber) also functions as a collaborator with the Argentine task force. He
mentions he had visited Buenos Aires a few years ago and Griselda summarizes her
feelings for the city and for her country:

-Yes, we are rich, a fortune in ghosts, and an enviable necrophiliac culture. Mummies and generals, bloodthirsty heroes, uncorrupted arms and legs, cut hands that sign accounts in foreign banks, dead that do not rest, drowned that float, bishops that bless the cattle prod, badges and emblems with mutilated arms that children draw on their notebooks, and an atrocious hunger in a country with five cows per inhabitant; but no Genet has yet been born able to tell it. Fear in the mouth, and in the morning Buenos Aires is full of fogged crystals by the breath of the imminent catastrophe. It seems new, but it is the same, and the entire circus dances around the most stubborn tamer –she said, and she stood up. (87)
Griselda’s rawness when talking about Argentina’s past and present works as a territory where she rebels against a fixed place for women as irrational and marginal construers of history and memory.\textsuperscript{32} Her willingness to start anew in Argentina (despite her strong feelings displayed above) shows a step towards reconciliation with her country. In the “mnemo-historic” context of the nation she provides a recent account of the scope the silence has reached, as it is this silence that has hindered new trials to begin in order to condemn the accused. Jerónimo’s death seems to free her to start remembering the past under her own terms and to be able to come back from exile and face what her country has to offer, good and not so good.

Conversely, in Winter Notebook (Cuaderno de invierno) Ana Luthman’s relationship with the past is a constant remembrance—not only of her own past, but also of her father’s—that literally shuts her voice off (Ana loses her voice and ability to speak for herself when she finds out her father has passed away).\textsuperscript{33} She is also a long-time exile in Madrid, Spain and the trip back detonates a flood of memories that had accumulated, but had not been fully acknowledged by Ana: her father’s Holocaust memories and her sister’s (Inés) and former partner’s (Antonio) disappearances are two heavy weights Ana

\textsuperscript{32} It should be mentioned that during the Military Junta (1976-1983) the Madres de Plaza de Mayo (Mothers of Plaza de Mayo) who started the association to look for their disappeared children and grandchildren, were deemed as “las locas” (“the crazy ones”) by the government as a way to lessen their power and credibility. Therefore, this commonplace of women as irrational—during those years and even afterwards—is a trope Rosenberg appropriates and uses for Griselda and that, later in the text, inverts giving Griselda the tools to overcome this typecast.

\textsuperscript{33} Both novels begin with the return of the protagonists due to the death of a family member: Griselda goes back to Argentina because Jerónimo’s father had passed away and Ana returns because her father was very ill but, when she gets to Buenos Aires, he has already died.
carries with her without being sure how to process them. Like Griselda, she also drinks and, when her professional life as a doctor starts to crumble, she takes refuge in alcohol (her personal life also suffers, even though she had been waiting for this to happen, as it is clear to her she does not feel—and has never felt—close to her husband). Her memories weave in and out of her daily life and Rosenberg intersperses Ana’s reality with periods of remembrance without pause: One moment Pablo, Ana’s husband, is talking to her and the next moment Ana is talking to her disappeared sister Inés in her memory (54-57). By not giving us clues to the state of Ana’s mind—if she is interacting with the present or past—Rosenberg manages to convey a different means of remembrance. It does not have to be linear, it does not have to be clear, and it does not have to be a “truthful” account of the period: It is sufficient that it encompasses glimpses of history to situate her story, but the rest is represented through memories of her protagonist. This is what Barbara Misztal explains when she argues that “in today’s societies, with their diversity of cultures, ethnicities, religions and traditions, we are witnessing the fragmentation of national memory” (18). Sara Rosenberg, through Ana, is part of this fragmentation of national memory, as her role for remembering and retelling is constrained by a society that has continuously disallowed her project of becoming part of the national archive. Nevertheless, this fragmentation has been poured into Ana’s

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34 Certainly, it is not the whole of the Argentine society that has not showed support for this project, but it has been challenging for Rosenberg to present her work in her native country. In an interview given in July 2009 to the Argentine newspaper Página 12, Rosenberg states: “I was already writing, but I was not doing it to be published. It took a long time to publish my first novel because people were not interested in the subject. It seems like in the nineties you could not talk about the disappeared, until I found a publisher who was interested in publishing A Red Thread. Without abandoning my visual interest, little by little literature started to devour my time. I cannot live on literature, I teach classes and I have to pay for the right to write” (Friera). (“Ya estaba escribiendo, pero no lo hacía para publicar. Tardé mucho en publicar mi primera novela porque el tema no interesaba. Parece que en los noventa no se podía hablar de los desaparecidos,
being through the memories her father Herman transmitted of his experience during the Holocaust years. She is aware of the varied obstacles keeping history and memory separated as, for her, one spills into the other. The frontier is so blurry that it also mixes conversations that were supposedly true in the past with conversations that might have taken place (that Ana has with her deceased father)—the territory of memory in the novel invites to imagine fragments that could have been. In this extensive quote, Ana imagines Herman giving a rendition of the past, his fears, and his losses in a way that condenses the historical periods that Jewish families encountered: from escaping the Holocaust, to settling in Argentina, to living through the Dirty War, to facing another exile. Fiction is imbued in history, which is imbued in memory:

You should not fear, those spaces are not empty but filled with forgetfulness, the necessary forgetfulness to continue living. Every human being has an unknown continent within, but there are moments in which the forgotten inhabitants wish to go outside and vacate the rooms, because strangely they had been left narrow. While you do not do this you will continue to waste your time, and living as if you were someone else. You are lucky you are still young and have time to do this. Do you remember the story of the Golem? When it grew up and turned against the one who had created it, he had to kill it himself. It is not easy, because in general we try to preserve what we have. […]

35 “No debes tener miedo, esos espacios no están en blanco sino llenos de desmemoria, la necesaria para poder seguir viviendo. Todo ser humano tiene un continente desconocido dentro, pero hay momentos en que los habitantes olvidados desean salir afuera y desocupar las habitaciones, porque extrañamente les han ido quedando estrechas. Mientras no lo hagas seguirás perdiendo el tiempo, y viviendo como si fueras otra persona. Es una suerte que todavía seas joven y que tengas tiempo de hacerlo. ¿Recordás el cuento del Golem? Cuando creció y se volvió contra el que lo había creado, él mismo tuvo que matarlo. No es fácil, porque en general intentamos conservar lo que tenemos. […]

hasta que conseguí que una editorial se interesara en publicar Un hilo rojo. Sin abandonar mi parte visual, poco a poco la escritura empezó a devorar mi tiempo. Yo no puedo vivir de la literatura, doy clases y tengo que pagarme el derecho a escribir.”)
By bringing up the Jewish folktale of Golem (an animated anthropomorphic being, magically created entirely from inanimate matter) in the midst of talking about the Argentine disappeared, Rosenberg is merging two apparently disconnected histories/stories and showing how the connection is real and exists. There are many versions of the Golem story and some of them date to early Judaism. In the Talmud, Adam was initially created as a Golem when his dust was "kneaded into a shapeless husk" and, like Adam, all Golems are created from mud, by those close to divinity. Interestingly, in the beginning, the main disability of the golem was its inability to speak. Here we can see a parallel with Ana’s own inability to speak when finding out of her father’s passing: she spends a considerable part of the novel in her inner world and having imaginary conversations with her family, while her silence is viewed as part of the shock and mourning by outsiders. It is also worth noting that in some tales a Golem is inscribed with Hebrew words, such as the word emet ("truth" in Hebrew) written on its forehead. The Golem could then be deactivated by removing the aleph in emet, therefore changing the inscription from "truth" to "death" (met meaning "dead"). The uncanny representation of this description of the Golem (and its deactivation) within the context of the Dirty War concludes with the reflection of the way a group of Argentine citizens were silenced with death while holding a certain truth. Herman continues talking about his feelings while revising the family’s (and nation’s) history and making the connections between his own experiences with Nazism and Inés’ disappearance during the dictatorship:

36 Information about the story of the Golem can be found in Joshua Trachtenberg’s text Jewish Magic and Superstition.
When Inés was kidnapped I thought your mother was going to die of sadness and I could not do anything else but devote myself to her. Of course I met with the lawyer and I dealt with demanding and looking for her. […] I could not do anything else for Inés, or for you, or for us. Time has given me the only possible reason. Your mother needed me, even delirious she was alive. It is always necessary to choose, and unfortunately my choices have never been easy. I did what I could. I dealt with my actions; I knew, since 1981, that Inés was not going to come back. I do not know if you remember this now, I have not been able to tell it to almost anybody, it was not worth it, or I was not able to. There are things no man is able to endure without feeling that something that is his has been destroyed forever. Maybe trust in the human species is the worst of the loses that a man can suffer, because from that moment on he starts to live only a remnant of life, pure survival; it is like always being in a field full of dead, waiting every day for clues to know that at least on that day the fury and the horror will not be released again; one learns that it is fragile what separates hatred from love and lives with such fear to break that limit that one starts to burden oneself with arbitrary barriers to protect oneself. Trust is not restored, the years go by but fear continues to paralyze us. I did not want this to happen to you or anybody else, I did not want you to take risks, but I did not know how to protect you. I was not able to explain to you how to do it. […] [B]ut what still appalls me is to know that the majority agreed with the massacre; the extermination was not done against the general feeling of the population, on the contrary. It was gestated through many years in the consciousness of the people, a desperate and domesticated mass. (121-126)
In the very last part, even though Herman is talking about Europe and the Nazis, it is also a commentary about Argentine society during the last dictatorship: there was also a strong feeling of helplessness by those who were affected by the cruelty of the Military Junta and could not understand how people cheered for the national soccer team during the 1978 Soccer World Cup (incidentally, hosted in Argentina) while atrocities were committed all over the country. Undeniably, people had been frightened by subtle tactics that underscored the importance of silence to stay alive and that is why the space forged by Sara Rosenberg bears significance: Being able to affect the way memory is intertwined with history from a fictional point of view opens an unlikely, yet valid way to approach the national archive.

This connection of the Shoah and the Dirty War is one that is seen in various other texts, offering society a way of elucidation that exists in their cultural memory. It is Liliana Ruth Feierstein who analyzes this connection in her article and uses a non-fiction text (*Ese infierno: Conversaciones de cinco mujeres sobrevivientes de la ESMA*) to untangle the threads of these links. Feierstein quotes from the text, which refers to one of Argentine poet Juan Gelman’s piece, *A Quilt of Memory*. The women in *That Inferno* explain what they think of this phrase:

What a *quilt of collective memory* could be woven from these tiny bits of memory or sayings, fragmented, scattered, which the witnesses and victims store away for themselves, as if immobilized in their former place. A *comforting, warm quilt to protect against possible repetitions*. The crimes of the past survive in what is hushed up about them in the present.

(31)

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This metaphor talks about the quilt of memory, but also of oblivion and silence. And, as Feierstein says, it “suggests the collective embroidery of a texture of memory on the basis of the remnants” (588). By connecting infernos (be the Dirty War, be the Shoah) in their framework of thought and remembrance, these women (as well as the characters in Winter Notebook) bring together voices that cross times and continents. It also repeats a horror story that the Luthman family is struggling to avoid to recognizing, but the transmission of this familial story happens without asking for permission: the father is painfully aware of what he witnessed in Europe and what he has to live through with his daughter Inés. This is also seen in That Inferno when a fellow survivor of the ESMA, Adriana Marcus, joins the main five women in their conversation. Marcus (a daughter of Jewish-German refuges) talks about her a conversation he had with one of her sons and the intergenerational trauma that is transmitted:

> Reading [about the Shoah] made me feel good, because I lost the sense that nobody else went through such an experience, this sense of loneliness. Once, when I spoke with my older son about the Nazis, he was about 13 years old, he said: “All four of my grandparents had to flee because of the Nazis, and you went through what you went through. What is going to happen to me?” And I had no answer to give him. (288)

The transmission of trauma also creates an anxiety that stays floating in the air with no certain answer to provide. Ana and Inés Luthman do not have children to pass their story to, but there are younger generations willing to listen to Ana’s story and to share glimpses of the dark past in order to attempt a brighter future.

**Disrupted Transmission and How to (Re)Tell the Story**
Even though Sara Rosenberg’s novels concern themselves with the past and the search for a way to live through the struggles that brought the protagonists to their seemingly unstable present and even though their extant audience a continent away from their previous reality cannot seem to connect with their previous—but very present and real—pain, both Griselda and Ana are aware of the responsibility of passing on the memories. Laura, Jerónimo’s daughter, travels to Madrid to find out what happened to her father while she attempts to write a dissertation based on the alternative theater her father was involved in the 1970s (also a way of getting to know her absent father). While not writing that type of text, she remains close to Griselda, especially when Griselda settles in Buenos Aires. The discourse Griselda chooses to communicate with Laura and to transmit memory/history is plagued with fragments and filled with artistic references: films, music, plays. This is the way Griselda finds to transmit who she is, who Jerónimo was, and what the past conveyed to them.

Likewise, even though Ana does not have a younger member of the family to refer to, she decides to go back to Buenos Aires and work towards the preservation and transmission of memory to younger generations. She leaves Madrid after trying to commit suicide, overwhelmed by the continuous deluge of memories, and has found an approach to making the past count towards the present:

I have talked with my friend Helena, and it will not be difficult to find a job at some hospital, although I will surely have to wait two or three months, which is what I need to buy a house, walk through the city again, visit old friends, build a tomb for Inés next to my father’s, that is like building a place where to remain… maybe. Antonio’s body, however, has not been found. I will continue looking for it for who knows how long. Some time ago I told you that this distant country of mine always gets mixed up, as life, with burials and exhumations. Before, I used to get sick,
now I assume it as part of what exists, of what our history was. What is important is to get the murderers at least tried and convicted. It is not easy. (251)

Both Ana and Griselda are aware of their limitations, but they also know that in order to move forward they need to leave testimony of what happened, they need to keep fighting against impunity, and they need to convey the need for justice and memory:

Memory that fits into what Christina Schwenkel calls “recombinant history”, which refers to “the interweaving of diverse transnational memories, knowledge formations, and logics of representation” (5). It is Ana’s found voice at the end of Winter Notebook and in Griselda’s determination shown to Laura in Backlighting when saying, “-After trying them in the public square, and with consensus, a clean shot, without pain. They do not deserve to be alive. When a torturer dies, the world becomes a little bit better. Those people will never change, they are totally rotten” (153). Their goal to transmit the need for justice, but also the pain that had been inflicted on them transforms their discourse into a site of memory itself, into “a transnational negotiated process that involves variously situated actors and their global engagements with memory to produce recombinant history” (Schwenkel 20-21). It is precisely this concept of “recombinant

39 “He hablado con mi amiga Helena, y no será difícil encontrar un empleo en algún hospital, aunque seguramente tenderé que esperar dos o tres meses, que son los que necesito para conseguir una casa, caminar otra vez por la ciudad, visitar mis antiguos amigos, construir una tumba para Inés al lado de la de mi padre, que es como construir un lugar donde permanecer... tal vez. El cuerpo de Antonio, sin embargo, no ha aparecido. He de seguir buscándolo quien sabe cuánto tiempo. Alguna vez te dije que este lejano país mío siempre se mezcla, como la vida, con enterramientos y desenterramientos. Antes me ponía enferma, ahora lo asumo como parte de lo que existe, de lo que fue nuestra historia. Lo importante será conseguir que los asesinos sean al menos juzgados y condenados. No es fácil.” (251)

40 “-Después de juzgarlos, en la plaza pública, y con consenso, un tiro limpio, sin dolor. No merecen seguir vivos. Cuando un torturador muere, el mundo se vuelve un poco mejor. Esa gente no cambiará nunca, está totalmente podrida” (153).
history” that provides the layout to rethink the formation of memory and history, based
not on the dislocation that happened to the protagonists in their exile, but “processes of
encounter and contestation” (Schwenkel 21). At that juncture, the nation may start
allowing for these other types of remembrance to co-exist and allow for a space of
“mnemo-history” that may surpass the tight frame containing the national archive.

Final Words

Both Winter Notebook and Backlighting provide Sara Rosenberg (not only a
writer, but also a visual artist) a space where fiction and reality are weaved so tightly
together that it is almost worthless trying to separate them—the same happens with the
different doses of memory and history amalgamated into the stories. The author works
her novels as a ceaseless painting where the whole composition defies established notion
of power: who remembers/forgets and what is remembered/forgotten stay on the same
side of the canvas. This forces a new approach to the meanings of remembrance and
oblivion, both within history and within memory. In Winter Notebook Ana wonders: “Is
oblivion also white? […] The days seem threads of water that disappear underneath the
stones of that white desert. And memory, unexpected gusts” (107). In the contemporary
Argentine “mnemo-historic” context Rosenberg’s transgressive remembrance may be
seen as an unexpected gust, but it is a calculated one delivered by her exiled Jewish

41 “¿El olvido será también blanco? […] Los días parecen hilos de agua que van desapareciendo bajo las
piedras de ese desierto blanco. Y la memoria, ráfagas imprevistas” (107).
Argentinean female characters who have decided not to stand on the side of history or, for that matter, memory.\textsuperscript{42}

\textsuperscript{42} It is important to note that Rosenberg’s gender is one more variable that allows for bending of the established norms. Her writing transgress the phallogocentric world and invites to see fiction and reality, and history and memory as mere categories that can work entwined to refer to the past. A famous precedent of Argentine female subjects that broke with masculine rules are the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, who were labeled as “crazy” by the all-male military government of the dictatorship. This label, however, was a way for them to escape the norms and try different strategies to talk about their disappeared children at a time when that implied deadly consequences. Sara Rosenberg was/is not a Mother, but she was a political prisoner and she has found in her art a way to transcend the way history is supposed to be written. (More about the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo in chapter three.)
Chapter Two b) - *My German Friend* and the Jewish Argentine/German “Mnemo-Historic” Context

Memory is an intersubjective relationship, based on the act of transmission and reinterpretation. Even personal memory requires others to remember: it is group support that makes waking life and memory cohesive and structured. We are never alone. When given the opportunity to reminisce, people talk as if their memories were there, waiting to be given the opportunity to be expressed in words.

(Elizabeth Jelin and Susana G. Kaufman “Layers of memories. Twenty years after in Argentina.” 105)

You don’t have to be German, or German Jewish, to relate to it. It has to do with us as human beings and about love and what love can do for you.

(Jeanine Meerapfel interviewed by Homa Nasab)

Film director and screenplay writer Jeanine Meerapfel was born in 1943 in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Her parents, German Jews, had survived and escaped the Shoah and found a new home in this South American country. Meerapfel grew up speaking both Spanish and German and in the 1960s went back to her parents’ country, where she studied film and started her productive career. Her latest long feature film, *My German Friend* (*El amigo alemán/Der Deutsche Freund*, 2012), is a semi-autobiographical account of her life and her attempt to create what, according to her, is the first film to address the relationship between Germans who escaped the Shoah and the ones who escaped justice. Meerapfel says: “I always found it astonishing that nobody has told the story of the families that came, the Jewish German families that came to Argentina, escaping from the Holocaust… And then, some years later, after the war, came the Nazis.

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43 In an interview by Homa Nasab, Meerapfel explains: “There is some personal stuff, but there is a lot of research into the film also… It is very ironical this destiny, somebody has to tell it and that’s what I did.” This irony being the fact that both Jews and Nazis sought refuge in the same South American country.
[...] So, that’s something that nobody told, what happens with the children.” *My German Friend* provides a space where the “mnemo-historic” context surpasses the tight frame of both History and Memory: Meerapfel’s technique of mixing real-life events (including background scenes projected on a TV set of historic events) and fiction provides a crossroads that allows for the analysis of the formation, reconstruction, and recording of memory. Maurice Halbwachs—the well-known scholar who has extensively studied collective memory—explains, referring to the reconstruction of the past:

> We preserve memories of each epoch in our lives, and these are continually reproduced; through them, as by a continual relationship, a sense of our identity is perpetuated. But precisely because these memories are repetitions, because they are successively engaged in very different systems of notions, at different periods of our lives, they have lost the form and the appearance they once had. (47)

Meerapfel underscores historical events in order to support her story, which is based on her own memories. This binding of two streams—Memory and History—results in the significant concept of “mnemo-history”. It is in this Jewish Argentine/German context that *My German Friend* develops its ideas and comments on the fate of Jews worldwide. As Sulamit (Celeste Cid) states: “I just learned how to fit in. Like all good Jews… My parents taught me, what possibly all Jews teach their children: To survive anywhere, anytime, to adapt.” Meerapfel created the characters of Sulamit Löwenstein who, like the director, was born in Argentina to Jewish German parents, and her next-door neighbor, Friedrich Burg (Max Riemelt), the Argentine son of an SS officer, to tell the story of these two countries from the 1950s until the return of democracy in Argentina in 1983. In this film, history and memory are intertwined to question not only
the collective history of Jewish and German émigrés to Argentina, but also to uncover the consequences of the earlier generations’ choices—consequences that drive both Sulamit and Friedrich into exile and propels the latter into political involvement, including guerilla movements in the 1970s. By utilizing Daniel Levy’s concept of “mnemo-history”—a concept of how memory and history are intersected by the mediation of the reproductive view of memory—I propose to analyze the way the past is remembered and recorded in this film.

“Mnemo-History” and Its Nuanced Approach

As in the previous sub-chapter, “Transgressive Remembrance: Jewish Memory in the Argentinean ‘Mnemo-Historic’ Context”, Daniel Levy’s concept of “mnemo-history” from his essay “Changing Temporalities and the Internationalization of Memory Cultures”, provides the possibility of bringing together the notions of memory and history in order to locate a space where they both exist and have the same weight in thinking about the past and its connection to the present (and future). As a “mnemo-historical” approach is developed and further validated, it is Jeanine Meerapfel’s strategy to undertake history from the standpoint of fictional accounts imbued with factual memory resulting in a most productive discourse: “mnemo-history” presents itself as remarkably dynamic and with basis to destabilize the static notion(s) provided by history. The alternative narration allows for a space where the film director is allowed to think about and later take to the screen the challenges that encompassed her life and her two countries of residence for many years. The issues surrounding what/who remembers (or forgets)—
fraught from the beginning—provide a space to recognize the relevance of re-creating memories and the importance of remembering emphasized by Jewish tradition. It is the responsibility to remember (zahor, in Hebrew, as in "remember the Sabbath day . . ." in Exodus 20:8) no matter the relationship and the effects of the past and the present, the fissures of the past or whatever remains the past might have left in the present. The repercussions of the past have a role in the present and the “mnemo-historic” context provides a venue where to peel back layer after layer of memory to rediscover a territory where this same memory has merged with history giving way to a hazy reflection where the revision of the past is not without fault, as forgetting is encompassed in the act of recollection.

“Memory was, as ever, creation” (58), says writer Jay Neugeboren and that is what Meerapfel does in My German Friend: she finds a way to create her story in the fine intersection of memory and history. She is aware of her creation, as she is aware of the pitfalls of her memory and the use of historical facts. For her film, the director reinvents the language employed to tell a story as she attempts to present a record of the 1950s-1980s in Argentina and Germany while simultaneously transforming the interstice produced by her remembering and her forgetting—in this crevice she finds a way to acknowledge the inaccuracies of memory and a way to represent the processes that lead to the creation that blur the lines between memory and history.

The Byroads of Memory
My German Friend follows the chronological story of Sulamit and Friedrich from their time in elementary school to their adulthood. The film resembles a chain where every scene is a link: it is connected to what happens before and after, but it can also function as its own individual unit. The thread that keeps the action going is the story of the main characters, but there is also the chronological order of historical data that is inserted throughout the film. This factual information frames the fictional account and works toward a veneer of authenticity. Meerapfel is conscious of this attempt as she explains: “After all, this is, above all, a love story developing against the historical background of victims and victimizers converging on the same place after ravages and atrocities of war” (“My German Friend”). The filmmaker, then, utilizes her own memories to construct Sulamit’s character while Friedrich’s, on the other hand, is based on knowledge Meerapfel had of some of her neighbors – although she never truly met the son of a Nazi officer when growing up in Buenos Aires. For her film, however, these circumstances—her lack of personal knowledge—are irrelevant, as she does not contextualize her story within a historic frame nor within a mnemonic one. Instead of trying to discern between fact and fiction, between past and present, Levy suggests trying to be “attentive to the different relationships of the temporal triad of past, present and future” (24). By bringing the future into the “mnemo-historic” context of the film Meerapfel establishes a connection with younger generations, as she presents the young Sulamit and Friedrich as the universal young lovers that struggle to find a happy ending (a representation of love with which audiences can easily identify). However, the circumstances surrounding this love and the constant setbacks by the historical conditions
were particular to the 1950s-1980s in Europe and South America. From the overthrowing of President Perón to the student movements in Germany in 1968 to the brutal government repression in Argentina in the 1970s, the political and the historical mark Sulamit and Friedrich’s love story. This is so as the story follows Friedrich along his desperate attempts to make sense of his father’s choices in the past. While in this quest to, in some way, elucidate his forebear’s wrongdoings Friedrich cannot see Sulamit loves him for who is, with no connection to his family’s past. Aware of the weight the name carries (Great-aunt Sulamit was killed by the Nazis), Sulamit’s family errs on the side of silence about their past: there are few references to the Shoah and Sulamit is confused by the ceremony and the Jewish ritual carried on at her father’s funeral. It is her aunt Else who has the only conversation about her family’s past when she gives Sulamit a ring:

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45 When thinking about Friedrich’s and Sulamit’s trips to Germany, Eva Hoffman’s account comes to mind: “Still, the visit helps. It helps in measuring the distance between the past and the present, and in anchoring that swirling childhood knowledge in solid actualities. And perhaps a kind of task has been fulfilled, for it is not good not to know where your parents came from, and where your ancestors died or were murdered. This was for my sister and me to do: to keep this fragment of larger story in mind, and perhaps, in some way, pass it on” (220). Intriguingly, it is Friedrich who is defiantly inquisitive about his family’s past (actually, he is haunted by it) and it is Sulamit who finds in Friedrich an excuse to go to the land where her family perished. While in Germany she makes no attempt to find out what happened to her ancestors or to visit her parents’ hometowns. Her lack of curiosity may be traced back to her family’s silence: a silence that was very common among Holocaust survivors and escapees—wanting to start anew in a new land and not burden their children with horror stories.

46 In contrast to Friedrich’s feelings, his father is not ashamed of his past. When Friedrich finds a bread basket with a swastika stitched in it he asks his father about it and the answer is: “It's a decor. A relic from other times.” The use of the word “relic” implies the sentimental value this object has to the former SS officer. Friedrich seems to react to both the shock of unearthing this part of his family history, as well as the nonchalant way his father acknowledges his past.

47 Sulamit attends a private French school while in elementary school, but is forced to switch to a public school when her father dies and leaves Sulamit and her mother in a perilous economic situation. In her elementary school we see how she is excluded from religious studies for being Jewish and directed to ethics studies whose teacher is often supposedly ill. There are only two references to Judaism in Sulamit’s life: one is during the high holidays, when her extended family suggests she celebrates “Chrismukkah, then. Christmas and Chanukkah” as a point of compromise between her family’s tradition and the
This ring used to belong to your great aunt Sulamit. It's for you.
- For me?
- You got your name from her.
- Why do we never talk about her?
- Because it's difficult. Perhaps she could've been saved. If only she'd not been so stubborn. I shouldn't talk so much. I'm just a bit meshugge.
- You're not, aunt! You can talk to me about anything, always.

Sulamit is put in a position where her family’s past and her own present are disassociated. By ways of this experience, she is able to separate Friedrich from his past—as well as his actions from his father’s—resulting in decade-long unconditional love for him.\(^{48}\)

The first scene in the film shows Sulamit holding a key while traveling by train through the vast Patagonia. Later we find out she is going to visit Friedrich, who has settled there after being imprisoned in Rawson, Chubut (a southern Argentine province) during the dictatorship (1976-1983). We eventually find out that the key was given to her by Friedrich when they were both children and wanted to meet freely without their parents’ permission and without supervision (the key accesses the attic in Friedrich’s house). This key could also be a symbol of their love: Sulamit keeps it throughout her life

\(^{48}\) In an interview with Homa Nasab, Meerapfel states her point of view about this love: “Only through love he (Friedrich) will really heal himself, he cannot do it through hate.” Nevertheless, Friedrich spends decades loathing who he is and what his family did and is not able to see Sulamit and the sacrifices she has made for him, like traveling from Germany to Patagonia (south of Argentina) to visit him in prison. The final scene shows a form of realization of these efforts and acknowledgment by Friedrich, but it is open to interpretation: after years of going back and forth between two continents Sulamit (who has established herself as a university professor in Germany) asks: “Are you coming with me?” To what Friedrich (who has settled in Patagonia after spending many years in prison there) answers: “Are you staying here?”
and finds out that attic door does not exist anymore before embarking on that final train ride. When Friedrich gave it to her there was a chance for their love to flourish. However, Friedrich had not reciprocated Sulamit’s love for years. In one scene Sulamit, already a university professor in Germany, is teaching a poem by Jewish Romanian poet Paul Celan (1920-1970):

With a changing key,  
you unlock the house where  
the snow of what’s silenced drifts.  
Just like the blood that bursts from  
Your eye or mouth or ear,  
so your key changes.

Changing your key changes the word  
That may drift with flakes.  
Just like the wind that rebuffs you,  
Clenched round your word is the snow.

Friedrich also reads Celan’s work while in his long imprisonment during the dictatorship. Patricia Nuriel relates this reading with Celan’s concerns “on the universal condition of persecution that exists beyond national, racial, ethnic, religious, or political affiliation” (108). It is a condition Friedrich is in at the moment of this reading, but it may also be a way to start to understand Sulamit and her family’s plight. Friedrich has spent his life struggling to grasp the logic behind his father’s decisions and, even though he commits to numerous political and social movements with the goal to make a difference, it takes him several decades to attempt to genuinely engage with his own values and principles. Even though Meerapfel does not dwell on the Shoah, she provides glimpses at its consequences and the (mostly silenced) burden that second generations carry. The
“mnemo-historic” context that frames her film presents her memories as a child of survivors/escapees and combines them with real-life events like Eichmann’s kidnapping in 1960. In the film, Sulamit writes about this historical incident in her high school newspaper and Meerapfel utilizes her own memories of writing in a student newspaper transposing the name of that newspaper (El espolón; The spur) into the fictional world.

By employing a universally understood narrative device, such as a love story, Meerapfel manages to connect to audiences worldwide. Furthermore, by inserting autobiographical references, she challenges those audiences by showcasing historical events that shaped two nations (and touched numerous others) and portraying the way the Shoah continues to affect many generations into the future. The director concedes: “I tell stories. That in the best case scenario can prevent those things from happening again” (Chiesa). There is the underlying desire to leave testament to world history, as well as to lie to rest personal memory.

**Otherness Multiplied**

In her 1981 documentary *Im Land Meiner Eltern (In the Country of my Parents)*, Jeanine Meerapfel says in voice-over: “If Hitler had not existed, I would have been born a German Jew, more German than Jewish, in a small village in southern Germany…” (Magee 64). Just like her creation, Sulamit, Meerapfel also felt like an outsider growing up. Being Jewish and speaking German with her parents in Argentina implied being marked as a foreigner. When moving to Germany in her youth to study film in Berlin and

49 Noticeably, at the time the film ends—when Friedrich and Sulamit are in their forties—neither one has had children, therefore disrupting the generational continuation and the transmission of memory.

50 “Cuento historias. Que en el mejor de los casos pueden llegar a conseguir que esas cosas no se repitan.”
Ulma she was met by the skepticism of her peers, not having met “a Jew” while growing up in post-war Germany. Shawn Magee states: “Jeanine Meerapfel is an outsider. As a woman in a patriarchal age, as a foreigner in a xenophobic country, as a direct descendant of a race nearly eradicated a generation ago by genocide, she stands apart from the mainstream of German society” (63). The feeling of not belonging followed the filmmaker and she pours that feeling into her cinematic alter ego.

In a scene towards the beginning of the film, Sulamit is attacked when leaving her high school building and she is called “Dirty Jew! [...] We'll slit you up” (an autobiographical event included by the director). This is one of two remarks of anti-Semitism in Argentina in the film and it provides a context to understand the society in which Sulamit grows up.51 As Nora Strejilevich points out: “[i]n Argentina, an anti-Semitism that is manifested in that a Jew can be considered, in any eventuality, alienus,” which emphasizes what is strange, alienated, and even with a connection to the enemy (143).52 Even though Friedrich also speaks German at home with his family, the film does not showcase this feeling of estrangement coming from the outside. Friedrich’s alienation comes from within when he finds out what his father was and what he did in Germany. The revelation of his father’s past disturbs him with such force that, a few

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51 There is a brief reference on the news of Graciela Narcisa Sirota, a nineteen-year-old college student, who in 1962 was kidnapped from her hometown of Buenos Aires and a swastika was carved on her breast. Unfortunately, without previous knowledge of this fact the remark is lost on most viewers.

52 “[e]n la Argentina, de un antisemitismo que se manifiesta en que el judío puede ser considerado, en cualquier eventualidad, alienus”.

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years later, he decides to travel to Germany to unearth more about the dreadful past. Without being able to cope with the true identity of his father and, therefore, his own, Friedrich spends his life supporting political causes. He involves himself in such a manner that he loses himself—a coping mechanism to reject the tainted blood running through him. He seems to chase ghosts throughout his life and when his support of German students’ demands in 1968 does not feel drastic enough he goes back to Argentina to fight with the armed guerrilla movement which is starting to publicly oppose the government. Meerapfel explained that when she went back to Germany in the early 1960s she met German students my age who fanatically tried to debunk their parents. These young men and women were so ashamed of the Nazi atrocities that they would conceal their German passports, or would blindly join extreme leftwing parties. They all had to go a long way before learning to love themselves and to love others. (“My German Friend”) Friedrich represents these young people Meerapfel encountered when traveling to Germany to study. The twist she adds to her male protagonist is the going back to Argentina, joining an armed guerrilla movement, and being detained by the police. Friedrich does not become one of the many disappeared (desaparecidos) because his location is known—he is transferred to a prison in the South for many years. When set free, instead of moving back to Buenos Aires or Germany, he stays in the Patagonia to

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53 Friedrich is distressed and furious and can only think about himself and uncovering his family’s hidden past. This hurts Sulamit who realizes she is not part of Friedrich’s present or future, as shown in this dialogue:

- I got a scholarship to study politics in Frankfurt. Please understand! I've got to know who my father was, what he did. And my own position in this.
- What are you talking about? Frankfurt? And us? What about us?
- Nothing, it's got nothing to do with us. Don't be sad.
help the indigenous people of the area (the Mapuches) reclaim their land. Through Friedrich, the director tries to showcase the lack of direction this guilt-ridden generation possesses: Friedrich’s shame and loneliness cloud his judgment and does not let him see Sulamit. And Sulamit, the Other par excellence in this story, is actually the one who thrives in Germany—yet again as a foreigner—eventually realizing her potential as a college professor. (In her personal life, her relationship with Michael Tendler (Benjamin Sadler) collapses as she cannot let go of her feelings for Friedrich.)

**Conclusion**

Jeanine Meerapfel’s *My German Friend* crosses the Atlantic back and forth in a story that evolves throughout the decades and transforms itself into an autobiographical account with historical patches (or vice versa). This approach to both history and memory—to looking at the past through the lens of “mnemo-history”—gives the director the necessary freedom to explore various themes within her film. As Patricia Nuriel puts it in her review:

*My German Friend* was filmed in Argentina and Germany using both Spanish and German languages. It raises topics of immigration and exile, explores themes of memory and identity, broaches social justice and human rights concerns, questions gender and minority constructs, and highlights personal and political actions in a transnational context. (108)

Most of all, this film utilizes “mnemo-history” to bridge the gap between memory and history, and between the present and the past. The repositioning of the filmmaker’s memories onto the screen provides a canvas where to paint her story privileging events meaningful to her and utilizing historical events as the easel that supports her picture. The
challenge of reconstructing her story through fiction frames the experiences for what is remembered through both space (Argentina and Germany) and time (1950s through mid-1980s). The resignification of these two axes through a love story is what allows present-day audiences to connect to a seemingly distant past. “Here memory and its association with a particular past are not an impediment for the future but a prerequisite to enunciate a narrative (bridge) over the present” (Levy 16). The director/screenwriter succeeds in situating her film in a myriad of crossroads, where languages, nationalities, cultures, identities, temporalities, and geographies intersect. Above all, *My German Friend* is a film embedded in the “mnemo-historic” context, a space where memory and history—and where Jews, Argentines, and Germans—coalesce.
Chapter Three - L’dor v’dor in Recent Jewish Argentinean Literature: The Role of Narrative in the Transmission of Memory

*History is never what one wants it to be, dear.*

(Liliana Heker *El fin de la historia* 234)

“Like a red thread fear has been enclosing us.”

(Sara Rosenberg *Un hilo rojo* 114)

Writing did not become an obsession but it is turning into a need. To bear testimony. Words that can linger beyond the wall.

(Manuela Fingueret *Hija del silencio* 173)

Memories—that is, fragments of memories, as memories are never fully kept nor transmitted—are actually residues of the events that created them in the first place. The attempt to trace the continuity from the event to the memory is in itself fraught. The transmission of memories further complicates these notions, as the memories are mediated by experience. The consciousness of this mediation is the basis of the narration in the novels studied in this essay: the awareness of the blurry lines between “reality” and “fiction”, as well as the deliberate objective to utilize this medium to recreate traditional storytelling, produce an alternative way to narrate and, by doing so, the authors undertake the fundamental task of transmitting. This transposing becomes the first step in preserving memory, but it also presents a form of resistance. What the novels analyzed here underscore is the role of future generations not as mere depository of memories, but generations responsible for integrating those memories and prolonging the resistance

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54 “La historia nunca es lo que uno quiere, hija.”

55 “Como un hilo rojo el miedo nos ha ido cercando.”

56 “Escribir no llegó a ser una obsesión pero se está volviendo una necesidad. Testimoniar. Palabras que puedan permanecer más allá de la pared.”

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created by the authors and their stories. In her book *Haunting Legacies* (2010), Gabriele Schwab states that “People have always silenced violent histories. Some histories, collective and personal, are so violent we would not be able to live our daily lives if we did not at least temporarily silence them. A certain amount of splitting is conducive to survival. Too much silence, however, becomes haunting” (46). For several generations of Jewish Argentines the question of how much to tell and how much to silence has been unanswerable: the migration to this South American nation amidst pogroms and the Shoah, and the 1970s military dictatorship, has left a thread uniting violence and trauma, survival and memory.\(^57\) This chapter delves into the way three Jewish Argentine authors confront the recent past and pour it into their narrative, creating a way for younger generations to start to comprehend the histories that precede them. Liliana Heker’s *The End of the Story* (*El fin de la historia*, 1996), Sara Rosenberg’s *A Red Thread* (*Un hilo rojo*, 1998), and Manuela Fingueret’s *Daughter of Silence* (*Hija del silencio*, 2006) are three texts among many that represent the way these authors who lived and survived the Dirty War chose to remember, imagine, and tell their stories.\(^58\) These writers lived through a dark period in Argentine history where a military government (1976-1983) left

\(^57\) The Jewish German Baron Maurice de Hirsch encouraged Eastern European Jews (through the Jewish Colonization Association) to migrate to the Argentine grasslands, where he had bought land to create a new Palestine. The first immigrants arrived in 1889 to Buenos Aires and moved to the provinces of Santa Fe and Entre Ríos to work the land.

\(^58\) The focus on these three novels come from the analogous projects presented by the authors: the three of them look for ways to recreate the traditional way of narration and, from that platform, generate a distinctive approach to storytelling, transmitting, and resisting. (*Hija del silencio* was translated by Darrell B. Lockhart and that edition came out as *Daughter of Silence* in 2012 published by Texas Tech University Press.)
30,000 disappeared, of whom an unusually high percentage were Jewish. Many authors in this community chose fiction as their preferred way to transmit a period too close to the Shoah, both in time and in savagery. However, their work becomes more than a story: It becomes a way to relay their experiences, history, and memories l’dor v’dor (“from generation to generation”).

In this chapter I propose to re-think the role of literature when reflecting on the recent past and fictionalizing events that marked a generation, a community, and a nation. I argue that the approach to these events shapes the way younger generations view the recent past and how this past will be remembered. The force of imagination and narrative within Jewish Argentine literature at the turn of the century beholds the possibility of finding an authoritative voice that (re)shapes the imaginary of this community within the nation. Moreover, the influence of these works of fiction has facilitated the period of recovery of memory which, in post-dictatorship Argentina, entails an ever-evolving undertaking. Given this space, these three authors have chosen unconventional ways of telling their stories: Far from linear, clearly-defined narrations, we find that, as readers, it

59 The Jewish population at the time was around 1 percent. The percentage of disappeared (kidnapped, tortured, murdered) Jews was between 10 percent and 12 percent. The word “disappeared” entails a forced abduction by a state or political organization that usually involves illegal detention, torture and murder. The body is then disposed—it “vanishes”—in an attempt for the abductors to deny the crime committed. It was a dreadfully common practice during the last dictatorship in Argentina, where it worked to instill fear and make the citizens accomplices. The phrase was first utilized during the Dirty War by de facto President General Jorge Rafael Videla who said “They are neither dead nor alive, they are desaparecidos”. The Mothers and Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo (the most visible of the organizations looking for the disappeared children and grandchildren, alongside H.I.J.O.S.—an acronym that in Spanish stands for Sons and Daughters for Identity and Justice Against Oblivion and Silence) believe in using the term disappeared/desaparecidos (in italics) as a way to confront the notion of the death of their children. This defiance helped bring many perpetrators to court—when the bodies were not found, it meant the deaths could not be confirmed; therefore the crimes did not possess a statute of limitations.

60 Even testimonies were fictionalized, like renowned The Little School by Alicia Partnoy and A Single, Numberless Death by Nora Strejilevich. The best-known non-fiction account of this period is Prisoner Without a Name, Cell Without a Number by Jacobo Timerman.
is our ultimate task to unravel the stories and make them come to life by the simple act of interacting with them, not forgetting, and (hopefully) transmitting them to the next generation. Therefore, the historical responsibility of remembering what lies in the Jewish archive presents itself here as a double obligation towards the Jewish Argentine community and to their newly adopted country. These narratives add a new layer to the act of transmitting the values and history of the Jewish people to the next generation: There is now the need to survive and thrive in an exile that has shown its limitations. As Marianne Hirsch suggests, “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” (The Generation of Postmemory 33). And it is the notion and awareness of the utilization of narrative in these processes that incarnates the task of transmitting l’dor v’dor.

Telling Context

The three texts analyzed in this essay were written in a difficult post-dictatorship context. Not only was this a society that had to deal with the fact that a military junta ruled the country from 1976 to 1983 and lost a war with Great Britain in 1982 over the Malvinas/Falklands Islands, but the level of dehumanization suffered was brought to a new intensity when the trials against the military began and the search for appropriated children (mostly sons and daughters of the disappeared) was in its early stages. Additionally, while the nation watched testimony after distressing testimony of the few who survived, no one could have imagined those same perpetrators would be released
from prison under the Full Stop Law and the Law of Full Obedience passed by the National Congress in the 1980s. Even though these two laws were repealed by the National Congress in 2003 and annulled as unconstitutional by the Supreme Court Justice in 2005, the damage to the nation’s credibility and integrity had been done.

In the midst of these political struggles, Liliana Heker and Sara Rosenberg published their novels where the protagonists search for the truth in their disappeared friends’ absence. This search for both the “truth” and the need to tell their friends’ stories speaks to the need of a country to recuperate a sense of justice and start recounting the past so that it will not also fade away. While the Mothers and Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo dug deeper into the investigation of their children and grandchildren there was a conscious need to find a way to transmit the history of these children’s family, community, and nation: Heker and Rosenberg partook in this pursuit with their novels.

When Manuela Fingueret’s second novel, *Daughter of Silence*, came out in the mid-2000s, the political situation was at the same time similar and different. Even though the pardon that President Carlos Menem had given to top military perpetrators in 1989 and 1990, including Generals Videla and Galtieri, was deemed void, opening the way for trials for human rights violations, the society was being compelled to remember—a task many Argentines still do not want to tackle. These three novels emerged as a way to urge the country to confront the past as the only way to move forward and start the healing process. As Irene Wirshing argues:

> Literature written both during and after dictatorships is often embedded in trauma. The writing is usually fragmented and nonlinear, which serves as
a metaphor for psychological trauma. Moreover, one cannot discuss postdictatorship literature without mentioning some aspects of mourning, memory, and national trauma. National trauma is the aftermath of totalitarianism; its paralyzing impact prevents nations from transitioning into democracies. (6-7)

Heker, Rosenberg, and Fingueret work to get the Argentine society out of this paralyzing state and transform it into a nation that not only remembers, but also acts upon that remembrance by transmitting its history. These authors inaugurated the path towards that remembrance/transmission by transforming the narrativization proposed by the literary world: analyzing the stories’ non-linearity, as well as the subtle (but overriding) blurring of “reality” and “fiction,” allows for an insightful comprehension of this nation’s struggles to sort through the conflicting and competing spaces for memories of the recent past and their possible location throughout the democratization process. Furthermore, by reflecting on the inclusion of Jewish characters and the connection with previous genocides a path is initiated to deconstruct the underlying stories that had already been passed from generation to generation.

*The End of the Story, the Beginning of Narration*

Liliana Heker (Buenos Aires, 1943) authored a semi-autobiographical novel *The End of the Story* (*El fin de la historia*) where the protagonist, Diana Glass, struggles to
tell the story of her friend and high school classmate, Leonora Ordaz. Diana cannot find a way to transmit the experiences of Leonora, as these are not first-hand accounts, and the end of the story changes the perspective Diana had of her friend and of the cause that engulfed a whole generation. Therefore, both the main character and the author herself are forced to deal with the responsibility of leaving the story of a failure to the next generations. How does one transmit the memory created while preventing discouragement from envisioning an equal world and from challenging the authorities? To find her way, Diana has the unexpected help of Hertha Bechofen, a Viennese writer born in 1906 who now lives in the Buenos Aires exile community (where she arrived in 1938 escaping from the Nazis) and who hosts literary courses in the midst of yet another authoritative government. Diana recognizes that her search for a way to narrate the story of her friend is also a way to make sense of the madness of the time, as well as her own: “I want to discover her. Or discover myself?” (166).

Hecker starts her story in 1971 when certain leftist groups in Argentina, which had started to organize and train for a more violent confrontation with the government since the 1960s, took a more aggressive approach to their claims. Leonora enters one of these groups and we see her involvement in these pre-dictatorship years while Diana takes a more passive role. When in 1976 Leonora disappears, Diana commits to write her

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61 Even though Diana’s Jewishness is not a central topic throughout the novel, the author leaves no doubt when she tells that her grandmother used to insist that her mother found “[a] good Jewish husband like hers” (“Un buen marido judío como el suyo”, 173). Diana even wishes her friend Leonora would someday get married to “a good Jewish husband who worries about the household and is married to her and not to politics” (“un buen marido judío que se preocupe por la casa y esté casado con ella y no con la política”, 174). An ironic wish, as Leonora’s husband (a highly political individual) was Jewish on his father’s side.

62 “Yo quiero descubrirla a ella. ¿O descubrirme a mí misma?”
story not knowing the ending would surprise her. Her uneasiness with the country’s environment replicates what many Argentines were feeling at the time and it becomes more confusing and terrifying as time goes by and people start to whisper horror stories. Diana’s words reflect what much of the citizenry was feeling as people slowly became aware of the underground tragedy happening at the time:

Because my horror consisted of being alive and cruelly, ferociously, I was being harassed by the insufferable desire to live, to laugh, to be happy. And the intolerable guilt of being alive. That was the horror that I had to tell: The joy, and the fear, and the guilt, and the fury, and the impotence, and the revulsion, all together coexisting inside me in that ruthless winter of ‘77. (206)63

That guilt is now transmitted to the next generation, but it is a guilt that is difficult to comprehend if one has not lived through the specific situation. That is where the character of Hertha Bechofen helps both Diana and the younger readers. She advises Diana to explain that what is happening in Argentina in the 1970s is not a rare and new phenomenon in humanity—Hertha had lived through this only a few decades ago. She is trying to convey to Diana what Heker is trying to convey to us: As difficult and complex as these events were we are obliged to narrate them and to pass them on. Consequently, Hertha explains to Diana that “[t]here is much madness in this period that we are living, dear, so, after this time of death, a time of great confusion waits for us” (210).64

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63 “Porque mi horror consistía en que estaba viva y cruelmente, ferozmente, me seguía hostigando el insoportable deseo de vivir, y de reírme, y de ser feliz. Y la intolerable culpa de estar viva. Ése era el horror que yo tenía para contar: la alegría, y el miedo, y la culpa, y la furia, y la impotencia, y el asco, todo junto conviviendo dentro de mí en ese despiadado invierno del setenta y siete.”

64 “Hay mucha locura en esta época que nos ha tocado vivir, hija, así que, luego de este tiempo de muerte, nos espera un tiempo de gran confusión.”
of confusion has extended long enough to reach to us in a new millennium and elicit a bridge of memory l’dor v’dor.  

What Heker is compelled to transmit—as painful as it may be to admit—is not just the horror of the Dirty War and its intricacies, but also the failure of a whole generation to achieve the expected goals to create a so-called “better world”, as well as the acknowledgment of the existence of traitors within leftist ranks (as it was the case in Leonora’s case). The author chooses to show us this layer of the 1970s through Leonora and her betrayal: After being kidnapped and tortured, she eventually forms a relationship with one of her torturers and helps him and his comrades carry on their illegal and violent ventures. The concrete, profound pain Diana feels when she finds out Leonora is alive (an oddity in itself) and she has switched sides triggers Diana’s confusion and her proclamation: “The story that I wanted to tell ends, it always ended, in that first chapter. Because the awaited woman will never do, never wanted to do the same revolution that the one who waits expects” (233). The whole project of an entire generation is summarized in Leonora’s character and Heker takes the risk of narrating the collapse of it all. She was fiercely criticized when this novel came out, so much so that three years later she published another book where she gathered several of her texts published in different

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65 Diana also explains to Hertha that the novel she was trying to write about Leonora was supposed to be a reflection of a whole generation who dreamt of a world they did not have to ashamed of; a homage to the dead of that generation, but also to the survivors. “We had everything.” (“Lo tuvimos todo”, Heker, *El fin de la historia*, 229) says Diana who struggles to comprehend her friend’s treason—a metaphor of the decay of the biggest, boldest dream Argentines would have.

66 “La historia que quería contar se terminó, siempre se terminó, en ese primer capítulo. Porque la mujer esperada nunca va a hacer, nunca quiso hacer la misma revolución que espera la que espera.”

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contexts, among them responses to these criticisms.\textsuperscript{67} She affirms she is always looking to blur the limits between document and fiction and she prides herself on the ambiguity she sows. Moreover, in a paper delivered in Tel Aviv in 1997, Heker states: “I think that literature’s task is to dismantle that dead memory and to replace it with a real memory, unfinished and imperfect, a memory that includes us and reclaims us, that leaves us in the center of history, responsible of correcting the imperfect and finish the unfinished” (\textit{Las hermanas} 112).\textsuperscript{68}

In \textit{The End of the Story}, Liliana Heker is conscious of the inheritance she leaves: Her narration is one way to transmit the memory of the events of an era that marked the Argentine nation for decades and generations to come. Her history/story encompasses a difficult questioning of the roles of both sides and she demands from her readers nothing less than correcting the imperfect present received and to finish the incomplete struggles of her era. As Hertha Bechofen explains: “And it is also a story of survivors” (234).\textsuperscript{69}

**Piecing the Story Together \textit{in Absentia}: A Red Thread**

In \textit{A Red Thread}, Miguel Larraín is hired to write a script for a film about the disappeared during the last military dictatorship in Argentina. He realizes the main character has to be his childhood friend and lover, Julia Berenstein, who was active in the

\textsuperscript{67} The book is called \textit{Las hermanas de Shakespeare} (\textit{Shakespeare’s Sisters}), Buenos Aires, Alfaguara, 1999.

\textsuperscript{68} “Pienso que es tarea de la literatura desarmar esa memoria muerta y reemplazarla por una memoria real, inacabada e imperfecta, una memoria que nos incluye y nos reclama, que nos deja instalados en el centro mismo de la historia, responsables de corregir lo imperfecto y terminar lo inconcluso.”

\textsuperscript{69} “Y también es una historia de sobrevivientes.”
ERP in the 1970s and was killed in Bolivia at the height of the Dirty War. Sara Rosenberg (Tucumán, 1954) places her story in her hometown, one of the most violent provinces during the time, and structures her novel following a documentary style, with transcripts of recordings Miguel makes when interviewing people that knew Julia, his own memories and thoughts, and parts of her diary. Interestingly, there is no chronological order, but this chaotic way (both in time and type of documents) seems fitting to reflect the confusion of the time and the fragmentary way memory works.

This is another case (as in The End of the Story) where the protagonist’s story is pieced together by a friend. Nevertheless, Julia never changed her way of thinking and was murdered, leaving Miguel with the insurmountable task of telling her life (and death). In addition, Rosenberg takes the responsibility of carrying the awareness that her fictionalized text goes beyond that realm: Through the different voices spread throughout the novel the author is narrating a very real period in Argentina’s history. Rosenberg weaves Miguel’s encounters with witnesses and his own thoughts through this fictionalized world, as “[v]iolent histories can be silenced and relegated to secrecy in spite of a circulation of stories and narratives. Hiding in language exists even when stories are told; the traces of such hiding are to be found at the surface of language” (55). It is the readers who are compelled to painstakingly remove layer after layer of anecdotal material in order to discover the troubled character of Julia and the thoughtless way she

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70 The ERP (Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo; People’s Revolutionary’s Army) was the military branch of the communist Worker’s Revolutionary Party (Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores) and had an important presence in the northwestern province of Tucumán in the 1970s.

71 At the beginning of the second chapter, Gabriele Schwab quotes Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan (from Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics): “Holes and gaps are so central in narrative fiction because the materials the text provides for the reconstruction of a world (or a story) are insufficient for saturation” (41).
related to others, including Miguel and her children. As much as the narrative tells us of the horror she went through when detained as a prisoner, and when she was killed, it is an honest story of the flaws of a woman—flaws that Rosenberg let spill onto that whole generation. Julia only stops to reflect on her doings when she feels surrounded by a red thread: That fear paralyzes her and starts unraveling her tragic end.\footnote{It is explained in the novel that in order to hunt vicuñas people use a red thread to encircle them and the animal then freezes and does not fight the hunters. (113-114.)}

Nonetheless, it is Miguel who many years later is left with a hefty burden of piecing Julia’s life together and making sense of her struggle (and of their generation’s struggle) to achieve the world of which they had dreamt. Julia, then, becomes the narrative voice \textit{in absentia} and Miguel becomes the bridge between her and the following generation.\footnote{Julia had two children, Federico and Natalia (the link to the next generation). It is worthy to mention that Rosenberg uses Natalia as a way to tell the story of the children of the disappeared, many of whom were appropriated by their parents’ captors or given in adoption illegally and were never told the truth about their identity. In the novel Natalia finds out the truth and is returned to her family, but not without tension (she decides to live with her grandmother in Spain and refuses to move to Mexico where her father and brother reside). (165)} The book ends with a reflection of this double task of gathering the pieces of stories and the accountability to pass those stories, those memories, \textit{l’dor v’dor}.

Miguel reflects after meeting Natalia (Julia’s daughter) for the first time, using Julia as his imaginary interlocutor, when he is about to conclude his script:

\begin{quote}
And in some History book, ten lines will talk about the attempt by a marginal group of students to explain that you can’t build a fire and pretend it will burn a prairie which roots have been forever dead, since before the first rain. And then, turning the page, we will confidently read that later elections were held and people voted for the murderers who won by majority, and when in the north, near Central America, for example, other voices ask for justice and cropland, we will think: Again, what a useless gesture, again another struggle that will not go anywhere and we will remain ailing, growing old, with grandchildren,
\end{quote}
if by chance we had them or our children had them, and we will put together a long fable to say that we have learned something that makes sense beyond making the bed every morning and leaning out the window to look at the sky, sometimes overcast, sometimes clear. Every day. (202)

The self-criticism that Miguel embarks on is perhaps the most valuable message he—through Julia—can transmit. The scattered narration of memories is an exercise in working collectively to recuperate what has been left after the devastation: The ones who are left should choose to talk; the ones who are gone can (albeit incompletely) be recovered by the survivors and all that is left is to work together in order to shape and recount history. The younger generations are, per se, waiting and watching.

There is also this awareness of the transmission of memory coming from a previous generation. Julia’s grandfather, Isaías Berenstein—who had come to Argentina in 1920 already married to Olga Trechk, both from small towns near Kiev—told his stories of the old country filled with nostalgia.

In 1971 he had to face his neighbors who started harassing him for having a granddaughter who robs banks—Julia was already

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74 “Y en algún libro de historia, diez líneas hablarán de un intento de grupos, marginales, para explicar que no se puede armar un foco y pretender que incendie una pradera cuyas raíces están muertas desde siempre, desde antes de la primera lluvia. Y entonces, al pasar la página, leeremos confiadamente que más tarde hubo elecciones y votaron a los asesinos que ganaron por mayoría, y cuando en el norte, cerca de América Central, por ejemplo, otras voces pidan justicia y tierra de cultivo, sabremos pensar: otra vez, que inútil el gesto, nuevamente una lucha que no irá a ninguna parte y nos quedamos achacosos, envejeciendo, con nietos, si por casualidad los tuvimos o nuestros hijos los tuvieron, y armaremos una larga fábula para decir que hemos aprendido algo que tenga sentido más allá de tender la cama todas las mañanas y asomarnos a la venta a mirar el cielo, a veces cubierto, a veces claro. Cada día.”

75 When asked how he is planning the film he is in charge of, Miguel says: “I try to reflect about memory. Only the ones who remember talk. Or rather we can only talk about what we have lived. Something like that. The voice is always collective, the recuperation of a story of all of us, where Julia is the axis, or rather the catalyst.” (“Intento reflexionar sobre la memoria. Sólo los que recuerdan hablan. O más bien sólo podemos hablar de lo que hemos vivido. Algo así. La voz es siempre colectiva, la recuperación de una historia de todos, que tiene a Julia como eje, o más bien como detonante.”) (158)

76 According to one of Julia’s cousins (43).
involved with the armed movement at the time. Instead of confronting them, Isaías wanders back in time to the day the soldiers took his brothers to the Russian-Japanese war, never to see them again, when the Cossacks came to his town and beheaded his aunt Eli and cousin Sonia, and when his neighbors denounced them and his father was taken away (90-91). He concedes that everything changes and that we forget history, but he did find a way to oppose this fate through telling Julia about his past and talking to Miguel: His narration is now part of a text (Miguel’s script as well as Rosenberg’s novel) and, even though his granddaughter is eventually murdered and cannot pass on the stories, his memory is inserted into Argentina’s historical archive. As Marianne Hirsch and Valerie Smith suggest, “Cultural memory is most forcefully transmitted through the individual voice and body—through the testimony of a witness” (225). Sara Rosenberg reinforces this idea by incorporating the various testimonies Miguel gathers, but with the caveat that it all happens without the voice and body of its main character: Julia is gone and her disappearance illustrates the state of her country, where the families of the disappeared are forced to piece together the lives of their loved ones and to give voice to those who did not return.

*Daughter of Silence and the Challenges of Transmitting Memory l'dor v'dor*

Manuela Fingueret’s (Buenos Aires, 1945-2013) second novel presents the stories of a mother and her daughter and the presumed inability by the former to talk about her past. In *Daughter of Silence*, Tínkele survived the ghetto of Terezín and later Auschwitz
and migrated to Argentina where she got married and had one daughter, Rita. The novel interweaves the voices of both mother and daughter in their most traumatic moments: Tínkele in Terezín and Rita as a prisoner in the ESMA during the Dirty War. It is in this tenebrous setting that Rita starts slowly piecing together the story of her mother, a story that loomed throughout her life from the silence and gestures of her mother, from secrets and hidden objects, among them, a yellow star found hidden in a box (104). It is the knowledge of Tínkele’s experience that helps Rita survive the imprisonment, the torture, and the ongoing brutality. Their voices and their bodies come so close in this imaginary realm that they become one: they share the pain each one suffered while proudly telling their stories of courage and resistance. Marianne Hirsch sees the connection between these stories:

The child of survivors who “transposes” herself into the past of the Holocaust lives the “burden of a double reality” that makes “functioning” extraordinarily “complex”. Karpf receives her mother’s memories in her own body as symptoms that plague even as they fail to lead to understanding. In the sense that they repeat the trauma of the past in what she calls an “awful, involuntary mimetic obsession,” her mother’s memories are rememories engaging both mother and daughter with equal vehemence. […] When the mother’s experiences are communicated through stories and images that can be narrativized, integrated—however uneasily—into a historically different present, they open up the possibility of a form of second-generation remembrance that is based on a more consciously and necessarily mediated form of identification. (The Generation of Postmemory 85).

77 Tínkele named her daughter Rita in honor of her mother Rivke, but changed the name into Spanish (her new acquired language). Tínkele wants Rita to be “strong and sensitive” like her own mother “in the long journey of a family that can find continuity with her” (199).

78 The ESMA (Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada; Navy School of Mechanics) was one of the largest clandestine prisons during the military dictatorship (1976-1983). About 5,000 people were taken to the ESMA and only over a hundred survived.
Rita, then, carries two functions in the narration: she embodies Tínkele’s memories and, through her own telling of her mother’s story and her own, she ensures the continuity of this narration for younger generations. This dialectal relationship between memory and narrative allows for the readers to also take responsibility and transmit the history. Memory is the catalyst for narrative and both mother and daughter revise their lives while foreseeing a future less bleak than their own. The line of women in the family has had its limitations when trying to convey the past in words, but the significance of those words had always been there. Rita declares in her cell: “Rivke enjoys the audacity that lives in me, Jasia binds the pain, and Tínkele is this useless survival. Here I am all of them. They are my vengeance, my pleasure and my conviction” (100). Rita’s mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother had managed to transmit both pain and prevalence in the silence of their narration: their transmission, overridden by gaps and crevasses, has nevertheless been passed l’dor v’dor. Rita has to wonder if those silences—that effort to complete her mother’s story by herself—aFFECTed her choices. Her decision to be active politically in perilous times in Argentina and to survive without succumbing to torture and the betrayal of her compañeros are, in Rita’s mind, direct consequences of the silent narration of her mother’s story. The way Fingueret shapes Tínkele’s character resembles

79 Rita doesn’t have children. Therefore, even though the familial re-telling ends with her, her story is inscribed in the national memory/archive (or, at least, that is the hope).

80 “Rivke goza la audacia que vive en mí, Jasia aprisiona el dolor, y Tínkele es esta inútil sobrevivencia. Aquí soy todas ellas. Son mi venganza, mi placer y mi condena.”

81 Rita wonders during the long days and nights in her cell: “If Tínkele knew the anger that she provoked me with her quiet way of hiding the past… She cannot imagine and maybe to know now, in these conditions, it would be insufferable. Would she have revealed her secrets if she had predicted my choices?” (“Si Tínkele supiera la ira que provocó en mí su modo callado de ocultar el pasado… Ella no se lo imagina y quizás saberlo ahora, en estas condiciones en que estoy, le resultaría insoportable. ¿Me habría revelado sus secretos si hubiese previsto mis elecciones?”) (61)
Marianne Hirsch’s depiction of the figure of the mother (drawing from Julia Kristeva’s theoretical discourse): “The mother as split subject, as locus of the semiotic, as both phallic and castrated, present and absent, omnipotent and powerless, the body before language, unrepresentable, inexpressible, unsettling, has become the privileged metaphor for a subversive femininity” (The Mother/Daughter Plot 171). Tinkele’s narrative—the way her story is constructed—lays bare the subversive facet of her motherhood: the only way she can survive—the only way she had learned from her mother and grandmother—is to guard her story while sharing it. Rita’s subversiveness lies in the non-chronological telling of events, as well as her lifelong struggle to decipher her mother’s memory. It is this endeavor, not the findings, which bring mother and daughter together and allows for a layered story, memory upon memory. The author gives Rita the main voice of the narration as the youngest generation in the novel and composes Rita’s story in the first person, while leaving Tinkele’s in the third person. Even though Tinkele’s story is written in form of a diary, it is Rita who has appropriated her mother’s story and now recounts it. Marianne Hirsch calls this type of memory “postmemory”: “‘Postmemory’ describes the relationship that ‘the generation after’ bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before—to experiences they ‘remember’ only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up” (The generation of postmemory 5. ).

She is also the one who brings history into the narrative as Fingueret intertwines poems from the collection in Terezín 1942-1944: Children’s Drawings and Poems published by the State Jewish Museum in Prague in 1959. By

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82 There will more discussion about this topic in the next paragraph.
having Rita tell Tínkele’s story (as well as her own story) and include these poems in Tínkele’s experience, the blurry line between reality and fiction starts to help one discern the role of memory in the transmission of memory.

It is in Writing History, Writing Trauma that Dominick LaCapra relates the role of literature to the role of art in their relationship as testimonial art and as “traumatized or post-traumatic writing” (105). The author compares the writing process to a “a means of bearing witness to, enacting, and, to some extent, working over and through trauma whether personally experienced, transmitted from intimates, or sensed in one’s larger social or cultural setting” (105). This post-traumatic writing process is what defines the method utilized in Fingueret’s novel. In the text there is a transmission process that is assumed by the generation that did not suffer the trauma directly, which is taken on as post-traumatic and is part of their postmemory. That is how the narrator tries to write her own history and, by doing so, is aware of the inevitable relationship of her own history and of her ancestors’—it will impossible for Rita to tell her story without untangling her maternal postmemory and, at the same time, the trauma within it. The consequence of an incomplete (and marked by trauma) postmemory is shown in the fragments that form it and that results in a source of frustration for Rita. However, this is how (she eventually realizes) her present looks like: it is her job to recuperate the fragments that surround her mother’s silence in order to unmask the past and the memories that lies within.

Returning to Hirsch’s considerations, the author borrows Paul Connerton’s concept of “acts of transfer” to explain that transmission not only transforms history in memory, “but enable memories to be shared across individuals and generations” (31).
And adds: “Postmemory is not identical to memory: it is ‘post’; but, at the same time, I argue, it approximates memory in its affective force and its psychic effects” (31). It is this series of effects that are visible in Fingueret’s novel: the main character struggles to acquire a history that is not her own as key to her own life. It is at the end of her life that Rita notices that she has always carried that history full of memories in her body and in her mind—her mother had transmitted it to her from a silenced/silent place. Hirsch also poses the possibility (or not) that the postmemorial generations can represent the intergenerational dynamic. That is, how to represent “the desire and the hesitation, the necessity and the impossibility of receiving the parents’ bodily experience of trauma manifested in the visual mark or tattoo” (81). She adds: “For postmemorial artists, the challenge is to define an aesthetic based on a form of identification and projection that can include the transmission of the bodily memory of trauma without leading to the self-wounding and retraumatization that is rememory” (86). The narrator created by Fingueret feels in her body the transmitted trauma, but it is the mark of silence (of what it is not told) what shapes that indefinite but tangible weight that she feels in her body and the lacunae of her postmemory. To solve this mystery, to group the fragments of the past, to fill in the lacunae: that is what takes Rita to venture in an intricate path, which is, at the same time, representative of the only option to understand the postmemory of silence.

In one of the first lines of Daughter of Silence Rita says: “Since I was a little girl I absorbed that fragmentation, that abrupt way of keeping quiet” (7). Rita adapts to the way her mother has of transmitting her history: fragments, silences, and almost to space

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83 “Absorbió desde chica esa fragmentación, esa forma abrupta de callar.”
for questions. The task of finding traces of another life, of making sense of her own life through those small voids: that is how Rita constructs the postmemory of silence. At the same time, Rita understands that her postmemory of silence takes her to an “exaggerated effort to become a heroine, in Tínkele’s avenger” (30). Rita knows that these gaps do not start or end with her, but they are part of a chain of generations that is re-produced in these spaces. Tínkele did not have the opportunity to know her history though her mother either, as it was her father who told it to her: “For Jasia it was a history full of so many unsolved conflicts…” (37). Therefore, Tínkele is doubly tied to the impossibility of transmission and to the use of silences with her own daughter: she did not receive her familial history through her mother and, at the same time, the Shoah left her unable to narrate that which cannot be told. An interesting side note in Tínkele’s life is the fact that she is aware of having lived joyous moments in the concentration camp with her friend, the painter Leie, and attending classes. However, she does not allow herself to feel this pleasurable emotion while confronted with the horror she went through. Likewise, Rita does not allow herself to unfold her experience from Tínkele’s and ends up fusing them in her mind: “The acrid smell is already part of this place. I carry it trapped to my body...

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84 Alicia Partnoy (known as the author of The Little School: Tales of Disappearance and Survival/La escuelita) talks about her grandfather’s silence (a Shoah survivor), a silence that she always thought strange. Nevertheless in the United States, says Partnoy, “I learned from children of survivors that this silence is the norm rather than the exception… I learned that survivors might choose to be silent, but that too often they fail to speak out fearing nobody will listen: their voices have been shattered, their agency destroyed” (235). Tínkele, then, is part of this silent group.

85 “exagerado esfuerzo por convertirme en heroína, en vengadora de Tínkele.”

86 “Para Jasia era una historia cargada de tantos conflictos no resueltos…”
like a curse, like a yellow star” (65). To occupy the blank space produced in Rita by the non-explanation of the discovery of a yellow star, she confuses memories while tangling sight and smell: every sense is useful to cover the gaps. And she says this in her own words:

How to I tell her what was missing. Words that could explain what she was hiding beyond those boxes, those wrinkled papers, that yellow star that I discovered by chance. Words that made sense to the faltering whispers. Words that could put names and content to Camp, tattoos, extermination. And, above all, words for her gloomy gaze, turn inwards. That gaze of hundreds, that gaze of thousands who accuse through what is silenced. (140)

Rita, whose Yiddish name represents Rivke (her great-grandmother), who embodies the continuation of the familial history, the militant, the one whose memory is silence, the one who is transferred in a sudden ending: Rita will not be able to break with the postmemory of silence of future generations within her own family as her transmission will be truncated. Nevertheless, she has succeeded in the laborious task of looking for answers where the discourse was interrupted and it will be the readers/citizens the ones in charge of providing continuation to her narration, as Amy Kaminsky suggests: “Stopping abruptly as it does, Rita’s story leaves the reader to make sense of it, to complete it by taking on the responsibility of a memory that was proscribed

87 “El olor a acre ya es parte de este lugar. Lo llevo pegado al cuerpo como una maldición, como una estrella amarilla.”

88 “Cómo decirle lo que me faltó. Palabras que me explicasen lo que oculta más allá de esas cajas, de esos papeles arrugados, de esa estrella amarilla que descubrí por casualidad. Palabras que dieran sentido a los cuchicheos entrecortados. Palabras que pusieran nombre y contenido a Campo, tatuajes, exterminio. Y, sobre todo, palabras para su mirada oscura, volcada hacia adentro. Esa mirada de cientos, esa mirada de miles que acusan a través de lo que calla.”
by the dictatorship but that is now presented as a moral imperative”. The legacy of silence is a burden that could overwhelm the ones who are looking for answers, but it is also an opportunity for the ones who are positioned to undertake it: it is an opportunity to delve in elusive places, to reflect on the fissures in our own history and the history of others, and to stop right on the edge of the ellipsis of our identity.

Towards a Conclusion

The three texts analyzed in this article are representatives of a continuous debate being held in contemporary Argentina about the power of memory and the question of who holds that power. In addition to this discussion within the nation there is the added identity of the Jewish community and the responsibility to not only bear witness, but to also communicate to younger generations. Liliana Heker, Sara Rosenberg, and Manuela Fingueret utilize their narrative voices to articulate the stories that go from pogroms to the Shoah to the Dirty War. However, they subvert the traditional roles and create literary spaces where the non-linear, non-chronological, feminine subject-centric stories are a collective effort to accept the responsibility of the transmission of memory, which is—in itself—a process of creating meaning. While remembering (or silencing the remembrance as another way of making memory) and passing it onto our descendants we construct a narrative that is meant to give meaning to the past and develop a consequential future. The characters in these three novels work page by page to reach this goal in a most imperfect way: as a frustrated and betrayed writer searching for the story; a parlous free spirit filling the blanks in absentia; and a daughter piecing together her mother’s life
before the end of her own. “When memories manage to seep through the wounds, I survive” (162), reflects Tínkele.\(^8^9\) It is the transgenerational transmission of memories that allows Fingueret’s Rita to survive another day. It is also the awareness of the function of narrative as a source to conserve and pass along memory that allows the Jewish Argentine history to withstand \(l’dor v’dor\).

\(^8^9\) “Cuando los recuerdos logran filtrarse entre las heridas, sobrevivo.”
Chapter Four - Acts of Memory in the Jewish Argentine Cinematic Present

Memory is always problematic, usually deceptive, sometimes treacherous.
Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi

In her text, *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination*, Annette Kuhn claims: “Although we take stories of childhood and family literally, I think our recourse to this past is a way of reaching for myth, for the story that is deep enough to express the profound feelings we have in the present”. That way of reaching out to the past and bringing it to the present as part of our history—of making our familial and personal story align with the collective memories—that is what allows for a deeper analysis of the past and re-interpretation of the present. There is no connection to a so-called truth, but a deliberate will to bring back (and maybe even concoct) memories that will be passed on.

Gabriel Lichtmann (Buenos Aires, 1974) and Ariel Winograd (Buenos Aires, 1977) launched their first feature films in 2006: *Jews in Space* and *Cheese Head-My First Ghetto* respectively. Both Jewish Argentine directors and screenplay writers place their childhood and family memory within a fictional space where, as Kuhn explains, remembering takes place for the present. They are storytellers that utilize memory as their main muse: they shape and re-shape this malleable substance until they develop what they recall. Not the truth (or what truth represents), but a form of it that embodies that memory. Thinking about this issue, Walter Benjamin states:

90 Reprinted (with a few changes) from "Acts of Memory in the Jewish Argentine Cinematic Present" by Daniela Goldfine. *Jewish Film & New Media*, Volume 2, Number 1 (Spring 2014). Copyright © 2014 Wayne State University Press. Used with the permission of Wayne State University Press.
Memory creates a chain of tradition which passes a happening on from generation to generation. It is the Muse-derived element of the epic art in a broader sense and encompasses its varieties. In the first place among these is the one practiced by the storyteller. It starts the web which all stories together form in the end. One ties on to the next, as the great storytellers, particularly the Oriental ones, have always readily shown. (371)

As Benjamin suggest, both Winograd and Lichtmann weave their stories based on their own accounts, as well as on those of their families’. They echo events from the past that have made it through different generations and reformulate them in their own storytelling experience. This experience is linked to feelings in order to be stored and recalled (and put into language)—eventually becoming a representation of memory. They belong to a generation of Jewish Argentine filmmakers who address this issue of memory from a unique position: their work shows that the familial and national memory has a definite bond to the present. These twenty-first century filmmakers encourage the idea of a merger of the national and individual memory in order to compound and imaginary, yet solidly anchored in reality, transnational and transcultural production by producing a space where the intersections are what matter.

This chapter focuses on a younger generation of Jewish Argentine artists who present a type of collective memory removed from storylines based on the traditional narrative within the Jewish community: the Shoah and the most recent military dictatorship in Argentina (1976-1983). Although referring to both major events, Jews in Space and Cheese Head-My First Ghetto seek a space to tell stories related to the memory and identity of this younger generation: as Argentines, they tap into their (and their families’) Jewish memory to connect to their Argentine present. Lichtmann’s and
Winograd’s approach showcases the intermingling of their culture/faith with their nationality—both intrinsic and undisputed features of the films’ main characters’ lives—as a natural consequence of their families’ choices. These filmmakers’ platforms contain versions of past events that involve the usage of remembrance as a connection to the present. Their works contrast with Roland Barthes’ *Camera Lucida* in that Barthes does not want to show us a photograph of his mother as a child claiming we, as readers, could not grasp the picture’s “piercing” quality (106). In contrast, Lichtmann and Winograd deliberately re-create and display memory, as their films flirt with being part of the archive yet concern themselves with connecting with the present.

The articulation of memory begins with the aesthetic proposed in each film. *Cheese Head* concerns itself with a dose of accuracy, as Winograd transfers details of his own past, such as the brand and color of the family’s car and the members of the club’s soccer team (utilizing his own father and uncle in the film), while providing an inner look to the protagonist’s puberty issues. Accurately recreating a Jewish gated community in the 1990s in Argentina could make the spectators feel estranged, but the coming-of-age story works as the universal connection to a wider audience. As Tzvi Tal notes in his essay “Jewish Puberty in Contemporary Latin American Cinema: Constructing Judeo-Latinidad,” “the protagonists are faced directly with the social control mechanism, with discourse, and with ideology, ascribing to them at once an assumed standpoint of innocence” (147). It is through these processes that there can be identification with the

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91 The theme of inter-generational distance and lack of understanding is not new in Jewish Argentine cultural production, with the play *Requiem for a Friday Night* (1964) by Germán Rozenmacher as one clear example. The semi-autobiographical play reflects the family conflict between a young Jewish man (born in Argentina) and his traditionalist Russian-born father.
film’s characters. Likewise, *Jews in Space* provides an easily recognizable family dinner setting: the film opens with the Passover Seder of 5747 (1987), but it is constructed in such a way so as to relate to the universal perception of the family get-together. Through these strategies the directors are connecting the Jewish memory to the Argentine present, opening up another way of understanding both categories not as a way of being, but as a condition. It is their willingness to reconstruct familial and national stories that drives their vision to manage past memories into a cinematic present: the bleak reality of two terrorist attacks against Jewish targets in the 1990s provides the basis for the reassessment of their identity and the reworking of their memory. On March 17, 1992 a suicide bombing attack took place in the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires. Twenty nine people died and more than two hundred were injured. Then, on July 18, 1994 a bomb blew up the AMIA (Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina, the largest Jewish community center in Argentina) killing 85 people and injuring hundreds. These terrorist attacks left a mark on the multilayered identities of this directors’ generation—in the form of a bewildered search for justice and the conclusion of unresolved cases. The country’s project—thought by their Argentine antecessors (Jews and non-Jews)—to truly create a pluralistic society where Jewish culture would be part of the nation’s mosaic and would be a step above from being merely tolerated seemed to fall to pieces in the two bombings. Being faced with this disappointing reality, artists such as Lichtmann and Winograd revisit the familial and national memory and re-create it in order to articulate a

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92 Refer to chapter Two a) “Transgressive Remembrance: Jewish Memory in the Argentine ‘Mnemo-Historic’ Context” (note 8) for more information and resources about the AMIA bombing.
connection to the present—while facing the challenge to possibly reconfigure the Jewish Argentine archive.

Familial Memory

One of the first comments Ariel Winograd makes in the Director’s Commentary of the DVD version of *Cheese Head-My First Ghetto* is that his first film is a “documentary of my childhood.” The main character’s—the so-called “Cheese Head”—full name is Ariel Winograd (played by Sebastián Montagna) and the director decided to keep all the names of his family when naming the characters: his mom (Lili), older brother (David), and older sister (Natalia). By doing so, Winograd gestures at transforming his private memory into part of the collective memory—or, at least, he attempts to insert his own recollection into a group effort towards the construction of memory. The filmmaker puts himself at a juncture where the work towards memory becomes “a method and a practice of unearthing and making public untold stories, stories of ‘lives lived out on the borderlands, lives for which the central interpretive devices of the culture don’t quite work’” (Kuhn 8). In Winograd’s memory the exile within his own family seems to weigh more than the recent events in his own country: there is a deliberate effort to reveal Ariel’s grandfather’s past in the concentration camps in Europe, as well as his mother’s dream of migrating to Israel, but there are no overt comments about the two terrorist attacks in Buenos Aires in the 1990s (the decade in which this film is situated). Living in a gated community surrounded only by Jews (where non-Jews are a minority and are mostly relegated to their role as employees)

93 “Es un documental de mi infancia.”
Winograd’s main character does not feel the Otherness that can be easily placed on Jews in Argentina throughout literature and other media. However, he does feel like an outsider when confronted with his own family and there is an obvious lack of connection that he feels as an adolescent and as the youngest member of the family. The disconnection is real—the prime example of this is when Ariel’s parents find out about his implication in a trial (within the gated community) through a leaflet and not through Ariel himself. Nevertheless, this typical teenage muteness is placed front and center and there is an emphasis on the non-existence of transmission of memory from Ariel’s parents to their children. It is the grandparents who are left in charge of forming the youngsters’ recollection of familial stories, like in the scene where the grandfather (Juan Manuel Tenuta) tells David (Ariel’s older brother played by Martín Piroyansky) and a friend about his experience in a concentration camp. He does so by comparing the ghetto where he lived in Europe with the gated community he lives now—the grandfather is the one connecting the present with the familial memory: “It was another time, other paths, another gated community. Before they didn’t ask for the lot number, they tattooed it on you”. Even though Winograd keeps his film in a light comedic tone, he inserts scenes like the previous one and like the one about the grandmother (María Vaner) persistently giving Ariel money so he can save for when he eventually migrates—according to Ariel’s grandmother, Jews have to be ready to leave their home at any given moment. These commentaries ring close to home for Argentine Jews, as many grew up with parents and grandparents who survived the Shoah and who, even though they found a home in

94 “Era otra época, otros caminos, otro country. Antes no te pedían el número de lote, te lo tatuaban.”
Argentina, their atrocious experience also made them aware of the precariousness of their new homeland. Winograd chooses this discourse to engage with the collective memory within the familial setting.

In the introduction to *The Familial Gaze*, Marianne Hirsch explains that “family pictures are often so similar, so much shaped by similar conventions, that they are readily available for identification across the broadest and most radical divides” (xiii.) It can be argued that there is a similar pattern in both of the films analyzed here, as their screenplay writers/directors use commonly shared Jewish traditions to create a familiar Jewish experience in Argentina. Winograd builds his story inside a Jews-only gated community and Gabriel Lichtmann’s story is constructed around the Passover Seder—the Seder of the main character’s, Santiago/Tati (Fernando Rubio), childhood memories, as well as the one he is helping organize as an adult. It is the directors’ approach to mirror their own familial memory and, therefore, make it part of the collective memory. The strategy implies using the remembrance in the films as a way to connect to the present. In order to consolidate the individual affiliation and identification between the people in the audience and the people in the films, the filmmakers use the familial gaze as an agent that can share a common memory. It is the spectatorial look which invites the audience to transform the seemingly universal into the individual. The films are traversed and constituted by this familial gaze with which the audience can identify.
*Jews in Space* presents a new point of view to old dilemmas of the immigrant, who is also a minority in the new land. However, the questions seem to be the same for this younger generation of Jewish Argentines as it was for their grandparents. In his essay “The Other Becomes Mainstream: Jews in Contemporary Argentine Cinema”, Tzvi Tal summarizes them as “the preservation of traditions, marriage to non-Jews, drifting apart from parents, how to relate with members of the dominant culture and the community, and personal neurosis” (378). In a thought-provoking twist Lichtmann creates a scene where it is the non-Jew the one who has to prove he is Jewish, as opposed to the usual belief that Jews are not truly citizens of the country where they are born or that they hold dual loyalties with Israel. In a dream-like scene Tati’s boss at the restaurant where he works, Toledo (Gerardo Chendo), is quizzed about his Jewish knowledge before helping out with the food for the Seder:

- Are you the chef in charge of the Seder?
- Yes, I’m the Chef… Guevara.
- What’s your knowledge of Jewish culture?
- Well, I was born in Israel, in a “kibus” near “Tel Avid”. […] I grew up in the Once neighborhood.96


96 The mispronunciations are intended as a way to showcase the lack of knowledge of Jewish culture by Toledo and, therefore, portray him as an outsider.

- ¿Vos sos el cocinero que se va a encargar del Seder?
- Pues, sí. Yo soy el Chef… Guevara.
- Muy bien. ¿Qué conocimientos tenes de la cultura judía?
- Bueno, yo nací en Israel, en un “kibus” cerca de “Tel Avid”. […] Crecí en el Once.
Besides depicting stereotypical characteristics that Argentine Jews are supposed to have—such as living in the Once neighborhood in Buenos Aires, a well-known first stop for Jewish immigrants at the turn of last century—Toledo’s answers emphasize the idea of Jews as outsiders in Argentina; an idea which is particularly underscored in this dialogue by the notion of being born in Israel and not Argentina. In this scene Lichtmann is utilizing the idea of what Yascha Mounk calls “stranger in my own country”. Mounk was born in Germany in 1982 and as a German Jew he explains that perhaps that category existed once in the past. However, “[t]oday, there are Jews and then there are Germans. The two categories, in the German even more so than in the Jewish imagination, no longer overlap” (38). After the terrorist attacks in the 1990s Lichtmann questions the juxtaposition of Jewish and Argentine while reviving the memory of Pesach. It is this familiarity with a Passover Seder that is able to transform the individual memory into a collective one. And Lichtmann uses this Jewish holiday—and the use of the typical food served during Pesach—to denote what Nathan Abrams explains as “the expression of nostalgia for a somehow happier past.” Lichtmann wants the audience to identify with the Seder of his childhood and this works as a way to focus on a key issue for young Jewish Argentines: Is it a continuation, a loss, or a change of Jewish cultural traditions? In The New Jew in Film: Exploring Jewishness and Judaism in Contemporary Cinema Nathan Abrams notes:

Many films look back to remember the past nostalgically as a golden age, depicting family life with dashes of sentimentality, bitterness, longing and mockery. Since Yiddishkeit focuses on the importance of family, the eating and partaking of food together, particularly on ritual occasions, is a cherished cinematic ritual, especially in contemporary cinema, where the
connection has been enhanced since 1990. The Sabbath and Passover meals show up, in particular, as obvious cultural expressions. (171)

*Jews in Space* does hold that nostalgic point of view, but it also utilizes memory to connect to a present where there is a major revision of values, both Jewish and Argentine. The dining table during the Passover Seder becomes an arena where there are articulating and competing versions of what the Jewish Argentine identity entails: the inter-generational conflict of the value of transmission of memory is what is at stake here. By defying Western civilized behavior at the table (as noted by Nathan Abrams), this cinematic Jewish family interrupts each other, argues heatedly, and converses in loud voices.97 This film features “the Seder table as the device for concentrating diverse and often conflicting family members (and their partners and offspring) into one place” (Abrams 156). By coming together for this holiday there is a conscious attempt to transmit memory to the youngest members of the family in attendance. Nevertheless, the memories trickle through a present charged with preoccupations that seem to diminish the significance of the familial memory muddling the path of self-recognition in the Jewish Argentine spectrum of cultural identity. The act of remembering, that is, the moment one remembers, contributes to the individual memory. This task includes the reason why one remembers an experience as well as the feeling attached with the evocation of the memory. In this recall from the present the past transforms itself and adopts the shape of

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97 Nathan Abrams notes this also happens in the movies *Annie Hall* (dir. Woody Allen, 1977), *Quiz Show* (dir. Robert Redford, 1994), and *A Serious Man* (dirs. Joel and Ethan Cohen, 2009) (179). Even though Lichtmann’s and Winograd’s films are situated in a non-European, non-North American context, Argentines strive to follow similar table manners as those typically utilized at the aforementioned world regions.
the context in which one remembers. In the midst of this family reunion for Pesach, the present of the evocation shows the limits of the social framework in which the experience is being remembered: there is the additive of a tension between public (in this case, the family environment within a larger community within a nation) and private to what is remembered. Inside the Jewish Argentine community there are multiple tensions between this public/private pull by the sometimes forced, but also voluntary oblivion of the past. Even though not openly acknowledged in the films, they both carry the weight of the recent past vis-à-vis the military dictatorship (1976-1983) that changed Argentina permanently. The division between those who strove to bring the atrocities to light and those who sought to forget marked the nation and continues being a permanent wedge among its citizens. Therefore, the strongest tensions of all are formed between memory and oblivion and between memory and history.

**National Memory**

In *History and Memory after Auschwitz* Dominick LaCapra explains that there is a primary memory and a secondary memory. Primary memory accounts for first-hand witnessing, while secondary memory involves the attempt by the historian to communicate the events to others who have not lived through the experience. LaCapra adds that this “procedure may require a muted or diminished transmission of the traumatic nature of the event but not a full reliving or acting out of it. It also requires an interpretation and estimation of what memory is other than factual” (21). In the two films discussed at length here there is an distinctive overlap of these two types of memory, as
Lichtmann and Winograd infuse their characters (specifically their main characters) with a strong primary memory while the secondary memory is interspersed along the narratives and becomes the backdrop for their stories. In *Cheese Head* Winograd employs his own adolescent experience in a Jewish gated community to set up his story, but he reaches to his parents’ and grandparents’ narratives to create a rapidly recognizable background of Argentina’s neoliberal years and the Shoah experience. The neoliberalism experienced in Argentina in the 1990s aimed to decrease the role of the state in directing and regulating the economy. It also encouraged the privatization of state-controlled companies and the deregulation of capital flows. This also meant that there were severe cuts in spending areas like education, health care, and transportation. But it also meant that many middle-class families (like the ones depicted in this film) were able to better their lives financially, access lifestyles that allowed for a home in the aforementioned gated community, and provided for the opportunity to casually consider moving to another country (in this case, Israel).

Unlike *Cheese Head*, *Jews in Space* provides a more tangible approach to the present as a way to connect to both the primary and secondary memory utilizing the Passover Seder: the childhood Pesach works as a bridge to the present (adult) dinner and the mere fact of being in charge of putting this dinner together is telling of the significance of this ritual. In this film the national context is engaged in a subtle way: contextualized in the early 2000s *Jews in Space* displays the consequences of neoliberal policies such as new ways of marginality and identitary fragmentation. Tati’s insecurities—both personal and professional—are linked to the governmental policies’
consequence of de-subjectivization, which disrupts the formation of the subject and the articulation of his identity; hence the need to reach out to the comforting, yet somewhat unnerving, memory of the Seder. However, following the tradition seems to only involve the food and the act of getting the family together leaving the religious strand aside.

Lichtmann echoes what Javier Sinay, a young Jewish Argentine journalist writes when talking about “di goldene keit” (“the golden chain” in Yiddish) to refer to the role of transmission (162). When explaining his own identity journey he says:

A descendant of a Rabbi, in my life I have not known about Jewish liturgy rather than through a confusing approach. It is not unusual. Ultimately, I am the perfect heir of four generations who have been shedding their religiosity as if it were old clothes brought from Russia. A sign of the times: a hundred years of progressive secularization. Who will be able to judge those four generations and then me? My great-grandchild? (247)

This generation of Jewish Argentine artists is aware of the slow, steady abandonment of the religious aspect of tradition and, instead, it reels in a memory which has a stronger connection with the nation where they were born. The connection between memory and present solidifies in the interaction between memory and history. LaCapra states that this interaction “attests to the pressure exerted by certain concerns that induces even astute and insightful historians to resort to questionable modes of conceptualization, especially in the case of traumatic events that still carry an intense affective and ideological charge and bear upon contemporary issues and social problems” (22). In a

98 “Descendiente de un rabino, no he sabido en mi vida acerca de la liturgia judía más que por aproximaciones confusas. No es raro. Al fin de cuentas, soy el prefecto heredero de cuatro generaciones que se han ido despojando de la religiosidad como si fuera la ropa vieja traída de Rusia. Signo de los tiempos: cien años de progresiva laicización. ¿Quién podrá juzgar a esas cuatro generaciones y luego a mí? ¿Mi bisnieto?”

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similar way, Winograd and Lichtmann write their screenplays generating a continuous rapport between memory (primary and secondary) and history—mainly, collective history. *Cheese Head* works from the present of the 2000s, when it was filmed, to the film’s present of the 1990s. This distance allows for a representation of the later decade, not only in the selection of clothing and thematic presences—like of a popular singer and the reaction it provokes in Ariel’s mother (Mercedes Morán) and grandmother as a reflection of the blind adoration of celebrities at the time—it also provides a closer look at the level of corruption being developed at that time in all levels of society. By showing the corruption and impunity at the micro level of the gated community, Winograd also taps into the injustices committed in the 1970s and 1980s during the *junta* government.

The aftereffects of the continuum of processes from the dictatorship to the neoliberal years (1975-2000) include a reconfiguration of the notions of private/public, construction of the national/political subject, and repositioning of individual/collective history. Thus, *Cheese Head* shows that family interactions and conversations serve as triggers to the reconstruction of memory that connects past and present, while exposing the discourse of the moment: the 1990s present is reproduced in the film to shed light on the nature of the nation’s processes. On the other hand, *Jews in Space* provides a more intimate take on injustices: the disillusionment/veneration/frustration Tati feels for his cousin Luciana (Luna Paiva) and her kleptomaniac habits resembles the attitude of the nation towards its allegedly corrupted leaders. There is an urgency to punish the wrong-doing, but there is also a call for exoneration. Even so, the film shows the different experiences within the family: Tati and Luciana do not share the identity conundrum their grandfather and great-
uncle dealt with, when they had to cross the space between cultures as immigrants to Argentina and, in the process, carry with them a sense of identity which they reconstructed and reinforced through memory in their new nation. Instead, the younger generation represents a hybrid identity which underlines transgenerational, transtemporal, transhistorical and transnational issues. It is their certainty in their national roots that anchors them to Argentina, whereas their family’s Jewish traditions are but a stroke in the painting of their lives.

Related to Jewish traditions and writing, Jonathan Boyarin observes a tendency to provide a collective history as well as a personal one:

Postmodern sensibilities allow us to recuperate the alternative (and in this case traditional) resource of identifying with Jews as a collective through continuity (co-extension in time) at least as much as through contiguity (co-extension in space). Jews have always, it seems, used narrative to recreate their shared identities across time. This technique demonstrates language as an ethnic strategy that need not impinge upon the autonomy of others. (xvii.)

Therefore the way in which these directors retrieve memory and reshape their identity is collective in nature, yet individual in style. The ability to transcend time and space through writing and provide a collective voice for generations of immigrants and their descendants ultimately achieves what “Althusser once provocatively wrote ‘Space without places, time without duration’”(Bhabha 294). Lichtmann and Winograd embrace this possibility when they try to recuperate their ancestors’ history and legacy and place it in a fictionalized present. To that end they provide an amalgamation of memory and history that shows a present day version of Jewish Argentine identity. Both filmmakers are quick to point out their disaffiliation with the religious aspect of the classification as
Jews, but they do stand apart when it comes to the connection between their stories and
their identity. Winograd explained in a 2006 interview that he does not want to be pegged
as a Jewish director, the way Daniel Burman and Lichtmann are: “But I do not have that
identity of the super Jew. Yes it goes out slowly. It’s just that I belong to a generation of
renegade Jews.” Alternatively, Gabriel Lichtmann thinks the two terrorist attacks in
Buenos Aires (to the Israeli Embassy in 1992 and to the AMIA, in 1994) were a pivotal
point to “go back to hold on to something and find a reason that can carry you through all
that. The passage to feel identified with a group of people through a shared culture, to
feel identified with some guys with walkie-talkies and buildings with pilings makes you
wonder what is happening. It was a shock for everyone.” Here Lichtmann is looking to
a correlation between the past shared Jewish culture invoked in the familial memory and
the present national history that is imbued in the Jewish references as the targets of both
bombings. But trying to find a connection between the two, he sees his identity shaken
and digs deep to delineate what it means to him to be Jewish and Argentine (he finds a
way of talking about this in Jews in Space, “a sad comedy” as he describes it to Miguel
Frías in a 2006 interview). On the other hand, Winograd does not think about the terrorist

99 Daniel Burman (Buenos Aires, 1973) is a Jewish Argentine filmmaker well-known for the so-called
triology: Waiting for the Messiah (2000), Lost Embrace (2004), and Family Law (2006)—they were all
written and directed by Burman and starred the Uruguayan actor Daniel Hendler as Ariel. Ariel is
Burman’s semi-autobiographical character depicting a Jewish Argentine young man in contemporary
Buenos Aires.

100 “Pero no tengo esa identidad del súper judío. Sí va saliendo lentamente. Es que soy de una generación
de judíos renegators.” (Winograd interview by Julieta Goldman)

101 “volver para atrás para aferrarte a algo y encontrar una razón que te pueda sostener frente a todo eso. El
pasaje de sentirte identificado con un grupo de personas por la cultura compartida, a sentirte identificado
con unos tipos con handies y edificios con pilotes, te lleva a preguntarte que está pasando. Fue para todos
un shock” (Constantino 12).
attacks because, he explains, it did not fit within his story. However, he focuses on what was called the “Argentinean Miracle, as the news labeled the way in which the president arrived. It seemed to me that what had to be pointed out was the menemismo, the car, the clothes and everything that was more out in the open with ‘let’s throw the money away’”.¹⁰² ¹⁰³ At the time there definitely was a strong emphasis on consumption and a favored attraction to celebrities. This two-pronged approach was to serve as a way to anesthetize and silence the increasing separation between the haves and the have-nots and to force the society to “move on” from the recent devastating past (including suppressing inquiries about the perpetrators of the bombing of the Israeli Embassy). By choosing to showcase the neoliberal 1990s in his first long feature film, Winograd portrays his story based on what he knows best: his childhood memory (which happens in a Jewish environment fostered by his family) and the national memory of what transpired in the early nineties in Argentina. There seems, however, to be a conscious effort not to mention the widening economical gap which Argentina’s citizens went through, even though it was a clear reflection of the government’s economic plan. These policies not only affected the economic aspect of the country, but they also left a profound social and political mark. Maristella Svampa summarizes this idea by conveying that

¹⁰² Menemismo refers to the two-term president Carlos Saúl Menem (b. 1930) who governed Argentina from July 1989 to December 1999.

¹⁰³ “El milagro argentino, cuando el noticiero titula así la llegada del presidente. Me pareció que lo que había que puntualizar era el menemismo, el auto, la pilcha y todo lo que estaba más a flor de piel con el ‘tiremos la plata’”. Goldman’s interview to Winograd.
the polarizing and fragmented social dynamic acquired such virulence that during an extensive part of the 1990s there were major difficulties to provide a political language to the experiences of decollectivization, in which different paths and situations intermingled, in addition to contradictory and ambivalent feelings regarding the new social condition. (11)

Even though Winograd chose to keep the social inequalities of the 1990s out of the limelight, the national aspect is clearly marked in his output and he shows this by setting the main character in an uncomfortable, yet poignant situation: in the first scene we see Alma (Tomás Kuselman), a fairly popular pre-teen in the gated community urinating on Coper (Nicolás Torcanowsky), a chubby boy who along with Michi (Nicolás Condito), the Russian (Fermín Volcoff), and Ariel forms part of a quartet of inseparable friends that summer. Ariel witnesses this humiliation and the film revolves around the experiences of this group of boys in the Jewish gated community and the trial that will take place at the end of the summer where Ariel is supposed to say what he saw. This trial and the intimidations Ariel receives are central to the film: when the group of friends wants to report the incident, a member of the administration tells them “Those things don’t happen here”. This denial by a member of an older generation seems to mirror an attitude usually found in the country: atrocities are not perpetrated here, not during the last military dictatorship (1976-1983), not during the bombings (1992, 1994). The imposed ignorance and silence makes Ariel/Cheese Head even more furious about the injustice that surrounds him and his friends. Ultimately, Ariel goes against the

104 “la dinámica de polarización y fragmentación social adquirió tal virulencia que durante gran parte de la década de los 90 hubo grandes dificultades en dotar de un lenguaje político a las experiencias de descolectivización, en la cual se entremezclaban diferentes trayectorias y situaciones, además de sentimientos contradictorios y ambivalentes respecto de la nueva condición social.”
intimidation carried out by adults and decides to testify at the trial. Telling the truth, giving *testimonio*, seems like the one way to break from the past and associate the present to the national memory—while struggling against oblivion.

**The Reconfiguration of the Jewish Argentinean Archive? Anita enters the picture**

The films studied in this chapter portray events within a narrative that allows for certain memories to seep through to the Argentinean society as a whole. However, these memories also manage to shape the view Jews have had of themselves throughout these times in a nation where their identity has been tested and where they have reluctantly been accepted into the national imaginary. Being able to inscribe the archive and, therefore, Argentina’s collective memory means the possibility of leaving the mark of “otherness” behind. It could be said that Winograd’s and Lichtmann’s productions function as part of an unofficial transactive memory system (explained in detail in the next paragraph) where they encode and store memories that shape identity, national history, and self-reconnaissance. These two films can be thought as part of the collective memory of the Jewish Argentine community (not exclusively, as obviously other Argentines have access to them) and, as transactive memory theory proposes, these films (as other texts created and representing this group) will be tapped on when remembering the aforementioned events (the Neoliberal – menemista—years and the AMIA bombing). Consequently, not only the newspapers/magazines articles and TV/radio shows of the 1990s are the ones which reflect these events, but also these films which serve as a form of witnessing. (The films are not to work as faithful mirrors of the events, but they exist
and they may impose their reading of the events and may also distort what happened in a
not-so distant past.) Whether we agree with this turn of events or not, this group of people
is partly going to be seen/remembered by the depictions of these films. Thus, while the
films do not necessarily go against official history, they present additional accounts that
mold the official Jewish Argentine archive.

In order to explain transactive memory, it should be said that it is a fairly recent
psychological hypothesis that was first proposed by Daniel Wegner in 1985. A
transactive memory system is a mechanism through which groups collectively encode,
store, and retrieve knowledge. In his essay “Transactive Memory: A Contemporary
Analysis of the Group Mind”, Wegner explains that a transactive memory system
consists of the knowledge stored in each individual's memory combined with
metamemory containing information regarding the different group members’ domains of
expertise. Group partners discern who knowledge experts are and learn how to access
expertise through communicative processes. In this way, a transactive memory system
can provide the group members with more and better knowledge than any individual
could access on his own (186). Wegner states that “[t]ransactive memory is therefore not
traceable to any of the individuals alone, nor can it be found somewhere ‘between’
individuals. Rather, it is a property of the group. […] Once in place, then, the transactive
memory system can have an impact on what the group as a whole can remember, and as a
result, on what individuals in the group remember and regard as correct even outside the
group” (191). Thus, the way Ariel Winograd and Gabriel Lichtmann chose to portray
socio-historical events in their films impacts the way we remember these events. As
Richard Moreland, Linda Argote, and Ranjani Krishnan explain in their article, few people rely exclusively on their own memories (as Wegner also noted):

Instead most people supplement their own memories with external aids. These memory aids include both objects […] and people… He [Daniel Wegner] argued that in many groups, a transactive memory system develops for the purpose of ensuring that important information is not forgotten. Such a system combines the knowledge possessed by particular group members with a shared awareness of who knows what. So when the group members need information, but either cannot recall it themselves or are uncertain about the accuracy of their own memories, they can turn to one another for help. (63-64)

*Cheese Head* and *Jews in Space* have become external aids which the Jewish Argentine community can access when remembering the last decade of the twentieth century. It should be said that these are works of fiction and they do not reliably represent the reality of that time. Nevertheless, beneath the stories that are told underlies the sustained mood felt during the 1990s. As the memory processes function in their three stages, these films *encode* their perspective of events, *store* these memories, and finally are open for *retrieval* whenever the public is ready.

It should be noted that another film can enter this discussion: Marcos Carnevale’s *Anita* (2009). It is a film that could be approached in different ways, as the protagonist, Anita Feldman, is a young woman with Down syndrome and the backdrop is the 1994 bombing of the AMIA. Marcos Carnevale places Anita among the casualties of the bombing, as her mother dies in the attack and she is left wandering the city of Buenos Aires. Her brother (who is also her only living relative, as their dad had already passed away) looks for her in the midst of chaos, but it is the relationships she establishes with strangers that make up the core of the film. Even so, the direct connection of Anita as an
Argentine Jew, the daughter of the owner of a store in Once (the Jewish neighborhood *par excellence*), a resident of the area, and a victim of the terrorist attack, places her as a witness of the life of this community in the mid-1990s in Buenos Aires.

After establishing the characters, Carnevale constructs a distressing scene when he recreates the moment of the bombing itself. That scene sets the mood for the rest of the film, as Anita goes missing not knowing her last name, phone number, or address. The re-creation of Ariel (Anita’s brother) waiting to hear if her mother and sister have been found and the first demonstration asking for justice after the terrorist attack are as close to reality as possible. On the one hand, Carnevale decides to use some of the names of the actual victims when reading the list of people who are still missing. On the other hand, the first demonstration demanding justice happened a few days after the attack and (Carnevale followed real time in this part of the script) we see Anita walking through it while still lost. This conscious act of keeping certain aspects of the actual historical events makes *Anita* part of the Jewish Argentine transactive memory system but, as the images we are seeing in the film are not recordings of what truly happened, it can be argued that it also reconfigures the Jewish Argentine archive. As in *Cheese Head* and *Jews in Space*, these images have already been encoded and stored and it may now be time to retrieve them. When this happens the individual memories that we have will be altered. That is, the memories of the bombing itself, but also of the investigation that followed. It is virtually impossible to separate the memories of the actual (physical)

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105 Anita/Ariel’s last name, Feldman, coincides with one victim’s: Mónica Feldman de Goldfeder. (The list of victims can be found at the AMIA website: http://www.amia.org.ar/index.php/content/default/show/content/50)
attack from the psychological attack committed by the lack of justice and the violence of impunity and corruption.

*Anita* ends when Ariel finds his sister and takes her back to the store and her home. It is difficult for her to understand that her mother will never come back from the AMIA—as difficult as it still is for the families of the victims to accept they will never see their loved ones again. However, the movie ends at that point (hinting at Ariel as Anita’s new caregiver) and there is no questioning of why the bombing happened, why their mother died, or why the perpetrators have not been detained and formally accused. This is the reality (not the memory) for all Argentines, but more significantly, for all Argentine Jews. The constant disregard of basic human rights endured all these years without concrete action from the government or the judicial system is a burden that is smeared on the memories of the attack and its victims.

*Anita, Cheese Head: My First Ghetto,* and *Jews in Space* contain reflections of the everyday uncertainty which bounded the 1990s despite the emphasis given on a free market economy and a cult of the rich and famous. In hindsight, the films utilize the crevasses left in the space between history and memory to illustrate a type of quest: In *Cheese Head,* Ariel searches for an opening within the adult discourses to prove to the community (as well as to himself) that there is room for truth, justice, and courage in postdictatorial Argentina. On the other hand, Anita is not on a particular quest: she drifts through the city of Buenos Aires in the wake of chaos, pain, and fear. The quest, however, is left to the spectators (the spectators of the film as well as the spectators of the massacre): Where do we go from here? Who do we trust? Anita seems to tell us there still
are generous and kind souls in Buenos Aires. However, the background story shows the opposite. Indeed, the deeper Anita gets lost in the city and the further away she is carried throughout the province of Buenos Aires the safer the audience feels she is.

Unfortunately, living and/or working near a Jewish institution is now a dangerous endeavor. And, as in Jews in Space, it may also be treacherous to bring back childhood memories when the ones involved are tied in a struggle to maintain tradition intact versus unguiltily let go of the past.

The articulation of the discursive world where the films take place is underlined and affected by the politics that shaped Argentina in the 1990s and the collective imaginary has long ago decided what to withhold in the archive. These nuclei of signification framed by the works of individual and collective memory and the way the films choose to narrate and conceptualize their stories (and back-stories) do not (and cannot) function in the vacuum: there is a community whose space within the nation is being re-elaborated at all moments but more urgently after two terrorist attacks. The personal, political, and communal identity of Argentine Jews is at stake—trying to stay afar from victimization, but adamantly asserting their right to uncover the truth and demand justice. At times, these films do fall into the traps of sentimentalism and commonplaces, but they also offer a venue where memories can be reached. It also means that what has been chosen (deliberately or inadvertently) to stay out of the picture has fallen into the realm of oblivion. Yet, this is not a territory to face with apprehension or uneasiness as it presents the possibility to open a virtual space of memory. The Argentine author and psychologist Hugo Vezzetti suggests that something not present, something
not lived or thought, is actually latently available to be evoked, confronted, even discussed or rectified by an act of memory (36). Just as the act of rectifying what was wrongly done, Ariel/Cheese Head reflects on that summer when he had to testify so that Alma would be punished for the humiliation he made his friend Coper go through, Ariel thinks “Maybe nothing would change”. The reality has shown he was right, not much has changed in the politico-economic landscape when it comes to achieving and reaffirming justice. Nevertheless, the mere possibility of giving testimony provides a glimpse of that imprecise tool of measurement named hope.

Final Words

Gabriel Lichtmann and Ariel Winograd belong to a generation of Jewish Argentine filmmakers who tackle the issue of memory from an idiosyncratic perspective compared to their antecessors’ standpoint: the familial and national memory showcased has a definite bond to the present—a bond that allows the memory to be developed and considered under a different light. While thinking about and working with memory, these twenty-first century directors encourage the idea of dissolution of national versus individual memory that have historically determined identity formation. They have creatively responded to the historic dilemma of immigrants and their descendants struggling to find their place in the world by claiming an identity that emerges in their imaginary transnational and transcultural production. By breaking with the seemingly stagnant notions of memory, they have produced a space where the intersections are what matter.
Both *Jews in Space* and *Cheese Head-My First Ghetto* represent a way contemporary films made in Argentina deal with the issues of memory from a present perspective. These films, indeed, probe the limit of true and false memory, but they also display a way the transmission of memory among Jewish Argentines is expanding and changing: the collective, the national, the familial, and the individual are poured into one same space where these categories are difficult to discern from each other. In their films, Winograd and Lichtmann portray the flexibility of memory, its ability to transform and incorporate new stories, as well as the plurality of stories that become part of memory. The usage of remembrance as a connection to the present has its limitations. Yet, these cinematic narratives serve a purpose: without the sense of connectedness fostered by these memories, there would be a lack of cohesiveness to function in the direction the Jewish Argentine cinematic present is heading.
Chapter Five - Reflections of Memory by the Post-Dictatorship, Post-Bombing
Generation of Jewish Argentine Women Artists

Every work of art responds to the period lived.\textsuperscript{106}
(Mirta Kupferminc interviewed by Radio Jai)

In 2005, in a conference in Rosario, Argentina, several Jewish Argentine intellectuals gathered to talk about issues of identity—both Argentine and Jewish—and about the challenges facing the twenty-first century. Héctor Schmucler weighed in:

While there is shared memory, while there is some form of memory and the nuances of that memory are infinite, while memory makes us feel that we belong to a group, is it possible to stop being a Jew?
And here we go again with the insistence on identity as a way of market. Identities can be acquired, but can identities be discarded? (51)\textsuperscript{107}

This essay confronts these issues of memory and identity and adds more layers to the quest: that of female subjects, that of artists, and that of a generation who were infants during the last military dictatorship (1976-1983) and who clearly remember the two bombings to Jewish targets in Buenos Aires in the 1990s. After more than one hundred years of living in a nation, what happens with the memory transmitted from generation from generation? What is repeated, what is lost for some time, and what is forced to live forever in oblivion? What happens when this community is fiercely hit by two terrorist attacks as it was in the 1990s and singled out during a dictatorship, as happened in the

\textsuperscript{106} “Cada obra responde al tiempo que se vive.”

\textsuperscript{107} “Mientras haya memoria compartida, mientras haya alguna forma de memoria y los matices de esa memoria son infinitos, mientras la memoria nos haga sentir que pertenecemos a un grupo, ¿es posible dejar de ser un judío?
Y acá viene otra vez la insistencia en la identidad como forma de mercado. Se pueden adquirir identidades, pero ¿se pueden abandonar identidades?”

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1970s? How do younger generations think about these issues, especially through visual arts and, especially, visual arts produced by female artists?

My project seeks to uncover how the visual art of Verónica Fradkin (Buenos Aires, 1974) and Gabriela Golder (Buenos Aires, 1971) showcases their incisive point of view when it comes to asking about their role as women in the arts and their responsibility as receivers and transmitters of memory. The work illustrator Verónica Fradkin has done with AMIA (the largest Jewish community center in Argentina and the target of the second bombing in the 1990s) explores the potential of memory: it brings together the horror of the 1994 bombing with the memory of another horror, the only pogrom in Latin America (Buenos Aires, 1919). By finding a bridge to remember and honor victims of both events, she finds a way to unite generations and compels the Jewish community, as well as the whole nation, to face the distant and recent past. Likewise, Gabriela Golder thinks of memory as a space of resistance and as an instrument to create identity after the 1976-1983 dictatorship: for this visual artist, it is the malleable substance of memory that shapes her identity as woman, artist, Argentine, and Jew. She says, “Memory helps to create an identity”. It is this awareness of the power of memory that provides a space for these artists to develop their identity.

I focus on Gabriela Golder’s video project, “In Memory of the Birds” (“En Memoria de los Pájaros”, 2000), where the artist sets out to uncover what was hidden beneath the silence and whispers that surrounded her childhood and where she attempts to answer how it was possible for her (as well as for her family, her friends, and her country) to live so-called normal, happy lives while the horror seeped through the fabric
of the Argentine society. Golder is a well-known visual artist and curator, as well as a professor of Video and New Technologies. She has also worked extensively with video and mixed media and since 2013 she is the program director of the Experimental Video and Film Program of the Modern Art Museum in Buenos Aires. I also focus on Verónica Fradkin’s work for the AMIA (Argentine Israelite Mutual Association; in Spanish, Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina), which was the target of a terrorist attack on July 18, 1994, where 85 people were killed and hundreds injured. After two decades of ongoing investigations and scandals involving judicial officers, nobody to-date has been formally charged for the bombing. Fradkin is a committee member of AMIA’s Memoria Ilustrada (Illustrated Memory), which is in charge of creating art projects to commemorate the bombing every July. In 2012 her work was part of the book Una mañana de julio (A Morning in July) and in 2014 (although the project started in 2013) in a project called MemoTest (a memory card game), where the artist represented the only pogrom that took place in Latin America on her card. Fradkin’s work has been featured in several exhibits and she has illustrated children’s books as well as other projects including the City of Buenos Aires and UNESCO’s Children’s Rights project.

Both Golder and Fradkin focus a large portion of their work on issues of memory. However, there is a detachment from the need to make their art belong to the collective memory of their Jewish ancestors or their Argentine nation: their relationship with memory, even though solidly anchored in their identity, reflects a decision to look inwards and reflect on their own memory in relation to their recollection of their past and

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108 In 2013 Fradkin’s work was part the exhibit “Sin palabras” (“Without Words”), also organized by Illustrated Memory to commemorate another anniversary of the AMIA bombing.
their choices regarding the future. As post-dictatorship, post-bombing Jewish Argentine women artists, their work comes from a place of another “post-”: post-diasporic. Santiago Kovadloff thinks about the Jews who, like the families of Golder and Fradkin, decided not to move to Israel when this state was created. Kovadloff wonders what the decision of staying in countries where Jews strongly identify with their nations means. Basically, “where are they, since 1948, the Jews who do not identify their motherland with Israel nor do they support a religious conception?” (41). Neither Golder nor Fradkin have a strong identification with the religious aspect of Judaism, although Fradkin self-identifies as a Jew. Therefore, these artists are part of a growing group of For Argentines who have grown to be aware of their belonging to their nation and whose connection to their family’s history has shifted compared to older generations, there is still the memory of being part of the Jewish people, but their attachment to that identity is weak at best. They both can easily identify as women artists, as Argentines, and as 1970s offspring, but the Jewish identity exposes a deeper questioning of that category.

Returning to Santiago Kovadloff’s notion of the post-diasporic being, he explains that:

109 “¿dónde están, a partir de 1948, los judíos que no identifican su patria con Israel ni tampoco hacen suya una concepción religiosa?”

110 In an e-mail to the author Golder states: “It is a complex matter, that of identity. I come from a Jewish family, albeit atheist for the past two generations, but I could not say I define myself as a Jewish artist. Simply as an artist, from Latin America (even the notion of ‘Latin American artist’ is difficult for me). So, I wonder about the definition of Jewish Argentine. Yes, I am, but I do not use this framework in relation to my identity.” (“Es una cuestión compleja esta de la identidad. Provenzo de una familia judía, si bien atea hace dos generaciones, pero no podría decir que me defino como artista judía. Sino simplemente como artista, de América Latina (mismo me cuesta la noción de ‘artista latinoamericana’). Entonces me pregunto sobre la definición de judeo-argentina. Sí, lo soy, pero no diría que utilizo este marco en relación a mi identidad.”)
…the diasporic man is one who, as emblematic Jew of the convulsions of our time, he lets himself be seen in the impossibility of symbolization of what he signifies. He does not find solace in the religious aspect anymore, the national Israeli ideal is not his and the word Jew with which he designates himself is, at the same time, what makes him unrecognizable; a presence that operates outside the field of identity. Yet, he clings to it. To that word that harbors and deserts him at the same time. To that word that situates him outside the Jewish knowledge as formally understood, to inscribe him in the steep and unpredictable realm of the confusing, the estimating, the conjecture and the conviction of being Jewish far from any certainty and against any appeasing proposal. With him, with that post-diasporic man, Judaism manages to be something that persists and wavers at the same time. (229)

The mere substance of being Jewish is in constant change in this post-diasporic time and artists like Fradkin and Golder reflect this tendency of a pendulum moving all too slowly away from the cultural/religious aspect and towards the identification of the self with the country of origin—the nation where their ancestors settled a few generations ago and where they have lived all their lives (and where their children are also being raised). Both Fradkin and Golder are examples of the wide spectrum of self-identification with the Jewish experience and their art also echoes their multi-layered identities. It is no coincidence that they both have works of art based on the experiences of the Dirty War, but only Fradkin has worked closely with a Jewish institution (AMIA), even though the 1994 bombing killed an injured Jews and non-Jews alike. The strong link

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111 “…el hombre posdiasporico es quien, como judío emblemático de las convulsiones de nuestro tiempo, se deja ver en la imposibilidad de simbolización de lo que él mismo significa. Ya no encuentra amparo en lo religioso, no es suyo el ideal nacional israelí y la palabra judío con la que se designa es, a la vez, la que lo vuelve irreconocible; presencia que opera fuera del campo de la identidad. Aun así se aferra a ella. A esa palabra que lo ampara y desampara a la vez. A esa palabra que lo sitúa fuera del saber judío formalmente entendido, para inscribirlo en el terreno escarpado e imprevisible de lo confuso, los tanteos, la conjetura y la convicción de ser judío lejos de toda certeza y contra toda propuesta apaciguadora. Con él, con ese hombre posdiasporico, el judaísmo llega a ser algo que persiste y vacila a la vez.”

112 Fradkin has a son and Golder has two nieces.
among artists of this generation is memory: their inquisition of what is remembered, how it is remembered, and the intrinsic process of unearthing uncomfortable truths.\(^{113}\)

**Confounding Memories of the Dirty War: “El recuerdo como un túnel”\(^{114}\)**

In 1976 Gabriela Golder was five years old. She lived with her parents and younger sister and she remembers having a happy childhood. Every summer the whole family would travel 400 km (approximately 250 miles) from their hometown, Buenos Aires, to spend their vacation in the coastal city of Villa Gesell. Like many other families, they would spend every summer there and they had made friends with the local residents.\(^{115}\) One particular family stopped going to Villa Gesell in 1976 and the rumors and whispers started to spread. Golder, as a young girl, tried to comprehend this sudden change in their family’s friends as well as the secrecy behind this event. The unsettlement accompanied her throughout the decades and in 1998-1999 she started to pour her questions into her work. More specifically:

How are disappearances possible? What is a disappearance? How is it possible to continue living when the people who surround you disappear?

\(^{113}\) Golder reflects about her project “In Memory of the Birds” saying: “I belong to a generation (maybe 2 or 3 years older) of the children of the disappeared, of the ones who survived, of those who were appropriated, of those whose identity was stolen.” (“Pertenezco a la generación (quizás 2 o 3 años mayor) de los hijos de desaparecidos, de aquellos que sobrevivieron, de aquellos que fueron apropiados, de aquellos a quienes se les robó la identidad.”) For a portion of older and younger generations the children of the disappeared (and its generation) continue to be a painful and uncomfortable reminder of those dark years. For this generation (born in the 1970s) the search for the truth and for identity continue to be a priority—for some it is even more imperative when thinking about their own children and the responsibility of transmitting a legacy of truth.

\(^{114}\) In Gabriela Golder’s project “In Memory of the Birds”.

\(^{115}\) Golder says in an interview with Manuela Moscoso: “Those friends were very close to us, as if they were part of our family.” (“Esos amigos eran muy cercanos para nosotros, como si fueran parte de la familia.”)
How did my parents make it? How was my childhood at that moment? How did my parents, despite the pain and the fear they lived in, manage to give us a happy childhood?116

These questions are not only a personal feeling of the artist, but they reflect a generation’s questioning: How could we have enjoyed a so-called normal and happy childhood in the midst of horror? And for descendants of Jews who escaped the Shoah, it also points to the inquiry that has been asked many times before: How could entire nations have continued living as usual while having the horrors of the Holocaust transpire right next to them?

Golder tackled this endeavor by going to the source, that is, by talking to the family that stopped spending summer vacations in Villa Gesell. She traveled to the province of Córdoba and talked to the Bondone family (the father and two teenage sons who had been kidnapped, held, and tortured survived) and she came back to Buenos Aires with many hours of recorded material. Golder’s challenge was how to preserve their testimony while focusing on her questions, on her childhood. She, then, became the filter that resulted in her 2000 project In Memory of the Birds (En Memoria de los Pájaros).117 The artist’s idea was to become this filter in a two-pronged approach: she

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116 “¿Cómo son posibles las desapariciones? ¿Qué significa una desaparición? ¿Cómo es posible seguir viviendo cuando la gente que está a tu alrededor desaparece? ¿Cómo hacían mis padres? ¿Cómo fue mi infancia en ese momento? ¿Cómo lograron mis padres, a pesar del dolor y el miedo con que vivían, habernos dado una infancia feliz?”

117 In a personal e-mail of March 2, 2015, the artist explains that the title of the video came to her spontaneously. The “In memory” part is the result of thinking of the project created as “in memoriam”. The part of the title referring to the birds is dedicated to “the ones who left, the ones who were killed, the ones who believed and fought”. Golder explains that there is a representative image in the video, “the one where there are papers with names hanging in Plaza de Mayo. They are images of a demonstration of resistance, the papers are swayed y the wind, the names can be read and then they cannot be read, they are there and later they are not.” The video can be watched at http://vimeo.com/8399549
asked his friends to lend her movies of their childhood filmed in Super8, where there were birthday parties, vacations, mostly joyful celebrations which she then she paired with news reels of people being detained in the streets of Buenos Aires and of the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo. By putting these two kinds of images side by side within a black frame [Figure 1], Golder becomes the unifying force, the filter: “That’s the video and I’m inside, in the interstices. I found my identity among all that, among all that material…” (Golder interviewed by Moscoso). Golder also utilized different sound recordings, such as the interview she did with the Bondone family and her own singing when she was a young girl. One more aspect is the phrases that appear running from right to left on top and at the bottom of the two windows that show the films. These phrases seem to reflect Golder’s thoughts about her life during the dictatorship, as well as the testimony of the Bondone family. Parts of the testimony state:

I say, I don’t understand
They covered our eyes
They tied our hands with cords
And they hit us, they hit us

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118 “Eso es el video y ahí estoy yo, en los intersticios. Mi identidad la encontraba entre todo eso, entre todo el material…”

119 A characteristic belonging to Hebrew—which is written and read from right to left—and not to Spanish, the language utilized in this video.

120 “Digo, no lo entiendo / Nos vendaron los ojos / Nos ataron las manos con cables / Y nos pegaron, nos pegaron”
Figure 1. Still image of the video *In Memory of the Birds* by Gabriela Golder (2000)

Golder interweaves this testimony by giving her own: even though she calls *testimonio* what other people contributes to the video, hers is also a testimony of what it was like to grow up in 1970s Argentina, of the secrets and the whispers, of “the end of innocence”.  

As an adult Golder became aware of the precarious situation that surrounded her family and her country and tried to put her memory—and that of others—to work in order to decipher how she managed to emerge from those dark years.

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121 “Fin de la inocencia” (“In Memory of the Birds”).
“untouched” (Golder and her family did not live in a vacuum and her strong desire to understand those years shows how repressing the reality for children can backfire).\footnote{In an interview with Manuela Moscoso Golder explains that her parents’ friends in Villa Gesell were “psychologists and lawyers, all leftists, all very committed politically” (“psicólogos y abogados, todos de izquierda, todos muy comprometidos políticamente”). The implication is that her parents and their friends were the target of the military at the time and, just as the Bondone father and two sons were kidnaped and disappeared, so too could that have been the fate of her parents.}

Elizabeth Jelin and Susana G. Kaufman explain the different layers encompassed by the “labours of memory”:

- as narratives of facts and remembrances; […]
- as ways in which memory is conveyed intergenerationally: who tells, who listens, who keeps silent;
- as thoughts and reflection about what one has experienced, considering the moment in the life course when this happened, and one’s current thoughts about the past;
- as reflections about one’s place in the world, about one’s own social responsibility. (105)

Golder’s “In Memory of the Birds” is composed of these layers as the artist reflects about her past using her memory of her childhood as a springboard. From there onwards she collects films, recordings, and other people’s memories, but she comes back to her own to produce her project. The last words on the video sum up her thoughts: “It’s a matter of time / I’m without identity”.\footnote{“Es una cuestión de tiempo / Estoy sin identidad”} Provocatively, she chooses to use the verb “to be” instead of “to have”—she could have said “I don’t have an identity” or “I have no identity”. However, she opts to equate the fact of being with the fundamental fact of having an identity. “I’m without identity” also launches a quest that goes beyond the video as an artistic expression: Golder insists on searching for that identity that started to...
form in the early 1970s, an identity that was surrounded by silences. The very first scene showcases Golder’s hand that is unraveling celluloid film. With this gesture, she seems to be setting the viewer up for what is about to happen: she is the one who decides what to show and she is the one who has dug deep into her memory and tried to unravel it in order to preserve it or, as Jelin and Kaufman say, convey it intergenerationally. Golder is conscious of answering “who tells, who listens, who keeps silent”. She once was in the position of the child, not being able to understand the situation surrounding her, but she is now in the position of transmitting her experience to younger generations. Golder is not interested in focusing on only the historical aspects of the times. Next to that window with documentary images she places the images of the everyday life—sometimes her own everyday life—to contrast her private (and her family and friends’) life and the public sphere.

Fabiana Barreda interprets the camera in “In Memory of the Birds” as

the recovered memory, in search of an impossible, an unimaginable, an unsaid. Two parallel images border a black interval, there where there is no image there is emptiness. A tragedy is staged and it’s survived through the invention of a parallel space. […] the pain submerges itself in an aqueous flow, it flows in the tenuous and immaterial light of the intimate memory merging into the collective history.

Gabriela Golder’s project is a timeless and, at the same time, time-anchored work of art: The artist utilizes the past, fixes it to the present, and connects to the future by

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124 The irony of the displayed public images is that they hardly show what was happening at the time in clandestine detention centers all around Argentina.

125 “la memoria recuperada, en busca de un imposible, un inimaginable, un indecible. Dos imágenes paralelas bordean un intervalo negro, allí donde no hay imagen hay vacío. Se pone en escena una tragedia y se sobrevive a través de la invención de un espacio paralelo. […] el dolor se sumerge en un fluir acuoso, fluye en la tenue e inmaterial luz del recuerdo íntimo que va fusionándose a la historia colectiva.”
placing two windows of images side to side connected by the black frames that surround it. This black frame is Golder in her present life and the whole project is a legacy to the future. That black frame connects her to her search for identity and she employs that emptiness to let the viewer in—whether the viewer lived through this period or whether this is new information, the memories resulting from watching this video are now part of the viewer. Golder’s social responsibility (as per Jelin and Kaufman) to tell the story about “how it was possible to live among the dead” is thus accomplished.

Illustrating Memory: Pogroms, Terrorist Attacks, and the contemporary Jewish Argentine Identity

In 2012 the AMIA committee Memoria Ilustrada (Illustrated Memory) launched a memory game called MemoTest to commemorate the eighteenth anniversary of the AMIA bombing [Figure 2].

126 “cómo fue posible vivir entre los muertos” (words by Gabriela Golder about “In Memory of the Birds” on her site gabrielgolder.com)
The game consists of 44 cards that reflect events that this committee (formed by members of the Forum for Illustrators) deemed that Argentines should not forget. The idea was to bring this game to schools as a way to talk about difficult events in Argentine history, focusing on fairly recent happenings. The game comes with a warning, though: it is recommended to talk to the children about all 22 events before playing the game. The events range from the military dictatorships to bullying to specific events like the neighborhood of Once Tragedy (a 2012 railroad accident that caused the death of fifty-

\[127\] The card set also comes with 2 blank cards in order to add an event that the players think should not be forgotten.
one people and injured more than 700) and the nightclub called Cromañón in which 194 people died and more than 1,400 were injured in a fire in 2004. There are also cards to remember the Malvinas/Falklands Islands War fatalities, as well as the disappeared, family violence and malnutrition. There are all kinds of events suggested by this game as fundamental to the collective memory of Argentines. Interestingly, only two out of the twenty-two featured events happened abroad: one is the Armenian genocide (the Ottoman government’s systematic extermination of its minority, Armenians, from 1915 to 1923 in what is now Turkey—with an estimated 1 to 2 million Armenians killed) and the other is the Holocaust/Shoah. And there are, of course, cards representing the 1992 terrorist attack to the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires and the 1994 attack to the AMIA building. While Fradkin did not work on any of these specifically, besides from being part of the Illustrated Memory committee she worked on the card that represents the Tragic Week: what is known as the only pogrom in Latin America which happened in Buenos Aires in 1919 [Figure 3].
The intentionality of Fradkin to represent a historical event elicits a double layer of memory: in her card,

[t]he reference to time passing, as an inexorable reality, appears in Verónica’s approach in her intention to make an image of the metamorphosis, a kind of mnemonic device: the passing of time is consumed in memory and memory keeps it as an image that is set in the remembrance and is transformed into a work of art.128 (Babino)

128 “La referencia al tema del paso del tiempo, como realidad inexorable, aparece en la propuesta de Verónica en su intención de hacer de la imagen de la metamorfosis, una suerte de recurso mnemotécnico: el
Fradkin chooses to honor and put emphasis on remembering the AMIA tragedy by summoning another tragedy that, in her opinion, needs to be rescued from oblivion as part of Argentine history. In a personal interview with the author, Fradkin explains:

I was interested in the subject. I think it is something of Argentine history that was left in total oblivion. And I always found it interesting how groups of immigrants, especially the workers’ struggle at that time, how groups of immigrants that just arrived to found Argentina, who were poor, who did not have anything, they committed to something that was about life or death. And then there is oblivion because they were like people who did not exist within the population, they were immigrants, there still not a nation. And I always thought of them as other disappeared.

As Babino had mentioned when talking about a work of art Fradkin exhibit many years earlier (in 1998), “memory keeps it as image that is set in the remembrance and is transformed into a work of art”. For her card in the memory game she spent time thinking of the best way to create the greatest impact without upsetting the school children for whom this game is intended. That is how she came to the idea of a needle with red thread, which symbolizes the work that many immigrants did, but especially Jewish immigrants, who were tailors and furriers. In her research she quickly realized there were virtually no visual materials to work with, but she instead based the silhouettes on the style and

transcurso del tiempo se consume en la memoria y ésta -a su vez- lo mantiene como imagen que se fija en el recuerdo y se transmuta en obra.”

129 “El tema me interesaba. Me parece algo de la historia argentina que quedó en el olvido total. Y siempre me pareció interesante cómo los grupos de inmigrantes, sobre todo la lucha obrera de esa época, cómo grupos de inmigrantes que recién llegaban a fundar la Argentina, que eran pobres, que no tenían nada, se comprometían tanto con algo que era cuestión de vida o muerte. Y después es como un olvido porque eran como personas que no existían dentro de la población, eran inmigrantes, todavía no eran como nación. Y eso siempre me pareció como otros desaparecidos.”

130 It should be noted that there is a Jewish traditional belief that a red string (especially tied around the wrist) can protect one from danger.
type of clothing of the time. Fradkin explains that “a needle and a thread were like an arrow shot, that thing that breaks, that cuts, and that also binds together, it breaks, but it binds too.” The red thread, although clearly painful, binds the workers and their families in the struggle for better conditions, in their experiences as immigrants, and in their disbelief at having abandoned their homes to escape this kind of violence and having to witness yet another pogrom in their new country. The red thread could also work as the binding element which Fradkin describes when talking about her own connection to this event, as her family arrived from Russia and the Ukraine right before the Tragic Week and, even though she admits to her lack of interest in the religious aspect of Judaism, she is aware of the connection Jews have: “It is something that is flying, that is going around. I do feel I belong because of the culture. [...] I don’t know, we have something in common, because of our history we have to get together to continue surviving. I don’t know if we are the chosen people, but… But I do feel I am Jewish because I was always told ‘you are the third, fourth generation in Argentina,’ then I do feel Argentine.” Fradkin’s commitment to remembering both the Tragic Week and the AMIA bombing comes not only from her Jewish heritage, but also from her responsibility as an Argentine to return to the spotlight events that affected numerous fellow citizens.

131 “una aguja y un hilo era como un flechazo, esa cosa como que rompe, que corta, y que también une, rompe, pero une.” (Personal interview with the author.)

132 “Es algo que está volando, está dando vueltas. Yo siento la pertenencia por cultura […] No sé, tenemos algo en común, por historia nos tenemos que juntar para poder seguir sobreviviendo. El pueblo elegido no sé si somos, pero… Pero sí me siento judía porque siempre me dijeron ‘sos la tercera, cuarta generación en la Argentina,’ entonces yo sí me siento argentina.”
In order to provide the card with a realistic feeling, Fradkin went for a walk around the Once neighborhood, where the AMIA building is located and where her grandmother lives—a fact that made the 1994 bombing a personal matter, as she and her family had thought the worst when the attack happened. In her walk she focused on textures and knew she had found what she needed for the background of her memory card when she saw the print of a work boot in fresh cement. “I thought it left an impact, like to step on the workers’ condition of the time, but also that thing of the mark, of the footprint.” Fradkin’s idea of the footprint, of leaving a mark, is also the idea of the work she does with the AMIA. The work of remembering and hoping that with her card, part of the memory game, many schoolchildren have a chance to review their nations’ past. There are people that can talk about the AMIA bombing, but the Tragic Week remains elusive and mostly forgotten. Marcelo Dimentstein outlines the reasoning behind the oblivion towards the Tragic Week:

Certain sectors of Jewish Buenos Aires resuscitated the Tragic Week pogrom insofar that it would provide elements to interpret the successive “presents” in which they were immersed, especially to understand the growing wave of anti-Semitic acts, at the same time as the memories were solidifying when elaborating collective identities, which confronted and created sceneries for the struggles of memory. (141)

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133 “Me pareció que impactaba como esta cosa de la pisoteada hacia la condición obrera de esa época pero también esa cosa de la marca, de la huella.”

134 “Ciertos sectores del colectivo judeoporteño resucitaron al pogrom de la Semana Trágica en la medida en que éste le proporcionaba elementos para interpretar los sucesivos “presentes” en los que estaban inmersos, en especial para comprender la ola creciente de hechos de antisemitismo, a la vez que las memorias eran solidarias a la hora de elaborar identidades colectivas, que confrontaban y creaban escenarios de lucha por las memorias.”
It is the horror of the AMIA bombing, an event that provokes, as in the case of Fradkin, a return to the past to try to understand the inexplicable. The footprint in the background of the card is a reminder of the workers attacked during the 1919 Tragic Week, but it can also work as the footprint of memory: The events happened whether we choose to remember or forget them and sometimes it is another sad event that triggers the curiosity of an artist to put history back in the limelight. That work boot footprint is also Fradkin’s footprint onto Argentine memory.

It is a work that started in 2012 when Fradkin participated in the Illustrated Memory project: a book called *Una mañana de Julio. Cuentos para no olvidar* (A *morning in July. Short Stories not to Forget*), which includes short stories related to the terrorist attack and illustrations based on those same stories. Fradkin is one of the illustrators that were inspired by Márgara Averbach’s short story “Un vacío en el lugar del nombre” (“An Emptiness in place of the Name”). The short story is about a blurry line that divides two countries: Memory and Oblivion. And right on that line there is a tree, which is witness to all the stories of people who cross from one side to the other of the line. As the line is not clear, people are never sure they are in the country Memory or Oblivion [Figure 4].

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135 The short stories were written by well-known authors like Canela, Paula Bombara and Eduardo Abel Giménez, among others. One short story was written by renowned filmmaker Daniel Burman, who wrote the screenplay and directed a trilogy of films linked to the Jewish community in Buenos Aires.
For the background of her illustration, Fradkin chose utilize the well-known Rivadavia sheet, which is used in every elementary school in the country and decided to use the tree as the divider. On the bottom half of the sheet she scribbled nonsense, as she feels that at school you are supposed to fill in the sheet but no one is certain with what (what task the teacher has given the students). On the top half she scanned postcards sent by her family. Her father provided her with these postcards and she admits not knowing who these relatives were:
There were things that had been written from Russia and I started to scan those texts and I started to use them like that thing that one starts to reconstruct without knowing exactly what is going on and you don’t know if it is the memory because it is a created memory. I don’t know them; actually my dad did not know who they were either. But you find names, stories, with things that are suddenly part of your history without you realizing it. I thought it’d be interesting to put it there.136

Fradkin also decided to draw different generations to show that older generations carry their history, but they start to forget that history. And there is the younger generation that is crossing the line, but you can’t tell whether is coming or going. The blurriness between memory and oblivion is what drew her to Averbach’s short story and she enjoyed the self-referentiality of using her family’s postcards, as she tends to utilize this technique in her work (she has used her own body in much of her art). When looking closely at the tree, the word “historias” (histories/stories) appears on one side. The tree is witness to the stories of those who cross from memory to oblivion and vice versa. This constant moving represented in Averbach’s short story and represented by Fradkin in her illustrations (the older generation seems static and concentrated in their reading, while the younger generation is in motion) goes back to concept of immigration—an intrinsical part of the Argentine and the Jewish experience. Ariana Huberman and Alejandro Meter explain the diasporic experience:

Memory and oblivion have a vital role in the diasporic experience since in the immigration and transfer process memories are threatened by the dispersion of social nuclei that feed memory. The stories of the Jewish

136“Había cosas que habían escrito desde Rusia y empecé a escanear esos textos y empecé a usarlos como esa cosa que uno va reconstruyendo sin saber muy bien que es lo que está pasando y tampoco sabes mucho si es la memoria porque es una memoria creada. Yo no los conozco; de hecho mi papá tampoco sabía de quien se trataba. Pero vos te encontrarás con nombres, con historias, con cosas que de repente van haciendo tu historia sin saberlo. Me pareció interesante ponerlo.” (Personal interview with the author.)
diaspora reveal processes from which immigrant groups reconstruct their culture from memories of their previous life. In the act of sharing memories from their previous relationship nuclei, the familiar genealogy unravels. (15)

One of Fradkin’s exact goals is to unravel the familiar genealogy (her own and her community’s) by utilizing her ancestor’s postcards in her art. By recovering objects that were long relegated to oblivion, she is inviting her audience, her family, and her country to take a moment to look back and look for the pieces that make up their history. In addition, she is highlighting this history in her art as a way to bring it into the future: the younger generations now have the opportunity to glimpse not only what a previous generation like Fradkin’s did in their lifetime (in her case, demonstrated in works of art), but of what many generations previous to Fradkin’s went through as immigrants, as travelers from and to diverse worlds, and as diasporic subjects.

Memory Unbounded: Art, Transmission, and Legacy

Gabriela Golder’s and Verónica Fradkin’s work not only utilize different materials, but they are also composed from different points of view regarding their self-identification with their roles as artists, women, Argentines, and Jews. Nevertheless, there is a thread that encompasses their loyalty and compromise into their multilayered identities: their sense of responsibility when transmitting their country’s history, as well

137 "El recuerdo y el olvido desempeñan un papel vital en la experiencia diasáfrica ya que en el proceso de inmigración y traslado los recuerdos se ven amenazados por la dispersión de los núcleos sociales que alimentan la memoria. Los relatos de la diáspora judía revelan procesos a partir de los cuales grupos de inmigrantes reconstruyen su cultura desde de la memoria de su vida anterior. En el acto de compartir recuerdos de sus núcleos de pertenencia previos, se va desentrañando la genealogía familiar.

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as their own. Golder deals with numerous themes in her art, from unemployment to women’s subjectivity, but it is In Memory of the Birds where she turns inwards (she asks herself how it was possible to have a happy childhood during the dictatorship that gripped Argentina between 1976 and 1983) and, by looking inward she becomes a symbolic spokesperson for an entire generation while providing insight to those who came afterwards. In Fradkin’s case, she also focuses on her need to learn more about her history in a project like the MemoTest. By doing so she provided a history lesson on the Tragic Week and on the ease of forgetting what is not ingrained in people’s memory—1919 is almost a century past, but the AMIA bombing happened only two decades ago and the sentiment and reasoning behind both events are uncannily connected. Fradkin is aware of the task at hand when she speculates about the way her (and her family’s) connection to their Jewishness has been shifting throughout the decades:

I was always told: Jewish is not a religion, Jewish is an identity, that that you carry, through food, through culture, through this thing of getting together, of transmitting traditions and customs. From that point of view, I feel Jewish. Not from the religion aspect; as a matter of fact I do not practice the religion. Yes, in my family there are people that are a little religious. They are not Orthodox, but they respect the traditions of not eating certain things or not eating them together or, it is not that they go to temple on Fridays, but during the High Holidays they do go to temple. […] I don’t know if I will impress this onto my children… […] There are certain issues that mark you. In that sense I do feel part of a group. Without ignoring that I can see other points of view, I can approach other ways of looking at things. But I do feel that there is something that belongs to me, it is something intangible, I don’t know how to name it, but it is there. […] I don’t know, we have something in common, because of our history we have to stick together to keep surviving. I don’t know if we are the chosen people, but… But I do feel because I was always told “you are third, fourth generation in Argentina,” then I do feel Argentine.138

138 “Siempre lo que me dijeron fue: judío no es religión, judío es una identidad, es eso que vos vas llevando, por la comida, por cultura, por esta cosa de la reunión, de la transmisión de saberes o de cuestiones cotidianas. Desde ese punto, me siento judía. No desde la religión, no es que me convoque lo religioso; de
This self-critical soliloquy shows the kinds of struggle Fradkin and her generation go through when establishing the parameters of their Argentineness and the Jewishness. At all times the artist is mindful of the pulls of history, going both backwards and forwards, and eventually concluding that her identity is more complex than a single label. Both Fradkin and Golder become storytellers and, as Walter Benjamin explains, as such they establish a relation with human life similar to the one a craftsman establishes with its material. Here both artists work with human stories—stories that belong to their nation, their culture, their gender, their profession, their families, and themselves—and they double as craftswomen. Their material can be a video or an illustration, but what they are committing to is to breaking Benjamin’s assessment that the storyteller/craftsman’s problem is that this is the downfall of their craft, that what we are going through in terms of human destruction cannot be made into a story because it exceeds our possibility of representation. Gabriela Golder’s and Verónica Fradkin’s art is one more step in the battle for the transmission of memory and towards giving a generation a voice to resist the silence and understand the historical circumstances that shaped their upbringing.

hecho no soy practicante. Sí, en mi familia hay personas que son un poco más religiosos. No son ortodoxos, pero si respetan las tradiciones de no comer ciertas cosas o no comerlas juntas o, no es que van al templo los viernes, pero en las festividades si van al templo. […] Yo no sé sí a mis hijos les inculcaré… […] Hay ciertas cuestiones que te marcan. En ese sentido sí me siento parte de un grupo. Sin dejar de lado que yo puedo ver otras miradas, puedo acercarme a otras formas de ver. Pero sí siento que hay algo que me pertenece, es algo como intangible, no sé cómo nombrarlo, pero está ahí. […] No sé, tenemos algo en común, por historia nos tenemos que juntar para poder seguir sobreviviendo. El pueblo elegido no sé si somos, pero… Pero si me siento porque siempre me dijeron ‘sos tercera, cuarta generación en la Argentina,’ entonces yo si me siento argentina.” (Personal interview with the author.)
Chapter Six – Conclusion

Memory is a seed that life plants, but that only blooms through the word.\(^{139}\)  
(Mempo Giardinelli Santo oficio de la memoria 270)

There will always be Jews while they remember. There is no bigger sin that forgetting.\(^{140}\)  
(Simon Wiesenthal El libro de la memoria judía 9)

Words are fragile and the memory I have of them is surrounded by warmth. […] There us something that makes fruition. It is memory: the open link of a long chain. That opening that unites me and separates me is what has brought me here.\(^{141}\)  
(Myriam Moscona Tela de Sevoya 17)

As with an intangible, subjective and malleable substance that memory is, it would be pretentious to arrive to any definite conclusion. The goal of this project was to select representative texts that could fit into the categories of Argentine and Jewish (a contested selection, that is) and look at the way contemporary artists pour their creativity into works that leave a mark in the processes of memory and identity within a certain people (self-identified Jews) in a certain Latin American country (Argentina). By relating these works of contemporary cultural production to memory and identity (that is, to the claim of “being”) there is tendency to show the artistic or testimonial in their facet as a show (as if it were evidence of that being). However, it should be noted that these processes are filled with interruptions, comings and goings: their edges are jagged and they cannot be assessed as a finalized work of art. This is precisely what counts for this

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\(^{139}\) “La memoria es una semilla que planta la vida, pero que sólo florece mediante la palabra.”

\(^{140}\) “Siempre habrá judíos mientras recuerden. No hay pecado más grande que el olvido.”

\(^{141}\) “Las palabras son frágiles y la memoria que tengo de ellas está rodeada de calor. […] Hay algo que hace frutición. Es la memoria: el eslabón abierto de una larga cadena. Esa abertura que me une y me separa es la que me ha traído aquí.”
project, as it is in these crevasses that the connections and disconnections are found.

Thinking of art as transformational and as creation allows for a path where the categories of memory and identity are thought of as revealed or invented while one questions or transforms it. The shaky ground of these claims is needed in order to continue the analysis of new and old cultural production. Younger generations will stand on different contentious territory and their works of art will offer a different point of view—or not. The processes that shape the formation of memory and identity are ever-changing and there is a need to problematize not only the objects of art, but the interpretation that comes along. Is it testimonial which is represented in the semi-autobiographical works of Sara Rosenberg and Liliana Heker? What about the distant memories of Gabriela Golder in her video? What do younger filmmakers like Winograd and Lichtmann choose to include and leave aside in their films and why? And why is that of interest?

In this project I reflected on the role of different generations in the formation (and influence) of the collective memory of the Jewish Argentine community (although, not exclusively), proposing that their challenging and diverse approaches to the past are a crucial contribution to their country as well as their community. Their texts in the form of literature, film, and visual arts question aspects that may have been left intact if not for these narratives—because they shone light on aspects that deserved more analysis and reflection than what they were deemed at a first glance. From their work, these artists encourage us to reflect on our experience (as well as our ancestors’) and to examine what we/they did, or did not do, to contribute to the processes of memory (postmemory) and identity. In other words, the goal is to achieve a more inclusive and instructive reflection
of the processes of memory that allow all actors, when possible, to learn from the past. This step is possible because of the artists’ position in relation to the past: they are close enough to feel the need to understand what happened, yet have enough distance to identify fissures in the narrative. Not only fissures, but they can detect ways of retelling known parts of the past in novel ways. Of course, the recent past for the generation born in the forties and fifties is closer to the Shoah whilst being witness to the turmoil of the 1960s and 1970s in Argentina. While for the generation born in the sixties and seventies the recent past is closely related to the dictatorship and their present was a childhood of neoliberalist 1990s and two terrorist attacks (1992, 1994). What will the generation born in eighties and nineties bring about? The tremendous economic collapse of 2001 and the massive migration of Argentines throughout the world will surely influence their memory. The de-exile—the coming back to their country of origin when the situation seems to improve—left many youngsters wondering where their place was: were they Argentine because they had been born there or were they now part of their adopted countries? Paradoxically, these same questions arose when exiles came back in the early 1980s when democracy returned to Argentina. Cyclic history is not an unknown dynamic to Argentines, as well as to Jews.

The transmission of memory is never unproblematic and the traumatic experiences generated by the involvement in conflicts—as well as experiences by bystanders, another problematic position—may be too painful to be evoked and there
may be a conscious desire to leave them unrevised. When it comes to trauma, there is no linear progression—no past/present/future—there is collapse of time and space. Consequently, there was a lack of transmission of a coherent personal narrative to younger generations and the transmission of the past was sometimes left in the hands of institutional collective memories. The dilemma being that after a conflictive past, there happens to be several collective memories with different interpretations of what happened, based on the experiences lived by the group which remembers. The advocates of these memories may have priorities other than explaining the past to the younger generations: they are fighting to establish their truth in the public sphere, as well as a place in history. Elizabeth Jelin observes that “[c]ontroversies over the meaning of the past surface at the very moment when the events are taking place. At the time of a military coup or of the invasion of a foreign country, the victors interpret their actions and resulting events in terms of their insertion in a long-term historical process” (30).

Therefore, accepting one’s active role in the construction of the present demands making decisions based on lessons from the past. That past, however, was either lived in very specific circumstances or has been transmitted in a series of memories that are not detached from emotional content. The survivors of these experiences carry a burden as a generation and beyond their individual stories—and those stories can be so difficult that it can be destabilizing to share them. The role of younger generations is, then, to open up spaces for encountering the history behind the pain, because their parents’ and

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142 For an excellent fictionalized account of the influence of military regimes on bystanders refer to the short story “Lovely’s” by Uruguayan author Cristina Peri Rossi. (Thank you to Amy Kaminsky for introducing me to this key story.)
grandparents’ generation most likely did not foresee a legacy of pain for the next
generations. They were thinking of a future where people could relate to each other in a
more compassionate way, engaged in achieving their own and others’ wellbeing. They
were thinking of different ways of truly leaving behind a more caring environment, but
those projects were viciously interrupted by repression and could not be transmitted to
the next generation. For younger generations to be able to identify and work on their own
projects there has to be a transmission of the experience of feeling connected to others.
However, the distancing in the projects as a country is only rivaled by the projects as a
community: religion does not define being Jewish these days. There is a different way of
thinking of being Jewish, of being an Argentine Jew. Author Marcelo Birmajer defines it
in a fictionalized way: “In Jewish secularism there was a contradictory possibility of
being metaphysically Jewish without believing in God (a logical absurdity that Western
Jews had been able to preserve), keeping the profundity of the identity without the
uncomfortable obligation of the rituals” (113). The astoundingly well described
paradigm of a large part of Jewish Argentines’ way of looking at their identity (and a
large part of Western Jews as well) obliges a confrontation with established ways of
thinking and self-identifying in a larger context. And the way memory plays a part in this
is a key aspect of this project. Looking back is not about being detained in time and
space, rather it is more about searching for clues. This way of relating to the past
coincides with what Tzvetan Todorov refers to as “exemplary” memory (12). After

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143. “En el laicismo judío había una posibilidad contradictoria de ser metafísicamente judío sin creer en Dios
(un sinsentido lógico que los judíos occidentales habíamos logrado preservar), manteniendo la profundidad
de la identidad sin la incómoda obligación de los rituales.”
recovering the painful event and without denying its singularity, the “exemplary” way of remembering takes it as part of a generalized reaction and as a model to understand the new situation with different representatives involved. In that way, the past becomes an example that allows us to draw lessons for orienting our actions in the present.

For Jewish Argentine writer Alicia Borinsky the very fact of recreating the past in her semi-autobiographical stories is a way of protecting that past. She thinks of this task as a way to soften the pain of her origins. In an essay where she remembers her grandparents’ arrival to Argentina and the connection of her parents to their own parents she observes that, even though her father was not born in their new land, his arriving as an infant produced in him a detachment from his mother’s experience and a closeness to her daughter’s (the author):

For him that past does not exist. He visits his mother with irony but with true enthusiasm for her cooking. He is Argentine, not Russian. He barely pays attention to what she says as if it were a radio show, mere background noise. We, the grandchildren, also put her between parentheses. I do not know this yet but we do not believe her because she speaks in a severed language, made of clippings that come close to Spanish without fully being it. Her language reveals distances, trips, passports, visas.144

This pulling back and forth between an older generation and a younger is not novel and it repeats itself ad infinitum. It is in the small spaces left in the transmission of

144 “Para él ese pasado no existe. Visita a su madre con ironía pero con verdadero entusiasmo por su cocina. Él es argentino, no ruso. Apenas presta atención a lo que ella dice como si se tratara de un programa de radio, mero ruido de fondo. También nosotros, los nietos, la ponemos entre paréntesis. No lo sé aún pero no le creemos porque habla en un idioma cercenado, hecho de retazos que se acercan al castellano sin serlo completamente. Su lengua transparenta distancias, viajes, pasaportes, visas.”

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their stories that we become “implicated subjects” (to use Michael Rothberg’s concept) and, as such, we become invested in the reality of past events as they come to influence the present and – as we are aware – the future. Borinsky openly and honestly accepts her grandparents’ tales as a child: she prefers the memories of the heroic grandmother and the polyglot and artist grandfather than the stories of victimization and the triumph of violence. She consciously chooses to re-tell those stories knowing her grandparents wanted to preserve their grandchildren’s dignity and decided to alter the accounts of their experiences to trade the losses in achievements for the future generations. In an interesting twist of the way of thinking the role of memory and what the transmission of the past can produce the author faces the entanglement of lives, memories, and legacies: “The inside of my Argentina is the one of the ones who are outside. My intimacy is triply interwoven with my family’s persecutions and exiles. And my way of belonging, denoted by the fortune of still being alive. […] In those fables that I was told they transmitted to me an oblique hope in the days to come.”¹⁴⁵

We could continue to dig into these intangible and fascinating topics ad infinitum, yielding ever numerous conclusions. Maybe there are no conclusions to be reached, but there is a vast academic field that can be undertaken via diverse angles, diverse means, and we would still only get a glimpse of what we think we are seeing. The processes of memory and identity formation may be elusive, but the utilization of the arts can let us sneak a peek through a restricted-by-time-and-space hole into what we think came before

¹⁴⁵ “El adentro de mi Argentina es el de los de afuera. Mi intimidad está triplemente entrelazada con las persecuciones y exilios de mi familia. Y mi modo de pertenecer, signado por la suerte de seguir viviendo. […] En esas fábulas que me contaron ellos me transmitieron una oblicua esperanza en los días que vendrán.”
us, what is happening right in front of us, and then put us in the not-so-unique position of
everyone before us: choose what to pass on and how. While there is always forgetting in
remembering, it is wise to be aware of this conundrum, as well as of the silences, the
gaps, and the fragmentations. Let us remember, ultimately: Ha’avar ze ha’hove (our past
is our present).
Works Cited


Fradkin, Verónica. Personal interview. 15 July 2013.


