# Counter-Narratives in the Void: Memory in *Los rubios*, its aesthetic heritage and its reverberations.

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## Dedication

Dedico la tesis a mis abuelas: Estela Labastía y el cine de Susa, Mamema y sus esperas y Meca y su adaptabilidad al cambio. Para las mujeres con tantos cuentos de los tiempos de antes como escucha del ahora inasible.

To my father (my aspiration, always with me), my husband (my soul-mate) and my son (my independent extension).

*… si me vieras, papá…*

**Abstract**

I study Albertina Carri's audio-visual production of resistance in memory, as a reaction to officially funded mainstream post-dictatorial films, produced during the transition, after the 1976-1983 dictatorship. Combined as the *Los rubios* project, this corpus includes a documentary, three experimental short films and a book.

Carri's project is studied as part of a tradition of resistance outside mainstream film. For that purpose, I trace Carri's heritage throughout a constellations of marginal audio-visual production since the 1930's.

The artifacts brought to dialogue use fragmentation, and particularly the void in-between fragments, as an opportunity to resist traditional storytelling. Specifically, I contend that the *Los rubios* project includes fragmentary storytelling to make memory narratives flexible and fluid as well as to invite the spectator to play an active role in memory.

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## Introduction

> "La memoria es un multigénero. El recuerdo a veces es un objeto, otras un policial, a veces viene en formato documental y otras es pura ficción. Creo que en *Los rubios* –tanto el libro como la película– la propuesta siempre fue ésa, pensar en formato memoria."
>
> *Los rubios. Cartografía de una película (2007)*

In 1976 the military forces took over the Argentine government. For seven years these forces in power functioned as the *Juntas*, brutally opposing any form of resistance to the dictatorial rule. Rapidly, a clandestine State-repression-system became the means of social control. Censorship, fear of retaliation and lack of interest within society secured that the inhuman deeds remained in the dark for a long time. The Argentine State during the dictatorship kidnapped, robbed, enslaved, murdered, raped and appropriated the children of its citizens.

In 1983 the country returned to democracy lead by Raul Alfonsín, a center-left president who aimed at healing[1] the nation after the atrocious past. His platform articulated the narrative of a peaceful transition. Following the "teoría de los dos demonios," such a narrative presented the dictatorial rule and subversive groups as equals: both forces were to be blamed of the estate of civic commotion. The Argentine society, caught in the middle of the fight between two diabolic forces, was an innocent

[1] Alfonsín's first presidential speech in 1983 claimed that democracy would educate, nurture and cure Argentina.

collective, lacking all agency to react to the national trauma. These narratives aimed at shaping the past into the rhetoric of the harmonious transition.

During the transition[2], cinema contributed to this narrative mostly via films born within the State-supported industry. Independent 35mm film production was very rare due to the high costs of film in Argentina. Most of the 35mm productions have depended on the rules of the market and entertainment and, more importantly, on official funding. Amateur formats could not play an active role during this period, as the early 1980's witnessed a technological shift where Super 8 and Double 8 formats were being replaced by video. Mass video, however, was not available until later in the decade, leaving audio-visual independent production disenfranchised.

Mainstream audio-visual productions during the first half of the 1980's, such as *La historia oficial* (1985) and *La república perdida* (1983), combined the emotional and didactic power of fictions and the explanatory documentary educational mode. Either the exemplary individual story illustrated the situation of the whole country, or the documents of past woven into a cause-effect chronological explanation by a legitimized source gave meaning to the dictatorial rule. The years of the 1976-1983 dictatorship were narrated in a sealed temporality, as an inaccessible past that could only be explained to the masses via these filmic stories born in the heart of the new system.

In a different way, audio-visual marginal productions articulated counter-narratives of memory. Artists within visual, performance, print and street art, presented

[2] I roughly define the transition as a period comprising the first half of the 1980's. During this period the rhetoric of the dictatorship was shifting as a result of the loss of power by violent rulers, the return of exiles and the work of international human rights associations which had already started to raise awareness of the abuses of the *Juntas*.

voices that diversified the homogeneous version of filmic narratives. Paintings by Antonio Berni from 1980 and 1981, a performance in 1983 by Guillermo Kuitca and Carlos Ianni, a 1983 street demonstration known as *El siluetazo*, and its replication in 1985 the "revista-subte," *Informe salvaje*, presented a fragmentary corpus subverting the filmic rhetoric. Fragmentation here disputed the uni-linear, chronological and cause-effect top-down discourse that postulated the notion of a monolithic Argentine society. Subverting traditional cinematic storytelling, the strategy was to articulate an empty space highlighting the clandestine system of terror coexisting with daily life in Argentina, while procuring a narrative that can represent with more inclusion.

A few years later, marginal 35mm film followed a similar trend in trying to articulate counter-narratives of memory that subverted the discourse of the transition. Films such as *El amor es una mujer gorda* (1987), *Un muro de silencio (1993)*, and *¡Que vivan los crotos!* (1990), distanced themselves from mainstream productions by experimenting with form and by exploring non-traditional funding, release and exhibition modes. Specifically, these films put in motion strategies to challenge the filmic discourse of the transition by articulating a fragmentary narrative and by highlighting the voids in-between fragments.

At the turn of the millennium, son and daughters of "desaparecido" parents started producing their films of memory. The most acclaimed film of post-dictatorial Argentina *Los rubios* (2003), engaged in aesthetics that I relate to the fragmented pathway present in the non-mainstream pieces just described.

Carri separated from the self-referential explanatory documentary and, in so doing, she disregarded an entire legacy of revolutionary pieces where images were woven into a narrative fabric via a voiced-over account. However, her formal explorations could be traced back to a different tradition, one that goes beyond film and across time, preceding the 1976-1983 dictatorship and continued its impact in the new millennium. Carri's piece embraces a local heritage of resistance born in the margins of mass cultural production.

After World War I, the avant-garde aesthetics developed as narratives working "against the grain." This shift allowed mechanized images and sounds to counter-narrate progress using the tools of progress. The more a medium consolidated its from in a negotiated syntax to convey a precise message to the masses, the more the artist in the margins tried to expose the working of "progress" via those same technologies.

In the line of avant-garde, highly acclaimed and well-known ethnographic piece *Las Hurdes: Tierra sin pan* (1932)[3], by surrealist artist Luis Buñuel, local non-mainstream production articulated a corpus of fragmentary audio-visual art that countered the rhetoric of the modern nation and the lack of agency that artists and the public experienced in the realm of mass circulated culture.

Among the early pieces *Así nació el Obelisco* (1936) by Horacio Coppola suggests a total insurrection of the modern city by fragmenting the storytelling. In that way, Coppola presents the perspective of a peripheral modernism, where progress

[3] I find most interesting that Jeffrey Ruoff's reads the film as a parody of non-fiction, mocking documentaries, such as Woody Allen's *Zelig* (1983) with its fabricated archival footage and pompous BBC-style narrator.

coexists with its residues. Similarly, a later production by David Kohon *Buenos Aires* (1958) counters the modern discourse by incorporating fractures that connect cosmopolitan life and its margins. A connective empty space is articulated via distressing editing so that the mechanized, anonymous, and faceless city is penetrated by another layer: the slum. In the cases of Grete Stern's photo-montages across three decades and Narcisa Hirsch's experimental film from 1975, these pre-disciplinary[4] pieces confront the mass-produced and distributed images and sounds, procuring spaces of agency for both the marginal artists and its audiences.

The echoes and reverberations suggested by this corpus from Coppola's 1936 piece to 2003 *Los rubios*, is reproduced by Carri's pieces of resistance and memory. The film from 2003 is reexamined by an almost homonymous 2007 print text *Los rubios: cartografía de una película*. The book does not present a new strategy to re-write memory; it proposes a new framework to re-read *Los rubios* film insisting on fragmentation and meta-spaces, while the in-between suggests an active role in the viewer/reader.

Additionally, *Los rubios* is preceded by Carri's avant-garde, two marginal productions, *Barbie también puede estar triste* (2001), a pornographic animation with Barbie dolls, and *Aurora* (2001), the *foto-novela* of a romance between a woman and her cheese-dish. Breaking away from the conventions of the form (genre/discipline) and

[4] I use the term pre-disciplinarity to highlight those aesthetic specifics of audio-visual production present even before film erected as a consolidated technical achievement, as an industry, and as a hegemonic narrative. This pre-disciplinarity relates to explore prior cinema, so that the moving images are placed within the realm of pre-filmic forms such as the Zoetrope, the Praxinoscope, the Kinetoscope, Photomontage, etc…

contesting formal restrictions in order to disrupt chronological cause-effect coherence, these two subversive pieces constitute the aesthetic foundation of the 2003 film of memory.

Finally, I study *Restos* (2010) a state-funded short film, part of the compilation *25 miradas – 200 minutos* (2010), produced for the Bicentennial of the Argentine Independence. *Restos* explores the "desaparecido" films of the dictatorship, many of which have partially reappeared in private homes, buried or in archives outside the country. This later piece functions as a reverberation of the *Los rubios* project, as Carri avoids including the real residues of "desaparecido" films. On the contrary, it encompasses an accumulation of poetic images of filmic creation, intervention and destruction to the sound of a voiced-over manifest. The aesthetics implemented in this film are rooted in avant-garde audio-visual art. In a similar process of creation and erasure, the fragmentary strategy demarcates a void.

Due to this conversation, Carri's *Los rubios* is not studied here as a film, but as a fluid and regenerating fabric of memory. It includes *Los rubios*, *Los rubios: cartografía de una película*, *Barbie también puede estar triste*, *Aurora* and *Restos.* This constellation should be thought of more as a rhizome (not a chronological sequence), where echoes, resonances and discordances articulate voids in narration making memory fluid and able to represent.

***Mainstream Post-dictatorial Film in the 1980's***

Films played a major role in consolidating the social imaginary of the recent past. Throughout the almost thirty years since the end of the last Argentine dictatorship, more than a hundred and fifty films aimed at illustrating the dark years of despotic rule. The discussion about representation in memory has posed a constant dilemma. Deciding who tells the story and which are the mediums/disciplines/aesthetics used for this articulation have gone hand-in-hand with issues concerning the politics of memory.

During the transition, there was a fever of memory[5] (Noriega, 8). In a context of cultural awaking, after censorship and conservative content control, the past was shaped solely as the pathway to a peaceful democracy. Most of the filmic narratives of state terror were shaped after the *Nunca Más* report elaborated by the CONADEP (National Commission of Missing Persons created in 1983 by the Alfonsín democratic government) and the *Juntas* trials. The mainstream cinematic narratives of memory fused education and entertainment, so stories typically used a mixture of example, sadism and guilt, mostly in the forms of fictional melodramatic/cathartic plots or informative/educational pieces.

Specifically, *La historia oficial* (1985) tells the story where the main character learns about the despotic system by finding out that her adoptive daughter is the child of "desaparecido" parents. The experience of the woman equates the experience of Argentina coming to terms with the recent past, during the transition.

[5] *Estudio crítico sobre Los rubios. Entrevista a Albertina Carri*. Picnic. Buenos Aires, 2009.

Similarly, *La república perdida* (1983) takes the form of the classic documentary where documents are organized in a historical account according to chronological cause-effect evolution. The 1973-1983 dictatorial period is placed in a historical continuum, partly legitimizing its violence, embedded in dynamics of brutal power that can be traced back to the colonial rule. The documentary form sealed the past into the fixity of the archival form.

In general the early films discussing the dictatorship conceived the depiction of state repression during the dictatorship within the context of the cultural "destape," an awakening that fused appalling stories of human rights abuses with nudity, sadism and sensationalism. Films such as *La noche de los lápices* (1986) gave images to the oral stories of concentration camps, depicting the captives as non-political school-age teens who were subjected to torture while naked. As a 14 year old in 1988, I remember wanting to watch it but having to wait till I was old enough because there was nudity. Much of the attraction to the film relied on the desire to access what has been prohibited for so long. Inclinations such as desire, sensationalism, an interest to know about the past, and to see what was once forbidden were all intermingled.

Many of the officially supported films of memory during the transition erased the very stories that they aimed to portray. As contended by Nelly Richard, many practices sought to keep alive the illusion of a continuity in history and tradition and its potential re-construction despite the abruptness of the interruptions (*The Insubordination of the Signs*, 11)[6]. Manifestations, such as these films, were not conceived in relation to justice

[6] Richard, Nelly. *The Insubordination of the Signs.*

and memory but were crafted as a fundamental component of Argentina's healing process (the suturing and reparation of a broken continuity) towards a pacific coexistence. That is the reason why much of the officially supported and funded audio-visual production of memory has been and still is problematic in its ability to represent society as a fluid corpus which encompasses a wide array of individual perspectives.

The end of the transition in the early 1990's signals to the politics of oblivion and new paradigms in filmmaking. The presidency of Carlos Menem (1989-1999) promoted amnesty laws that were at the center of political and legal debates for almost a decade. During this time, conservative forces clashed with human rights activists once again (Levy, 587) and the counter-mobilizations of human rights advocates, supported by international human rights agencies and transnational networks, gained new momentum (Risse and Sikkink 1999). The Menem administration renewed the cinematic paradigm by reducing public finance, thus reducing local cinematic output, and by redesigning the exhibition system according to neoliberal policies. International films and multiplex theatres took over the already deteriorated business of small town independent playhouses (most of which transformed into churches).

Many of the 35mm films produced in this period benefited from particular strategies of financing, production and distribution. Film festivals as finance sources and exhibition venues (with no studios, no actors or with exhibition limited to domestic formats such as VHS) were some of novelties embraced by Alejandro Agresti, Lita Stantic, and Ana Polliak.

These innovative strategies were fully explored later in the decade, as the turn of the millennium made available new technology and collectives to film, edit and distribute audio-visual pieces. The aesthetic renovation of Argentine cinema, known as *New Argentine Cinema (NAC)*, was shaped by this previous trend, with Agresti and Stantic considered amongst their main influencers of young directors[7]. The NAC as a recognized aesthetic shift emerged in 1995, as result of a competition and praised by *El amante* film magazine[8]. According to their official website, Carri is a director self-affiliated with the *NAC*.

***Hijos Making Films***

In the 2000's sons and daughters of "desaparecido" parents got involved in film-making. Three of the early films that emerged during the turn of the millennium present three different perspectives that illustrate the transformation of a paradigm. There is a shift from traditional documentary to a hybrid form, as well as a triangular movement from observation to self-depiction to displacement.

Andrés Habegger's *(H)istorias cotidianas* (1998-2000) is the first documentary bringing the voice of the descendants of those killed by state terror. Habegger includes the stories of six other young men and women asking for or about their parents, who were detained and killed during the 1976-1983 dictatorship. He brings into scene for the first

[7] Lita Stantic became the main producer of NAC directors such as Lucrecia Martel and Adrián Caetano.
[8] The cover of El Amante, June edition (issue 40), confronts Eliseo Subiela's *No te mueras sin decirme adonde vas*, titled as *Lo malo* (the bad) and the compilation by young filmmakers *Historias Breves I*, as *Lo nuevo* (the new).

time the incipient group HIJOS[9] (Daughters and Sons for Identity and Justice Against Forgetting and Silence), embracing the political institutionalization of their affiliation.

*Papá Iván* (2000), by María Inés Roqué, is the second documentary to discuss inter-generational and filial issues of memory. Exploring self-referentiality, Roqué places herself in front of the camera with the materials she has at hand: interviews of family members, a letter from the militant "desaparecido" father, photographs, a confessional text and hypnotic camera movements (Ruffinelli 147). Roqué de-idealizes a narrative of heroism while exalting filial and family relationships, contesting the political motivations that led the militant father to fight for his ideals.

*Los rubios* (2003), by Albertina Carri, is the third film discussing the topic of 1976-1983 state repression by a daughter/son of "desaparecido" parents. Carri places herself and her story in front of the camera suggesting a self-referential documentary about the search of her missing beloved ones. Soon she shifts the focus by disengaging with the traditional documentary form as she fuses interviews and archival images with non-traditional documentary techniques like an actress, costumes, animations, and meta-spaces within diegetic space.

***Los rubios, its purpose, its aesthetic heritage and its resonances***

Carri was a toddler when her parents were kidnapped right in front of her, in 1977. Since she started filming she was told that it was her duty to make a film about them. Named *Los rubios (2003)* after her parents' nickname, the film is at a first glance a

[9] *Hijos por la Identidad y la Justicia contra el Olvido y el Silencio*, an organization created in 1996.

story about Carri's individual case, as filmmaker and daughter of well-known militants and intellectuals. However, she brilliantly manages to make a film that goes beyond her personal experience. As Mauricio Alonso points out, *Los rubios* is not a film about Carri's parents, it is not a homage to victims of state repression during the 1973-1983 dictatorship, it does not expose a specific case, it is not an act of justice and it is not an epitaph (157). *Los rubios* is a film about the mechanisms of post-dictatorial memory and, as such, it embraces doubt and creativity.

This film was initially denied official support because, according to the Argentine film institute, Instituto Nacional de Cine y Artes Audio-visuales (INCAA), the project lacked documentary rigor[10]. Barry Ellsworth's production company and the support of the Buenos Aires independent film festival (BAFICI[11]) procured the sources to finish the film and *Los rubios* was soon praised in scholarly circles and distributed internationally by Women Make Movies (WMM). According to the distribution company, *Los rubios* is a very personal tale. It asks about the Carris; specifically, about their identity, their disappearance, their aspect and their political motives, so that the director can unravel the mystery of her parents' life, disappearance and death. Through this process she reconstructs their fate and analyzes her own construction of them[12] *(Film Catalogue: The*

[10] The film includes a copy of the fax received by Carri, where Carri is denied official funding because the project "lacks documentary rigor."

[11] Buenos Aires Festival Internacional de Cine Independiente.

[12] Specifically, the distribution materials include the following synopsis: "In 1977, when she was four years old, Albertina Carri's parents vanished without a trace, victims of Argentina's brutal military junta. In The Blonds, (or Los Rubios, her parents' nickname) the young Argentinian filmmaker travels with her crew across Buenos Aires to unravel the mystery of her parents' life, disappearance and death. Attacking the shifting projections of memory from many fronts, Carri enlists an actor, her parents' comrades, fading photographs and happy Playmobil dolls to investigate complicated questions of identity and responsibility. Who were the Carris? How did they disappear? Were they brunette or blond, revolutionaries or parents, or

*Blonds/Los rubios*). This self-referentiality highlighted by the distribution company is what granted Carri a voice and what validated the expectations of documentary rigor by INCAA's authorities.

However, Carri forces her audio-visual artifact away from the mainstream film. Using experimentation typical of non-mainstream filmic storytelling, the director places her piece in the margins of cultural production. *Los rubios* embodies a counter-look, a repositioning that facilitates a perspective that is individual but it is not personal. Carri goes beyond "the Carris" as she neglects traditional film-making as the medium that best suits the narration of memory while also getting away from her individual story in favor of a narrative of "lack," as a locus of enunciation open to others in memory.

The film has been studied extensively since its exhibition during the 2003 BAFICI. I was covering the festival as a journalist and had just returned from a year-long stay away from Argentina. I had left the country escaping collective and personal traumas: the Argentine 2001 crisis and the death of my father in 2000. Back in Argentina I was covering film festivals for *Cómo hacer cine*, a Spanish online source for the film industry. That year, the BAFICI had an important local presence. One of them, *Los rubios* (2003), concentrated most of the discussions amongst journalists. I was fascinated by the lack of solemnity, playfulness and creativity that this search for the parents inspired. I was still dealing with my own loss, dreaming that my father was flying back to

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merely a fiction created by those who remember them? With every turn, a more complex and suspect truth emerges. In the end, merging fact, rumor and imagination, Carri succeeds in reconstructing her parent's fate and her own construction of them. Emotional fraught and intellectually provocative, The Blonds is a compelling meditation on what it means to remember, and how love, longing, and fear all play a role. Carri's fresh cinematic vision reveals a generation forced to mourn those who they cannot remember, with resonance far beyond the tragic history of Argentina's "Dirty War." (Women Make Movies)

me and I could see how this strange dramatization with superimpositions, wigs and Playmobil dolls could help Carri shape her appalling loss. The film affected my peers. I precisely recall one TV producer saying "Albertina, come on, get over it!"

I am a year younger than Carri and I have always felt very close to *Los rubios* due to my own experience with trauma and, specifically, post-dictatorial trauma. I remember as a five or six-year-old that whenever the *Juntas* appeared on radio or TV, life froze in fear. I have always wondered how these feelings can be narrated, as we all relate(d) differently with the common traumatic experience.

During my life as a graduate student, I continued to contemplate the aesthetics of shared memory as well as the potential for audio-visual art to become a space for sharing trauma while maintaining the differences of each individual case. Upon my reflections, I would go back to Carri's piece (with its wigs and the Playmobil dolls) as well as to the "Get over it" comment.

Because of this, I have a special relationship with *Los rubios* as narrative of loss and agency in memory. Specifically, I believe that more than telling her own story, Carri is building bridges to make memory available to others. Via non-traditional techniques, *Los rubios* articulates a kind of strangeness and closeness that aims at starting dialogues. The continuity of traditional documentary is splintered and the meaningful interruptions turn Carri's own story into a mold for others to narrate memory. The director captures this shared feeling and gives it audio-visual aesthetics. In sum, with the excuse of re-presenting her personal case as a daughter of "desaparecido" parents, Carri unfolds a

nontraditional depiction of state terror. This depiction aims at revising the narratives of the transition, while inviting others to participate in narratives of memory.

Carri presents herself in opposition to the other films of the dictatorship (Alonso, 159). The director defies their discourse by disarming the uncontested version of the past and its educational purpose. The filmmaker is clearly unsatisfied with their intent to unfold versions of the inaccessible past (which are personal for her); to claim indisputable truth or emotional venues; and to aim to procure empathy in the spectator. In so doing, the director dismisses an entire tradition of political (expository) documentary and the depictions of the past that look for empathy solely based on emotions.

On the contrary, the filmmaker experiments with the filmic form, looking for aesthetics that are best suited to articulate post-dictatorial memory. Therefore, as Aguilar argues, *Los rubios* develops the aesthetics of memory that counter both political documentary and the emotional nature of fictional stories exemplifying the years of terror (180). In these aesthetics, uncertainties and the hybrid genres by prioritized. Untidy shots, hand-held camera, awkward sounds/lightning and violent zooms subvert traditional documentary (Alonso 161). These options expose a fragmentary textual fabric via textures/relief, contrasts and spaces, particularly in its interludes[13] (Aguilar, 176). Carri defamiliarizes the documentary genre by including repetitions, montage contrasting still and moving images, and the avoidance of video-graph to identify testimonies and places. These hiatuses take the form of filmic malformations and interruptions, dismembering the uni-linear, cause-effect chronological evolution traditional mainstream films.

[13] These contrasts/relieves are studied in relation to the notion of haptic images, following Oscar Espinosa's ideas (Aguilar, Gonzalo. *Otros mundos. Un ensayo sobre el nuevo cine argentino*. 2010).

In addition to her own presence in the film, the inclusion of an actress representing her duplicates her image. This de-individualizes her specific situation as daughter of "desaparecido" parents. Besides, by including costumes, impersonations with toys, and wigs and frames within the frame, Carri suggests spaces outside the diegesis. According to Laia Quílez Esteve, such dissociations (the actress, toy characters) are rooted in the lack of trust in testimonies (82). These exercises expose the imperfections in the filmic form; thus, denouncing the deliberate manipulations present in traditional filmic storytelling of memory.

Continuing with Aguilar's ideas, *Los rubios* departs from a tradition of political documentary. Carri denounces an entire corpus of the hierarchical (top-down) totalizing discourses of memory embedded in legal procedures, documents and dramatic plots. This dismissal of political film is Carri's way to counter the mainstream filmic narratives, thus neglecting the legitimized voices of memory and the sense of closure this type of narration gives to memory: sealing it in the past, immutable and inflexible. Moreover, this rebuttal of tradition replaces the hierarchical narrative of memory with a sense of open participation. Thus, Carri's efforts allow memory narratives to consider new perspectives, to avoid closure and to be available to those traditionally unrepresented. Carri seems to coincide with Andreas Huyssen, in that the past must be articulated to become memory, and that this split (fissure) should be understood as a powerful stimulant for cultural and artistic creativity (1994, 3).

Carri's storytelling is a deliberate narrative choice that not only has a specific purpose but also follows its own aesthetic program. *Los rubios* embraces an artistic

tradition of avant-garde film, such as Jean-Luc Goddard and John Waters (181). Carri thus traces her aesthetic heritage to experimental and marginal yet groundbreaking art, and in so doing, she retraces filial relationships (Amado, 2004, 77) not strictly within the realm of film.

This work studies *Los rubios's* narrative devices within the realm of non-mainstream audio-visual since the beginnings in the 1930's. Non-mainstream audio-visual pieces like *Así nació el Obelisco* (1936), *Buenos Aires* (1958), the selected photo-montages by Grete Stern, and *Taller* (1975) present a legacy of resistance that preceded the 1976-1983 dictatorship. This trajectory is continued during the transition by the non-filmic audio-visual art that includes Antonio Berni's paintings in 1980-1981, the performance *Besos brujos* (1983), *El siluetazo* (1983) and *Informe Salvaje* (1985). Later, at the turn of the decade, El *amor es una mujer gorda* (1987-9), *Un muro de silencio (1993),* and *¡Que vivan los crotos!* (1990), embrace similar aesthetics within the realm of film. This constellation helped shape Carri's acclaimed film of memory *Los rubios* (2003).

However, *Los rubios'* narrative of memory is not to be conceived as a mere film. It is not an independent piece, completed and impenetrable. *Los rubios* is also part of a bigger concept via which film goes beyond film. Like a brilliant theoretician, Carri crafted the mold of resistance by echoing and revising *Los rubios*. A marginal corpus by Carri establishes her own foundation and the platform of resistance. As her own avant-garde, Carri's audio-visual production prior to *Los rubios* has suggested the aesthetics of

resistance that influenced her film of memory. Pieces that followed *Los rubios* put forward strategies for re-reading *Los rubios* via dissimilar reverberations.

Albertina Carri anticipates *Los rubios* in her own pre-disciplinary pieces *Aurora* (2001), a montage of still images, and the pornographic animation of Barbie dolls, *Barbie también puede estar triste* (2001). Via the print text, *Los rubios: cartografía de una pelicula* (2007), Carri invites the viewer to re-read the film, making it fluid and continuous. Embracing avant-garde aesthetics, *Restos* (2010) continues that exploration of memory, expanding the issue to "desaparecido" narratives.

*Los rubios* is not a film of memory but an audio-visual project. It traces its aesthetics of resistance back to avant-garde audio-visual practices reaching outside film (the apparatuses/ the industry/the politics/the market), into the marginal independent nucleus of counter-cultural production. Also, as a project, it is a continuum in that it allows narration in memory to be endless and non-hierarchic; it is open to change and to the participation of diverse sectors within society.

***The void and collage***

Jonathan Safran Foer's book, *Tree of Codes* (2011), focuses on cutting (instead of writing) in order to narrate the memory of the Holocaust. Foer who had already explored post-traumatic narratives in *Everything Is Illuminated* (2002), recalling the Holocaust, and *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005), putting the Holocaust in relation to the 9.11 terrorist attack, made a shift with *Tree of Codes*, questioning the mere act of narrating while delving into a syntax of memory.

Foer takes *The Street of Crocodiles* (1963), the translation in English of a 1934 novel by Polish-Jewish writer Bruno Schulz, and rewrites it by carving out words. In so doing, the writer achieves an object that looks more like a sculpture than a book (see figure below).

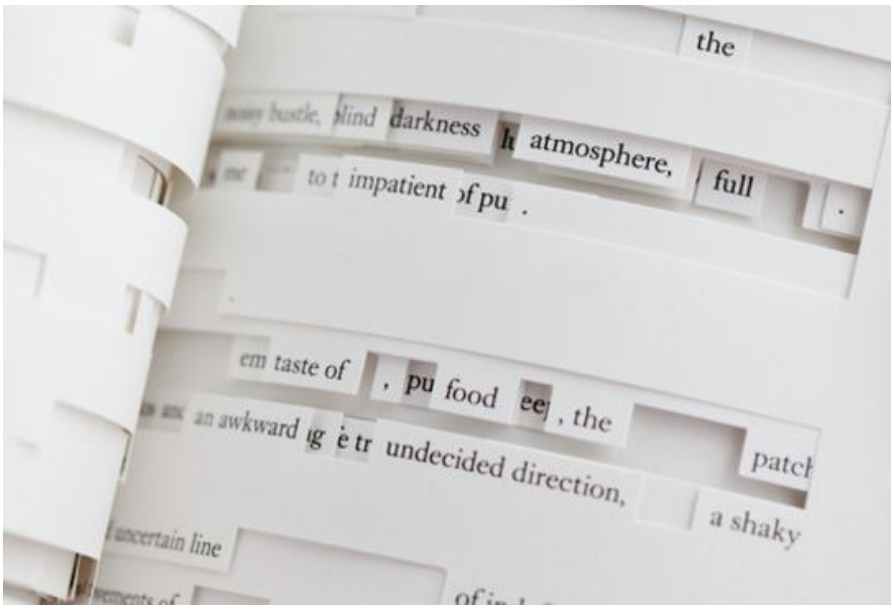


**Figure 1: Tree of Codes (Foer, 2010)**

The first intention when you have Foer's book in your hands is to read whatever appears in the windows produced by the layers of cut out rectangles along the pages. In the end, you give up your attempt to read and let your mind play with the spaces in-between. These spaces involve the viewer/reader in the narration, playing an active role in a narrative of memory. To fill the voids it is not necessary to find the right words, but it is mandatory to participate. In this way, memory does not belong to Schulz or Foer, but memory is an exercise that an active reader/viewer performs.

Albertina Carri's film of memory anticipates this sculptural book using narrative devices present in earlier explorations of memory within a vast array of audio-visual artifacts since the beginnings of the 20th century. Pieces like *Mnemosyne Atlas* (1925-9), a foundational collage-like artistic-ethnographic composition of memory by art historian and cultural theorist Aby Warburg, has addressed the need to create non-fixed narratives of memory. The scholar has proposed an atlas articulating the history of western civilization as a pull of sixty three wooden boards with pinned images.

Using metal clasps, Warburg assembled this collage-constructed history by articulating a constellation of pinned images, such as black and white photographs and images reproducing art, the cosmos, maps, manuscript pages, as well as clips from newspapers and magazines. As seen in the panel 47, the composition is suitable for changes (see figure below).

**Figure 2: Mnemosine Atlas, Panel 47 (Warburg, 1925-1929)**

In fact, Warburg constantly altered the composition by adding and removing, arranging and rearranging, the pieces brought together. According to Brandon Taylor, Warburg would frequently rearrange his artistic-ethnographic collage because suggestiveness and intensity arise not out of constructed meaning, but out of something more random and diffuse (96). This denial of fixity has helped later artists think about memory as a fluid construction. This flexibility is made possible by conceiving the collage not as fragments brought together but as the exercise of bringing together in an empty space. The narratives of resistance studied along these pages embrace the empty space as a strategy. This void proposes a subversion of traditional modes of storytelling.

The monolithic voice of the state-funded narratives are countered in different ways. I analyze aesthetics of resistance along marginal pieces from 1936 to 1975 and resistance in memory through pieces from 1980 to 2010. In those narratives prior to the 1976-1983 dictatorship, the void subverts depictions of prevailing progress as well as calls attention to unexplored potential in both marginal artists and its audience to counteract the homogenizing rhetoric born in the core of the system. In the post-dictatorial narratives, the empty space denounces terror by highlighting the folds of terror: a structure that allowed the clandestine to take place in broad daylight. Clandestine concentration camps in car garages, occupied private houses and re-designed institutions allowed the systemic violence to coexist with daily life of millions of Argentines.

Following avant-garde aesthetics of resistance, the memory of terror adopts flexible storytelling styles. Memory can be activated in narration by re-signaling the

folds, sculpting new loci of enunciation in the in-between spaces. These narratives have the potential of making memory more inclusive as they diversify representation including those sectors that were once denied participation.

### *Non-mainstrema audio-visual: From experimental audio-visual to New Argentine Cinema (NAC)*

As Beatriz Sarlo argued succinctly in 2004, Walter Benjamin in *The Storyteller* has identified the impossibility to narrate experience resulting from changes in cultural production. Modernist capitalism, via massively produced novels, silenced the subjectivity of oral tradition, replacing it with narratives articulated within the realm of mass produced media.

Cinema usually is studied as an aesthetic, as a medium with technical specificities and as an industry in terms of production, exhibition and distribution. Due to the cost of industrial 35mm cinema, state support has been vital to produce films in Argentina as well as to help these films reach mass audiences. With the penetration of the audio-visual language in daily life via mass produced films, there was a consolidation of specific filmic aesthetic aiming at polishing a syntax that could be understood by the multitudes.

In the meantime, technology has made available domestic audio-visual formats used to articulate experimental syntaxes. Resistance in audio-visual production has become possible with the arrival of cheaper technologies and experimentation. Aesthetics of resistance countering hegemonic films have been experimenting with form since the inception of marginal audio-visual and continue today. What emerged as pre-

disciplinary moving image experimentation and amateur/independent-experimental/underground film, turned into contemporary explorations fusing all types of audio-visual language. These experimental pieces never accessed wide audiences. If audio-visual professional formats have greatly depended on state support, experimental pieces avoided all restriction to challenge the aesthetics adopted in mass-communication.

Argentine avant-garde audio-visual productions since the 1930's challenged formal disciplinary divisions, expectations (class, gender) and the circulation of images and sounds which were increasingly shaping modern society. Specifically, I contend in my analysis of amateur *Así nació el Obelisco* (1936) by Horacio Coppola and independent *Buenos Aires* (1958) by David Kohon, that these marginal pieces denounce class inequalities in the modern metropolis, and resisted traditional documentary depictions. Further, the study of a selection of Grete Stern photo-montages, and Narcisa Hirsch's "underground"/experimental film, *Taller* (1975), articulates the void as strategy of resistance. These pre-disciplinary moving-image pieces produced before the 1976-1983 dictatorship, served as the aesthetic framework of resistance for post-dictatorial narratives.

During the democratic transition, filmic domestic formats ceased to be an option for experimentation. With the late arrival of video in Argentina, and the discontinuation of Super 8 amateur film, there was a gap in audio-visual options. Super 8 film was becoming increasingly difficult to acquire and video did not become a popular medium until the end of the 1980's. Therefore I have focused on the aesthetics of resistance

outside of film during the early transition (1980-1985). Specifically, I study Antonio Berni's visual art from 1980 to 1981, the performance *Besos brujos* (1983) by Guillermo Kuitca and Carlos Ianni, the public space performance *El siluetazo* (1983), altogether with its pamphlet, "revista-subte" *Informe Salvaje* (1985).

By the end of the 1980's, the industrial cinema framework gave birth to 35mm films that managed to place themselves in the margin of cultural production. Specifically, I study *El amor es una mujer gorda* (1987-9), *Un muro de silencio (1993),* and *¡Que vivan los crotos!* (1990). These films used aesthetics, production and distribution modes that shaped Albertina Carri's film of memory, *Los rubios* (2003).

The turn of the millennium cinematic aesthetics in Argentina experienced a shift due to the development of cable TV (making accessible production ventures in smaller cities[14]), the growth of film schools and the proliferation of more affordable technology. These, together with the atomization of the film industry of the 1980's which made it inaccessible to the newcomers, created a potential and a desire for new cinematic discourses according to new aesthetics. Under the umbrella term of NAC, heterogeneous films by young filmmakers made it into the public sphere as a group that gathered the winners of a contest organized by the national film institute, INCAA. The compilation of

[14] Cable TV came to my small town, Pilar, in Buenos Aires, for the first time in June 1990 (see 2010 article, *A 20 años del nacimiento de la televisión local*). During high school, I remember going to improvised cable production studios after school. As a teen I could access an editing room or participate in production meetings thanks to local cable TV.

short films by artists under 30 years old was exhibited, distributed and promoted as *Historias Breves*[15] (1995).

Aligned with the NAC, Albertina Carri, has actively assumed this aesthetic renovation by exploring diverse genres such as documentary, film-noire and animation, as well as by constantly contesting hegemonic discourses of order, gender, and, to a lesser extent, class. She studied screenwriting, cinematography and direction at the *Fundación Universidad* del Cine in 1991 and 1992. Since the year 2000, she has consistently received official funding and other venues of support. She received funding from the INCAA and the Huber Bals Fund to produce No *quiero volver a casa* (2001). The pornographic animation *Barbie también puede estar triste* (2001) was produced thanks to a grant issued by Fundación Antorchas. The initial steps of *Los rubios* (2003) were made possible through the producer Barry Ellsworth in his efforts to collaborate with underground film classics and to fund emerging filmmakers from the US and Latin America.

In the context of the 2007 BAFICI, and with the financial support of the festival, Carri edited *Los rubios: cartografía de una película*, a print text aiming at complementing the homonymous film. In 2010 Carri was invited to contribute to the compilation *25 mirada-200 minutos*, a state-funded project in celebration of the bicentennial of Argentine independence. Fully embraced as narrative of memory, *Restos*

[15] The filmmakers that embodied the renovation during the mid-1990 presented themselves in opposition to the filmmakers who led the scene during the transition. During an interview with the magazine *El amante*, six of these filmmakers discussed this renovation by describing the older generation as "dinosaurios" (Martel in El amante, 24), authors who were detached from real life whose actors sounded artificial and who continuously used fake metaphors instead of relating with the real world.

presents a fragmentary storytelling to explore the "desaparecido" film during the dictatorship.

***Marginal Pieces that Preceded Narratives of Memory***

In a collage-like composition, *Así nació el Obelisco (1936)* by Horacio Coppola resists hegemonic positivist representation of the urban setting by demarcating a void which dis/replaces the marginal subjects of the city in a centered, empty space. Specifically, he suggests in-between empty spaces by insisting on conflicting scales, and placing life and movement in those empty spaces.

*Buenos Aires* (1958) echoes Coppola's reaction to the modern city. The film evidences the power of the "void" as a strategy of narrative resistance. Kohon suggests empty spaces pierced along a fragmentary narrative via bizarre connections between city and slum, vacated spaces, and an interrupted temporal and causal progression in its storytelling.

In Grete Stern´s work the selected photo-montages are structured around the empty space which functions as the liminal space where the fragments of the composition come together. This void is mutant and relational, so I study the pieces of the selection as a textual interweaving. The photo-montages in *Idilio*, a woman's magazine, counters mass produced photography with a subjective stance while resisting the truth claim of photo-journalism and homologizing nature advertising.

*Taller* (1975) is an experimental film by Narcisa Hirsch. As an 11-minute one-shot piece, it focuses on a collage on the wall while verbally describing the artist's studio. The void outlined by the out-of-frame studio, the collage, the reverberations, repetitions and the blacked out images carve a space of agency for both non-mainstream artists and the audience.

*Aurora* (2001) tells the story of a love affair between a woman and her cheese-dish. Carri uses the pre-disciplinary format of the *foto-novela* to present a counter-narrative of traditional melodrama and the emptying syntax of mass-produced and distributed images. The void in *Aurora* is articulated by rampant editing, fake voices and awkward use of scale.

*Barbie también puede estar triste* (2001) is a pornographic animation film made with Barbie dolls. It counters the traditional genres by intertwining melodrama, pornography and children's icons. Carri disarms the mass-produced dolls by manipulating them; she adds genitalia and mismatches their parts in order annul the monolithic image and to question identification and representation. The sutures of the amended Barbies create an empty space as a strategy of fragmentation and inclusion.

***Pieces of Memory (1980 – 2010)***

Berni's pieces *Enigma doloroso* (1980), *Mutilación* (1980), *Cristo en el departamento* (1980) and *Cristo en el garage* (1981), use fragmentation to suggest the multiplication of narratives. Via innovations in spatial articulation (in-between empty spaces) Berni dismantles the duality of good-evil discourses of the transition.

*Besos brujos* by Ianni and Kuitca proposes a spatial reconfiguration, intertwining interior and exterior spaces. Using an actress and the audience, the social dynamics of dictatorial years are simulated in a performance where the actress dressed as a bride is harassed by the public through windows via speakers.

Through silhouettes, *El Siluetazo* emulated empty spaces by connecting the private to the public and the personal to the collective. The collage-like "revista-subte," *Informe salvaje*, multiplied and echoed fragments of the event *El Siluetazo*. The folds amid layers gestures to a void where abundant in-between spaces open up the possibility for counter-memories.

*El amor es una mujer gorda* suggests a different way of storytelling which replaces the traditional narrative continuum. Agresti uses inter-disciplinary/inter-media dialogues and story and meta-story intertwined to fragment storytelling. The empty in-between spaces emerge from the fractured whole.

Signaling to the void, *Un muro de silencio* proposes a strategy of narrative fragmentation by opening in-between spaces. Stantic uses non-traditional storytelling including slow motion, a particular use of color filters, and the insistence on reflections, meta-spaces off-camera, and black screens.

*¡Qué vivan los crotos!* suggests space fragmentation and voids in-between. Polliak includes of the out-of-frame images, inter-disciplinary/inter-media poetical enactments, the desynchronization between image and storytelling and the spectator´s

involvement in the narration. These strategies counter the transitional post-dictatorial rhetoric by involving the spectator in an exercise of post-dictatorial memory.

*Los rubios* fragments narration by dissecting director and character/narrator, by suggesting meta-spaces such as the behind the scene, or by splintering the visual code as the director includes color and black-and-white images intermittently. The void signals a counter-version of memory that subverts the official narratives of the past. Carri vacates the spaces suggested in the film in order to broaden participation in post-dictatorial narratives.

*Los rubios: cartografia de una película* is divided into partitions following the sequence of a traditional production: *Pre-production*, *Shooting*, *Post-production* and *Release.* This customary format does not reflect the real process in the film *Los rubios.* The void emerges in between spaces. The void -as the strategy to access memory collectively counters chronological cause-effect correlations; highlights the fragmentary nature of memory and the possibility of new reconfigurations; and includes inter-textuality.

Finally, *Restos* (2010) is a short-film complementing the project of *Los rubios* from an avant-garde perspective. As a reverberation, the recent film revisits memory in *Los rubios*. *Restos* fragments storytelling in the distortion of the relations embedded in traditional documentary and cinematic syntax (image and sound, vestiges/fragments and documents brought together, and the neglect of the uni-linear chronological cause-effect progression). This fragmentation carves a void that activates a memory that is fluid and inclusive.

## *Chapter 1: Official Filmic Narratives and Non-filmic Counter-narratives of Memory*.

> "con mi intervención no hago más que sugerir una posibilidad de lectura.
> Se trata de un discurso abierto.
> Lo que me interesa es establecer un diálogo con la persona que mira ese mármol, buscando producir una reacción intelectual o emotiva en la proyección fantasmal de cada uno de nosotros.
> Es en ese momento que comienza a funcionar la polisemia de los símbolos"
>
> Marie Oresanz[16]. "Fragmentismo" (fragmento). 1978.

Throughout this chapter, I propose two movements. One articulates narratives and counter-narratives of the transition, placing film vis-à-vis its marginal counter-parts (the non-filmic narratives that contested the official filmic discourse of memory[17]). The second movement studies *Los rubios: cartografía de una película*, the non-filmic narrative of the new millennium that supplements the homonymous film. As an audio-visual project, print-filmic *Los rubios* becomes a fluid fabric of memory in which the spectator assumes an active role.

[16] Marie Orensanz is key figure of South American art. Orenzanz started her artistic career with foundational Argentine Modernists, Emilio Pettoruti and Antonio Seguí, and continued in the realm the Instituto Torcuato Di Tella, and the Centro de Arte y Comunicación. She moved to Milan in 1972 where she started working with fragments of Carrara marble. According to Christina M. Harrison in Oresanz{s official website, "Orensanz uses material and symbolic fragments—of marble, of line, of signs—to represent thoughts. … An interpretation of the work, in Orensanz's conception, depends on the intersection of the fragments with the viewer's own thoughts and experiences." Orensanz produced a monumental piece for the Museo de la Memoria in Buenos Aires, called *Pensar en un hecho revolucionario* (2009). This quote by Oresanz appears in "*Manifiestos Argentinos. Políticas de lo visual 1900-2000"*

[17] I use the concept "official filmic discourse of memory" as a way to refer to heterogeneous discourses born in the heart of the industry (with the help of official funding), aimed at mainstream circulation. These discourses were articulated according to the transitional rhetoric, with variations, using aesthetics that could access mass audiences.

During the transition, the freshly gained democracy presented the challenge of dealing with the past in a way that allowed peaceful coexistence between social actors representing confronted factions of the political spectrum. The rhetoric of the transition was organized around the political platform of Raúl Alfonsín, the first democratic president after the 1976-1983 dictatorship. When I discuss the transition, I do not refer to specific years (a fixed temporality) but to a framework of discursive and counter-discursive formations. I specifically selected audio-visual artifacts produced between 1980 and 1985. This compilation illustrates official currents and marginal counter-currents that fostered renovated aesthetics of memory.

Specifically, I take two films born in the heart of the system sponsored by the transitional government, and juxtapose a selection of non-mainstream audio-visual expressions surfacing from 1980 to 1985 in the realms of visual art, performance, street art, and underground publications. Among the mainstream films, fictional *La historia oficial* (1985) adopted the melodrama to educate the society of the transition using the individual story as the illustration of the collective drama. Similarly, *La república perdida* (1983) relied on the "one" monolithic voice, speaking on behalf of the whole as a chronological cause-effect piece supported by a concatenation of documents.

In contrast, a variety of marginal non-filmic audio-visual productions subverted this hierarchical, top-down, uni-linear approach by proposing a fragmentary framework. Berni's selected pieces from 1980 and 1981 multiplied the schemes of representation via meta-spaces. *Besos brujos* (1983) used windows and technology to fragment and multiply space. Via the trope of the silhouette, *El Siluetazo* emulated empty spaces in order to

suggest less hierarchical counter-narratives and the "revista-subte" *Informe salvaje* subverted the documentation intent of E*l Siluetazo* by presenting incomplete vestiges. In sum, all these pieces used fragmentation as a way to carve a void so that new perspectives can surface, making memory less univocal and rigid.

The second movement discusses Albertina Carri's print text, *Los rubios: cartografía de una película* (2006-7) that supplements the film *Los rubios (2003).* This addendum exposes aesthetics to re-read the film of memory. Highly visual, the book shatters the film into fragments that take the film outside the realm of cinema, beyond the cinematic composition, and into pre-cinematic (pre-disciplinary), and counter-cinematic (non/professional, domestic) formats as well as a collage-like syntax. This new reading of the film highlights Carri's non-traditional choices such as the dissection director/character/narrator and the meta-narratives brought into the frame. The purpose of bringing these alternative perspective signals into a counter-version of memory is to subvert the official narratives of the transition.

Edited by BAFICI, the same institution that acclaimed *Los rubios* in 2003, the book is nurtured by documents omitted in the film.[18] Although the print-text/film editing seems to include fragments left out of the film during editing, thus completing it; the revision ends up reinforcing the fragmentary strategy. In both texts, fragmentation dismantles self-references towards aesthetics that make memory more fluid and able to represent diverse sectors within the Argentine society.

[18] According to María Moreno, the book unfolds the point of view of Carri's mother, Ana M. Carusso. "El libro de ésta". *Página 12.* March 23, 2007. Web. June 25, 2014.

***Confrontations, Chronology and Reverberations***

All these pieces illustrate forces rooted in the specific political landscape(s) of the period(s). In the first movement the period is 1980-1985, which includes the last two years of dictatorial rule, the early democratic government, and the trials of the *Juntas*. The second movement highlights Carri's reaction to her own 2003 film of memory in a time of a paradigm shift. The politics of memory were key issues during the Néstor Kirchner administration (2003-2007); precisely, he repealed the Full Stop Law that had given a closure to Juntas trials and revised crimes against humanity during the 1976-1983 dictatorship.

I choose to start in 1980, a point when the dictatorial power was dwindling, its censorship was diminishing, exiles started to return to the country and when human rights organizations became more visible in daily life, legitimizing the claims of human rights abuses by the dictatorship. The period between 1983 and 1985 is signaled the "destape" after a long period of repression and the Juntas trails permeating all media.

The inclusion of the print text of 2007 gestures to Carri's revision of her own work in a context of memory practices. Throughout 2002-2007 a wide range of Argentine filmic productions or co-productions surfaced, discussing issues related to the dictatorship, human rights abuses and trauma narratives, many of them with local institutional support.[19] This extensive compilation of memory filmic narratives contemporary to and post- *Los rubios* put Carri's film under a new light.

[19] *El Nüremberg argentino* (Miguel Rodríguez Arias,2004), *La mayor estafa al pueblo argentino* (Diego Musiak, 2002), *Memoria del saqueo* (Pino Solanas, 2003), *Roma* (Adolfo Aristarain, 2004), *Raymundo*

Concluding, this first chapter focuses on the aesthetics developed by the Argentine State and those counter-narratives surfacing outside the cinematic realm. The official filmic narratives of the transition tried to shape the discourse of memory while the counter-narratives that emerged in the margins of the filmic industry articulated aesthetics that subverted the mainstream narrative. In the second movement, I discuss Albertina Carri's print text of 2007, *Los rubios: cartografía de una película*, a book complementing the film *Los rubios* which -I assert- suggests a re-reading of the film.

### *1.1 The line and the void*

The paradigm of the first democratic presidency after the 1976-1983 dictatorship was conceived as an electoral platform and put forward during the Raul Alfonsín (1983-1989) administration. The ideas that nurtured the paradigm materialized in a narrative that prioritized a peaceful transition. During the early 1980's, mainstream filmic productions articulated this narrative via the exemplary "one" story or the explanatory documentary led by a legitimized voice.

Films like *La historia oficial* embraced the emotional and didactic power of fictions, narrating the story according to an exemplary individual account; that of a woman, which

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(Ernesto Ardito y Virna Molina, 2002), *18-J* (Adrián Caetano, Carlos Sorín, Daniel Burman, Alberto Lecchi, Alejandro Doria, Lucía Cedrón, Juan Bautista Stagnaro, Mauricio Wainrot, Marcelo Schapces y Adrián Suar,2004), *Los fusiladitos* (Cecilia Miljiker 2003), *Trelew* (Mariana Arruti, 2003), *Hermanas* (Julia Solomonoff, 2004), *H.I.J.O.S., el alma en dos* (Carmen Guarini and Marcelo Céspedes, 2002), *Cautiva* (Gastón Biraben, 2003), *Nordeste* (Juan Solanas, 2005), *Crónica de una fuga* (Adrián Caetano, 2006), *Fuerza Aérea Sociedad Anónima* (Enrique Piñeyro, 2006), *Hamaca paraguaya* (Paz Encina, 2006), *Yaipota ñande igüi - Queremos nuestra tierra* (Lorena Riposati, 2006), *Fusilados en Floresta* (Diego H. Ceballos, 2005), La antena (Esteban Sapir, 2007), *Madres* (Eduardo Félix Walger, 2007), *Fotografías* (Andrés Di Tella, 2007), *Familia Lugones* (Paula Hernández, 2007), *Pulqui, un instante en la patria de la felicidad* (Alejandro Fernández Mouján, 2007), *M* (Nicolás Prividera, 2007). (yearly releases available at *Estrenos*, Cinenacional.com)

illustrates the situation of the collective, the country. Similarly, the officially- conceived documentary was organized in a chronological cause-effect logic which exclusively relied on the "one" monolithic voice, speaking on behalf of the whole.

In the margins of film, a variety of non-filmic audio-visual productions subverted hierarchical top-down uni-linear storytelling by a fragmentary framework. Berni's paintings splintered space in order to multiply the schemes of representation. In *Besos brujos* windows and technology fragmented and multiply space. *El Siluetazo* emulated empty spaces, via the trope of the silhouette, as way to articulate a less hierarchical (less uni-linear, top-to-bottom) narrative fabric. *Informe salvaje* was a subversive publication (revista-"subte") echoing *El Siluetazo,* it countered and reinforced the documentation intent, bringing fragments into a mechanically reproduced piece and subverting those fragments by presenting them as unfinished (texts are semi-buried and sentences are incomplete). In an in-between empty space, the "document" is disarmed by a collage. In all these pieces, fragmentation carves a void in which new perspectives can emerge and which facilitates an antidote to the crystallization of memory.

As a reverberation of *Los rubios* film, the homonymous book, *Los rubios: cartografía de una película*, invites the viewer to think of *Los rubios* as a space and, particularly, as a counter-space. Supplementing the cinematic piece, this cartography is splintered in order to carve a void in in-between spaces. As a project of memory, *Los rubios* becomes a fluid narrative; one that exceeds the 90 minutes film into a fabric that is dynamic and open.

## 1.2 *The Transition: Discourse and counter-discourse*

The contrast that I point out is between state-sponsored moving images and the expressions that emerged in the margins of officially supported production. While the post-dictatorial mainstream cinema of the transition educated society via explanatory documentaries (with clear forces of good and evil) and the cathartic experimentation hidden in melodramatic plots, the marginal artifacts choose to engage in fragmentary storytelling, thus highlighting the problems of simplified narratives in which nuances are suppressed and representation in limited.

The narrative of mainstream production put forward the peaceful transition via texts that articulated the notion of an innocent society in between two diabolic forces. The strategy was to present the exemplary "one" via melodramatic catharsis or the explanatory documentary (with a thesis, supported with documents, following chronological cause-effect storytelling). Fictional and documentary styles aimed at educating the citizenry on how to read the past. Education and explanation, according to official transitional rhetoric, can only come from legitimized sources. Entrenched in a hierarchical model, the past had to be mediated by the institutions that were shaping the transition. Specifically, the strategy of the mainstream discourse was to articulate an uncontested version of the past according to the "teoría de los dos demonios," where society is caught between two evil forces. This discourse erases responsibility and agency

while also ensuring that the narratives of the past cannot be modified.[20] In a sealed temporality, they become immutable.

Regarding their funding, most mainstream films received official funds and the support of co-production schemes. Films needed the designation of "special interest" in order to count with official funding, and without this financial assistance it was highly difficult to film in Argentina in the early 1980's. Further, the Argentine film institute favored films that were closer to the paradigm of the transition. This thematic control consolidated specific discourses to the detriment of other perspectives.

On the contrary, the pieces on the fringes of audio-visual cultural production were anarchic and fragmentary. Engaged in experimental exercises of memory, and using less expensive media, the marginal production was playful, less solemn and highly fragmentary. The denial of a unified, chronological, cause-effect voice was the strategy to contest the monolithic perspective by a legitimized voice, and the proposed sealed temporality in relation to memory narratives. The aesthetics of the fragmented style opened memorial configurations to a new syntax that is fluid and that allows the participation of multiple voices in memory.

In terms of audio-visual formats available during the transition, not only was 35mm film difficult to make in Argentina, but also the more independent and less expensive formats available to amateur filmmakers elsewhere were also highly

[20] Specifically about *Nunca más*, Bietti says, "El discurso del Nunca Más es un 'discurso sedante' que opera sobre todos los sectores sociales: exculpa a cómplices o responsables; disciplina y niega a los insistentes denunciadores de las violaciones de los derechos humanos; horroriza, paraliza (pero tranquiliza) al que 'jamás supo nada.' Pero sedante, sobre todo, porque asegura que Nunca Más sucederá. No importa qué, ni porqué, pero no pasará más. El presente es así 'virginizado', ahora 'todos somos democráticos', no importa qué hayamos hecho antes."

unattainable in Argentina. Particularly, as formats such as Super 8 and Single 8 were ceasing to exist following technological changes and video did not consolidate until later in the decade[21].

Given the unavailability of cheaper formats, much of the artistic production that countered this official filmic discourse appeared outside of film. Visual and performance arts had a major impact in narratives of resistance during that period. There was intense experimentation across disciplines, particularly in relation to memory, where ephemeral art played a major role in narratives of memory. Non-filmic expressions erected as voices of dissent, as they contrasted and complemented the transitional discourses.

The strategy that these non-filmic pieces used to challenge the mainstream transitional discourse was to disrupt the storytelling, traditionally as cause-effect, chronological, document-based or instructive/educational/exemplary. These disruptions transformed the syntax and the narratives became less univocal, and less organized according these traditional frameworks. Fragmentation and especially the empty spaces carved out via this fragmentation process were used to dismantle the logic, thus suggesting new loci of enunciation.

### *1.2 a Transitional cinema*

The mainstream cinema of the transitional time during the 1980's in Argentina chose either fictional stories to deal with the past (to re-read, represent and re-signify the traumatic experience), or testimonial pieces echoing the factual/legal approach that were

[21] The technology for domestic audio-visual was shifting to video, a more user friendly audio-visual format.

molded after educational documentaries and the media converge (seemingly objective informative sources) of the *Juntas* facing trials. Both styles presented the traumatic past in a clear, uni-linear, cause-effect expository construction which avoided all possible contradictions and inconsistencies. This unified version echoed the impetus of the moment to create a "memoria ejemplar" (Vezzetti, 2002 30), which erased some aspects and highlighted others, depicting the system as diabolic and the victims and society as blameless.

Without condemning films like *La historia oficial* (1985) or *La noche de los lápices* (1986) –pieces that played a significant role in presenting the past to broader audiences, both domestic and international- it is important to point out the connections between these and the rhetoric of a peaceful transition in the 1980's. These films were embedded in a wider narrative of the "return to the democracy." This cinematic discourse was constantly being reproduced in diverse media, according to the "destape" style: narratives of terror combined elements of example, sadism, and guilt via catharsis, fascination and a sense of personal detachment in relation to the shared past. Such a filmic trend embedded in mainstream productions embodied the official version. Its style was nurtured by sensational storytelling of mainstream mass communication and the factual/legal procedures taking place at that time, in relation to human rights abuses by the dictatorship. Scholars are currently questioning many of the pieces produced within

the realm of the industry as exclusive[22] (De la Cruz, 714) and fetishized[23] (Rodríguez Marino, 2005, 74).

In collaboration, different expressions were combined in a corpus articulating a post-dictatorial narrative of memory that annulled conflict, disarmed meaning and erased any kind of resistance. The past was domesticated in a negotiated syntax that left the citizenry outside the political confrontation during the 1976-1983 dictatorship. The way in which mainstream films negotiated the shared traumatic experience resulted in the erasure of other voices willing to contribute to the discourse of memory.

These films sealed the past, fixing it in unchangeable terms. The possibility to read the past differently seemed impossible, so, in a way, these films froze/crystallized memory, recalling terms used by Andreas Huyssen and Hugo Vezzetti. The inflexibility of a sealed past presented the peaceful transition as a continuum of stability and harmony that nurtured a sense of collective-self. As a unified narrative, the filmic corpus of the transition presented a harmonious pathway to democracy. The mainstream filmic corpus was meticulously designed as the logic of the peaceful transition. In many of the films produced during the early 1980´s, the characters lack will and the system is immoral; ignorance and injustice are validated by this system. The messages conveyed by this rhetoric were targeted at society –at large.

Raúl Alfonsín, the first democratically elected president after the 1976-1983 dictatorship who governed the country from 1983 to 1989, created a platform to articulate

[22] Referring to films such as *La historia oficial*, *La noche de los lápices* and La república perdida 1 and 2:"Se produce aquí una operación de exclusión y olvido. Sobrevuela la idea (presente en la época) de lo conocer, de no escuchar y de "yo no sabía lo que pasaba" (712)

[23] About *La historia oficial* and *Los chicos de la guerra.*

a coherent post-dictatorial discourse that permeated state funded film productions. The democratic slogan of the time, "la cultura es para todos," postulated a state-facilitated *national culture* which merged high culture and popular culture. As recalled by Luis Gregorich, a politician, scholar and artist linked to UCR (Unión Cívica Radical),[24] and specifically to Alfonsín's administration, culture was incorporated into Alfonsin's political platform as a fundamental dimension for development and growth (Gregorich, 2006, 25). The democratization of the culture was to be implemented via the governmental program for cultural promotion of the new government. Cultural production had to be conceived in relation to education, scientific and technologic progress, and media (Gregorich, 2006, 27).

As a candidate, Alfonsin's platform had promoted close ties with the arts from the beginning of the electoral year. The *Taller de Cultura y Medios de Comunicación Social* was an organic cultural plan, conceived as a working platform to diagnose the cultural situation and to define future policies. Moreover, Alfonsín expressed his intention to maintain a relationship and a fluid communications with cultural leaders. As recalled by Viviana Usubiaga, a month before assuming his presidency in December 10, 1983, he met with artists, writers, journalists, and important figures in the film industry, such as Hector Olivera, Manuel Antín, Aída Bortnik and the actor Luis Brandoni (who was also a cultural adviser of the Alfonsín administration). The purpose of these meetings was to articulate a cultural agenda for "all." This strategy resulted into the homogenization of society, where the country was to be viewed as a unified cultural entity.

[24] Center-left political party, born as a reactionary force confronting the conservative rule in the early 19th century.

Gregorich played a significant role, both in articulating the cultural platform and communicating it. A foundational text written by Gregorich in 1983, "Apuntes para una política cultural," discloses the legal-framework that gave shape to the cultural platform. Throughout the text he argues that the programs of the Alfonsín administration were embedded in 27th article of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and, fundamentally, were aimed at supporting the democracy[25] (Gregorich, 1983, 11). The ideology behind the cultural practices of the administration was shaped via programmatic texts such as the *Declaración de Mar del Plata*[26](1984).

A national plan nurtured by these principles was established in September 1984 with a variety of *Direcciones Nacionales* focusing on books, theater, anthropology and folklore, Music and Dance, and Museums and Visual Arts. This plan aimed at bringing together heterogeneous expressions in order to shape the "espíritu nacional" (in Usubiaga 188), as posited by newspaper *La Nación*. All in all, this platform conceived a unified vision of Argentina (and with it, a notion of society that annulled diversity). As acknowledged by Gregorich in a more contemporary text from 2006, these cultural practices did have a universalizing goal, which, in a way, was impregnated with relativism, and categorical imperatives [27] (2006, 26). Under this paradigm, the cultural practices crafted a unified discourse which erased any dissidence or friction.

[25] Gregorich believed that it was one of the best contributions for the consolidation of democracy.
[26] This declaration concluded the *Primer Encuentro del Consejo Nacional de Cultura* It highlighted mass participation, decentralization (localities), the integration of indigenous culture and Latin American identity; it also pointed out the dangers of the growing mass media.
[27] "podemos reprocharles a estos posicionamientos cierto relativismo y cierto descuido en la búsqueda de valores universales e imperativos categóricos en el terreno cultural (…)"

Film was the primary purveyor of post-dictatorial narratives sponsored by the state. During the Alfonsín tenure, the local filmic production almost doubled, as did the films exploring state terror. With the support of private funding (also political parties, such as the UCR, the new players in in cultural production), the annual output increased during the transition, from 15 films per year during the dictatorship to 25 films per year until 1989 (Falicov, 147). Most of these films discussed issues related to the traumatic past, and, for example, in 1984 16 out of 26 films touched on issues related to the dictatorship (Falicov, 48). Nation building in the transition to democracy was at the core of these films. Hence, this prolific state -funded source of images and sounds focused on memory in an unprecedented way.

The first gesture of the administration to the industry was the reorganization of the Instituto Nacional de Cine (INC) and the eradication of censorship laws. Manuel Antín, an experienced filmmaker of the *Generación del 60,* was named the INC director. During his leadership, the film industry was revitalized, and serious art house and film productions for export prevailed. The international market reopened to Argentine productions after the ban of the dictatorial years. Antin's strategy had favorable cinematic implications as it resulted in the reactivation of country´s good reputation abroad.

Argentine films returned to film competitions participating in the most prestigious festivals and, during the Alfonsín administration, Argentine films won over two hundred prizes. Antín was an aesthete who cared deeply about the artistic integrity of national cinema as a special cultural form as well as a statesman who saw the potential of cinema to communicate positive attributes about Argentina (Falicov, 54). Rodríguez Marino

coincides with this view by saying that films supported by state funding aimed at reinserting Argentina in the world (75). Therefore, film was used by the administration as both an artistic discipline and a tool to reintegrate the country to the world, within the global circulation of images, after the dictatorship.

The disadvantage of this direction was that it was very difficult to produce films that did not meet the thematic and formal expectations of INC. Following the "cultura para todos" strategy, mainstream films tended to portray a monolithic Argentina, depicting a white middle class country, the "white" side of Argentina (Falicov, 53). Even though the programmatic texts of the cultural platform postulated a merger between high culture and popular culture, the themes and aesthetics of the films produced during the early democracy evidenced that the industry was a bastion of ´high culture´ (Falicov 51) and mainstream films were made for both a national middle class and an international audience.

In conclusion, films needed the designation of "special interest" in order to procure the funds needed to make the filmic project come true but the INC favored films that were closer to the proposed paradigm. State support was fundamental for scripts/projects to turn into films given the high cost of film and technology. This control regulated narratives of memory and many of the films produced during this period consolidated the discourse of a peaceful transition.

***La historia oficial (1985)***

In general, the mainstream fictional films of the transition followed a model established in early 1980's (during the last years of the dictatorship). These stories trusted the emotional and didactic power of fictions, insisting on narratives based on the individual story of (one person) to depict a broader situation (the collective). Films such as *Tiempo de Revancha* (1981), and *Los últimos días de la víctima* (1982), by prolific film director Adolfo Aristaraín, laid the foundation for the fictional films of the transition. Many of them told the story of a main character, usually innocent and powerless, who witnesses a monstrous and hidden reality (Aprea, 93)

Largely, the fictional films of the transition exposed a version of the story which coincided with the "national" culture of the "la cultura es para todos," revising the tragic events explicitly or allegorically.[28] These narratives reinforced the idea that the universe unveiled by the film corresponds with the life of the viewer (Aprea 95). Overtly explicit, these stories had a crystal clear political message while, at the same time, would also follow the rules of spectacle and entertainment. These films accessed massive audiences as well received recognition at home and abroad, like the *Oscar* prize[29].

Even though the sad incidents of the years of terror were constantly recalled in these stories, the political conflict of the 1976-1983 dictatorship would not be fully explored in most of these productions. The dictatorship was used as the context of fear,

[28] Examples of this trend are films such as *El arreglo* (Fernanado Ayala, 1983), *Darse cuenta* (Fernando Doria, 1984), La *historia oficial* (Luis Puenzo, 1985), and *La noche de los lápices* (Héctor Olivera, 1986).
[29] *La historia oficial* was also awarded the Golden Globe (1986), the Asociación Argentina de Críticos de Cine (1986), Berlin International Festival (1986), Cannes (1985), Cartagena Film festival (1985), Chicago International Film festival (1985) and David di Donatello Awards (1987), among others.

but films did not address the specific issues in relation to the tragic events that had taken place during the last dictatorial period in Argentina (Aprea 93).

Metaphoric readings like *Camila* (1984) by María Luis Bemberg, where the 19th century dictatorship was illustrative of state terror between 1976 and 1983, contributed to the depiction of the recent past. Parallels between Bemberg's films and explicit narratives of the Argentine dictatorship showcased how despotic rule played into nation building. However, this historical perspective in a way removed the particularities of the 1976-1983 period, thus cancelling the distinctiveness of the more contemporary dictatorship. Further, this melodramatic film legitimized the 1976-1983 violence, as the state terror is explained within a historical continuum of non-democratic rule, tyrants and powerless masses.

In these transitional fictions, the audience was expected to identify with a character symbolizing the society. In the skin of an innocent individual indirectly affected by state terror, the spectator would engage with the story, as a character without agency and responsibility. Using the particular as the metaphor of the collective, this rhetoric validated claims of impossibility, innocence and ignorance.

*La historia oficial* is one such fiction. In a contemporary tale of parental love, Alicia –the main character- is a woman who discovers that her adoptive child Gaby is the daughter of "desaparecido" parents. During the film she comes to terms with this situation, dealing with her violent husband and learning about the girl's biological family and Alicia's close friend who was kidnapped by the regime.

In this fiction, characters function as metaphors. The husband embodies the sinister system during the dictatorship, the friend represents subversive forces, and the girl and Alicia symbolize society. Gaby, as a child, is denied a voice. Alicia speaks and searches for the past on behalf of her, and her "one story" is the story of society.

Alicia articulates how Argentine society lacked agency during the transition. Even though she is a person of power, shown in the film leading her class as history professor and at home as professional, mother, and married woman, she has difficulties unfolding the truth right in front of her. Others around Alicia -a colleague/professor at her school and some friends or acquaintances in the film- seem to know systematic oppression, but not her. She portrays her leading role as a betrayed and infantilized woman who never doubted what she was told.

*La historia oficial* is chronological, organized according to cause-effect relations using traditional framing and editing. Alicia personifies the "one" version as she is constantly depicted in the center of the frame. She is followed by the camera mostly in medium shots and medium close-ups when she is on her own, unless she is presented in relation to her environment in long shots, where she usually is the only one that can be identified.

When Alicia shares the frame with other characters, she tends to embrace them. She is seen hugging several characters, particularly, Gaby, her kidnapped, abducted and

illegally adopted daughter and Ana, her temporarily "desaparecido" friend. Embracing them is both a sign of love and restriction[30] (see figures below).

**Figure 3: La historia oficial (Puenzo, 1985)**

**Figure 4: La historia oficial (Puenzo, 1985)**

Alicia erases all nuances by holding them in her arms, as if her "one version" is the only perspective that the transition can bear. In a way, these hugs annul the capacity of abducted children and "desaparecido" persons to have a voice. Unable to separate from Alicia's exemplary univocal voice, those around her are obliterated.

[30] When Alicia is holding Gaby, her status of parent functions as means of control. When Alicia and Ana can finally discuss issues of the abduction by military forces, they look drunk, as if those things could not be talked about freely.

The exemplary character symbolizing the collective endorses the idea that the society during the 1976-1983 dictatorship was incapable of reacting, and that society as a communal entity lacked any responsibility for the shared past. The narrative of "innocence"[31] and "lack of knowledge" was articulated by this transitional discourse as the pathway to a peaceful democracy.

Until 1983, the dictatorial years articulated the "them-against-us" binary. The "subversivos" were presented against "society," and society (headed by the Juntas and the Church) was the umbrella concept of non-dissent. This duality was reinstated in good-evil terms during the transitional government. The two devils were combined into a malignant force. Good (innocent society) and bad (evil forces, two demons) were clearly outlined.

Such a duality was a continuation of the war-against-terror dictatorial discourse. In this rhetoric, "Society" is a uniform mass kept in the middle of two forces; thus, "society" is innocent, unaware of the past and blameless. The transitional discourse split the evil into two forces, according to the "teoría de los dos demonios." Dictatorship and subversive forces were blended into the evil force of the "two devils." Good, as the counterpart, materialized the Argentine society and the "evil" encompassed the "devils" of the left and of the right. This rhetoric erased any possibility of agency in relation to the shared past, neglecting pain, responsibility, or the individual voice for justice.

Alicia epitomized how melodramatic fictional characters were used during the transition to shape the concept of "innocent society." Like in *La historia oficial,* in other

[31] Described by Bietti as "virginizado", where "todos somos democráticos" (4)

mainstream fictional stories within the local film industry, the main character erased other voices by claiming innocence and lack of will, opportunity or responsibility. As either a victim or an observer of tragic events, these characters cancelled all possibilities to resist. This transitional rhetoric dismantled the individual agency to contest as well as the individual voice to narrate memory. In a linear, chronological cause-effect narrative, Argentine society was depicted as a monolithic whole, a submissive non-agent and inactive mass caught in the middle of a battle.

Concluding, the condition of existence of this unified communal body depended on the articulation of non-agent subjects conforming the collective. As a result, *La historia oficial* (illustrating many productions across the fictional cinema of that period) carefully crafted an amalgamated vision of the past coherent with a political agenda. This erasure of agency (power to react or resist) emptied the possibility to participate in memory. The notion of society was restricted to those who were willing to put peace during the transition above all. The members of society had to detach from any sense of shared knowledge as they were deprived of the possibility to engage in any conversation about the past.

***La República perdida (1983)***

Following a similar path, the memory articulated in mainstream documentaries complemented the new filmic foundational fiction discussed earlier in the section. *La República perdida* (1983)[32] by Miguel Pérez was the most popular post-dictatorial

[32] *La República perdida* II (1985) was the sequel to this film, also directed by Miguel Pérez.

explanatory documentary. Financed by the UCR as a propaganda project led by Enrique Vanoli and scripted by Luis Gregorich, the film was released weeks prior to the presidential election in 1983, and it was supported by exhibitors, the general public and the media.

As the main documentary of the transition, *La República perdida* became a document of civic education (Margulis 98), assuming a foundational status. Since the beginning, the film has been incorporated in official educational materials as a balanced historical account. Still, in the new millennium, the value of the documentary is confirmed as a rigorous testimonial register of the political and social events of the past, carrying a republican message that contributed to collective memory[33] (Marsciangioli and Labandeira, 1-2).

*La República perdida* embraces the explanatory documentary tradition, portraying seemingly objective and transparent images and sounds. It engages with the past by relying on archival images and a chronicler while avoiding first person (individual) testimonies of the past, presenting itself as a "proof"/"truth Statute" [34](flowing Bill Nichol's and Carl Plantiga's ideas). Following Plantiga's "proof" concept, this documentary adopts "classic"[35] (Margulis 99), formal stylistic choices where an

[33] "El valor de esta película se sustenta en un riguroso testimonial de los acontecimientos políticos y sociales de la época, en su mensaje republicano y en su contribución a la construcción de la memoria colectiva". This quote appears in the analysis of the film published by the Education Ministry. (Marsciangioli and Labandeira, La República perdida I : guía didáctica para el análisis del documental. 2001)

[34] Paola Margulis examines the theories of "prueba" and "estatuto de verdad" (98), in relation to *La República perdida.*

[35] "clásicas"

omniscient narrator knows the entire truth and where the information is provided by posing a question/thesis and articulating a clear answer following a deductive rationale.

The images obtained via exhaustive archival work[36] (Margulis 105) are woven into a chronological, cause-effect progressive narrative. These intermingled images - most of which were already familiar to the public - helped contextualize and shape the images of the dictatorship of future (Aprea 99). In other words, the editing of familiar images interwoven in the film according to a uni-linear, cause-effect, monolithic, historical account re-contextualized images of the past in a sealed temporality.

In *La República perdida* the spectator is expected to follow a progression through Argentine history guided by an off-voiced narration. The documents are subordinated to two voices: a man's and a woman's. The hypothesis of *La República perdida* is that Argentina is being dismantled by the fight between authoritative regimes and limited democracies and that the confrontation of two violent forces (left and right) has trapped the Argentine victimized society[37] (Aprea 99).

The film starts with a text stating that its purpose is to articulate memory.[38] Specifically, these initial images declare that Argentina is becoming a country without memory and that documents are being destroyed due to political reasons, sloth or lack of will.[39] This statement is the thesis/question about post-dictatorial memory to be developed/answered. While this initial statement addresses the need to create a memorial

[36] Specifically, Margulis defines it as "trabajo de rastrillaje y búsqueda de metraje de archivos".
[37] "Como producto de este enfrentamiento , el conjunto de la sociedad se convierte en la víctima de una violencia que no propicia ni comprende"
[38] "Esta película quiere construir a la recuperación de nuestro pasado y nuestra historia"
[39] "La Argentina se está convirtiendo en un país sin memoria. La destrucción de documentos y archivos continúa consumándose, a veces por motivos políticos, a veces por simple desidia y abandono."

construction, the interwoven images respond to it by articulating a narrative that followed the legal factual spirit of that transitional time. The succession of images is edited to the off-voiced narration. Memory exclusively trusts fixed and immutable information, organized using an explanatory narrative.

According to this rhetoric, the individual experience has to be replaced by a collective stance, supported by data, maps and numbers. Individual stories are delegitimized and the preferred sources of information are papers, files, documents, and archives. These images organized in a chronological cause-effect logic create a new corpus through which the past has to be re-read. This transitional documentary narrative relies exclusively on the one unified voice speaking on behalf of the whole. Therefore personal stories have to be avoided or assembled into a collective source and supported by documents.

Claiming the "radical" working class origins of the UCR, the story of *La República perdida* opens with the turn of the century class struggles in Argentina, aligning the UCR with the poor (an thus, as analogue to *peronismo*[40]). It highlights some of the social policies of Hipólito Yrigoyen, UCR founder, underscoring his education policies exemplified by the mandatory use the white smock in public schools and the Reforma Universitaria. The first initiative aimed at erasing class divisions while the second allowed lower class students to attend upper level classes for free.

Enlarged and saturated images of unidentified school-children in one establishment illustrate Yrigoyen's education policy. The images depict Argentine

[40] Doctrine of Juan D. Perón presidencies of 1949-1955 and 1973-1974.

children, presented in a predominantly white image (saturation and the white photograph margins). Saturation makes skin and hair look paler or blonder. Under this light, these children, embodying Argentine society (these children who were elderly persons at the time the film was exhibited in the 1980s) are unidentifiable and white. Moreover, these children are presented exclusively as students, doing their civic duties as citizens-of-the-future. Using the word "brotherhood,"[41] the off-voiced text explains how the education policy insists on an already démodé notion of "fatherland," which also combines society and childhood. In this narrative, innocent, childlike and peaceful individuals ("white doves") form a post-dictatorial collective. According to this narrative, the erasure of the individual by the whitening as well as by instruction makes "society" possible.

After images of state repression against student demonstrators in the early 20th century, the film continues with images of multitudes in all sorts of demonstrations and gatherings, mounted up via edition to the soundtrack. A triumphant tune accompanies the last images of the progression, when the predominantly light-blue and white 1980's archival color footage replaces the black and white images. The chronological explanation evolves from monochrome to vivid colors. According to this closure, the narrative articulates a shift where the dual and polarized society of the black and white binary can become peaceful, cheerful and technicolor with the 1983 democracy.

Paradoxically, throughout the documentary, the memory of the 1976-1983 dictatorship (the most recent atrocious state repression events) is merely explained as a continuum. Following the relationship between colonial tyrant rule and the 20th century

[41] "para que los chicos argentinos se sintieran hermanos de otros chicos argentinos".

dictatorships established by film *Camila*, the most brutal of all Argentine dictatorships is explained as the culmination of an ongoing confrontation between authoritative factions; thus, abhorrent human rights abuses are again legitimized as part of a constant struggle. For over a century, society has laid in-between those two forces as an innocent and subjugated mass.

The dramatic events are consistently presented in compliance with the "teoría de los dos demonios,"[42] as the clash of two evil forces. The class struggles get deactivated as the duality "aristocracy vs. working-class" mutates to "violent-forces vs. innocent-society."

These transitional narratives suggest that the promise of a peaceful transition depends on a collective stance that is innocent and ignorant about the past. This concept was shaped in relation to the country's union. In the documentary UCR leader, Ricardo Balbín is cited stating that Argentina's success depends on the union of Argentines.[43] This "unión nacional" echoes the "espíritu nacional" of the Alfonsín administration. The union erases all discrepancies about the past in the hope for a peaceful transition. Regarding the violent forces, the narrator continues stressing that Argentina needs to exorcise its demons[44] in order to recover its unified essence, which remains alive despite the challenges posed by extremists from the left and from the right. The transition needs

[42] Gustavo Aprea asserts that the "teoría de los dos demonios" is explicit in "La repúplica perdida," in contrast to "La historia oficial," where is merely suggested. (99)

[43] Addressing the turmoil prior to the 1976 dictatorship Balbín states "no se realizará el país sinó sobre la base de la unión de los Argentinos."

[44] "Sólo la unión nacional basada en la verdad y la justicia nos podrá devolver la salud. Lo que perdimos, lo perdimos todos. Lo que debemos recuperar, sólo entre todos podremos hacerlo, una vez que hayamos logrado exorcizar a los demonios del miedo, del odio y del autoritarismo."

Balbín's "unión," a uniform mass, the "espíritu nacional," the "innocent society:" a child-like collective, like peaceful doves.

***Towards the future***

Emptied, as a tabula rasa, the narrative of the transition centers on a society that is particularly concerned with the possibility of a peaceful future. In this paradigm, memory requires official guidance as well as the support of documents and archives. The past must be sealed in a fixed temporality in order to give a closure to memory. That is the recipe for a peaceful and cheerful democracy. Thus, the film´s introduction concludes with the predominantly light-blue and white images of the footage of Alfonsín's public gatherings of the 1980's, followed by the place and date included in the inscription, "Argentina, Agosto 1983." Less than two months before the elections, the film anticipates the celebratory images of Alfonsín as president. With the excuse of memory, the film erases the unwanted past in preparation for the democracy.

The intent of transparency and objectivity of this piece, following the aspirations of the genre (expository documentary), fuses cinema with the factual/legal framework of the transition. There is an intent to control meaning based on the rules of objective demonstration. Documents function as proof, to legitimize the narrative. However, far from opening memory to a diversity of voices (according to claims of transparency and objectivity), this discourse erases any gesture of dissent by articulating a notion of society that has been drained of its history, agency and responsibility. Contrary to the alleged commitment to objectivity and transparency, this all-inclusive narrative erases memory while disfiguring the individual.

***The continuum and the fragment***

Documentary and fictional films of the transition narrated society as a uniform mass, caught in middle of the fire between opposite and complementary devils. From two different angles -as two different genres, one that educates and the other that entertains- factual and fictional narratives enriched each other. The official sources of mainstream sounds and images of the transition articulated these explanatory and emotional narratives to educate citizens about how to make sense of the traumatic past. As described by Nelly Richard in regards to the Chilean transition, any critical and reflexive interval must be replaced by simple communication transactions[45] (*Cultural Residues*, 5). Official narratives of memory used educational melodrama and explanatory documentary to articulate a chronological cause-effect story weaving the past into an immutable narrative which seals the account at the same time that it erases any inconsistency.

As a result, this discourse erased the individual's power to be an active contributor of memory narratives. In the name of an all-inclusive "national culture" and human rights, the films born in the core of state -funded cinema became the voice of the transitional discourse. Using all its power and the impetus of the moment to participate in the cultural production of the transition, the Alfonsín administration shaped a sense of collective that removed independent voices. Personal memory of the recent past was de-legitimized by an all-encompassing filmic transitional discourse. This cinematic narration was produced via stories where an innocent character embodied the entire society as well

[45] "[…] powerful bureaucracies and technocracies of meaning conspire(d) daily to erase any critical – reflexive interval that seeks to complicate communicative transactions with any suspended of dilated mode of interpretation."

as by a compilation of an archive where impersonal documents of the shared past prioritized the individual voices, all towards a peaceful[46] transition.

Characterized as a kind of purgatory exercise, Nelly Richard[47] has addressed the normalization of the democratic order which exorcised the fissures and dislocations produced during the dictatorship. The consensus required the neutralization of different perspectives into a non-contradictory plurality[48] (Richard, *Cultural Residues* 16).

In articulating an uncontested version the official discursive formations of the transition in Argentina eliminated other voices. As documents of the past (unalterable by nature), these narratives tended to remove from the public voice its fissures while -at the same time- they gave a closure to memory[49]. This permanence and conclusiveness sealed the past into a narrative produced within a pre-established hierarchical order.

On the other hand, in the margins, clandestine threads reveled against totalizing truths. Unassimilable by any official cultural system, the non-mainstream works produced during the transition resisted being appropriated by any totalitarian logic. For that purpose, elaborated techniques were developed to shape memory via the precarious

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[46] This notion also follows Nelly Richard's ideas, when she discusses the "democracy of agreements" where the normative consensus tried to set limitations to the 'overflow" of "what is hidden- repressed outside the official networks of designation" and which open memory to reinterpretation ("open to an incessant struggle of readings and meanings").(*Cultural Residues* 15)

[47] Similarly, Tamara Falicov has recalled an 1986 article by Patricia Aufderheide who asserted that Argentines "use(d) the darkened movie house like a confessional" (in Falicov, 49) .

[48] "(the democratic order) sought to exorcise the ghosts of multiple fissures and dislocations of signs produced during the dictatorship, making the formula of the consensus responsible for neutralizing differentiating counterpoints, antagonistic stances , and polemical demarcations of contrary meaning through an institutional pluralism that obliged diversity to become 'noncontradictory.'"

[49] According to Richard, the consensus rhetoric of the transition in Argentina also left aside all the "wounded substance of remembrance," particularly "eras(ing) from its public voice the untreatable, unsociable recollection of the nightmare that tortured and tormented its subjects in the past" (Cultural Residues, 18).

economies of the fragment and of the trace (Richard, *The Insubordination of the Signs*, 2). According to Germán Bravo, the aesthetic of the fragment not only critiqued the totality of a falsified union but it also revealed representational flaws which demarcated discrepancies.

An impossible continuum made fissures and points of disjunction visible [50] (Richard, *The insubordination of the Signs*, 81). By decomposing the uni-linear, cause-effect progression of traditional narrations, marginal works of memory were critical of the dual discursive regime that in Argentina[51] articulated the rhetoric of good-evil.[52]

As Richard contends, the practice of memory may neither be concerned with the linear restitution of a single history, nor presume to represent a totality of meaning (*The insubordination of the Sign*, 6). In other words, the subversion of the "one story" (true, legitimized by authority, clear) can open to a wide range of opportunities with creative aesthetics and inter-disciplinarity. Memory can benefit from disjuncture as a form of resistance, and one strategy to deal with memory is to articulate a narrative that is open to change. Fragmentation can allow new perspectives as well as provide space for new voices to emerge.

Further, memory should adopt aesthetics that counteract any possibility of crystallization. Via fissures, discrepancies and the proliferation of narratives the unified

[50] "It makes visible, in the domain of what we call "culture," those fissures and points of disjunction in which society does not completely coincide with itself."
[51] This idea follows a similar argument by Nelly Richard who explains Chile the duality as "the dogmatic rigidity of "yes" and "no" into an imprisoning paradigm" (Richard, Nelly. *The insubordination of the Signs*, 5).
[52] The duality of the transition continues a duality embedded in dictatorial discourse of them-against-us (justified as a civil war) which the democratic transition continued with the theory of two devils.

fixed voice can be dismantled. Hugo Vezzetti has acknowledged the dangers of memory becoming so fixed that it cannot represent. Specifically, he has suggested that memory should set free from fixed[53] (*frozen, following Vezzetti´s wording)* images because only this ruminating exercise would allow the dialogue of complex and dense signifiers of the past. The filmic narratives that emerged within the official realm made an effort to preserve, control and dominate memory by articulating all-pervading official narratives. According to Andres Huyssen,[54] far from articulating memory these attempts kill, freeze, sterilize and decontextualize it (1995, 30).

### *1.2 b Non-filmic resistance of the transition 1980-1985: Visual and performative arts*

In the margins of the film industry, other expressions articulated counter-narratives of resistance. Independent of the audio-visual cultural industries aligned with the power, these expressions were autonomous and diverse. Visual and performance arts played a vital role in a time of contraction of independent moving images due to the "natural death"[55] (Hirsch, 2013) of amateur formats, such as super 8 film, increasingly unavailable as the 1980's decade progressed.

[53] The freezing of memory is also explored as the musealization and monument phenomena, taking place at the turn of the millennium: "the desire to articulate memory in stone or other permanent matter" (Huyssen 1995 253). What has been earlier criticized as "deadening reifications" (255) become places of negotiation of "the multiple discourses of memory provided by the very electronic media to which the monument as solid matter provides an alternative". Revising these words for a post-2000 perspective, the digital media are in themselves "solid matters" as well.

[54] These ideas appear in Huyssen's text *Twilight memories* and are inspired by Baudrilard and Jeudy (Huyssen, Andreas. 1995, 30).

[55] Narcisa Hirsch during an interview with Jutta Brendemühl explains the reason for the dissolution of the group known as "El Grupo Goethe" and the experimental film "Under." This art collective produced underground film throughout the 1970's. (Hirsch, Narcisa. *Narcisa Hirsch & El Grupo Goethe*)

In this section, I propose a constellation of non-cinematic pieces which functioned as intermediaries. In an inter-disciplinary, moving-image, and pre-disciplinary framework, these pieces countered the uni-linear, chronological, cause-effect logic of the mainstream filmic pieces just discussed. These pieces bridged audio-visual and performative media in an intent to articulate aesthetics that countered the discourse of the transition.

Subverting traditional storytelling in cinema, the strategy of resistance across this marginal corpus was to articulate an empty space in-between fragments. These empty spaces illustrated the clandestine system of terror coexisting with daily life in Argentina, suggesting the involvement of civil society in the despotic rule as well as highlighted the potential of an ever-regenerating narrative.

The constellation includes Antonio Berni's visual art from 1980 to 1981, which referred to spaces outside the two-dimensional space of the painting; *Besos brujos* (1983) by Guillermo Kuitca and Carlos Ianni, a performance in a patio that invited the participation of the audience through windows; *El siluetazo*[56] (1983), a public space performance which hybridized a protest demonstration and street art, altogether with its pamphlet, the "revista subte" *Informe Salvaje,* both as its documentation as well as the inspiration for multiple replications across the country.

These pieces renovated the relationship between the interior and exterior spaces so drastically separated during the dictatorial years. In the dictatorship, the private had to be kept in the intimate spaces, while the outside was an utterly restrictive environment -

[56] I will refer specifically to the first event that took place in 1983, but many spontaneous expressions echoing *El Siluetazo* took place across the Argentine geography.

with all exchanges regulated- meetings were forbidden and liberties were restricted. The gestures towards the outside were vital in the sense that the return to democracy was also the return to the public spaces.

The pre-disciplinary or inter-disciplinary framework was a valid reversal to cinema production traditions. The return to the public space negotiated the audio-visual form. Specifically, its exhibition mode had to be altered in order to leave the restrictive interior spaces and the mass media culture approaches.

In their experimentation with narrative fragmentation, this corpus articulated empty spaces. The voids put in motion three strategies: First, these non-filmic experimentations hybridized media/languages/disciplines, making available new languages to provide memory with a sense of fluidity, a "work-in-progress" status. This counteracted any possible freezing, sterilizing and (/or) decontextaliz(ing) process. Secondly, the in-between empty-space, combined the inside and the outside, functioning as a multiplier of narratives and perspectives. The spectator and those within the visual narrative are invited to participate in narration. Finally, this experimentation contested the notion of the "innocent society," suggesting a shared sense of agency and responsibility.

***Antonio Berni (1980-1981)***

Among the early 1980's aesthetics of resistance in Argentina, pieces by canonic 20th century artist Antonio Berni set a precedent in fractured narratives to denounce state terror. This corpus, however, goes beyond the mere denouncement of violence. They articulate precise, precious and rebellious expressions against the (one) totalizing discourse on the verge of becoming the official transitional rhetoric (Richard, *Cultural Residues,* 12).

I have selected four pieces produced between 1980 and 1981 (when the dictatorship was still ruling the Country) where Berni condemns the wrongdoings of the violent rule, while at the same time proposing aesthetics to express agency. Different to the mainstream pieces of memory of the transition, Berni suggests a shifting point towards a different post-dictatorial strategy of memory. Specifically, these paintings fragment space in order to multiply the schemes of representation as well as to enable non dual perspectives and to facilitate an antidote to the crystallization of memory.

The paintings *Enigma doloroso* (1980), *Mutilación* (1980), *Cristo en el departamento* (1980) and *Cristo en el garage* (1981) clearly allude to society under the dictatorship and its victimized subjects by insisting on the tropes of the sacrifice, sadness and death. The characters of the pregnant woman, the boy, the mutilated body and Jesus propose a variation to the depiction of an "innocent society." Moreover, these pieces obscure the binaries needed to sustain claims of innocence (caught between two monstrous forces). If the dictatorship presented the dual rhetoric of "them against us," that is "subversivos" against "society" (headed by the Juntas and the Church); the mainstream transitional discourse rearranged this dual setting by separating "Society"

from the *Juntas*; and presenting "society" as the only "good." In the official transitional rhetoric the two devils are combined, fusing the "subversivos" with the *Juntas*. In this sense, this transitional discourse is a continuation of the logic articulated by the dictatorial government.

On the contrary, Berni's paintings subvert the dual image of good vs. evil by positioning the viewer on the threshold of both discourses. Specifically, these paintings resist the official rhetoric by merging the "subversive-other" and the "innocent society." In so doing, terror is solely embodied by the structural machine of suffering led by the dictatorial rule.

Further, Berni also suggests that the subversion emerges within the fabric of society. This is achieved by the combination of interior and exterior spaces and the cancellation of the one-ness. He does so via the reconfigured space within the frame, the displacement of the vanishing point (as the predominant perspective, with a coherent center), and the inclusion of several doors or windows fracturing the space within the frame, conflicting relations between the private and the public as well as the visible and the unseen.

According to Usubiaga, all these paintings make use of a spatial syntax that consistently combines interior and exterior spaces as a selective recuperation of memory. Specifically, Usubiaga stresses that the outside is combined with the domestic spaces via lateral or background openings (32). The windows allow the outside to filter the space of the painting. Moreover, these openings (spaces within the space of the room) make a gesture to the audience (Usubiaga, 25). Potentially embodying the "innocent society," the

audience is granted an access to memory. This dualistic inside-outside combination exposes secrets, but also denounces society´s complicity. In so doing, the painter questions the predominant narrative of the transition where the innocent society is defenseless, caught in the middle of two violent forces. The insubordination to the claim of an innocent society and the articulation of an alternative space point to the folds in society: spaces of awareness, collaboration and resistance.

*Enigma doloroso* (1980) depicts a sad, pregnant woman and a boy. Even though the woman is deeply sad and vulnerable, with a fragile body and a child at her side, Berni portrays her as a sensual woman, with her short red dress, falling stockings and enlarged breasts. This duality makes the woman a hybrid representation. Seen from the perspective of the "innocent society," her depiction is problematic as innocence and sensuality are contradictory (sensuality has no place in the depiction of an innocent and vulnerable mother). The portrayal of the suffering mother as an erotic figure repositions the viewer; this viewpoint coincides with that of the Dictatorial-demon. In this correspondence, society-tyrants alter the good-evil order, fusing the viewer/"society" with the denouncement of dictatorial rule.

Regarding the spatial articulation, there is an open door beneath the woman and child, on the right, from which you can see a fragment of an old house. The door has a chalk-drawn silhouette of a man. On the floor, below the door, there is a rhomboid shape refracting light from the outside. The flattened and ghostly "subversive-other" is placed in the connection between the inside and the outside. Refracting light from the outside onto the inside, the rhombus evokes a mise-en-abyme and a kaleidoscope, combining

spaces outside the two-dimensional painting via the meta-spaces offered by door/window/screen/painting (see figure below).

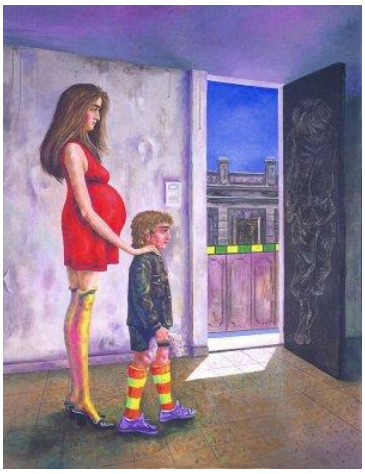

**Figure 5: Enigma doloroso (Berni, 1980)**

The image of the woman in *Mutilación* (1980) complements the pregnant woman in the first painting. Naked, blindfolded and bleeding, the highly erotic image of her exposed body is disarmed, and de-eroticized by the incapacity to see, the crippled posture, and the pain that the painting conveys with its missing limbs and absent facial expression (see figure below).

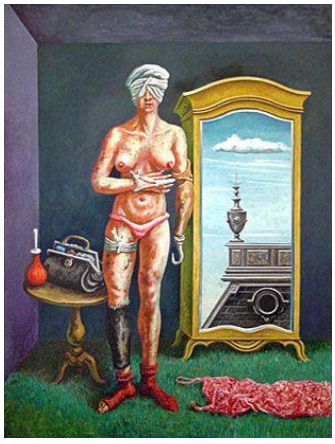

**Figure 6: Mutilación (Berni, 1980)**

Again, the recognition of the violated woman as erotic places the spectator as a voyeur and a witness, as one who enjoys sadism. In other words, the viewer is repositioned as a "demon."

As far as the spatial configuration is concerned, slightly to the right, there is dresser with a mirror, producing an alternative dimension within the space of the room. The mirror shows the upper part of the exterior of the building, reflected in the inside as if there were no fourth wall, as if the image of the tortured woman could be seen by anyone passing by, or as if the viewer is the one witnessing her pain. The awkward perspective (what the spectator sees is a roof) makes impossible the connection between interior space and city traffic. The reflection of what is outlined points to an alternative interior. The potential to connect is both suggested and neglected. With the blindfold, the lack of visual connection between woman and the spectator makes it impossible to merely look at her. Contrarily, the painting urges the viewer to play an active role.

The Jesus that Berni brings to the forefront in *Cristo en el departamento* (1980) and *Cristo en el garaje* (1981) unites the concepts of innocence, sacrifice and the tortured body. These paintings dismantle the depiction of dual evil forces by blending into the same image of society and the victims of terror, the "subversive-other."

These Christs –in plural, multiplied and replicated- look like real men, in real places, such as an apartment or a garage. Having lost supernatural qualities, any claim of the divine nature of Christ is sabotaged. Variations and multiplications embody the possibility of multiple narratives to coexist.

Further, these paintings also engage in the articulation of "empty spaces" via spaces within the frame. Specifically, in *Cristo en el departamento* there are two gateways to the exterior: a door on the back wall (also on the right) and a window on the left wall. *Cristo en el garage* reproduces these openings; there is a window in the back and another one above, on the ceiling (see figure).

**Figure 7: Cristo en el garage (Berni, 1981)**

In all these paintings by Berni, the subversion is produced by a space that breaks into pieces. The conflicting nature of re-presentation is highlighted and contested by a fragmented space articulation. The frames within frames multiply the dimensions and thicken the margins between inside and outside. These frames within the frame makes of memory narratives mutant constructions. The insinuation of another (an-"other") space, or other spaces, within the paintings, open up the storytelling to a diversity of simultaneous narratives. The "empty space" is what makes these alternative narratives

possible. Via an "empty space", Berni shows how chaotic narratives can coexist in memory. The possibility of such a syntax counteracts the traditional cause-effect, uni-linear progression of stories according to chronologic evolution.

Some years earlier Berni had produced a disturbing piece, *La torturada* (1976), an assemblage of a woman in the process of being tortured. Combining painting and real objects (shoes, clothes, hair and a deformed mask as well as torture paraphernalia such as cigarettes and a *picana*), this piece is an explicit critic of brutal and sadistic torture. *La torturada* remained unknown until 2006, decades after Berni died.

It is possible that Berni feared censorship and retaliation, and this resulted in the painting being kept in the dark until the painter's death in the 1980's and, then, for three decades. However, the reasons for hiding the piece might have also been others as well. I contend that Berni predicted that such an explicit denunciation may have had undesired effects because -when violence goes beyond comprehension- its re-presentation produces an "othering" effect in the spectator. This "othering" cancels any possible connection between depicted subject and viewer. Furthermore, Berni seems to have anticipated the sensationalist portrayals of captivity of the future, described by Vezzetti, as darkly fascinating depictions that were able to concentrate the attention in morbidity and perversion[57] (2002 184). Thus, the painter might have decided to maintain this painting in secret[58], perhaps believing that there might not be a proper moment to present such an explicit denunciation of systematic violence. Furthermore, he might have also felt that his

[57] "capaces de sostener un interés bastante extendido en lo morboso y lo perverso".
[58] The painting remained in Berni's Paris studio until 2006. It was sent to Argentina for the exhibition *Sucesos Argentinos,* at the Museos de Bellas Artes de Neuquén in September, 2006. Berni died in 1981. (*Un Berni será exhibido por primera vez*, 2006)

painting could be read as morbid pornography, thus completely failing in its intent to denounce terror.

Berni´s counter-discourse evolved as the official narratives changed. When the "them against us", "subversivos" against "society" (headed by the Juntas and the Church) rhetoric prevailed, he invoked the concept of the real in the depiction of the tortured men and women, who -up to that moment- were mere "ghosts". Via a pastiche of paint, real clothes and objects, the "desaparecidos" gained the materiality that the rhetoric of the totalitarian regime denied. *La torturada* is a compilation of documents giving flesh and blood to these ghosts.

As soon as the transitional discourse started to surface, these depictions would enter the realm of mass consumption of sounds and images. Morbidly fascinating and fetishized, the incarnated ghostly figures would became the "other", marginal and separate from society. Such discourse would not only deactivate the meaning of the past but would function as an "othering" strategy. Detaches from the narrative, it annuls the spectator's potential to empathize while separating the "other" and "society".

As the dictatorship progressed, Berni opted for a different strategy to depict human rights abuses: he proposed ambiguous depictions of violence, spatial fragmentation within painting as well as a proliferation of conflicting narratives. *La torturada* is an explicit attempt to denounce violence via its "documentation", bringing the vestiges of the past, in the form of a forensic archive. On the contrary, the paintings from 1980-1981 studied here propose a shift in the depiction of dictatorial violence.

Berni's 1980's pieces offered new aesthetics of memory which did not seek to fill in the gaps but which fostered connections. Using figures of the abyss, emptied of all interiority[59] (Eltit in Richard, *The Insubordination of the Signs*, 15), subversion was articulated via a space that breaks into pieces. Frames within frames multiplied the dimensions and, thus, the venues of communication, as a proliferation of narratives. These contested the uni-linear official legal/factual discourse of the transition. In these paintings by Berni, both fragmentation and the gesture towards the public sphere (the street), urged the spectator´s involvement. Merged with the "subversive-other", the society regains involvement in the shared past and, with that, each individual became a potential agent in memory narrations.

***Besos brujos (1983)***

I find in the early pieces by Guillermo Kuitca an echo of Berni's aesthetic. Having participated in human rights assemblies in 1979, the young artist produced his first piece denouncing the consequences of the dictatorship with *Del 1 al 30,000* (1980), a canvas on which he wrote 30,001 numbers. From far away, the spectator perceives a grey-ish rectangle which demarcates a space. The text is aligned with the right margin and, from, afar, the grey rectangle looks like a bed[60] with a white pillow. However, as the spectator gets close, small numbers are revealed; it is a progression of numbers

[59] This quote by Diamela Eltit is used by Nelly Richard to point at new aesthetics of memory which do not seek to fill the gaps. Contrarily, these aesthetic expose the gaps as absence of whole (lack) as a guide for social consciousness. (Richard, Nelly. *The Insubordination of the Signs*, 2004, 15)

[60] This idea came up during an interview between Guillermo Kuitca, Olga Viso and Douglas Dreishpoon. (Kuitca, Guillermo. *Opening-day Artist Talk: Guillermo Kuitca.* Walker Art Center. 26 Jun. 2010.) The artist will continue working with beds in relation to state repression his entire career.

materializing the victims of state terror. Numbers are so close that it is very difficult to differentiate each individual number. The viewer needs to assume an active role in separating the 30,001 numbers, making individual entities of the seemingly long numeric progression.

The corpus *Nadie olvida nada* (1982) is another highly spatialized depiction of state violence. As a gesture towards displacement, objects are situated in vague environments and theatrical meta-spaces are suggested. The entire series depicts the "desaparecidos" via emptied bodies, spaces, beds and a color palette (red-white-brown-orange). Tropes and palette recall illegal detention centers; they are dark spaces, inhabited by individuals who cannot be identified and who are surrounded by beds and tables in shadow-and-blood-colored tones.

Guillermo Kuitca and Carlos Ianni produced the performance *Besos brujos* (1983) within the celebratory event Ex-presiones,[61] curated by Laura Buccellato and Carlos Espartaco. Kuitca and Ianni proposed a highly spatialized theatrical composition situated in the Patio de los Naranjos of the Centro Cultural de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires[62]. This ingenious play expressly denounced state terror practices.

[61] While doing an art-history account, Fundación Proa describes *Besos brujos* as follows: "En esta oportunidad Guillermo Kuitca presenta su performances *Besos Brujos*. La obra inspirada en una canción de Libertad Lamarque, incluye en su disparatada sucesión de apariciones: un bailarín cantaba flamenco mientras una mujer que era obligada a confesar a baldazos de agua. El propio título de la muestra es sintomático. En el texto del catálogo los curadores se refieren a una necesidad de expresarse en el proceso de restauración democrática y de manifestarse libremente en la convivencia simultánea de distintas propuestas estéticas."

[62] (today's Centro Cultural Recoleta).

*Besos brujos* is an homage of a film[63] and a song[64] by Libertad Lamarque. The film tells a story about class and gender relations, where a famous female artist, a tango singer, believes she is abandoned by her aristocratic lover. In despair, she moves to a smaller city where she is kidnapped by a rancher after her performance. The rancher keeps her captive in a cabin, expecting that she will fall in love with him after sharing so much time. The rancher finds a wounded man in the jungle and takes him to the wretched cabin where she is kept in captivity. This man turns out to be her aristocrat lover, who has been searching for her all along. The tango singer pretends to love the rancher so that her aristocrat lover is set free.

It is fascinating that this film inspired a "return-to-democracy" performance. Kuitca's and Ianni's piece is a free adaptation of the tale of captivity, the cancellation of the voice of the artist, and the dynamics of despotic rule. In the case of the performance, unrelated topics are brought together in an act of violence towards a woman. Flamenco dancers introduce a bride (performed by Rosario Bléfari) who is brought into the scene, carried by the arm and placed on the stage. Buckets of water are thrown at her violently, emulating the torture methods of the dictatorship. She is harassed verbally, forced to say ("cantar"[65]) the names of the organizers of *Ex-presiones*. The actress is asked with violence about the event "Who was there? Who else? Say the names!" (Usubiaga, 124).

The performance has an elaborate spatial composition, with fragmentation and interweaving of the inside and the outside. The stage is placed in a patio while the public

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[63] *Besos brujos* (1937). Dir: José Agustín Ferreyra. Perf. Libertad Lamarque. (film)
[64] *Besos brujos (*1937). Orch. Alfredo Malerb. Perf. Libertad Lamarque. (music)
[65] While "cantar" literally means "to sing," this term was used by police and military forces to coerce detainees to provide information.

is placed on the other side of the glass, in the galleries. The voices pestering the woman come from the inside of the building, via microphones. The audience witnesses the violence through the windows[66] (*Escenas de los 80's*, np). Gradually, much of the harassment comes from those who are in the galleries watching the play through glass panes, mediated and amplified using microphones.

This performance proposes a new spatial configuration, intertwining interior and exterior spaces. Taking place in an internal patio, the drama is placed in an outside within the inside of a semi-public space: a cultural center. Windows and technology fragment the space both intertwining and distancing the inside with the outside. At the same time, the multiplicity of windows and spectators, as well as the echoing voices, implies the interconnectedness between the bride, the torturers and the public, who assumes an active role in the play. The multiplication of spaces, windows, spectators and voices, reverberates also in the form of a kaleidoscope and a mise-en-abyme.

This type of depiction of violence counters the uni-linear storytelling by a narrator to a more anarchic "action," more in the sense of a "happening" than a performance. Although the actions of actors are scripted, the audience is invited to take a stand, assuming a position in the narrative and, with it, becoming responsible for the role they play in the story that is unfolding and that recalls the deeds of the recent past.

In this form, Kuitca resonates with Berni´s style, fragmenting space in order to articulate spaces of resistance via the proliferation of narratives. Similar to Berni's strategy, Kuitca uses windows as connecting tissue between an inside and an outside.

[66] As per images in Usubiaga (124) and the Wipe magazine, the audience is placed in the inside of the cultural center while the performers are in an internal patio.

This strategy repositions the spectator as an agent. With this re-positioning of the audience, Kuitca also subverts the dual innocent/public vs. violent-extremist rhetoric of transitional discourse. Society is the public watching through the windows. The audience cannot remain untouched by the actions being witnessed and, depending on each person's identification, the audience makes choices as they position themselves. These positions range from being an extension of the torturer to feeling empathy and compassion for the tortured.

### *El siluetazo (1983) and Informe Salvaje (1985)*

Born as an urban intervention denouncing the "desaparecido" men and women during the dictatorship, *El Siluetazo* was the practice of collectively producing silhouettes to be exhibited on the street. This artistic and political event took place for the first time on September 21, 1983, on the verge of the democratic government in Plaza de Mayo.

As the initiative of three visual artists and teachers Rodolfo Aguerreberry, Julio Flores and Guillermo Kexel, this performative street-art demonstration aimed at bringing the personal losses into the public sphere. They gathered in the public space in order to re-present the missing men and women by drawing empty spaces in the form of life-size silhouettes. Different to the top-down dynamics of memory headed by official initiatives of memory, this expression relied almost exclusively on the spontaneous participation of neighbors or random people passing by.

This action hoped to open up the discourse of the transition about post-dictatorial memory via the renovation of the aesthetics of memory. As recalled by Julio Flores, the plastic expression tried to resist the transitional discourse via a fragmented a narrative

using discontinuity, formal novelty and the progress of aesthetic discourse[67] (90). In other words, the unrestrictive nature of these aesthetics of memory allowed different actors to participate in the narration of the traumatic past.

*El Siluetazo*'s strategy was to emulate empty spaces, using the trope of the silhouette as a connecting tissue not only between the private and public and the personal and the collective, but as way to articulate a less hierarchical (less uni-linear, top-to-bottom) narrative fabric and thus, to open up narration to others within society. The anarchic proliferation was a gesture of agency and responsibility.

Hyperbolizing Kuitca´s theatrical performance, *El Siluetazo* reversed the spatial motion. The public action took over the streets piercing everyday routine with "windows" (silhouettes) to the pe rsonal grief. The empty spaces blurred and highlighted the divisions between the inside, the personal/intimate/private, and the street outside. Personal marks of the individual trauma were brought into the public sphere by outlining the body. The fact that silhouettes were devoid of recognizable personal traits made the personal mark become a collective and connective gesture. The void functioned as an alternative space, an in-between that combined the inside and the outside.

Further, the spontaneous act of September 1983 ended up succeeding its ephemeral quality by being subject to endless replication across the country for years. These reverberations of similar-yet-different demonstrations gave the silhouettes a fluid status not only as a connective tissue, but as a textual fabric. In their resonances, the movements turned the demonstration into a kind of fabric that reconnects multiple

[67] "Descubro después que, favoreciendo la sorpresa en cada nueva metáfora de la obra visual que recurre a los factores de discontinuidad narrativa, de predominio de la novedad formal y de progreso del discurso estético" Flores, Julio. *Siluetas* in El Siluetazo Ana Longoni and Gustavo A. Bruzzone. Eds. (90).

narrators across time and through the geography. As they echoed, the anarchic proliferation of narratives took the initial gesture of agency and responsibility to a collective stand.

Different to Berni and Kuitca, this public act placed itself in the margin of art by neglecting its "artistic" heritage. If Kuitca's performance took place within the context of *Ex-presiones* in an artistic setting, *El Siluetazo* embraced the style of the demonstration. This gesture guaranteed its openness as well as cancelled its value as an artistic expression; for that reason, it was initially ignored by the art scene. Edward Shaw and Juan Carlos Romero were amongst the few who recognized the artistic resonance of *El Siluetazo*.

Shaw, Buenos Aires Herald´s art critic, praised *El Siluetazo´s* artistic qualities as one of the best art events of 1983.[68] The street demonstration was not only compared to Marta Minujin's return-to-democracy piece *El Partenon de Libros: Así refundamos la democracia*[69] (1983), but also to Picasso´s *Guernica*. Shaw´s piece may have inspired some of the spontaneous replications of the event across the country.

A very different type of reaction was Juan Carlos Romero's "revista-subte," *Informe Salvaje,* first issue, dedicated to *El Siluetazo* event. As a collage-like composition, the "revista-subte" combined varied photographs (concentration camps, Madres de Plaza de Mayo, demonstrations), fragments of a pamphlet of the event and a text in first person. As described by Evangelina Margiolakis, the "subte" (underground) category proliferated during the dictatorship as a form of resistance that countered mass-

[68] Shaw, Edward. "Silhouettes: the 'art' exhibit of the year." Buenos Aires Herald. Jan 15 1984. Print.
[69] Minujín created a structure representing the ancient Greek agora with 30,000 books that were banned by the Juntas Government.

produced visual material and the official discourses. Specifically, they referred to what was invisible during times of censorship and repression [70](66). The marginal status and the home-made design and reproduction methods placed these publications in an alternative space, positioning them on the margin of cultural production.

Recalling Robert Darnton´s analysis of the role of pamphlets in the French Revolution, Beatriz Sarlo has pointed out the part that leaflets played in French ideological transformation (2001, 150). Similarly to the European pamphlets, marginal, independent and alternative publications like the "revista-subtes" [71] were key for new discursive practices during the transition in Argentina. Thus, embracing the "revista-subte"-format, *Informe Salvaje* is positioned within a tradition of marginal expressions of counter-communication.

Specifically, *Informe Salvaje* was an example of the counter-communicative strategy during the transition. Mechanically and independently reproduced, the piece echoed the silhouettes, replicating the performance virally (using a concept that did not exist at that time) across time and space while also documenting it. *Informe Salvaje* unleashed any temporal or spatial fixity of the original event, re-embracing its visual

[70] "El término "subterráneo" o "underground" tiene sus antecedentes en aquellas publicaciones que presentaron una opción diferencial frente al mercado o al predominio de una "estética oficial". Se multiplicaron en un contexto caracterizado por la imposición de mecanismos de censura y represión" according to Evangelina Margiolakis, *Las revistas culturales "subte" durante la última dictadura militar* (2011).

[71] In Argentina, the underground publications flourished in the 1960´s during the Onganía dictatorship and adopted the denomination of "alternative" or "underground" almost interchangeably, as a way to differentiate from mainstream publications which at the time were subject to state censorship. Many of them were artisanal publications, mimeographed, photocopied or made as collages. For example, *74 metros, Buenos Aires me aburre* and *Historietas obvias* circulated freely. They spread so broadly that even magazine stands would carry them. Highly active from 1974, these publications started a transitional process with the arrival of democracy in 1984 without ceasing production.

quality and its status as a disciplinary hybrid. Self-propelling, the pamphlet engaged the citizenry in its circulation/distribution. The pamphlet embodied the "other," (a cultural entity outside of mainstream discourses); thus, it opened narration to those typically unrepresented by the official rhetoric.

The resonance of el *Siluetazo* in the "revista subte" was an act of resistance to the transitional discourse in a variety of ways. Contrary to mainstream pieces such as *La república perdida*, the underground piece attempted to narrate memory collectively, by bringing a spontaneous and public act into the discussion of memory, by associating art and human rights, and by claiming a sense of agency. Romero's piece fuses text, photographs, images and inscriptions with markers and stencils. Formally, the anarchic design of the "revista" highlights its marginal and pre-disciplinary status. In its rhetoric, *Informe Salvaje* contests the notion of an infantilized society, as depicted in *La historia oficial.* The text repositions the innocent and non-agent society as "el pueblo," an entity with agency to resist the main narrative of the transition by manifesting in the public space.

*Informe Salvaje* situated the *El Siluetazo* within the realm of underground print media. While maintaining the potency of the non-mainstream, this piece gave the performance both a sense of continuous evolution (replication) and a sense of fixity (print). In the form of a pamphlet, *El Siluetazo* could finally be circulated, archived, and echoed. In its composition, *Informe Salvaje* intersected real vestiges and more creative elements by stenciling and pasting fragments of a pamphlet of the first *El Siluetazo* event. It also included images of human rights demonstrations and extermination camps. The

collage-like composition of Romero's "revista-subte" linked vestiges of atrocious years, the civic act and hand-made decorative vignettes fusing/suturing all parts via black drawings. In *Informe Salvaje*, the multiplication of narratives produced a meaningful empty space where memory is narrated (see figure).


**Figure 8: Informe salvaje - front (1985)**

Contesting the documentary style, the decorative vignettes camouflage the documents. Moreover, the creative design (these decorative vignettes) problematize the

documentation intent, as information is hidden in the black and white mechanically-produced pamphlet. The "document" is disarmed by a collage. Texts are semi-buried, such as in the incomplete sentences: "the hands of the people demand justice and p [sic],"[72] "no to amn[sic],"[73] "judgment and pun[sic],"[74] "to the guil[sic]."[75] These statements involve incomplete yet recognizable expressions, opening creative hiatuses in narration. The easy-to-decipher hidden portion of the sentences expose the past specifically by veiling the information (see figure below).


**Figure 9: Informe salvaje -back (1985)**

[72] "punishment (incomplete)
[73] Amnesty (incomplete)
[74] Punishment (incomplete)
[75] Guilty (incomplete)

In the layering within the visual piece, abundant in-between spaces emerge creating loci of enunciation for counter-memories. In that way, Romero negates the top-down hierarchical archive-based documentary style of official transitional discourse. On the contrary, the anarchic layering and its fissures create vast opportunities to participate in narration.

The first-person narrative text[76] included in the pamphlet addresses two issues concomitantly. On one hand, it describes an explicit intent to depart from the legal/factual approach to the past. Memory must be articulated by merging politics and art. Echoing the design of the pamphlet, the written portion highlights what the superposition of images and the decorative elements suggest: memory goes beyond the legal realm. Memory requires an active narrator. Memory must be an active and fluid construction.

Secondly, Romero re-positions the notion of "society" within the transitional discourse. The "society" narrated by Romero is no longer incapable of relating with the years of terror, lacking agency and unable to take responsibility of the shared past. According to this first-person narrative text, the experience of the *El Siluetazo* showed that "society" (el pueblo) reacted to the demands of those in need, empathize(d) with the claims of Madres de Plaza de Mayo and was transformed from the role of passive spectators, to become a real actor (Romero in Bruzzone y Longoni, p. 139 and 180). In

[76] Complete text transcribed by Romero is "El olvido es una forma de muerte siempre presente en la vida. El olvido es también el gran problema de la política. El totalitarismo priva a los hombres de memoria y por lo tanto los convierte en un país de niños. Creo que en nuestro país estamos viviendo un acontecimiento inolvidable; las Madres de Plaza de Mayo en su esfuerzo por mantener y acrecentar el justo reclamo por los 30.000 detenidos-desaparecidos están generando hechos políticos ligados al arte nunca vistos. La participación y la creatividad unidas nos están demostrando que, cuando el pueblo es sensibilizado por el llamado de quienes lo necesitan, toma conciencia y genera acciones que son verdaderas obras de arte. Hace propios los reclamos delas Madres y de un pasivo papel de espectador se transforma en un verdadero actor" (Longoni, p. 180).

this narrative, "agency" counters "spectatorship" (the mere voyeur), thus, memory must not be imparted by a hierarchic order because, on the contrary, it can emerge from a more creative process.

Like in the other expressions explored in this first section, *Informe Salvaje* articulates an alternative narrative emerging in-between the fractures of the transitional discourses. As a reaction to official discursive formations (claiming to be the only valid form of memory), these pieces used inter-disciplinarity and space fragmentation in order to unseal the narration of the past. This reaction to the solidified voice of the unified collective opened up the post-dictatorial discourse to a broader society.

### *1.3 Carri's non-filmic resistance*

#### *Los rubios: cartografía de una película (2007)*

In 2007 filmmaker Albertina Carri produced a print text to complement her highly acclaimed film of memory. This text, published for the 30th anniversary of the Carri-Carusso kidnapping, functioned as sequel to the film. In a scrapbook-like style, Carri pasted the original ideas and the film script as well as added all the interviews and letters that did not make it to the final cut of the filmic version. In the first reading, this addition appears to complete the film by re-editing it, so that it would include everything that was deliberately left out of the 2003 version. The similarity in the title of film and book suggests this complementarity. The book can also be interpreted as supplement. The print text includes the letters between the mother in captivity and her children as well as it includes images and quotations from Roberto Carri's text *Isidro Velazquez: Formas pre-revolucionarias de la violencia* (1968). Fragments of the father's book explain the

rationale and aesthetics behind the film. There is an economy in the film that at first glance seems to be questioned by the book.

However, the addition/amendment of the title, *": cartografía de una película,*" seems to point at something different. It is an invitation not to re-edit (re-write) but to re-read *Los rubios*. By focusing on the aesthetics suggested by the colon and the term "cartography", the book re-examines the film from a spatial perspective. The colon, as both border and connector, is a space delimitation. Functioning as a mirror, the colon highlights sameness and difference at the same time. It suggests the double and the counter-part. *Los rubios* is a false negative as well as an empty space. Understood as a cartography, these texts read in collaboration invite the viewer to think of *Los rubios* as a space and, particularly, as a counter-space. In other words, my reading pays attention to how the print text reinforces the specialization strategy of the film. It does not propose a new strategy to re-write memory, but it presents a new framework to re-read *Los rubios* film.

This print piece functions like *Tree of codes* (mentioned in the introduction), the sculptural text claiming to narrate memory of Jewish Poland via empty spaces. While these voids originally engage the reader into making sense of the information conveyed by the words that can be read in between voids, the ultimate intention is to give an aesthetic form to the empty space and to signal to its narrative potential. Ambiguously, the 2007 *Los rubios* print text suggests an intent to suture the film while at the same time it neglects any possibility of wholeness and continuum. The empty spaces put forward a strategy to fragment and counter-narrate memory.

The *Los rubios* book is divided into an introduction and the four parts that follow the traditional production process: *Pre-production, Shooting, Post-production* and *Release*. This customary format does not reflect the real *Los rubios* process,[77] in which *pre-production, shooting, and post-production* all happened at the same time. This imaginary design, according to chronological, order is Carri's strategy to turn memory into an organ that can be tamed.[78] In other words, the strategy is to articulate a false progression, a process according cause-effect logic and chronological order so that memory is domesticated. Ironically, Carri disrupts this order by constantly interrupting the cause-effect logic and chronological progression of the written text complementing the film. The narrative flow is shattered into fragments via visual divisions, amendments, and discordances. Following this strategy, I will demonstrate how memory emerges through the interstices.

*Introduction* is the brief explanation of the difficulties of writing an introduction as well the outline of the complete text. This introduction is preceded by two images: one is the facsimile where the INCAA, Argentina's national film institute, denied official funding to the *Los rubios* project, and the second is the image of a worn-out book by Roberto Carri *Isidro Velazquez. Formas pre-revolucionarias de la violencia* (1968) and

[77] "Las estructura de este libro emula la estructura de una producción convencional, ordenando prolijamente una etapa después de otra. En el caso de *Los rubios*, preproducción, rodaje, y postproducción convivieron en un mismo tiempo. Pero la memoria es engañosa y uno no se puede fiar de ella" (Carri, 2007, 10).

[78] "Por eso en este libro, recuerdo o revivo las etapas de Los rubios de manera ordenada; como si una vez que la película estuviese terminada, siguiendo un orden cronológico de los hechos, fuera posible convertir su memoria en un órgano domesticable" (Carri, 2007, 10).

one of its quotes explains the importance of the "empirical base"[79] (Carri 7) of the book. The facsimile, as the first interruption of the narrative, makes impossible the film according to the logical stages of traditional cinema. Without funding, the film is neglected from the beginning. The Isidro Velazquez's book, the image of the whole vis-à-vis its fragment, and the quotation, highlights the potency of the dismemberment. The quotation, on its own and in new possible reconfigurations, is able to create new and endless meanings. The quotation of the father is the first in a series of quotes producing similar effects. The text includes citations of texts by Constantino Kavafis, Olga Orozco, Stanisla Itkieicz, and Francisco Urondo, among others.

*Pre-production* is introduced by an image illustrating the manifesto of the IRCA[80], a film institute where Roberto Carri used to teach "History of Ideas." *Pre-production* combines random notes with the ideas behind the project. Notes are united/separated by dotted lines and coordinates (0º, 20 º, 23 º, 30 º, 34 º, 37 º, 42 º, 47 º, 58 º). Latitude/longitude lines point at stages in the filming process which do not correlate in time adequately. Given the lack of an established chronology with specific dates, the latitude/longitude relates more to fragmentation of space than to a linear sequence. Although the lack of cardinal points make this locations uncertain, there is a numerical evolution (0º, 20 º, 23 º, 30 º, 34 º, 37 º, 42 º, 47 º, 58 º) gesturing to an internal spatial order within the fragmentation.

[79] "Una pequeña investigación sobre el terreno, conversaciones con pobladores del lugar, lectura de diarios y otras publicaciones periódicas que se ocuparon del caso, intercambio de correspondencia con amigos que viven en la zona, componen la 'base empírica' de este trabajo. Evidentemente, el material utilizado puede ser cuestionado por los investigadores más serios, pero no tengo ningún inconveniente en declarar que eso me importa muy poco" (Carri, 2007, 7).

[80] Instituto para investigación y realización cinematográfica en Argentina.

In addition to the illustration of the IRCA, Carri includes other fragmentary images. There are letters to her family from the Catholic Church, the Red Cross, the Army, the Organization of American States, etc.; as a pile, they can only be read in fragments. There are intervened family photographs (silhouettes cut off, collages bringing together family members in new compositions) and in these reconfigurations, the family's past is being reinvented and re-narrated. There is a composition of nine images, some of which contain other meta-images, like photographs in photographs or in a frame of a film. The images separate and demarcate three spaces: the city, neighborhood and the countryside.

The second part *Shooting* is presented via hand-made interventions (notes), with reminders, time and place of meetings (see image below).


**Figure 10: Los rubios: cartografía de una película (2007)**

The core of this part is the script of *Los rubios.*[81] The script has been amended and coded-marked with green annotations; these markings aim at disrupting the linear scheme[82].

[81] Along the text Carri explains that at the moment she started thinking the script she had 30% of the footage.

Most locations in the script (in the book) are subdivided into city, neighborhood and the countryside (or variations). *Shooting* includes images of film strips. There are images of the film and its production including "el campito" sign, the actress from behind, the contrast between country and city, as well as the actress (in a close up and in a medium long shot). Notes and fragments of print and hand-made documents are attached. (see figure below).


**Figure 11: Los rubios: cartografía de una película (2007)**

[82] "Entre corchetes, en otro color, me parece interesante incluir un segundo nivel de escritura para romper el esquema lineal de acción que presupone cualquier guión (…)" Carri, 2007, 33

Specifically, those that comment on memory such as: "Present the countryside! Memory is a mystery, similar to the pampas and the infinite,"[83] "(t)he countryside is the place for fantasy or where my memory starts. Memory or remembrance?"[84]

*Shooting* also includes production notes. According to these annotations, the first text explaining the kidnapping and murder of Carri's parents in 1977 [85] should be preceded by their arrival to the countryside. A camera movement is highlighted with pen markings and symbols.[86] The script includes other intertextual texts, following Roberto Carri's quotation (Isidro Velazquez), there is another by Olga Orozco[87] about identity, a phrase about erasing dissent coined by the Juntas,[88] and one of Stanisla Itkieicz's *Adios al otoño.*[89]

This section brings together images of the film complementing the script. There are abundant images of the actress. Many of these images are confusing, as if the visual depiction of the photographic image needs to be questioned or as if the photographic devise must be used "against the grain" to disclose both the complexity and the potential of the medium. Some of these are enlarged to the extent that they become pixelated or unclear. One of the images illustrating the section is both pixelated and upside-down.

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[83] "Presentación campo! La memoria es un misterio similar a la llanura y su infinito" (Carri, 2007, 48).

[84] "El campo es el lugar de la fantasía o donde comienza mi memoria. ¿Recuerdo o recordar?" (Carri, 2007, 49).

[85] "Ana María Caruso y Roberto Carri fueron secuestrados en 1977 y supuestamente asesinados ese mismo año. Tuvieron tres hijas, Andrea, Paula y Albertina" (Carri, 2007, 49).

[86] "Largo travelling en que la cámara ecuentra a LA ACTRIZ, la pierde y vuelve a aparecer en plano, una y otra vez *********" (Carri, 2007, 49).

[87] "No creo que mi familia sepa nada, y lo más probable es que seas hija de tus padres. Yo también creí que era hijo del Rey Salomón, de Rasputín, de Mata Hari, y hasta de la manera de saludar de mi tío abuelo, y nada, ya lo ves. Resultó que soy hija de mis padres" (Carri, 2007, 50).

[88] "Primero mataremos a los subversivos, luego a sus colaboradores, luego a sus simpatizantes, luego a quienes permanecen indiferentes, y por último a los indecisos" (Carri, 2007, 53).

[89] "Ah, si todo el mundo pudiera ser así, como recuerdos, amaría a la humanidad entera, moriría por ella con deleite" (in Carri, 2007, 60).

The final image, where the actress is walking in the countryside, is out of focus (see figure).

**Figure 12: Los rubios: cartografía de una película (2007)**

The animation with Playmobil dolls appears twice, once as a frame of the film and the second as a photograph of the animation depicting Carri's parents being kidnapped by a UFO. These images illustrate the creative process of conceiving *Los rubios*.

In sum, the fragmentary organization of documents, the genesis and process of filming, and the examination of the medium function as both amendment and legitimation of the strategy in the film. Its economy is confirmed and the creative processes to articulate memory are validated.

*Post-production* is presented by the hand-drawn image of the interior of the concentration camp,[90] and a poem by Francisco Urondo[91] about memory being shared. The first sub-section includes the interviews that were not included in the film. Giving closure to this subdivision, there is another text by Urondo urging the reader to keep looking[92] throughout the night and a double-page black and white photograph of the countryside at night.

The second sub-section is *Letters,*[93] which includes the transcription of all the correspondence between kidnapped parents and three daughters. Carri explains that the letters have been transcribed with an effort to maintain the original punctuation and orthography of the originals. However, in order to make reading easier, Carri acknowledges that some paragraphs have been omitted. The transcription of the letters is complemented with images of fragments from the original letters.

This entire section reveals an intent of communication and dialogue with those unrepresented in memory. There is a hand-made outline of the concentration camp drawn by the actress. Urondo's selected tropes include a tale of person who falls down and stands up as a different person, and who highlights the need to continue the search throughout the night. The accumulation of hand-written letters, duplicated by the text

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[90] The actress draws the concentration camp, "El Sheraton", according the explanation heard during an interview.

[91] "De boca/ sin ruidos/he caído una tarde/sobre la playa/
Y no recuerdo/ si he despertado/ o si fue otro/quien se levantó de la arena.
Tengo mala memoria" (in Carri, 2007, 67). I read this poem in this section as memory being passed to others.

[92] "hay que rastrear durante toda la noche" (in Carri, 2007, 81).

[93] The letters by Carri's mother have recommendations highlighting readings (Julio Cortázar's short stories, Ricardo Güiraldes' *Don Segundo Sombra* and Miguel Cané's *Juvenilia*) her daughters should do. There is encouragement to be critical, as the mother deemphasizes traditional political associations for more critical personal perspectives ("Leélo y decime si lo entendiste y te gustó" p. 96).

with voluntary omissions, also gestures to the idea that communication in memory seems to emerge from fissures and erasures.

Lastly, *Release* is described during the book's introduction as the true finish line of the film because it is when the film reaches its audience.[94] Paradoxically, the introduction suggests that this should not be understood as an end but as a continuation; specifically she states that it is possible to rest till the next destination.[95] This continuance is explained in relation to memory by asserting that the voyage of memory is endless, like a film or a book and even more.[96] This last section is not a conclusion or closure but more as an intent to make memory fluid by reaching out to others. This section includes only an interview where Carri discusses with Fernando Martin Peña[97] the repercussions of the film.

The section titled *The key of the chest*[98] is the only explanatory stance of the entire book. Here Carri exposes the film's acclaims while defending it against her critics. The audiences specifically discussed in this portion are academics, the friends of her parents, and HIJOS, the organization of sons and daughters of "desaparecido" parents. *Release,* according to the interview, does not relate to mass public but to specific groups related to the politics of memory. Carri also reaches out to other generations by discussing those

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[94] "Todavía falta un tramo de esta travesía: el lanzamiento. El verdadero final de todo hecho cultural es llegar al espectador" (Carri, 2007, 10).

[95] "Es posible bajar del barco y recoger la velas, volver a encerar las maderas ajadas y descansar hasta emprender nuevo destino" (Carri, 2007, 11).

[96] "El viaje de la memoria es infinito, tanto o más que una película o un libro" (Carri, 2007, 11).

[97] To Fernando M. Peña (film critic, programmer and collector, born in 1968) "Tu generación, sin ir más lejos, fue mucho más vapuleada: ustedes no sólo se educaron en dictadura sino que después tuvieron que sobrevivir en la juventud la teoría de los dos demonios. Es una generación que en su mayoría quedo diezmada" (Carri, 2007, 115).

[98] "la llave del arcón"

who, educated during the dictatorship, lived their youth according to the "teoría de los dos demonios."[99] The interview finishes with the photograph of Carri behind the camera. It is not clear which film she is shooting; it could refer to *Los rubios*, it could refer to portions not included in the final cut of *Los rubios*, or it could be an image of Carri shooting other films. The six-page interview with Fernando Peña does not function as a "release," but as the only justification explaining Carri's conceptualization of both film and book.

Lastly, Carri writes the final thanks. First, she expresses gratitude to those closer to her (her partner, her friends), then she expands the appreciation to those unknown (everyone involved in *Los rubios*, everyone who watched *Los rubios*, everyone who felt moved by *Los rubios)* and finally she returns to those close to her (she thanks her family, her friends) and to *Los rubios*.

*Release* acknowledges that memory narratives are a constant work-in-progress, across disciplines and across generations with varied levels of closeness to the traumatic events. Memory is made possible by Carri's family members, but also by those who felt moved by the film. Specifically, the real instance in this section where Carri reaches its "audience" is the last photograph and the final thanks note.

[99] She claims that generation prior to hers was "decimated" ("Ustedes no sólo se educaron en dictadura sino que después tuvieron que sobrevivir en la juventud la teoría de los dos demonio. Es una generación que es su mayoría quedó diezmada"). She contends that although this generation could not lead the renovation in film and memory; it was this generation that "guarded the key," allowing Carri's generation, rebellious by nature, to embrace memory and play with it. It is interesting to note the vocabulary ("En cambio, para tu generación, eso (la herencia) fue más difícil, ya que son como los hermanos mayores que se quedaron con la llave del arcón donde la abuela guardaba los vestidos y deben velar por ellos para que nada les pase") (Carri, 2007, 115).

Regarding the photograph of the director filming, Carri's image behind the camera dismisses the filmed object while emphasizing the filming subject, the filming instrument, and the audience brought together in an empty space. The triangular perspective between Carri-camera-audience makes the film of memory a contingent narrative. The film is outside of the frame, and the narrative depends on the relation between filmmaker-audience. In its triangulation (director-camera-audience), Carri involves its public in the narration of memory (see figure).

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**Figure 13: Los rubios: cartografía de una película (2007)**

The *release* (lanzamiento) reaches its audience through the void of a prism/mirror. The camera devoid of a filmed object functions as a mirror, like the colon within the title. This prism/mirror, confuses the positionings between filmmaker and audience, uniting director and public as both equals and antipodes. The release, therefore, makes the viewer a partner in storytelling.

The last note articulates an elliptical movement from proximity, to unfamiliarity and back to proximity again. However, this ellipsis is interrupted as she names *Los rubios*.

The term referring to both her parents and their impossibility, the void, brings back the idea of the prism. *Los rubios*, as a constructive empty space for memory, is a fissure in narration naming the "other;" it is what lacks representation. This interstice is a gesture of possible communion between those close to Carri and those who are unknown but who either were involved in *Los rubios*, watched *Los rubios*, or felt moved by *Los rubios.* *Release* in the book re-shapes a notion of kinship in memory made possible by the empty space. Communion and the narrative potential of the void are echoed along the entire print text in its fissures.

Following previous strategies, *Los rubios*'s *Release* engages in a counter-narration that is also articulated via a fragmentation strategy. Via the void, this print text re-shapes the reading of the 2003 film according to the aesthetics of memory articulated during the transition outside of film; particularly, in the works of art by Antonio Berni's visual art from 1980 to 1981; *Besos brujos* (1983), *El siluetazo* (1983) and the "revista-subte" *Informe Salvaje.* Like these non-filmic artifacts *Los rubios: cartografía de una película* reacts to the aesthetics of memory proclaimed by state supported films of memory in the traditional forms of mainstream fictional film and educational documentary.

## *Chapter 2: Marginal films*

"[…] If I want to write, to film an auto-bio-graphy, and I
edit from the tape just the visible, recognizable, audible
inscriptions, I will have a video clip, a few minutes. I will
have the acceleration of isolated frames, an explosion.
But life, my life, is not visible here,
There is not a narrative…. There is only discontinuity.
I will have to make use of external graffiti pictures,
I will have to search, to randomly put together letters,
Photographs, music, objects… […]"

*An Autobiography*, Narcisa Hirsch

In Argentina, since the inception of the moving image, audio-visual discourse has oscillated between state-funded films and those expressions that have been made possible with the development of new technologies. Marginal audio-visual production has always defied mainstream cinematic discourses. Audio-visual expressions outside the film industry countered hegemonic discourse as a mutant form shifting from artisan kinetic explorations to amateur film and video. The more consolidated were particular styles of editing and narrative suture; the more the non-traditional formats aimed at subverting them.

Alternative audio-visual forms contested mainstream productions not only in their rhetoric and aesthetics but also in terms of production, distribution and exhibition. Marginality, thus, shaped messages, aesthetics, means of distribution and access to audiences.

Film failed to become the medium of resistance during the transition due to a technological shift in the early 1980's. During the 1960's and 1970's, marginal audio-visual productions (experimental film in Super 8 and Single 8 formats) became a main expression of filmic resistance. However, as video became the new technology for home-movies early in the 1980's, these filmic domestic formats became inaccessible in Argentina soon after. This shift in media prevented experimental film to become a major player in filmic counter-discourses. As studied in chapter 1, many expressions of resistance to the despotic rule laid outside of film.

The early 1990's points at shifts both in the filmic industry and the politics behind films of memory. During the Carlos Menem (1989-1999) administration, amnesty laws were promoted, invigorating renovated mobilizations of local and international human rights advocates. The turn of the decade also experienced a shift in the cinema of memory. By the end of the 1980's, some films born within the industrial cinema framework managed to place themselves in the margin of cultural production, posing drastically different cinematic discourses of memory. Specifically, the 35mm films *El amor es una mujer gorda* (1987-9), *Un muro de silencio (1993)*, and *¡Que vivan los crotos!* (1990), share aesthetic and production aspects which place them on the verge of the industry.[100]

The mainstream cinematic narratives of the transition embraced an all-inclusive rhetoric. This universalizing claim affected both its resources, the configuration of the

[100] An aspect to consider these films as non-mainstream is their duration. Different to the international blockbuster average duration of 127 minutes in the 1990´s, the length of many of these films is below the 90 minute threshold, such as the 75 minute *¡Que vivan los crotos!*

message conveyed, its aesthetics and its distribution. That means that officially-funded films used state funds (financed by the collective) to articulate a narrative that, following classic narrative strategies, communicated with audiences locally and internationally. Moreover, these audiences were accessed via mainstream distribution venues, like theatres and global exhibition systems.

The differentiated placement within the cultural tradition of the non-mainstream 35mm films studied in this chapter resulted from alternative production and distribution strategies as well as non-mainstream aesthetics. In relation to the production choices, in one way or another, these films tried to break away from mainstream production. They were engendered from outside the INCAA and the major studios in Argentina. Many of these films explored differentiated aesthetics, contesting traditional film genres. In terms of distribution, as Máximo Eseverri explains, many of these traditional 35mm films did not have traditional commercial releases, most of which used festivals and other eclectic exhibition venues, such as institutions in relation with human rights. Tailored strategies of distribution allowed special interest films to reach their audiences. Even if these pieces were filmed in 35mm, they were distributed in non-35mm formats, such as VHS or DVD, later (Eseverri, 146). As they avoided traditional theatrical release and exhibition, they denied the structure of mass-circulation, where the success of a film is decided exclusively in economic terms.

The films selected in this section discuss the years of the despotic rule, putting in motion strategies to contest the filmic discourse of the transition by articulating a fragmentary narrative. Using unconventional storytelling strategies and color filters, these

narratives focused on the potential of experimentation as narrative tool. This experimentation facilitated inter-disciplinary/inter-media dialogues. Black and white film and color filters gave "relief"[101] (Aguilar 176) to the image, stressing contrasts within the narrative. Fissures are used as means to dissect and multiply narratives. The multiplication of narratives, as they accumulate, demarcates an empty-space. This void is dialogic, incomplete and fluid.

This fragmentation follows the aesthetics present in non-filmic pieces of the early 1980's, as studied in chapter 1. Berni fragments space by suggesting meta-spaces within the frame, which alters traditional spatial syntax as a means of resistance. The meta-spaces present voids within narration questioning delimitations between the private and the public, countering the discourse of the non-agent "innocent" society and engaging the audience in a more inclusive style of storytelling, thus contesting memory as a fixed and immutable narrative.

Kuitca and Ianni propose a spatial reconfiguration where the spectator engages in violent practices through windows. These windows function as empty spaces interconnecting the torturers and the public, revisiting notions of guilt and responsibility via tropes of the voyeur with the participant. In the performance, reverberations of practices of terror reposition the audience in the verge of the two demons, thus contesting the mainstream dual good-bad rhetoric of the transition.

[101] Gonzalo Aguilar, taking Oscar Espinosa's idea, has used this term in relation to haptic images. He believes that the texture of the image demarks strong contrasts and different surfaces/areas, particularly in the interludes. He has used his concept to explain the founding post-dictatorial documentaries by sons and daugthers of "desaparecido" parents *(H)istorias cotidianas*, *Papá Ivan* and *Los rubios* (Aguilar, Gonzalo. *Otros mundos. Un ensayo sobre el nuevo cine argentino.* 2010).

*El siluetazo* uses the trope of the empty space in order to articulate a fragmented narrative. The void (silhouette) connects the private and the public as well as the personal and the collective. Its reverberation, *Informe salvaje,* fragments narration in order to hide/highlight residues which are reconfigured by a collage. In between spaces suggest counter-narratives of memory, as active constructions while contesting the notion of a non-agent society.

Finally, the print text *Los rubios: cartografía de una película* (2007) suggests fragmentation and in-between spaces to confirm the spatial strategies present in the film *Los rubios*. The book is a collage of an artificially ordered, chronological, cause-effect sequence. Coordinates, quotes, meta-images, pixelated images, and notes dismember the composition, turning it into a fluid narrative of memory. The book invites the viewer to re-read the film, paying special attention to the way in which the fragmentary subverts the traditional flow of chronological, cause-effect logic, according to frozen-in-time and sealed narrations. Fragmentation proposes a new syntax, one that also sets free from top-down hierarchical articulated narratives.

In the films included in this chapter, fragmentation is produced via unusual narrative and editing options, more in line with experimental cinema than the mainstream. Similarly, each film also makes a gesture to the spectator/"society," questioning the transitional discourse where society is ignorant and innocent, like a child, lacking agency and responsibility.

*El amor es una mujer gorda* (1987-9) presents a fragmentary narrative to discuss the dictatorship. The director avoids the uni-linear, chronological, cause-effect

storytelling. Like *Los rubios: cartografía de una película*, an inter-disciplinary/inter-media fabric functions as a framework to highlight encrypted areas via reminiscences and repetitions. Meta-spaces point at a fragmentation that allows multiple perspectives, contesting the monolithic, filmic discourse of the transition. *Un muro de silencio (1993)* challenges the notion of a non-agent society. Lita Stantic, the director, articulates reverberations via color filters, reflections, meta-film, non-diegetic spaces and black screens. These hiatuses fragment storytelling into a fluid narration. *¡Que vivan los crotos!* (1990) discusses the 1976-1983 dictatorship via the story of a hobo. Polliak's strategy is to counter the traditional documentary genre by including out-of-frame images, concomitant disciplines/media, poetical enactments, narrative des-synchronization and audience participation.

Using the fragmentary mold proposed in the first chapter, *Los rubios* is re-read from the perspective of its fragmentary strategy. Specifically, I pay attention to the following choices: mediated testimonies; the director that is duplicated by an actor; de-synchronized sounds and images; out-of-frame and meta-spaces that suggest contemplative exercises that force the viewer to participate in narration. All these strategies are combined to articulate a void as a counter-narrative of memory, to subvert the discourses born within state-funded film during the transition, and to gesture to the politics of oblivion that kept affecting the filmic discourse.

## *2.1 The margin within film*

### *El amor es una mujer gorda (1987-9)*

*El amor es una mujer gorda* is Alejandro Agresti's second feature film. Produced abroad, thanks to international funding, the film was highly acclaimed and these recognitions resulted in an exhibition strategy orchestrated around festival circuits, such as the 1988 Sundance Festival. In its production characteristics, the film innovates with auteurial style and the support of producers Kees Kasander and Denis Wigman. The piece has been recognized for its striking cinematography, the use of black and white film, extreme camera angles and complex tracking moves (Rist, 14). Gesturing more to a mid-length experimental film than to a commercial release, this 70-minute-long film assimilates non-mainstream aesthetics as a way to resist transitional post-dictatorial narratives.

*El amor es una mujer gorda* deals with exile and "desaparecidos." It tells the story of José, a recently returned émigré, and a jobless journalist who starts wandering Buenos Aires´ streets as he tries to remember, re-elaborate and understand the fact that his girlfriend, Claudia, has gone-away (later he is informed/reminded that she did not leave him but that she is a "desaparecida"). There is a meta-narration in the film, a film within the film where a sadistic foreign director depicts poor areas of Buenos Aires. The recently returned exile cannot function as journalist due to market censorship. Not only is his perspective invalidated by mass-communication rules, but the disappearance of his girlfriend is also explained in terms of the market, as Claudia must have left him for another man.

In order to tell this story of loss, fear and displacement, Agresti follows experimental narration. As contended by Paula Rodríguez Marino, the fragmentation of the storytelling and the montage of the film (avoiding uni-linear, chronological, cause-effect relations) precisely illustrates the impossibility of narrating post-dictatorial memory in a traditional manner. She seems to believe that this fragmentation is the aesthetic best suited for memory narratives, because it brings to the fore the fact that reminiscences and repetitions create a different pathway for storytelling[102] (Rodriguez Marino 81, 2005). A uni-linear, chronological, cause-effect continuum is replaced by rhizomorphic and refractory configurations where interstices emerge from the fractured whole. Echoes, encrypted areas, and in-between cracks take the form of an inter-disciplinary/inter-media fabric. Recurrent marginal spaces surface as frames within frames. The film, suggesting inter-disciplinary/inter-media dialogues, combines the story and the meta-story as well as involves apparatuses of replication, alteration and modification.

With film and meta-film, Agresti´s black and white experimental piece stand out against the expensive production within the film. The shiny colors of the present (of mainstream cinema, taking the form of a foreign-produced film within the film) block any intention to search into the past which also annuls Agresti´s black and white film. In the meta-film, cranes elevate the camera in order to film the scene from above. The foreign director shouts violently, via speakers: the apparatus mediates violence. Moreover these speakers make visual the verbal harassment. This inter-disciplinary/inter-media

[102] "las reminiscencias y repeticiones operan a través de relatos incompletos con reiteraciones, desvíos y zonas que parecen encriptadas."

dialogue continues with José's intent to sell a tape recorder in a pawn-shop. He does not receive much money for it due to the lack of interest in "recording."[103]

The film becomes the reverse of mainstream cinema productions of memory. The black and white image that no one wants to see is an alternative image. In between the fragments, a marginal point of view wanders spatially across Buenos Aires. This marginal intermediate space also surfaces in-between mediums (the film, the newspaper, the TV). It is the back-stage of the mainstream American film within the film. It is the mirrored news-room where José argues with his boss until he is fired. It is the backstage of the TV program where jobless José applauds for money after he has been laid off from the newspaper.

The resonance across different media is recurrent. Political, economic and social issues are woven together, shaping a narrative of the margin. This peripheral narration, surfacing in the in-between empty space, contests the washed away images of the peaceful transition aligned with the rules of the market and spectacle. Audio-visual documents of the past (images of former despotic heads, Videla and Massera) appear on TV without following a clear logic.

Right after the dictator's images there is an empty train, where the film within the film is being shot.[104] "Take 2," shouts the director, and a woman appears nursing her child on this train; increasingly she is disturbed and pushed to an extreme by the

[103] According to the seller, what people want is a color TV, neither recorders nor black and white apparatuses.

[104] Mutant and marginal, the empty train clearly alludes in the film to an in-between space. In the repeated scene, we witness via the "behind the scene" footage style, the manipulative nature of film.

director´s harassment. Via parallel editing, Agresti edits this filial image vis-à-vis the quarrel between José and his boss in the newsroom (which resulted in José losing his job). Manipulation of film, violence and the rules of the market exhibit how the transitional narratives shaped memory.

Later, as José is talking with a friend, the camera shows a photo of Alfonsín framed on the wall, the soundtrack is a radio-show discussing the visit of the Pope while highlighting the intervention of the "Tango 02," the official airplane. The border becomes the main fabric interlocking those images. This new syntax makes possible those connections denied by the transitional discourse. The meta-story, difficult to follow, is surreal at times and always beautifully filmed. As it is orchestrated, it facilitates oneiric experimentation in the spectator as well as a displaced point of view.

Agresti bisects the standpoint by combining low angle camera shots and crane shots, where the director of the meta-film establishes his perspective. The director of the film within the film is identified as the *"*yanki." Taking Christian Gundermann´s ideas, Ana Amado has explained this contraposition (between a good camera and US imperial point of view), asserting that the American filmmaker cannot transcend mere appearances (2006, 111). I believe that this duality also indicates detachment. Agresti connects this marginal narrative and the spectator as he repositions the spectator within the storytelling.

Paradoxically, it is the God-like sight from above that ends up bringing José´s lost girlfriend by the end of the film. According to the *"*yanki's" cinematic narration, Claudia has not been missing (killed and tortured by authoritarian forces). On the contrary, she has just been a mischievous and disloyal girlfriend, who left her loved one for another

man, someone who suits her better. Her presence at the end delegitimizes any claim about "desaparecidos" having been abducted and killed by state forces. This suggests that José's search is absurd and that violent repression by state officials was unlikely during the dictatorship. However, Agresti subverts this resolution because Claudia appears on a shiny and colorful big screen of American cinema, as a for-ever-19-year-old woman. This de-synchronization confirms the violent past while it also points to the strategies of erasure executed by mainstream cinema to wash away the vestiges of the trauma.

In Agresti's depiction, the margin is placed on the verge of the officially supported audio-visual production of the transition. In between places (wanderings) as well as in-between media, the counter-narrative contests the rhetoric of the transition by articulating a non-dual perspective, thus contesting binaries entrenched in the "teoría de los dos demonios." This standpoint is neither from above nor from below.

Film vs. film-within-the-film and upper-vision (takes from above, shot placing the camera on the crane) vs. images taken from below, articulate a third-space of representation. The perspective that allows renovation and representation in narratives of memory emerges in the in-between. Moreover, the final scenes of the film depict the intention of transcending these dual spaces, while creating new in-between positionings. For example, José´s finding that Claudia has disappeared is suggested when he goes to an empty space: the house where she used to live is now deserted. José literally transcends this dual perspective when he jumps to grab the crane and pushes it down. Furthermore, in order to transcend this dual space, José is constantly moving and in that motion there is agency.

The final sequence showcases a dialogue between José and a homeless man in a deserted place. The hobo, embodying the margin, engages in an illogical conversation in relation to memory which gestures to a different system of meaning, a different syntax, fragmented and without chronological or sequential cause-effect relations. The deficiencies that this dialogue[105] conveys (logic, sequencing and structure), reveals the impossibility of dialogue in relation to memory. When José asserts, "If I shout no one listens," the hobo replies, "You see." Or when José says, "first they said we did not have memory as if we were stupid, and later they want us to forget it all," the hobo replies, "Sure, don't tell me." In this dialogue denouncing the impossibility of memory using the dialogical, chronological, cause-effect storytelling, the border is placed in the center. Nonsense answers invite the spectator to doubt the process of dialogue believing that the dialogue is a cover-up for the transitional, top-down rhetoric articulated in the voice of consent. Multiple monologues can, on the contrary, contest these mainstream narratives.

After this conversation, José starts walking, passing through the open windows of a bar. Once he passes an open door he enters. Around the table, representatives of different political parties are seated. The discussion among confronted sides of the political spectrum questions any prospect to narrate memory solely within the realm the

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[105] José: "Y si ahora grito no me escucha nadie."

Homeless man: "Mirá vos."

José: "que primero nos dijeron que no teníamos memoria como si fuéramos unos boludos. Y después quieren que nos olvidemos de todo."

Homeless man: "Y claro. No me digas."

José: " ¿y vos?"

Homeless man: "Argentino."

political/legal. José is denied an opportunity to narrate the past in this conversation; similarly, he cannot participate in narration as a dissident journalist. As argued by Rodríguez Marino, memory is not solely articulated via remembrance, but it also surfaces by disclosing incomplete stories, denied perspectives and encrypted zones.

Agresti deliberately gets away from flash-backs and raccontos. On the contrary, he insists on a more fragmentary and refractory composition where dialogues are fissured or where José's constant and recurrent monologues infuse communication with reminiscences and repetitions (Rodriguez Marino, 2005, 81). Memory, therefore seems to surface in the hiatuses, in-between fragments.

The director uses the homeless man in the nonsensical dialogue and teen Claudia reappearing to shed light on the strategies used by the official images and sounds of the transition (made possible by the market of mass communication and entertainment). Voids –my visual empty spaces, seen by Rodriguez Marino as silences (Rodriguez Marino, 2005, 81)- permeate the entire film in order to allow the different characters to preserve their individuality.

The filmmaker creates spaces of resistance as empty spaces. These voids have unlimited potential to make representation in memory more accessible to those not aligned with the rhetoric of the peaceful transition. Expanding on Rodriguez Marino's ideas, the in-between empty space is a strategy to engage the spectator in a personalized approach to memory. In this way, the spectator can place him/herself in the verge of the fragments brought together and thus assume an active role in the narration of the recent past. If the cinematic rhetoric of the transition had erased all opacities into a washed away

depiction of the shared past, Agresti's strategy allows fluidity and renovation in narratives of memory as an antidote to down-to-bottom hierarchical narrations.

***Un muro de silencio (1993)***

Lita Stantic has produced a long list[106] of films since 1979. *Un muro de silencio* is her second and last directorial venture. This second feature can be seen as the continuation of her earlier piece *El bombero está triste y llora* (1965), a 12-minute documentary short co-directed with her partner Pablo Szir that explores the use of light, color and darkness in children's depiction of their surroundings. In *Un muro de silencio*, a self-referential film from 1993, Stantic tells Szir's story. Stantic's partner was kidnapped by the 1976-1983 dictatorship in Argentina and remains a "desaparecido" until this day. The more recent film tells the story of an English filmmaker, Kate, who travels to Argentina to make a fictional piece about Ana and her "desaparecido" husband.

Although Stantic could have planned a film fully immersed in the industry, *Un muro de silencio* gestures to marginal/independent pieces. In this film, Stantic functioned as both director and producer; this more auteurist style allowed her to participate in the entire process of the film production. Besides, *Un muro de silencio* had an alternative exhibition style, projected in schools and cultural and human rights institutions. The film was available to audiences in a variety of platforms, geographies and within an extended time-frame. This exhibition was not delimited by the technical requirements of 35mm

[106] Lita Stantic has been very active in Argentina´s film industry since 1979. The list of films she produced the emergence of films by women filmmakers -Yo, la peor de todas(1990), Miss Mary(1986), Camila(1984)-, the mainstream cinema-art of the 1990's Dársena Sur(1997), Sol de otoño(1996), film renovation of the turn of the millennium -Mundo grúa (1999), La ciénaga(2000), Un oso rojo(2002), Cordero de Dios(2008)-, documentaries - Café de los maestros(2008)- and new perspectives form other Latinamerican countries -Hamaca paraguaya(2006)-

projection nor by its commercial success. Such a renewed distribution paradigm exemplified how the director-producer pushed this film to the periphery, as the result of the lack of support (proper State regulation) as well as the reluctance of the general public to watch post-dictatorial films in the early years of the 1990's.

*Un muro de silencio* disconnects from a tradition of post-dictatorial film (Eseverri 150), particularly in the depiction of the society and in the configuration of its storytelling. As asserted by Paula Rodríguez Merino, it anticipated a trend that took place later in the decade, around the mid-1990's when films started challenging the notions of the innocent/ignorant society, a perspective which was inaugurated in film by Stantic [107] (Rodríguez Marino, 2006, 174). Regarding aesthetic choices in relation to memory, the film proposes a strategy of narrative fragmentation. These fractures articulate meta-spaces signaling to the empty spaces in-between.

Stantic uses non-traditional storytelling such as slow motion, a particular use of color filters, the insistence on reflections, meta-spaces off-camera and black screens fragmenting narration while opening in-between spaces. These strategies aim at involving the spectator in an exercise of post-dictatorial memory that counters the transitional post-dictatorial rhetoric (and its evolution to politics of oblivions during the 1990´s). Stantic reveals the complexities of memorial narrations by denying any possibility of uni-linear, chronological, cause-effect storytelling.

*Un muro de silencio* fragments narration by opening hiatuses and drawing in-between spaces. The traumatic past is visually made evident by a spatially fractured

[107] "Recién hacia mediados de los años noventa, en el cine argentino —sobre todo en las películas de producción independiente— los cuestionamientos hacia la visión de una sociedad ajena a los crímenes de lesa humanidad se hicieron más frecuentes" (174).

composition, where even the title, "a wall of silence," suggests an invisible barrier signaling a spatial division. Like in the previous non-filmic examples, this memorial narrative is also woven together by the use of a fragmented spatiality.

The film presents a meta-narrative, as a film-within-the-film. The script of the film-within-the-film is based on a book by Bruno about the kidnapping of Silvia´s husband. In the meta-fiction, Silvia is incarnated by a fictional character named Ana. The real Silvia also appears in the film, as a soon-to-be re-married middle-aged woman. Silvia is a university professor and mother of a teenage daughter, whose father is the "desaparecido" in the film.[108] The book/film/meta-film crossbreed illustrates in-between spaces, highlighting the film process, the editing room and the duplication of characters.

A dislocating montage is constructed by the use of framing and "frames" in the form of mirrors, windows, screens, cameras, as well as color filters and black screens. This framing suggests the claustrophobic spaces filtering the space of enunciation and, for that reason, the film insists on medium-close shots and small spaces and these inaccessible spaces function as alternative spaces, or "meta-spaces." To add more layers to this spatial construction, the director incorporates numerous compositions with frames, including picture frames, the meta-fiction of the film-within-the-film, as well as the alternative filmic spaces like the actors' dressing rooms or the off-camera spaces within the shooting.

The fragmented visual code is defined along the initial minutes of the film. A young couple and a baby are riding a bike in slow motion. This retarded flow is

[108] Stantic's film could be thought of as a reaction to La *historia oficial.* Silvia emulates Alicia, Silvia renovates Alicia but, specially, Silvia's daughter responds to Alicia claiming to speak on behalf of Gaby.

interrupted three times by a black screen with white titles: the main title, and then the initial credits in two parts. The subsequent scene presents Kate and Bruno, who are in the ruins of an unknown place full of windows and a big puddle reflecting the light, as if it were a mirror. The title at this point establishes the date and place as Buenos Aires in 1990; they are in an unidentified abandoned concentration camp. Right after this Kate is being subjected to reproduction as she is being photographed. She is framed by a big window beneath her.

Later, the meta-fiction of the film-within-the-film is introduced in its full complexity and potential. The performers appear in the middle of the composition. Spaces multiply through movement and actors are soon left in the margin, from the time the camera starts moving to the right until the camera is seen in the frame. This image reaches Bruno, the scriptwriter, who is seen behind the camera. Bruno controls the shooting in a second, off-camera-space-level.

Bruno's memory of Silvia is also depicted via spatial fragmentation in the actors´ dressing room as he is engaged in a conversation with Kate. They are surrounded by mirrors, superimpositions of their reflections, photographs of the performers and the reflections of the reflections. Images multiply without ceasing, and the layering creates a connective tissue articulating in the in-between spaces for memory.

Another alternative space is presented in relation to the production of the film within the film. Kate appears watching footage of class struggles and State repression. However, in her film-within-the-film she opts for a more creative storytelling in the fictionalization of Silvia's personal story. Moreover, Kate is viewed at the production

office and the studio. In both cases, the suggestion of production areas highlights that storytelling depends on making choices and that the story in the film is just one version: a version that is nourished by documents, stories, and creativity.

The use of a winter color palette, blue and sepia filters, and the black screen of the credits is another strategy to fragment narration. The black empty spaces at the beginning (the black screen) signal interruptions in the flow of memory. Stantic also chooses color filters to separate past and present, the meta-narrative and the film. Blue filters are used for the past, and general pale sepia coloring is used for the present.

Conversely, the dual filters to articulate time are conflicted in order to achieve an alternative perspective. The conflict of the color binary is established to suggest communion in the fragmentation. At the beginning, there is a house under construction where Silvia and her new family, a teenage daughter and new husband (the replacement in present time of the "desaparecido"), will move. The daughter notices that they had mistaken the color of the paint; it should have been light-blue (the color of the past). The subsequent shot shows Ana, the actress playing Silvia, with a baby and husband in the filming set; it is a light blue room. The blue of the past is brought into the present time and it is echoed in the fictional story of the film within the film. This splintered continuation highlights how reminiscences and repetitions are strategies to make memory accessible and susceptible to narrative articulations.

The off-camera space that illustrates fragmentation strategies when the film starts reappears closer to the end. Echoing the initial moments, Silvia´s daughter repositions herself, standing next to the camera by Kate. It is interesting how this spatialization

expresses an intention to broaden the storytelling, to open narration specifically to those who have not witnessed the past but still can engage in the exercise of memory. Like Agresti´s José, the exile, *Un muro de silencio's* mnemonic practice is heralded by a foreigner and a teenager who was just a baby during the years of terror. The trope of the outsider being the one who leads post-dictatorial storytelling of memory suggests the lack of will to engage in those narrations within Argentina at the time. Therefore, both films dismiss society's claims of innocence and ignorance because, in terms of agency, "lack of will" and impossibility are very different.

The final scene of the film shows Silvia and her daughter in the ruins of a ghostly concentration camp. The rectangular holes of the windows emulate the rectangular frames within frames. Again, echoing the initial image of the film, the concentration camp returns. If in the beginning the image exhibits numerous reflections, as the floor is covered with water, mirroring the destroyed buildings while multiplying empty spaces, at the end the reflection becomes something else. Silvia and her daughter are seen from behind, facing an immense abandoned construction. Soon the camera starts zooming-in, focusing on the center of the composition -the vanishing point. The camera focuses on Silvia's daughter, zooming-in to close-up. The teenager faces the screen inquiringly, involving the spectator and questioning the notion of "innocent society."

With the repositioning of the characters (first, it was Bruno and Kate and, by the end Silvia and her daughter) the marginal space becomes a fluid empty space, a void which opens representation to others not included in the official discourse of memory during the transition. The shot where Silvia's daughter looks at the camera engages the

spectator via the eye-matching of the teenager and the unknown collective spectator. It is a gesture to invite the younger generation to assume responsibility with this past. By looking at the screen, the forth wall of the performative space disrupts the diegesis and expands the space beyond the frame into the outside and, therefore, into the non-diegetic space, outside of narration. According to Stantic's piece, the demarking borders (which divide as well as communicate) within narration are crucial to narrate memory.

The film-within-the film has a kind of circularity or closure with the repetition of the image, the camera, and the multiplied spaces. First, the audience sees Kate and Bruno in a concentration camp and, by the end of the film, a similar image is restored with Silvia and her daughter. At the beginning, the audience sees the actors Kate and Bruno in the filmic set, and by the end this depiction is renovated by replacing Silvia's daughter by Kate behind the camera. These displacements/replacements of agents in filmic narration multiply spaces as a means to make memory more accessible. This open-ended depiction annuls closure, suggesting an end-less continuation while demarking the de-regulation of memory narratives.

In sum, *Un muro de silencio* narrates the traumatic events by articulating a proliferation of narratives that aim to engage the spectator. From the production standpoint, the little formal spectatorship of the film (103,501 viewers, according to INCAA) repositions it in the margin; however, it's immense acclaim in intellectual, artistic and human rights circles (and its reverberations), made the film a central piece for discussing post-dictatorial narratives. As such, it claims a site for agency and memory in non-mainstream audio-visual production.

***¡Qué vivan los crotos! (1990)***

Another film involved in similar mnemonic strategies is Ana Polliak´s documentary *¡Qué vivan los crotos!*. Although it is a 35mm film, it gestures to marginal audio-visual production by responding to a trend of self-sufficient auteur-ship present in Argentina in the early 1990's. Like pieces such as Martín Rejtman's *Rapado* (1991) and Esteban Sapir's *Picado fino* (1993), in Polliak's film, the filmmaker functioned as an entrepreneur, a writer/director/producer who was not afraid to dive into independent filmmaking, always looking for alternative means in terms of storytelling, technology, funding and distribution. In the case of *¡Qué vivan los crotos!*, international awards, such as Coral de La Habana and Troia, were vital for its funding. Besides, its non-commercial style and the cross-bred between documentary and fiction, required alternative distribution systems.

The film tells the story of Bepo, a man who left his home in 1930 to become a hobo in order to live in freedom. Polliak uses space fragmentation to tell this story. She includes the suggestions of what lies out-of-frame, inter-disciplinary/inter-media dialogues, poetical enactments, the spectator´s involvement in the narration, and desynchronization between image and sound, disrupting the storytelling.

*¡Qué vivan los crotos!* starts as a traditional documentary, where there is a person being interviewed facing the camera. It is an older man behind an open door. He is explaining his relation to the young hobo. He soon interrupts this narration, addressing

the person behind the camera. He cannot continue.[109] An off-camera voice of a woman asks if he is nervous. He replies that he should have talked differently.[110] The decision of the director to keep this scene in the final cut subverts the seemingly initial documentary intent while reinforcing the idea that these images are real.

What starts as the "behind the scene" of a documentary continues with a continuum of manipulated images (blue filters are predominant) without dialogue, as poetic enactments. It is dark, yet we see an older man on the grass packing a rudimentary sack and later he sits on top of it, facing a wall while giving his back to the camera. Then, it is still dark but the camera concentrates on the only source of light: the window reflected in a tank filled with water. The figure of a young man is reflected as he passes near the tank, walking by, he is deformed in the liquid mirror. Right after, we are in a dimly-lit room. There is a close-up of the window seen from the inside. By the window there is a man and on the other side behind an opaque glass; a ghostly silhouette crosses the window frame. The camera is back outside; the young man grabs the sack and jumps over the wall.

The scene is interrupted by the title, followed by inscription, "A Lucinda Álvarez, desaparecida el 7 de mayo de 1976 y en su nombre, a la memoria." Polliak makes this explicit association with the 1976-1983 dictatorship via a personalized story (the individual with a name) while she opens the hobo narrative using the blurred image of an actor, windows and reflections.

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[109] "No me sale" he says, "no sé, estoy nervioso. ¿tengo que hacerlo de nuevo? Estoy nervioso."

[110] "porque no me gusta lo que dije, lo habría dicho de otra manera, tendría que haber ensayado. Muchos se van a extrañar, que yo no tendría que haber hablado así."

As in *El amor es una mujer gorda*, the homeless man, as a trope, points at the margin. Here the narrative potential of the margin grows exponentially, reaching multiple connotations. The homeless man embodies the impossibility of dialogue, the negation of a totalizing discourse and the potential to move, to be fluid and to change. Via the Lucinda Álvarez inscription, these aspects of the hobo's story illuminate issues of memory in relation to the dictatorship. The story of the homeless man unveils possibilities outside the system of norms. Without the attachments (family, home, job, money) Bepo lacks the characteristics that make him a man. The hobo's personal story points at what takes place within the border of discourse, that which cannot be assimilated by the pervading discursive formations in a particular context.

In the association to the despotic rule, the film also gestures to the system of terror that coexisted in-between the folds of daily life during the dictatorship but which was denied by the dictatorial logic. People could see Bepo, people gave him their left-overs but, as a hobo, no one was able to imagine his perspective. He is denied the human point-of-view. As a marginal being he is dehumanized and he cannot enter narration as man.

Similarly, between 1976 and 1983 and during the transition, society could perceive the vestiges of systematic terror, however, both the dictatorial and the transitional rhetoric erased the vestiges that could not be absorbed by the pervading discourses while its residues could only be understood from a sensationalistic, sadistic, or morbid viewpoint.

Ana Amado has discussed Polliak's film in 1995 in relation to Diamela Eltit's *El padre mío*, considering its narration as consecutive and superimposed images as a

strategy to dissolve any intent of wholeness (1995, 515). Such a fragmentary narrative presents itself as the counterpart of a traditional documentary (where the voiced over narration explains those images). In Polliak's tale, the splintered storytelling of a hobo functions as that rejection of totalizing, absolute and authoritarian narratives (Amado, 1995, 522). In 2009 the scholar has revisited the film in connection to Eltit's piece, viewing it as a gesture of resistance to the system by constantly searching, by embodying an eternal vanishing point (2009, 130). Fluid and self-propelling, the displaced center is communicative and heterogeneous.

*¡Qué vivan los crotos!* invites the spectator to assume an active role in the story, and, by extension, to memory. As the connections are still unclear, the spectator is expected to trace a relationship and to discover dialogues, associations or metaphors between Bepo and the dictatorship. Polliak places the spectator in the margin of storytelling, in between its fragments, to preserve Bepo's voice, as well as the individual voices in relation to the 1976-1983 dictatorship.

Blurred images, reflections, triangulations with actors, and meta-spaces fissure the narrative into a variety of concomitant threads. In-between, Bepo is provided with agency revealing his own story, by countering what the others say about him. The spectator, placed in the void, re-reads against the grain of Bepo's tale, along with what is conveyed by the voiced-over explanation.

The film, ideologically nurtured by both anarchist philosophy and the spirit of the early 20$^{th}$ century class struggles, explores the quarter century between 1930 and 1955 seen from the perspective of Bepo, the "croto," and those who remember him, such as

friends from the past. Bepo's story showcases the struggle for representation and washes away meaning embedded in the traditional documentary genre and the potential of an active audience. *¡Qué vivan los crotos!* questions traditional narrative fabrics, particularly those aiming at educating the audience about a shared past as well as those trying to make sense of what lies in the margin.

Although the testimonies of the past (embodied by the elderly voices of his former friends ) make sense of Bepo, they also erase him. Those perspectives de-marginalize Bepo, ("descrotizándolo") as his "otherness" dissolves in the storytelling. If the spectators close their eyes and just listen to the story being told, all voices melt into a unified expression and the "difference" that makes Bepo the "other" is washed away. This monolithic account de-subjetivizes him, ambushes him, takes away the freedom that he struggled to keep for thirty years: homeless, hopping trains and eating somebody else's left-overs.

Polliak echoes Bepo´s intent to break free from the system. She edits the film to disarm the oral narration, arranging testimonies in a collage-like format, so that the voices of the past coexist with performances (a play) and fictionalizations. Bepo's life is illustrated by an actor playing a silent, young hobo and his now-septuagenarian friends play themselves, as youngsters.

The strategy is to fracture meaning as a means to subvert the documentary. The director uses fragmentation in order to articulate, within the same film, a narrative -which I will call the "main narrative"- and its counterpart. The first one is the monochord orality of the friends' recollections. The counter-version is narrated via interruptions. The

unified discourse articulated as the "main narrative" is subverted by including fissures and interferences that put the flow of the uni-linear, chronological, cause-effect storytelling constantly on hold. The "main narrative" is articulated as those who remember/imagine Bepo describe the past. The counter-narrative resists by departing from the documentary's intent.

The traditional logic of storytelling is subverted with interruptions. The first scene described earlier, where Polliak includes in the final editing off-camera comments and questions, when the older man presents Bepo nervously, fractures the storytelling. These fissures/interruptions subvert the memorial as "documentation" of the past. Besides, Bepo departs from this "main narrative" by referring to himself as "crotito" or "Rubio" (doubling himself as character). He constantly uses the inexistent word "crotear," which ultimately is used for describing the unspeakable. Moreover, Polliak articulates resistance by the inclusion of the fragmentation of space, using doors, windows, the off-camera space suggested by the voices outside the frame, the superimposition of diverse expressions such as low quality images, a theater play within the film, the young fictional Bepo and the old real Bepo concomitantly.

In order to counteract the homogenizing process attempted by the voices of the past, Polliak also destabilizes meaning with this fragmentation. Firstly, she denies all information as to who is being interviewed, and when this takes place. The film does not differentiate what is document from what is fiction. This lack of identification (in the denial of clarifying titles) counters Bepo´s de-subjetivation. Testimonies are deprived of a

name and identity, neglecting the friendly voices of the past. According to Amado, these testimonies lose their function of documentation; specifically, the scholar suggests that when biographical information is omitted, the documenting function stumbles (2009, 129). Deprived of identification, the testimony loses its purpose and its center.

Lastly, we may ask: In what sense does this film relate to the dictatorship? Even though Polliak ends up avoiding any clear reference, leaving the question unanswered, implicitly she proposes an alternative mnemonic exercise throughout the film, one that subverts any documenting function while it reinforces the potential to narrate the post-dictatorial memory in a different way (not chronological, not sequential, not cause-effect). At the end, the director problematizes the mnemonic strategies of those who remember via a traditional narrative (the oral story describing the past) because while these friends expressly act out of love and affection for Bepo, they end up erasing him.

Bepo´s erasure resonates with the early post-dictatorial strategies to deal with the past, in which while narrating the violence under the 1976-1983 dictatorship according the transitional mold, they annulled the very essence of conflict: the social disparities and the dream of a better world. Polliak thus names Bepo/Crotito, like she names Lucinda Álvarez, to whom this film is dedicated and in her name, to memory. Bepo/Crotito can be named as long as his naming is not fixed, so this naming is articulated in numerous ways, according to the multiple expressions to narrate and counter-narrate him. Memory, for Polliak, lies in multiplication and fracture, in the subversion of the just one way (typically, the official one) to narrate memory. In opening this narration to the margin and

to others, in its displacement (Bepo) and its replacement (Lucinda Álvarez), Polliak contests all previous films dealing with the post-dictatorial memory.

## *2.2 The margin in Carri's film of memory*

### *Los rubios (2003)*

Albertina Carri's film assembles a narrative of memory, using the documentary format and taking a subjective stance while conflicting her own self-referentiality. As daughter of "desaparecido" parents during the 1976-1983 Argentine dictatorship, she narrates her loss by including testimonies and documents of her personal experience. Conversely, Carri counters both the typical documentary of memory and her subjective standpoint by embracing unconventional narratives tools such as the dramatization of her situation by an actress; the doubling of her identity by also including herself in the diegesis; the insinuation of production meta-spaces as inter-mediate loci of enunciation; costumes; animations, and the reluctance to identify the testimonies included.

These unconventional options pushed *Los rubios* to the margins of film; a position that limited Carri's access to official funding. During the initial stages of *Los rubios* the Argentine film national institute, INCAA, denied funds claiming that the film lacked documentary rigor. Once awarded a major prize in the fourth edition of a very incipient yet much esteemed international independent film festival in Buenos Aires (BAFICI), the project procured the needed funding.

Althought Carri's film was born in the margin of Argentine cinema, her own legitimacy as daughter of "desaparecido" parents has generated great expectations. The

initial lack of official funding was the result of her own neglect to adopt a stance aligned with the local tradition of political cinema. With time, both the industry and the academic circles have recognized *Los rubios'* importance, particularly in renovating discussions of memory.

What made Carri's renovation possible was specifically its refusal to adopt earlier assumptions. *Los rubios* does not articulate memory in the same way as its predecessors. Carri denies the possibility of narrating the past and reacts to other films that tried to approach the issue ever since the early 1980´s. Carri´s film disengages with previous films of memory in numerous ways. Many of these instances were thoroughly studied by scholars in the last ten years; that is the reason why I will solely concentrate on the strategy of resistance articulated as spatial fragmentation.

As Carri acknowledges during an interview, the film is structured according to three spaces and each space proposes a unique way to relate with: the city is where the documents are analyzed, the neighborhood is where her parents were kidnapped and the countryside is a land of fantasy.[111] In each of these spaces Carri proposes strategies to contest the documents and to open representation to those who are traditionally neglected a voice in memory.

In her self-referential tale, Carri positions herself in the places of the past and removes herself from those spaces as a means to consolidate the memory's capacity to represent and to remain relevant. Even though she goes to the places of the past, she

[111] "Allí estructuré la película y desarrollé tres espacios centrales: la ciudad, que es el lugar donde se llevan los materiales y se analizan, ese escritorio donde ella lee las cartas, mira las fotos, hace los llamados, etcétera; el barrio, que es el espacio donde ocurrió el hecho; y el campo, que es el lugar de la fantasía" (Carri, 2013).

avoids the documents of the past and triangulates meaning rather than presenting meaning directly. The director goes to these places to revise or re-create documents. However, like Polliak, she manipulates the documents of past, countering them. When there are voices of the past, they either lack identification or identification is problematized. Besides, testimonies are mediated, as they are seen through other screens and monitors. Carri also includes director/actor crossings and duplications, de-synchronization of sound and image, inclusion in the frame of monitors mediating the image, the insistence on contemplative exercises to engage in hallucination and hypnotism.

The dissection director/character/narrator, the monitors the director brings into the frame and the black-and-white images of the behind the scene included in the frame vis-à-vis the color images of the "in-front of the camera," articulate an "other space." This alternative space signals to a counter-version of memory that subverts the official narratives of the past. Such a counter-version is made possible not necessarily by other documents, but by opening up the discourse to others. For that purpose, Carri vacates the spaces suggested in the film. The void is what allows others to participate in post-dictatorial narratives.

A variety of audio-visual registers positions Carri within the realm of marginal audio-visual productions. The mixture points out to ways to produce outside the film industry and to the process of producing and editing. As an economic endeavor, the challenges of independent producing are present in *Los rubios* aesthetically. Via the

layering of low budget formats and 35mm, the image acquires differentiated textures, especially highlighted by the use of black and white images (see figure below).

**Figure 14: Los rubios (2003)**

*Los rubios* starts as a film-within-a-film, where an actress expresses that she will play Albertina Carri. Throughout the film, Carri is placed interchangeably in front of the screen or behind the camera within the frame while an actress plays her role, doubling, and thus, multiplying the representation of the self. The alternative spaces permeating the cinematic realm (off camera) call into question the ability of the sign to represent as well as the inaccessibility of the traces of the past. All these strategies facilitate the counter-reading of the documents brought to the mix.

Carri denies the format of traditional political documentary, typically articulated via interviews, archival images and footage, and the clarifying use of video-graph. She –

on the contrary- positions herself within the realm of the experimental narrations of resistance, not the political documentary genre.

The film engages in dialogues with these other texts, by proposing inter-textual reconfigurations. In this inter-textual weaving, the films of memory that preceded *Los rubios* are read subversively, and the artifacts that are not related to post-dictatorial films provide *Los rubios* with an aesthetic heritage. Particularly, *Los rubios* traces its aesthetic affiliations to avant-garde aesthetics of resistance, bringing into the film Jean-Luc Godard, John Waters, Stanislav Wietkiewicz and Roberto Jacoby. For example, *Los rubios* established connections with *Cecil B. Demented* (2000) by John Waters by placing the poster as the background of a shot. (see figure below).


**Figure 15: Los rubios (2003)**

Such inter-disciplinary dialogues articulate a collage-like inter-textual composition delving into the "folds" of its affiliation[112] (Aguilar, *182).*

[112] "los pliegues de la afiliación"

For this purpose, Carri also includes animation, anachronistic sound, multilayered and fragmented storytelling, meta-narratives and costumes (see figure below).

**Figure 16: Los rubios (2003)**

These non-traditional film techniques are used to articulate an alternative sphere within narration. The more marginal formats contest a tradition of post-dictatorial films of memory and the film industry.

The soundtrack of the initial credits uses countryside noises, mainly insects, animals and wind, but the first image is a wheel of a Playmobil farming cart, a figure of a cow (flat), toy horses behind toy fences, a toy house with a closed window, a closed door, and an open window, while different voices shout specifics of the filming process to "Alber" (who we understand is the director). These initial instructions specifically relate to "space" by asking if the section is properly framed[113] and if the camera can get closer[114]. The asynchronous sound highlights a dual *spatialization* as well as an interconnection of these spaces.

[113] "Dejá que la sección está en cuadro"
[114] "Alber, decime si me puedo acercar un poco más ¿entré?".

The insistence on doors and windows manages to create connections between the ludic depiction and the real-voices. When the voice explains how to ride a horse, the relation of the two cinematic spaces, that of the toy farm and that suggested by the dialogues, starts to make sense, so we understand that a film crew is in the countryside. At that particular moment, the dolls start moving, walking. This awkward sudden reaction of an inanimate entity interrupts the flow while evidencing the manipulative animation and editing, as if this were opening a window to the editing room, unfolding yet another layer of "film-within-the-film."

The next scene is a real countryside where several fences cross the green immensity of the Argentine Pampas. The image demarks space, "El campito"[115] is written on the fence. The voice continues with equine specifications. The vistas of the countryside are multiplied and different perspectives of the same space (water, bars, a tree, a fence, barbed wire, a dirt road) are brought together in imperfect repetitions, similar-yet-different.

Then there is an image of the city traffic taken from above: all vehicles are respecting the lines of three lanes, when suddenly a red car passes from the left to the center lane, taking the place of a huge white truck or bus. The car´s sudden movement is another interruption of the logical, uni-linear, chronological, progressive, evolution traffic, as a metaphor of the story. A woman's mouth is reading aloud a book on Isidro

[115] Beatriz Sarlo doubts if the sign is ironic or a parallelism between "el campo" de la niñez and the concentration camp where her parents spend the time between kidnapping and death (Sarlo, Beatrix. *Tiempo pasado. Cultura de la memoria y giro subjetivo*. *Una discusión*. 2005. 148).

Velazquez[116] and on her back there is a balcony fully covered by barbed wire *(*see figure below).


**Figure 17: Los rubios (2003)**

The extreme close-up of a mouth against a permeable division, and the voice of this woman in conversation with the random sounds coming from the street, intertwines urban/geographic and the cinematic cartography.

A young man and a young woman are walking down the street of a poorer neighborhood; there is a visual abundance of barred windows, fences and wooden blinds. These two people (one of them is Carri herself) start talking to a neighbor, who is inside the house. They are having this conversation behind an open door while the couple remains on the street, on the other side of the fence. The vistas of the neighborhood are again multiplied to the soundtrack of the film crew.

Next, animated 3D titles announce the disappearance of Carri´s parents, "On february 24 1977," "ana maria caruso and alberto carri," "were kidnapped," "that same year killed," "they had three daughters andrea, paula and albertina."[117]

[116] *Isidro Velazquez. Formas pre-revolucionarias de la violencia* (1968), a text written by the filmmaker´s father, the revolutionary intellectual, Roberto Carri.

Subsequently, the actress Analía Couceiro presents herself explaining that her role in the film is to play Albertina Carri. Couseiro is filmed from a vehicle in motion as she is walking on the side of the dirt road in the countryside. This image (of Albertina-actor) is repeated with minimal variations nineteen times, one after the other. Again, the fold fosters multiplied spaces and draws penetrable margins which seem to make possible the inter-connection of varied "vistas" (perspectives).

Regarding the strategy to subvert the documentary genre, Carri puts into question the testimonies from the past. All conversations with the former neighbors and the later recollections of her parents' *compañeros* are mediated, permeated by fissures in the form of fences, windows, monitors and screens. Moreover, the only non-mediated dialogue recalling the past in the first part of the film, which uses synchronic image and sound, is a conversation between the film crew and a former neighbor of the Carri family. In a nonsensical speech of confusing memories, the neighbor not only contradicts herself, continuously invalidating everything that is being said, but she also seems to make false testimony in her contradictions. This verbal mis-interaction delegitimizes the interview of a witness of the past. The traces of the past appear in-between babble and silence, in an alternative space within the frame, in between abundant spatial barriers of the composition (fences, barbed wire and bars).

The 3D animated plaque produces an elliptical motion. The text explaining the dramatic fate of the Carri family is inscribed exclusively in lower-case letters, including the proper names; it has almost no punctuation marks, with the exception of a comma

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[117] "el 24 de febrero de 1977", "ana maria caruso y alberto carri fueron secuestrados" "ese mismo año asesinados" ¨tuvieron tres hijas andrea, paula y albertina."

between “andrea” and “paula.” In addition, in these titles the director places the events in an incorrect chronological order and the “desapariciones” (“el 24 de febrero de 1977”, “ana maria caruso y alberto carri fueron secuestrados” “ese mismo año asesinados”) seem to have taken place before the birth of their daughters (“tuvieron tres hijas andrea, paula y albertina”).

The soundtrack of these titles is that of wind, which anticipates the highly acclaimed documentary of memory inspired in Howard Zinn's *People's History of the United States, Profit motive and the whispering wind*[118] (John Gianvito, 2007) –also all in lower case letters. Following the temporal, de-synchronizated titles to the sound of wind, the multiple images of Couceiro (Albertina-actress) by the dirt road nineteen times, suggest that memory should not be articulated according to the uni-linear, chronological, time and cause-effect formats of traditional storytelling. In contrast, it should open a proliferation of narratives. Like Gianvito’s film, the idea of movement in the empty space is made evident by the sound that accompanies the elliptically dancing titles: wind, recalling the opening images of the pampas from different angles; as a contemplative exercise of narrating memory in fluid voids.

By end of the film the camera makes a filmic exercise, where Albertina-actress, practices a section to shoot under the title, “Entrevista Vaquita de San Antonio.” She discusses options with Albertina-director, who is seen behind the camera. The clapperboard states that this is the second take of “Entrevista Vaquita de San Antonio. Toma 2”, evidencing the repetition. Albertina -director, looking at the action through the

[118] Gianvito opted for using lower case letter in the title *Profit motive and the whispering wind.*

camera utters "Buenísimo. Corte." Albertina-actress repeats the script. This final exercise of repeating, fracturing and duplicating, again, puts in motion the notion of a memory piece produced out of contingent fragments which come together in an empty space, emerging in-between the multiplicity of screens brought together. As a post-dictatorial film, *Los rubios* fosters representation in memory, especially by avoiding a cohesive version. Representation, thus, takes place where different attempts occur, in the displacement of the represented and in securing a space for the (still), the un-represented.

Beatriz Sarlo contends that, due to her own subjectivity, Carri's story fails to represent. The scholar claims that her "daughter" positioning within the narrative overshadows her parents' story, explaining this as lack of interest, indifference and – even- hostility (2006, 147). This interpretation is what justifies Carri's departure from conventional aesthetics of memory and, specifically, her choices to counter-read the testimonial components (not according to the tradition of political film). From Sarlo's perspective, *Los rubios* is exclusively interested in Carri's own life, concerned solely with her own loss.

I disagree with with Sarlo in this matter. I believe that Carri focuses on her own case specifically to displace herself, and this displacement has the effect of emptying the locus of enunciation. Although I agree with Sarlo that the detachment is a gesture of separation, I cannot accept this being a sign of hostility (2006, 150). On the contrary, I contend that this is Carri's intent to open the narrative of memory to others. The filmmaker's double representation is not the affirmation of her own identity but its blurring, its imperfect repetition. In disagreement with Sarlo, I believe that Carri's intra-

diegetical directions to the actress are not aimed at sculpting Carri's identity into *Los rubios,* but the hope to expose the manipulations in storytelling of memory; particularly, manipulations in film (documentary film, in this particular case).

Moreover, I do not believe that *Los rubios* is a failed exploration of memory. Quite the opposite, the film exhibits the mechanics of memory very successfully. This is achieved by gesturing to the impossibility of the one story to encompass it all, by alluding to the fragmentary nature of the recall, in dissimilar repetitions and by posing a narrative that is suitable to change, a narrative that can also mutate.

The images woven into Carri´s inter-textual fabric, most of them marginal (in formats such as low resolution video, defamiliarizes identities by the lack of identification and by the use of costumes, the illustration of events via toy animations and pure experimentation), complement and confront each other. Carri accumulates images in an alternative space. The purpose of this hybrid is to denounce the "one story suits all" of transitional discourse as well as the washing away of the mainstream rhetoric of the transition. The strategy is to mark the space each of these images inhabits, and to empty this space, making it available to the representation of what has not yet been represented.

Lastly, the family replacement with the artistic affiliation is a confirmation of this displacement. In wigs, walking to the future, seen from behind, to the sound-track of Charly García's song *Influencia* this communion not only opens up narration to those who are traditionally delegitimized to narrate memory, but it suggest an inter-textual fabric for memory. As Juan Pablo Cremonte states, García's version of Todd Rungren's homonymous song invites remembrances, quotes, thoughts, and other resources (239). In

Carri's film, this fabric includes a wide array of accumulated narratives. In their proliferation, they neglect the uniqueness of the legitimized discourse, including those that may come from any social actor claiming the one version for all.

Carri's placement/displacement and inter-textual accumulations carve a void, an empty locus to narrate the loss. Vacated of the specificities of the "one story," this narrative of memory is fluid and ever-changing, always apt to challenge the status quo. As a film of memory of "desaparecido" parents during the 1976-1983 dictatorship, *Los rubios* is not "an example of absolute subjectivity" [119](Sarlo, 2006, 153). In contrast, its creativity, sharpness and generosity are what makes Carri´s narrative of memory so exceptional.

**Los rubios: The project**

Carri supplements the 2003 film with an almost homonymous book in 2007. The book goes back to the film as it seems to complete it by adding those aspects left out of the final cinematic version. It appears to complement the voice of the father with the suggestions of the mother (Moreno). However, it also goes beyond the Carris.

The book uses a scrapbook style to suggest the multiplication of narratives woven into a text and a non-chronological order. Fragmentary and full of windows, the construction in-abyme offers a continuum outside of film, allowing *Los rubios* to leap out of the film strip and paper, into an inter-media fabric. This interlacing materializes a fragmentary and non-linear continuation, a constant echo, and an imperfect repetition.

[119] "El film de Carri es un ejemplo casi demasiado pleno de la fuerte subjetividad (…)" (Sarlo, Beatriz. *Tiempo pasado: cultura de la memoria y giro subjetivo. Una discusión*. 153)

The book returns to the film and expands the film. The film, re-read from the perspective of the book, stretches outside the filmic medium, into a multi/inter-media framework of resistance that also goes beyond the memory of the 1976-1983 dictatorship. As a rhizome, these reverberations suggest a continuum that is non-chronological, non-linear, non-cause-effect. Also as a rhizome, this projects reaches out to a genesis of resistance, making memory unfix and mutant.

## *Chapter 3: Fragmentation as aesthetics of resistance: The genesis*

Using wooden boards, measuring approximately 150 x 200 cm and covered with black cloth, Warburg arranged and rearranged, in a lengthy combinatory process of addition and subtraction, black and white photographs of art-historical and cosmographical images.
Christopher D. Johnson about *Mnemosyne Atlas* (Abby Warburg, 1924-1929)

*Los rubios*, both film and print text, must be understood as a whole. Complimentary, as desynchronized echoes, the hybrid audio-visual presented in the introduction and explored in chapter 2 (*Los rubios)* and the amending print text (*Los rubio: cartografía de una película)* discussed in chapter 1 of this dissertation acquire a life of their own in numberless reverberations. Combined, they constitute a fluid and timeless audio-visual fabric of memory and, as such, the project extends beyond all limits: the duration, its reach (the access to its audiences) as well as boundaries of discipline and genre.

The *Los rubios* project has been nurtured by two sources of sounds and images. On one hand, the film was a reaction to officially supported narratives during the transition and the politics of oblivion of the early 1990's. The later book was a confirmation that memory had to subvert the legal discourse by developing mixed-media narratives that countered the chronological cause-effect logic and aesthetics that reached beyond the materiality of the document. These would activate memory and make representation in memory available to a wider society. On the other hand, *Los rubios* was nurtured by a variety of subversive counter-narratives which emerged and evolved in the margins of cultural production since the inception of amateur/independent audio-visuals. I relate this marginal production to avant-garde aesthetic foundation which, throughout the 20th century, had continuously articulated counter-narratives resisting the homogenizing discourses of mass media.

Thus far, I have focused on the textual fabric that developed as a consequence of state terror in the aftermath of the 1976-1983 dictatorship in Argentina. I have contended that the aesthetic roots of the post-dictatorial project *Los rubios* lay outside of mainstream film. I have analyzed the narratives present in visual and performance expressions of the transition and Carri's print text, which I read as the confirmation of the aesthetics embraced by the audio-visual project.

Then, I have transitioned to non-mainstream films produced between the late 1980's and the early 1990's, vis-a-vis the film *Los rubios*, whose aesthetics counter the official discourses of the transition. I specifically concentrated on the strategy of

resistance present in three films, as they articulate spatial fragmentation. This strategy dismantles the clear chronological cause-effect discourse based on the legal rhetoric of the transition while allowing the narratives of memory to be more representative.

In all the pieces studied so far, there is a repetitive strategy. The marginal artifacts challenge mainstream transitional discourse by disrupting the storytelling, fragmenting it into a less univocal, cause-effect, chronologic narrative and, in this fragmentation, the empty spaces in-between embody new loci of enunciation. In these post-dictatorial artifacts, counter-narratives contradict the official versions embedded in mainstream films of the transition.

The "one" source of memory (official narrative) use data, archives, documents, and emotionally charged educational dramas to shape this filmic official version. As a reaction, the counter-narratives challenge the rhetoric of the transition where society is depicted as an innocent, non-agent, where the dynamics of the "two-devil" discourse disarmed any possibility to present gray areas, new perspectives or nuanced approximations to the past. These strategies make memory more eclectic and accessible. In these counter-narratives, the spectator is invited to play an active role and, in so doing, all the "others" are invited to participate in narratives of memory.

The current chapter places *Los rubios* within a broader tradition of resistance. As mentioned before, Gonzalo Aguilar has traced the film's legacy back to lead international cinematic figures such as Jean Luc Goddard and Chris Marker. I contend that *Los rubios*

goes back to a wide array of audio-visual, avant-garde production born within the framework of local modern conflicts.

As soon as technology made available independent/amateur/ experimental formats, counter-versions proliferated. These contested the rhetoric of mainstream productions. As a consequence of both formal experimentation and media limitations, these marginal pieces revealed new possibilities of inscription and re-inscription, countering homogenizing discourses of modernity. Therefore, Carri's project of memory is studied here as part of a constellation of narratives of resistance born in the margins of state-supported cinematic productions.

Carri's subversive mold has its origins earlier in the century, particularly in the context of avant-garde practices, the counter-tradition of resistance-par-excellence. *Los rubios* gestures not only to emblematic international cinematographers, but also embraces avant-garde reactionary and visionary aesthetics. I argue that the film adopts an artistic style engendered in local conflicts, such as class struggles and the negotiation of agency for both artists and the spectator/audience.

This chapter outlines a constellation of subversive pieces born outside of state-funded sounds and images which, I contend, can be read as *Los rubios*' predecessors. Specifically, these aesthetics of rupture and fragmentation are studied in a selection including Horacio Coppola's short film *Así nació el Obelisco* (1936), David Kohon´s short film *Buenos Aires (*1958), Grete Stern´s photo-montages *Sueños de*

*Inhibiciones/Botella de Mar* (1950/1967) and Narcisa Hirsch´s experimental film *Taller* (1975).

In relation to *Los rubios*, I study Albertina Carri's own aesthetic legacy connected to avant-garde aesthetics. Precisely, I explore *Barbie también puede estar triste* (2001) and *Aurora* (2001) as the antecedents of *Los rubios*. *Restos* (2010) is studied as its reverberation. *Los rubios,* thus, embraces Carri's own legacy and repercussions where fragmentary aesthetics are used to resist the commodification of audio-visual production and to continue exploring resistance in memory during the turn of the millennium.

### *3.1 The Consolidation of Mass Media: Audio-visual discourses and counter-discourses*

Born as a reaction to positivist thought in relation to progress, the avant-garde has articulated narratives of resistance since the early 20th century. These expressions were nurtured by the same progress they denounced, as avant-garde artifacts relied on the technical advancements of capitalism, used the vestiges of consumer society and, at times, focused exclusively on the margins of that same society. The Avant-garde used the residue of consumer society to resist narratives of progress while highlighting the essential but unwanted by-products: the margins of progress.

As a mainstream medium, film shaped its syntax after the written text. However, the nature of the moving images allowed diverging fragments to accumulate simultaneously. This served both as confirmation of progress and its subversion. While the audio-visual productions closer to mainstream cultural industries consolidated a cinematic syntax rooted in the written text, the marginal audio-visual production focused

on experimenting and conflicting the increasingly consolidated syntax of mainstream cinema.

In general, the moving image has served as a framework of simultaneity, like collage or other types of montages. Specifically, until sound technology in the 1930's, film has relied on the written word to draw relations of causality and progression. In other words, the written text has helped the initial relations of causality, interweaving the images, following the linear, chronological evolution embedded in the syntax of occidental, left-to-right, top-down, sequential, one-to-crowd and cause-effect texts.

In terms of its historical evolution, with the outbreak Word War I, there was a dramatic shift in the dynamics of mainstream film industries. Specifically, due to the lack of business with Europe resulting from the war, the US expanded to the south, to Latin America (López 158). [120] This reinforced the rhetoric of progress from the perspective of global dynamics. Whereas early films mostly inscribed the dreams of modernity from a local perspective, after the war international players influenced cinematic narratives.

Besides, with the arrival of sound technology in the 1930's, the film industry in peripheral countries needed major investments to adapt to the "talkies." Argentina's Sonofilm and Lumiton were specifically created to make sound films, while many of the independent theatres surrendered to the influence of the international companies. Across

[120] López has explored the role of early film in negotiated precisely the conflicts generated by the dilemmas Latin American modernity. Specifically, López has articulated the role of early film in tracing the aesthetics that would mark the development and reception of later mass media. (López, Ana M., 2000).

Latin America, the 1930's films evolved around music, from the *chanchadas* in Brazil to the *rancheras* and *rumberas* in Mexico, and the *tango* films in Argentina (Tomkins, 6).

The 1920's and 1930's in Argentina brought together the spread of consumer culture (advertising, the emergence of popular tabloid and the consolidation of cinema and radio) and internal migrations (from provinces to the center in marginal "barrios"). A new sense of nation-building relied exclusively in mass media and melodrama. Combining their efforts, film, radio and media publications such as *Radiolandia (*founded by Julio Kron, the distinguished publisher of sheet music*)* and *Antena* (owned by Jaime Yankelevich and created to advertise the programs of Radio Belgrano) appealed jointly to the new urban mass (Karush, 138). Mainstream films created its melodramatic plots to the sound of popular music.

Contrarily, the new audio-visual technologies also made possible the multiplication and diversification of independent voices in film. Thanks to cheaper and lighter cameras (narrow gauge), audio-visual production was brought to the realm of the amateur filmmaker. Much of the amateur production aligned with the avant-garde in that they experimented with the moving image language and its syntax while disregarding any restrain in terms of form, production or exhibition. The first cine-club was co-founded by Horacio Coppola in 1929 in Buenos Aires, which imported, exhibited and gave lectures about avant-garde/experimental films (Martín F. Peña, 59).

Due to the inter-war international context, Argentina also received regional and transatlantic migrations in the 1920's and 1930's. As the result of anti-communist, anti-

anarchic, Francoist, fascist and anti-Semitic persecutions, many figures in relation to non-conservative politics and avant-garde art, escaped their environments. In this period, artists such as Bauhaus photographer Grete Stern moved to Argentina.[121] Many of these artists found a space in the *Revista Sur* and *Asociación Amigos del Arte*[122] (Buenos Aires, 1924-1942).

### *3.2 Resisting Mass Circulation: Pieces of memory echo Avant-garde experimentation*

The counter-narratives of memory, studied in Chapters 1 and 2, make an explicit attempt to depart from consolidated audio-visual aesthetics and disciplines. This rejection of formal conventions is used as an instrument to counter the official discourses of the transition. I contend that this subversive mold follows a tradition of local avant-garde experimentation.

In the previous chapters, fragmentary storytelling and the "void" in between function as narrative strategies to open representation to others. This empty space emerging between fragments resists traditional modes of storytelling while displacing the univocal voice suggested by the transitional narratives.

Berni's selected paintings fragment space in order to multiply the schemes of representation. *Besos brujos* proposes a new spatial configuration, intertwining interior and exterior spaces. *El Siluetazo*'s strategy is to emulate empty spaces, using the trope of

[121] After a brief stay in England, escaping nazi Germany, Stern travelled to Buenos Aires with her Argentine husband, Horacio Coppola, and resided in Argentina her entire life.
[122] Artists such as Federico García Lorca and David Alfaro Siqueiros visited Buenos Aires, invited by Asociación Amigos del Arte.

the silhouette as a connecting tissue not only between the private and public but also the personal and the collective. In a collage style, Romero's "revista-subte" *Informe salvaje* intertwines vestiges of violence, a civic act, and hand-made decorative vignettes. The book *Los rubios: cartografia de una pelicula* dismantles the chronological cause-effect narrative by highlighting the fragmentary nature of memory and the possibility of new reconfigurations. In *El amor es una mujer gorda* the traditional narrative continuum is replaced by configurations where empty in-between spaces emerge from the fractured whole. *Un muro de silencio* proposes a strategy of narrative fragmentation via non-traditional storytelling such as slow motion, color filters, the insistence on reflections, meta-spaces, and black screens. In *¡Qué vivan los crotos!* Polliak includes out-of-frame images, inter-disciplinary/inter-media poetical enactments and desynchronization. Via the "void," *Los rubios* signals to counter-versions of memory that subvert the official narratives of the past.

In terms of disciplinary restrictions, the pieces of memory studied in Chapters 1 and 2 place themselves in the margins of cultural production. The alternative positioning destabilizes the power relations of established cultural practices via the dismissal of both institutionalized categories, according to artistic and cultural disciplines, as well as the separation between producer/artists and public. The reluctance to adapt to disciplinary boundaries also cancels limitations resulting from traditional funding sources. Thus, the marginal positioning dismantles institutional and market limitations. As such, these artifacts set free from rhetorical conditionings and the restrictions of mass circulation.

Placed in the verge of cultural practices, these pieces are autonomous, self-determining and unrestricted.

Specifically, Berni highlights the dangers of deactivated meaning when images are mass-circulated. For that purpose, he shifts from an explicit depiction of violence in the form of a forensic archive, such as in the pastiche *La Torturada* (1976), to a proliferation of paintings that make available alternative positionings. Romero's "revista-subte" *Informe salvaje* also conflicts the vestiges of violence by combining them with creative processes, like hand-made decorative vignettes as a way to gesture to an impossible whole. Similarly, the scrap-book style, *Los rubios: cartografia de una pelicula,* brings together fragments of the past that seem to conflict the possibility of presentation.

The films *El amor es una mujer gorda, Un muro de silencio, ¡Qué vivan los crotos!,* and *Los rubios* in different ways place themselves in the margin of the industry. They all highlight the importance of an artistic production that is independent of the limitations of official funding and the rules mass produced and circulated images. All of them were funded via non-traditional sources, particularly festivals. *Un muro de silencio* benefitted form an alternative and artisanal way of distribution and exhibition.

Due to their aesthetics, all of these films align themselves with experimental audio-visuals. Particularly, *El amor es una mujer gorda* explores black and white film and *Los rubios* and *¡Qué vivan los crotos!* fuse documentary and fiction.

In all these pieces, the audience is invited to play an active role in narration. Specificaly, *Besos brujos* and *El Siluetazo* hyperbolize the connections between artists and audience.

These post-dictatorial marginal aesthetics and positionings have been nurtured by a local avant-garde tradition of resistance which aimed at countering the narratives of progress. For that purpose, Chapter 3 delves into avant-garde pieces that reveal against the restrictions put forward by institutionalized disciplinary audio-visual practices. The artifacts studied in this chapter claim for an autonomous voice for the artists as well as resists the erasure of the working mass, the inevitable yet undesirable by-product of progress. Such counter-versions of progress helped shaped the voices of resistance emerging in relation to the 1976-1983 dictatorship, as a reaction to the transitional discourses of memory funded by the State.

In order to circumvent disciplinary restrictions, the "void" is studied within the realm of collage, as a pre-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary framework suitable to explore diverse audio-visual production.

### *3.3 The Avant-garde*

Although the Latin American avant-garde shared some aspects with the global avant-garde, it had specificities rooted in power dynamics. In Latin America the avant-garde embraced those elements that were not assimilated by the official culture. As contended by Gwen Kirkpatrick, its subversive aesthetics opened representation to those traditionally unrepresented by mainstream narratives. The use of the fragment,

juxtaposition, pastiche and the renunciation of the sequential narratives, according to Kirkpatrick, contributed to the interjection of popular speech or representation of the working class without incorporation into realist narratives (187).

Various forms of audio-visual expressions emerged in the Argentine art scene throughout the 20th century and, as contended by Pablo Marín, experimental cinema has best taken advantage of its limitations, as it confronted the inertia of pre-established production conditions, it crafted creative methods of resistance and it developed contrasting aesthetics (13). However, the audio-visual narratives studied here are not restricted to the limitations of film, its industry, and the specificities of the filmic medium. On the contrary, audio-visual artifacts, visual art, moving image and pre-moving image explorations are combined in order to delve into the syntax of fragmentation. This mix contests disciplinary constraints and engages in experimentation to reveal the workings of such an inter-disciplinary framework of resistance.

In relation to distribution/reception/exhibition, most of avant-garde production reconfigured the relationship with the audience. As René Jara suggested, in South America the avant-garde was an inscription of rupture that sharpened the senses and its productivity depended on the figure of the accomplice-reader (the spectator, in our analysis) who is expected to have an active role in articulating the logic of the avant-garde text. This avant-garde text is seen as a blank space, a space of transformation and change[123] (53). The void, therefore, embodies a space of rupture, an opportunity to

[123] "(…) en la América del Sur (la vanguardia) – fue una inscripción ruptural, potenciadora de sentidos, que ceñía en la figura del lector, del cómplice, la productividad del texto. Texto que se definía como

narrate and an invitation to the reader/audience to play an active role. The empty space (página en blanco) has incalculable potential to represent.

Regarding its exhibition/distribution, avant-garde audio-visual experimentations resisted mass communication. The "one-to-multitude" interaction is replaced by an individual stance. In the marginal pieces studied here, even the machine for recording and reproducing neglects commercial exhibition/distribution. Particularly, in formats such as Super 8 film, where copies cannot be made, it is the very medium that denies its mass propagation (Sayago).

Subversive audio-visual production diversified its form in order to develop its own aesthetics. The medium embraced new technology and/or adopted pre-disciplinary or inter-disciplinary frameworks. As a continuum of resistance to progress and to the univocal voice of the productions made within the industry, non-mainstream audiovisual production shifted its form over a century.

Avant-garde local production in Argentina aimed at countering the rhetoric of the modern nation and the lack of agency experienced by both artists and publics, in the realm of mass circulated culture. In order to present a framework flexible enough to study a wide array of audio-visual expressions, I study audio-visuals as part of the broader concept of collage, a category functioning as a liminal space signaling to pre-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary audio-visual aesthetic terrains (Harding, 67).

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espacio, como página en blanco, en primer lugar, lugar de transformación y de cambio del mundo, que hacía tábula rasa de la escritura platónia que había triunfado hasta entonces" (Jara, René. *Reflexiones sobre el concepto de vanguardia*, 53).

### 3.4 Fragments and the void: collage, the fragmented aesthetics of the avant-garde

Pre-film animation devices and collage aesthetics made available for the first time an accumulation of concomitant images in one text. If the trompe- l'oeil aimed at making sense of disparate images according to the traditional reasoning, collage as an avant-garde practice aimed at breaking free from the logics of representation. Taking Marjorie Perloff´s ideas, collage calls into question the representation of the sign, the stability of the genre, the individual medium and the barrier between artist and audience (xviii). Collage facilitates a type of discourse that allows new modes of representation that break free from chronological, cause-effect evolution (Perloff, 57).[124] Thus, collage presupposes a very powerful rhetorical device to explore representation, hybrid inter-media explorations and shifting relationships in relation to authorship, allowing the audience to become an active participant in narration. As such, collage embodies many forms of fragmentation, loss and desire that have no place in conventional narratives.

Although the very notion of collage resonates with the verb in French "coller" *["to paste"]*, Max Ernst has specifically pointed out in 1936 that collage is the exercise of bringing together, of being active as narrator and spectator. Pieces might not be necessarily glued together in a collage because its fragments are not as vital as the space that brings them together. This recalls the concept of *papier épingles* (pinned papers), a type of composition used initially by Pablo Picasso in early pieces like *Bar Table with*

[124] Perloff asserts "How can traditional discourse with its complete sentences –the "prison of the Latin period"—convey this new language of telephones, phonographs, airplanes, the cinema, the great newspaper, which Marinetti calls "the synthesis of a day the world's life" (Perloff, 57). It is vital to revise this quote from the peripheral perspective.

*Guitar* (1913), where superimposed pinned papers of diverse shapes, colors and chalk drawings allude to the  elements addressed in the title (see figure below).

**Figure 18: Bar Table with Guitar (Pablo Picasso, 1913)**

Collage can, therefore, stress the idea of a mutant empty space emerging in contingent folds produced by arrangements and re-arrangements. The collage is not the final composition; on the contrary, it is multiple versions made possible by the impermanence of the fragments brought together. The possible alterations to the composition enable a proliferation of narratives in the vacant space (void).

Picasso's collage used pins and chalk to fasten its pieces together. The lack of glue made the collage unstable and vulnerable. What has been brought together in *Bar Table with Guitar* is ephemeral, not only the pins –which, if removed, imply the collapse of the composition- but also the chalk drawing; its transient nature is emphasized by its vulnerability to water or friction.  According to Brandon Taylor, Picasso´s choice of pinning rather than pasting paper lends, "an air of provisionality to the work, while absence of glue suggests efficiency and lightness" (26). Secondly, the "provisionality" is extremely powerful because the text can be both dynamic and ephemeral.

After Picasso´s piece, glue-less collages continued developing in different versions. Stenciling, over-painting, or Max Ernst´s frottage,[125] raised the interest of avant-garde artists since 1921. In 1938 André Breton created a photomontage illustrating the concept of automatic writing. It is a photographic self-depiction where he, in the center of the composition, gazes at the camera while holding a microscope. There is a woman behind him, also in the middle of the composition. She is also staring at a camera but she is seen through the grid of a barred window (see figure below).

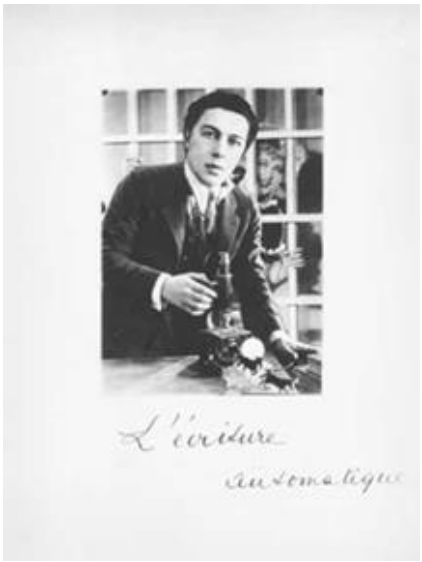

**Figure 19: Automatic Writing (André Breton, 1938)**

Although the photomontage's composition does not evidence the different photographs brought together, the inclusion of a division separating the woman and Breton fractures

[125] The pictorial equivalent of automatic writing, the procedure of frottage was discovered by Max Ernst in 1925 in the course of a specific incident. When he was adjusting the rickety floor at an inn where he was staying in Brittany, he decided to take an impression of the wood by rubbing black lead over a piece of paper laid on the floorboards. He then extended this procedure to other textures and published his first collection of frottages, *Histoire naturelle*, in 1926. He continued these experiments with oil painting. *Glosary of Surrealism*. Educational Dosier. Center Pompidou.

the whole into its fragments. Diverse images within the frame are demarcated and fragmented by the grid of the barred window as an in-between empty space.

This photographic collage includes multiplied windows by the synchronous layering embedded within the photograph. As suggested by Rosalind Krauss, this layering is also an instance of construction-en-abyme (17). The microscope suggests a distorting-yet-clarifying lens, which, apart from duplicating images, addresses the manipulative nature of vision and the subversive potential of challenging scales.

In line with avant-garde thought, the strategy of the in-between spaces within narration of the collage is to counter the promise of modernity, as it reveals fissures (its margins) by carving a void in the narration. The multiplicity of vistas devours cause-effect, chronological, progressive evolution.

In its potential to bring together the diverse, to displace and replace, the empty space is another strategy to dismantle narrative, temporal and cause-effect hierarchies. As fragments, the multiple images coexisting in the photomontage call attention to the multiple compositions that can surface in an audio-visual text. The photomontage contests the fixity of the traditional photographic image. Following avant-garde approaches to mechanically-reproduced images, photography is used against the grain, as it subverts the increasingly pervasive claim of truth of the photographic image rooted in photo journalism.

In this line, narratives like George Bataille's *Documents* (1929-1930) presented contradictions and incongruence as strategies to counter the progress of modernity. Intending to express a rigorous will to insubordination (Bataille in Ades and Baker, 11), Bataille's publication is a collage composed by "documents," including reproductions of objects, books and manuscripts from the Bibliothèque Nationale de France.[126]

The unorthodox reproduction of archives created mysterious or bizarre images. Close-ups, confusing scales, unclear illustrations and uncanny echoes created a dialogue of unrelated ideas [127](in Ades and baker 36) (see figure below).

**Figure 20: Papier colant et mouches (Boiffard, 1930)**

Like in the image above, the disturbance of images used irreverence as a tool to question representation. This irreverence dismantled cause-effect relations, carving voids in between the images brought into a nonsensical exchange.

[126] Bataille worked as a librarian there.

[127] "[…]in close-ups, at confusing scales, illustrations turn up uninvited to the wrong places, images act as spanners in the smooth workings of earnest, determined arguments, and echo uncannily in the spaces between unrelated ideas."

*Documents* also engaged in inter-textual enterprises with other prestigious magazines in order to destabilize their perspectives. Frequently Bataille succeeded in subverting the spirit of the traditional article [128](Ades and Baker, 14).

Breton and Bataille use fragmentation to counter the syntax of mass images. The former highlights the fragments brought together in the photomontage and the manipulative nature of the apparatuses of vision in order to counter the photographic image. The latter contests the textual fabric by dismantling the logic among images and other texts put in dialogue. The disruption of the traditional logic intersects the uni-linear flow and the pact of truth between photojournalism and the reader/public. Fragments vacate space so that new configurations can take their place.

### *3.5 Argentina´s Audio-visual resistance 1930's-1975*

In Argentina the 1920´s witnessed the proliferation of film as a popular medium, and during that decade, the number of theaters doubled. Until the 1930´s, most of the circulation of moving images in the country was aligned with the official discourses, in particular with the production of propagandistic/advertising newsreels. Between 1920 and 1930, Cinematografía Valle, Cinematografía Glucksman and Arata Pardo produced hundreds of documentaries for official use. According to Irene Marrone, these films shaped the nation by establishing identity affinities, particularly, in relation to consumption trends and labor and production expectations (21).

[128] *Documents* echoed topics chosen by magazines like, for example, *Cahier d' Arts*, rereading them "a contrapelo" *[against the grain]*, as conceived by Latin American avant-garde.

The 1930´s saw the birth of sound-film technology, the Golden Era of mainstream Argentine cinema and the emergence of amateur film. The investment in sound technology concentrated the industry in fewer hands. International companies absorbed local firms that were unable to adapt to the new technology. Within this context an audio-visual resistance emerged, made possible as the result of new technology and as a reaction to mainstream film. Available around the mid-1920´s, the mass-produced 35mm film camera Leica and the Leitz projector facilitated the proliferation of independent film aficionados.

### *3.5a Countering Documentation Processes via the Subversive Lens*

Coppola and Kohon filmed two documentaries of Buenos Aires that contested the rhetoric of modern progress. Coppola made his short film while producing the officially commissioned images for the photo-book *Buenos Aires, 1936: Visión fotográfica*. Kohon completed his own project that started as an official initiative to eradicate slums but, as the official funding was never procured, Kohon's piece continued using less expensive film formats.

Both artists functioned within the mindset of the local avant-garde. As Fernando Rosenberg asserts, Latin American Avant-gardes made an effort to dismantle the epistemological position that the modern/colonial order assigned them. This peripheral modernity played particular attentiveness to spatial issues (18). There is a longing for the primitive (primal) in avant-garde production seen from the perspective of the central powers that is contested by peripheral modernities. In Argentina, like in Latin America in

general, the marginalized-colonized coexisted with the modern. Margin and center co-occur. The border inhabits the residual sphere of the modern city. This peripheral perspective explains why these two directors resist the rhetoric of progress by forcing new spaces within the frame.

***Así nació el Obelisco (1936)***

Horacio Coppola started exploring the mechanical image in the 1920´s. In 1929 he co-founded the first film club in Buenos Aires and throughout 1930´s, during and after his experience in Europe, he produced filmic and photographic pieces, interchangeably.

Coppola started his photographic production in 1931, initially influenced by his brother, but later profoundly affected by his experience in Germany, as part of the Bauhaus.[129] After *Sur* magazine published some of his images of Buenos Aires in 1931, in 1935 he was commissioned by the Buenos Aires Government to illustrate the book *Buenos Aires, 1936: Visión fotográfica*. This role legitimized him as the official photographer of the metropolis in the context of fifth centenary of the first foundation of Buenos Aires.

The director's amateur films[130] reveal a shift in style, beginning with the subjective surrealist narrative of *Traum* (1933) in association with Walter Auerbach, to

[129] Coppola´s modern style has made him the first modern photographer in Argentina.

[130] *Traum* (1933), *Un quai de la Seine* (1934), and *A Sunday in Hampstead Heath* (1935) were conceived and produced in Europe. *Así nació el Obelisco* (1936) was the only cinematic production by Coppola, filmed in Argentina.

the more documentary explorations *Un quai de la Seine* (1934), *A Sunday in Hampstead Heath* (1935) and *Así nació el Obelisco* (1936). This latter piece is most interesting within the context of this thesis, as it embodies Coppola´s independent exploration of the Argentine metropolis, which complements and conflicts with his officially-commissioned photographic depiction of the city.

*Así nació el Obelisco* (1936) is an amateur film aspiring to counter-narrate the modern city, Buenos Aires. As described by Coppola, in the commissioned photographs (for the book) he moved from the center to the peripheral neighborhoods[131] (Coppola 207). According to this composition, development spreads form the center to the periphery (from Rivadavia to Avenida del Trabajo and Lacarra). The center-periphery movement is in line with the futuristic vortex style, as a centripetal force [132] . The commissioned images make a gesture of inclusiveness by incorporating different visions of the city, allowing a modern perspective by giving sense to a pre-existing inventory of images that, until then, had never been included in the urban narrative.

The film conflicts the notion of linear development via a fractured collage form exposing how the modern city is permeated by meaningful interruptions. In the amateur film that Coppola chose to do while taking the photographs[133] for the commissioned book, the artist articulated a different perspective. The margin became the center by placing the construction workers at the core of the Obelisco.

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[131] Complete quote "yo hice un plan, agarré el plano de Buenos Aires y dije: Buenos Aires está acá, acá está Rivadavia, acá está Santa Fe- Cabildo, y acá están San Juan y Avenida del Trabajo, y así empecé a salpicar en los tres ejes. Del centro a los barrios, y llegué hasta Avenida del Trabajo y Lacarra".

[132] In an earlier work, following Brandon Taylor's analysis of Hannah Hoch's art, I have identified the non-vortex approach as a strategy to make the narrative more fluid, dialogical and fragmentary (Manzoni, *Decapitaciones poderosas*, 132).

[133] "Y por iniciativa mía hice la película de la construcción del Obelisco" (Coppola in Oubiña, 208).

The film suggests a total insurrection of traditional narratives of progress rooted in modern thought. It places the "other" in the most elevated place, while the world beneath is presented as lifeless, accelerated and automated.

The filmmaker uses three strategies to present his subversive view of the modern city: he insists on conflicting scales; he articulates empty spaces and folds in the narration; and he places life and movement in those empty spaces. As in *Documents*, subversion functions inter-textually, and Coppola´s film complements -or even counteracts- the commissioned photographic narrative of the city.

*Así nació el Obelisco* resists hegemonic positivist representation of the urban setting by articulating the invisible yet indispensable marginal subject at the center of representation. The margin is what makes the modern city possible. In a collage-like composition bringing together fragments of the city, the film reveals a potential narration, marking a void that addresses what needs to be open up to narration. This dis/replacement of the margin in a centered-empty space coincides with the placement of the camera.

Reminiscent of Picasso's collage, Coppola's film starts with a manually-produced and ephemeral image: the title written with chalk on a small black board, dated in 1936. The initial image is a panoramic view from the top to the bottom of the construction site. The handmade processes depicted and the relation between top and bottom highlight the role of the worker in the process of the metropolis.

The wooden structure surrounding the building looks like a cage, full of fissures, and in-between spaces. Miniaturized workers constantly appear in its cavities, between

wooden beams. The workers in action recall two concomitant images, that of ants building a nest as well as a potent image of the time: *King Kong* (Cooper and Schoedsack, 1933) climbing the Empire State Building.

There is a force of nature behind progress, and real flesh and blood at the core of the machine. Moreover, workers are fabricating the structure right on site from very basic materials. Coppola witnesses this process of manual construction of the monument. He follows the weaving of the structure, combining smaller pieces into geometric compositions until they grow into colossal dimensions. In his filmic view, the pyramid recalling the 400 years of the foundation of the city is a man-made, hand-made (manipulated), marginally-erected testimonial of what progress entails.[134]

As asserted by Coppola, the elevator is the most intriguing feature, so he puts the camera in the elevator and filmed the motion from the street to the top of the construction, from darkness to light (Coppola in Oubiña, 208).[135] The elevator is a mutant empty space. The wooden structure and the elevator connect the earth and the sky via an empty space where the counter-version of the metropolis takes place.

The elevator has a window that connects inside and outside, up and down. The window, in a mirroring image, is the camera looking at itself, enclosing space, and producing a void. In the elevator's movement, while enclosing space the void connects what can be brought together. Therefore, the counter-narrative (the need to articulate new

[134] This monument would later become the icon of the city (and of the country).

[135] "comencé las primeras tomas cuando estaba todo el andamiaje, pero lo que me interesó sacar fue la subida en ascensor. Había un montacargas, yo puse la cámara en el montacargas y filmé una secuencia que iba desde lo oscuro y se veía allá arriba la ventanita, y se iba acercando, y de repente se llegaba al cielo" (Coppola in Oubiña, 208).

spaces for narration and new aesthetics of resistance) is a "window" from darkness to light, the transit between heaven and earth.

The empty space is articulated in numerous other ways. On one hand, the void is depicted by opening new dimensions, such as when a man is pumping water, when the workers are drilling, or as the excavated areas are being insistently illustrated throughout the film. All of these images suggest the space below the floor. Borrowing from abstract photography, the images of the projections of the structure on concrete walls and the busy street, drawing cavities of light and shadow, also suggest the image of the "void."

Furthermore, as in *Documents,* the use of proportion (conflicting scales) is revolutionary. The director interlaces extreme long distance shots and close-ups, and often he resists both perspectives by including in the frame objects of a different scale. If he is filming from above a long shot of a miniaturized city, usually he lets a nearby tool penetrate the frame. Acquiring gigantic dimensions, becoming as big as a bus on the street, the hand-manipulated tool is magnified as is the worker (synecdoche). Or, if the shot is from below, in a close up of the building the enormous beams wrapping a hollow space reveal the interior motion of minuscule entities, men, so that the invisible working mass behind modern cities is paradoxically highlighted by the diminutive proportions of the workers.

Finally, Coppola uses repetition of similar yet different images. Showing the same image twice, a low angle shot where cloud movement is fast forwarded, the repetition seems a Trompe-l'œil.[136] This violent editing cancels time and dissolves motion, turning

[136] I agree with Tom Gunning. The "trick" does not aim at accuracy in representation, but it proposes a disquiet with "conflict of messages." Conversing with Maxim Gorky's ideas, Gunning stresses the uncanny

the moving image into a still (static image), while at the same time it re-establishes its moving-image status by hyperbolizing motion (fast forwarding).

Three years later, Coppola would reflect again about the city in the photograph *Buenos Aires* (1939), conceiving it as an empty space. The image is taken from below and buildings carve a cross-shaped sky (a void) at the center of the composition. *Buenos Aires* is a hollow aerial space (see figure below).

**Figure 21: Buenos Aires (Horacio Coppola, 1939)**

As described in the curatorial text of Fundación Telefónica's online catalogue of Coppola´s work, this depiction of the metropolis moves away from documentation, as it exhibits the need of aesthetic autonomy.[137] It is a void coinciding with the vanishing point. The city, thus, becomes all void, as if Picasso's pins have finally come out of the paper in *Bar Table with Guitar*, opening itself as a space yet-to-be narrated.

***Buenos Aires (1958)***

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effect of the mixture between realistic and non-realistic qualities. Under the category of "cinema of attractions," the author identifies this subversive power as an "underground current flowing beneath narrative logic and diegetic realism" (Gunning, 123).

[137] "Aquí, Coppola se aleja del retrato o del documento, para dotar a la imagen de la autonomía estética que le es propia. Fotografía desde abajo la cima de unos edificios del Buenos Aires moderno, en una especie de escorzo que coloca al cielo en el centro de la composición, creando una cruz griega en el espacio que se convierte en el punto de fuga de la imagen."
http://www.fundacion.telefonica.com/es/arte_cultura/patrimonio_artistico/detalle/938

Recalling a similar aesthetic path, David José Kohon produced *Buenos Aires (*1958), a film that was initially part of an initiative to eradicate slums by President Arturo Frondizi's administration. Kohon started the pre-production by going to the site on the weekends to interview its residents and to film in 35mm. At the time he was working as a critic for the newspaper *Democracia*. The Frondizi project never took off, so he continued the film in 16mm with the help of filmmaker Ricardo Aronovich, and without official funding.

This was his second filmic piece, after *La flecha y un compás* (1950). Similar to Coppola's transit from a surrealist narrative to a more documentary style, Kohon's first film was a surrealist exploration produced independently in 1950, which delved into the aesthetics of space. This experimental piece was filmed in positive, as a way to extenuate the technical and aesthetic possibilities of the medium in order not only to be independent but, due to the lack of funding, in order to be, to exist.

Kohon's production[138] has constantly been studied as part of the highly aestheticised *Generación del 60.*[139] *Buenos Aires* exposes how the aesthetic renovation was an act of resistance, an escape from formal and general conditionings[140] (Feldman, 50). Specifically, this generation reclaimed the cinematographic language of silent cinema as an expression of rebellion (Kohon in *Generaciones 60/90*, 143).

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[138] In chronological order, Kohon's filmography includes, *La flecha y un compás* (1950) *Buenos Aires* (1958), *Prisioneros de una noche* (1960), *Tres veces Ana* (1961), *Así o de otra manera* (1964), *Breve cielo* (1968), *Con alma y vida* (1970), *¿Qué es el otoño?* (1976), *El agujero en la pared* (1981) and *Hacia la vida* (1987).

[139] This aesthetic renovation presented itself as a reaction to the previous mainstream Argentine film. The films of this "generation" were influenced by the global *new waves*, like Italian *neorrealismo*, the French *nouvelle vague* as well as the other Nuevo(s) Cine(s) Latinoamerican(os), and the exhibition phenomenon of the film-clubs.

[140] "la necesidad de escapar a condicionamientos de forma y fondo"

In *Buenos Aires* I discover the defiant nature of the Nuevo(s) Cine(s) Latinoamericano(s), both in terms of aesthetic renovation and social content. *Buenos Aires* even coincides thematically and chronologically with iconographic piece *Tire Dié* (1956-1958), Fernando Birri's highly acclaimed *opera prima.*[141]

Consistent with Coppola's modernist aesthetics,[142] *Buenos Aires* starts narrating the city in a similar vein to foundational urban filmic narratives, such as *Manhattan* (1921) or *Berlin: Die Sinfonie der Großstadt* (1927). He incorporates laudatory images of an efficient city with mechanical movement, using aerial shots or canted angles. However, soon Kohon counters the modern discourse by incorporating a distressing editing. Mixing city and slum images, the abruptness of montage aims at de-automatizing the perception in the spectator, as the familiar city becomes alien using canted angles and fusing city and slum[143] (Bernini, 2013, 23). Mechanized, anonymous and faceless, the city is penetrated by another layer: the slum.

The subversive power does not emerge out of the dual versions of the urban space, but out of the meaningful interruptions that create a connective margin combining city and slum. Towards that aim, Kohon uses inter-textual conversations between commercial posters included in the frame and the poor surroundings. Besides, he also

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[141] Another similarity is that both filmmakers had very limited opportunities to film in Argentina, particularly during the Juan D. Perón´s (1945-1955) administration, as they were expressly antagonistic of his film policies. Fernando Birri left Buenos Aires, the core of filmic production, to experiment formally. He started filming independently in his native Santa Fé, in search of the invisible/unseen faces of Argentina. Similarly, Kohon asserted that his insertion in filmmaking was very difficult so his short films during the 1950´s were self-funded.

[142] There is homage to Coppola´s *Rivadavia entre Salguero y Medrano* (1931), when Kohon is filming his feet while walking on patterned sidewalk.

[143] "un montaje alterno muy brusco, de una tosquedad que sin duda tenía la meta de desautomatizar la percepción del espectador sobre su propia ciudad, opone planos del centro de la ciudad con encuadres aberrantes, a otros tomados en una villa cuya locación se desconoce […]" (Bernini, 23).

shoots and edits differently depending on whether the scene is in the city or slum. Finally, he uses bizarre connections between them in order to fragment the illusion of continuity and to shock the spectator. These bizarre connections between city and slum pierce holes in the documentary narrative whole, suggesting empty spaces of resistance.

Among the inter-textual interactions, Kohon uses collage and displacement to interrupt narration. The camera highlights a poster selling modern apartments. Soon the camera zooms out and there are other commercial ads. On the left, one of the ads becomes legible; it has the image of a boy and a legend that states, "Puede ser su hijo. Protéjalo." Next to it a real-state ad sells luxury condominiums. While zooming out, the audience realizes that the inter-textual fabric is wrongly placed on the wall of an extremely poor house. The advertising-collage becomes a counter-narrative in its misplacement. The camera pans to the left in full circle, as an establishing shot, showing the slum from right to left. This collage-like, inter-textual connection demarcates the margin as a space of contrast.

Once in the slum, the camera adopts a different attitude. It zooms consistently, opting for medium shots first, and then, close-ups. These are the only faces the spectator gets to see throughout the entire film. Children are depicted playing and adults are portrayed working and running the necessary errands. Daily life in such an inhospitable space questions the idea of progress while at the same time it addresses a sense of community in the silent exchanges among slum inhabitants. As asserted by Laura Podalsky, Kohon offers a harsh vision of the villa life, struggling to humanize those who

live there (93). However, the faces (identification), the routines and the respect and care across generations humanize the inhabitants of the slum.

The second inter-textual connection is a conservative ad, "La Moral. Familia, Sociedad, Patria." This image cuts to a skyscraper after which the movement of the city is intensified. Preceding both Kohon's *Tres veces Ana* (1961) and internationally acclaimed feminist piece *23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles (*1975), by Chantal Akerman, the camera focuses on the street, placing the camera below the waist line. In so doing, he places the spectator in a marginal child-like position (Manzoni, *"*Buenos Aires/Zobeide*",* 101). Wheels on the pavement gesture to automatic movement. The image soon concentrates specifically on a cart wheel in motion. Soon there is a jump-cut to abandoned cart wheels in the slum, discarded on the ground where children are playing. The awkward positioning of a seemingly misplaced object draws a connection between progress and its residue, its margins and it's left-over.

As a nod to *Document´s* subversive mold, *Buenos Aires* points out to the lack of modernity within modernity as well as the marginality embedded in the very concept of "modernity." This strategy of counter-reading progress sets in motion a different relation between the city and the margin. Kohon demarks the separation between center and periphery in order to subvert it. The initial dichotomy between the modern city and the inhospitable slum gets conflicted right after both spaces are defined. Meaning shifts while the city becomes a machine-like apparatus. As the slum changes, the inhuman conditions of the settlement are transformed due to the humanizing portrayal of its inhabitants, active and caring both individually and functioning as a group and a force. Moreover, this

shift is facilitated by inter-textuality and the differentiated camera and editing options used to depict one and the other. All of these establish dialogues between city and slum.

Finally, Kohon subverts this duality by walking after three of the inhabitants of the slum on their way to work, in the city. This takes place during the second half of the film, where the filmmaker chooses three individuals, following them with the camera on their way from their humble homes in the slum to their work place in the city. There is a woman and two men. She is a weaver and they are a post-man and a blacksmith. These three characters take the margin with themselves as they walk, piercing the narrative of the city, connecting the diverse, opening the discourse to other voices. Like the worker´s in Coppola´s Obelisco, these three individuals (representing many other men, women and children seen earlier in the slum) are the heart of the city; they make it happen.

Kohon´s laborers are allowed to go even a step further as they become identifiable, and individualized characters. For that purpose, they are depicted in close-ups, so that the spectator recognizes them. Further, using medium shots, they are seen manipulating their means of production or taking care of personal hygiene, in a sense that they contribute to the social fabric. Kohon uses with them lengthy takes and long shots; thus, they are depicted in action, interacting with their context and their community.

They evoke the idea of a collective, a force. Lastly and more importantly, the film recognizes them as individuals by letting them gaze back at the camera, and by pronouncing the only words and the only human sounds of the entire film. Their sentences confirm that they live in the slum “Si, señor. Yo vivo aquí” (see figure).

**Figure 22: Buenos Aires (Kohon, 1958)**

The end of the film evidences the power of the "void" as a strategy of narrative resistance, with the whitening of a political inscription on the wall. "Frondizi" disappears, letter by letter, under the white paint, highlighting that time has passed and that a new leader is on the way while everything remains the same. The empty space of a white wall demarks past, present and future, while also counters the notion of linear temporal progression. This white wall is another inter-textual articulation which opens yet another layer in this narrative of the city. As I have contended in an earlier work on Kohon's films, the white wall is a liminal space between private and public spheres. It is a space that is marked with the passing of time, and, specially, it is a multi-dimensional empty space[144]. Analogous to Coppola´s camera in the elevator going from the subterranean vault to the sky, the white square as an empty space is another mirroring image of the

[144] "(L)a pared blanqueada es vacío, es límite entre el espacio público y privado, es espacio definido que sufre pasivamente las inclemencias y los cambios del tiempo, pero a la vez, leída "a contrapelo" es hoja en blanco, es hueco multidimensional, es tanto punto de contacto como barrera, es cara que también mira a la calle—no solo hacia adentro—y que se regenera por medio de las huellas de sus transeúntes." (Manzoni, "Buenos Aires/Zobeide", 100)

camera looking at itself, interconnecting in the void that can be brought together (what has not yet been open to narration).

The documentary genre in 1958 had already a long-standing tradition of depicting modern cities. In its manipulation of the documentary genre, using it and subverting it, Kohon condemns that Buenos Aires, an efficient modern city, has been achieved at the expense of a marginal working class population. Paradoxically, this poor force working for modernity does not benefit from the advantages of progress.

In sum, via a highly aesthetized production, the director achieves a narrative of resistance. This is articulated using the emulation of abstract painting/photography, rampant editing and differentiated camera treatment, so that the documentary as traditional genre is neutralized. Interrupted storytelling and inter-textual dialogues infiltrate empty spaces in the textual fabric.

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***3.5b Counter-audio-visual: artist-audience agency***

Pre-disciplinary audio-visual can highlight the strategy of the void in narratives of resistance. A selection of the works of two German-Argentinean artists, Bauhaus educated photographer and filmmaker Grete Stern; and experimental filmmaker, Narcisa Hirsch allow a unique perspective to understand the in-between empty space as a narrative devise. This segment explores a photo-montage by Stern *Sueño de Inhibiciones*, which has been reedited in different versions as well as anticipated in a 1936 conceptual photograph. Hirsch's piece studied here is the experimental film *Taller* (1975).

These artifacts make exclusive use of the empty space as a strategy to counter hegemonic discursive formations. As a whole, this corpus presents itself in opposition to predominant audio-visual traditions. It conflicts film syntax and gestures to pre-disciplinary explorations (pre moving-image or experimental moving image). Moreover, the empty space, as a narrative device, vacates the locus of enunciation. Allowing the independent artists and the public to participate in narration. All in all, the void, as a strategy of resistance, counters the state-funded, top-bottom, hierarchical audio-visual narratives.

Stern gestures to the unfixity in a textual fabric that can change. The photo-montages, in their reverberations and in conversation with photographs, contest the unalterable nature of photography. Hirsch's 11-minute shot of a motionless wall challenges film as moving image. In opposition to and as complement, these artifacts trace links to machine-less, pre-film pieces like the phenakistocope created by Joseph Plateau in 1832, or rebellious avant-garde explorations such as Man Ray's rayographs in the 1920's. The subversion of the film form contests modes of funding, production, distribution and exhibition so embedded in the rules of mass media and the market of images and sounds.

***Grete Stern's selection (1931-1967)***

Stern and her husband Horacio Coppola settled in Argentina in the late 1930´s, escaping anti-semitism in Europe. Soon after their arrival to Buenos Aires, Stern mingled with local artistic circles. She became the photographer of artists and intellectuals, such

as Jorge L. Borges. She collaborated with the Madi arts group and exhibited in the context of Victoria Ocampo´s Revista *Sur*. A decade later, as an already well-known photographer and advertising photo-montagist, Stern decided to contribute to the magazine *Idilio* with photographs illustrating its psychoanalytic section for women. Stern opted for photo-montages, called *Sueños*, which illustrated the descriptions of the dreams sent to the magazine by the readers, so that Richard Rest, the psychology expert, could analyze them and publish this interpretation along with Stern´s photo-montages.

Via the photo-montages in a woman's magazine, Stern countered mass-produced photography with a subjective stance. This gesture brought the private voice of the reader into the circulation of mass consumption. In a way, Stern also subverted the psychologist's intent to clarify the reader's dreams. The photo-montages resist the medium, advertising, photo-journalism and the very analysis of dreams that R. Rest claimed to do in the section.

As understood by the artist, photo-montage was the technique that most adequately represented dreamy oneiric images while at the same time elicited images of subversive power. The artist was interested in creating "uneasy/agitated images"[145](29)--a term I understand to describe images that are not calm, serene or still, but those that are restless and frantic. This concept echoes ideas in earlier chapters, stressing the power of unstable compositions to evolve and change. Unstable or un-fixed images foster a space beyond disciplinary and institutional concerns. For independent artists, this activates the

[145] "Imágenes intranquilas"

power to be represented. Further, these flexible compositions require the participation of an active viewer.

Well established within surrealism and psychology, these photomontages produced by Stern for *Idilio* make visible tricks of photography and the film laboratory. The meaningful interruptions such as overprinting, superimposition, combination, repetition and distortion are deliberately made evident. These tricks highlight the fragmentary nature of the photomontage. Like Breton's, these photomontages depict impossible images, such as a giraffe driving a car or a mouth-less woman. In their awkwardness, they stress the fragmentary nature of the compositions.

Throughout the artist's corpus, there is a redundancy of pieces with women in enclosed spaces, such as a bird-cage or a bottle. In particular, *Sueños de Inhibiciones/Botella de Mar* (1950/1967) presents a young woman placed inside a corked bottle. These pieces narrate resistance by the articulation of a space that is emptied (see figures below).

**Figure 23: Sueño de inhibiciones (Grete Stern, 1950)**

**Figure 24: Botella de Mar (Grete Stern, 1967)**

Complementing earlier studies of Stern´s work, my reading focuses on how the photomontage structures its strategy around the concept of the void.[146] The empty space here functions as the liminal space where the fragments of the composition come together. This empty space is mutant and relational, reaching out, not only to the fragments involved in the specific photomontage, but also other "empty spaces" appearing across Sterns photographic corpus. Photomontage is inter-disciplinary and pre-disciplinary and, as such, it places itself outside disciplinary boundaries, before and beyond film/photography.

A woman is positioned in an impossible place: a bottle. This not only serves as a metaphor for gender relations but also facilitates an aesthetic exercise. The void articulates narrative resistance. The possibility of the composition is made available by

[146] David W. Foster´s and Paula Bertúa´s analyze how Stern subverts the gender roles imposed by the dominant narrative.

the enlargement/miniaturization that gives meaning to it. As recalled by Stern, controlling perspective and proportion was key to the production of the photo-montage *Sueños de Inhibiciones/Botella de Mar*: the girl models to fit in the imaginary container, the bottle is enlarged, the girl is placed behind the bottle as if she were inside and the composition is enlarged and cut[147] (Stern 30).

Although this youth faces entrapment, she seems neither protected nor imprisoned. On the contrary, her enigmatic glance (Foster) challenges the most typical connotations of restrictive confinement. This subverts the idea of the female detention via an alternative space. In a way, she is similar to smiling and gracious woman appearing in Breton's photomontage, where a woman in-between window panes embodies agency.

Stern goes one step further, conflicting the duality inside/outside-free/hostage. If indeed, the bottled woman echoes the woman in Breton's piece, she does it partially. The bottled woman by Stern presents a splintered body, a struggle between comfort and discomfort. She looks half relaxed and half stressed. Her facial expression, looking up, shows tranquility but the position of the rest of the body is constrained and uncomfortable as she is containing her extremities and surrounding her contorted legs with her arms so that they fit in the glass containment. Incoherent in her posture, the body is not a whole but just another accumulation of fragments. The body thus functions not as a place where things come together but as a spatial demarcation of fracture, and thus, of resistance.

This fragmentation is made clear in Stern's description of the process implemented to articulate the photomontage. As quoted earlier, the woman must adapt to

[147] "Tomo una fotografía de la chica sentada en la posición que indica el boceto. La amplio a un tamaño que me permita colocarla detrás de la botella real, de modo de que produzca la impresión de que la chica está encerrada en la botella. Amplío el conjunto y lo recorto."

a pre-established shape. She must sit as the sketch demands in order to fit in the preexisting bottle. This regards the woman as a mere excuse to narrate the space of constraint (resistance), thus, she (in the bottle) soon ceases to be a woman as it evokes other images: that of the almighty genie in the bottle (of a superhuman nature), or embodying the message in the bottle that thrown into the sea acquires a life of its own. In both options, the enclosure becomes a kind of vessel that can travel across time and space. The power to resist lies in the empty space that the bottle encloses and its potential to move and to change.

Another spatial demarcation takes place when Stern decides to alter the proportions. Similar to the miniaturized workers in Coppola´s Obelisco –where the differences in size separate and connect the inside/workers/sky and the outside/street below- the miniaturized woman points at a sense of wholeness that is troubled and confirmed by the collage. Proportion is not a mere detail of composition but a fundamental aspect and, as asserted by Cesar Aira, an aspect that cannot be isolated because it dissolves[148] (Aira, 75). This is due to the fact that the woman's disproportion is the core of the photomontage; had it been a seashell that can naturally fit in a bottle, the subversive nature of this composition would be instantly dismantled. The minuscule woman is distorted as long as she exists in relation to the bottle.

Besides, inter-textuality plays a vital role en *Sueños de Inhibiciones/Botella de Mar,* which in itself is inter-textual as it refers to several versions of the same piece. The void presents reverberations of the same-yet-dissimilar. *Sueños de Inhibiciones* was the

[148] "no se la puede aislar como se hace con los fragmentos de los cuadros, porque entonces se disuelve" (….)

original 1950 photomontage that was remade in 1967, complemented with poems, and renamed[149] *Botella de Mar.* For a later exhibition, in 1981, the poems were erased. In a 1992 event, the selection of *Idilio* photomontages was again exhibited, but this time they did not have titles and they were identified by numbers.

Not only titles but also the image of the original photomontage was modified for the 1967 exhibition. In *Sueños de Inhibiciones,* the bottle has large proportions and the frame is a dull background; it has a misshapen and big dark plug and the bottle is crystal clear. *Botella de Mar* shows a smaller bottle placed on a beach, reflecting the outside. The woman is translucent, the borders of the bottle demark the montage, and the cork is small and loose. This comparison proposes a shift in the relation between the bottle, what is inside and what is outside. The woman is re-placed, the border is re-defined, the constraining device is loosened, and the difference between contained and container, woman and glass, is conflicted.

In between these two bottled women, Stern produced a photographic piece *Frasco de vidrio* (1960) which echoes *Sueños de Inhibiciones* and anticipates the alterations in *Botella de Mar*. This photo-still has a glass base filled with water and a dead plant that has been placed in the vase above the level of the liquid. The bottle looks empty, but the water produces effects. It amplifies the imperfections and cracks on the wall behind it as well as projects light onto the walls. *Frasco de vidrio* replaces the woman with water and makes the inside and the outside clearly discernible (see figure).

[149] At this point Stern had acknowledged that titles were essential to the contextualization of a photograph.

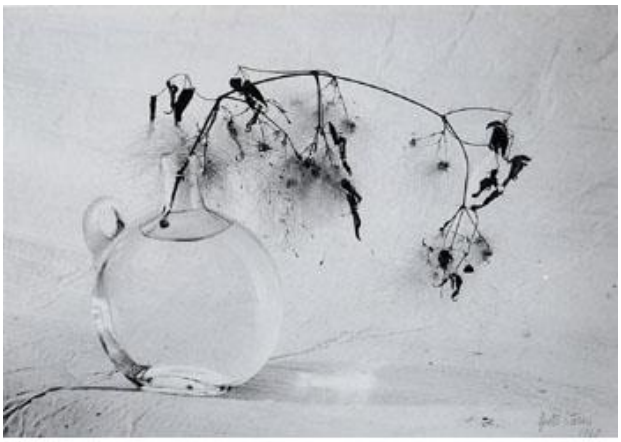

**Ilustración 1: Frasco de vidrio (Grete Stern, 1960)**

The trope of the empty space was also used during Stern's Bauhaus years, as shown in *Glass With Paper* (1931). The photograph depicts a piece of graph paper in a glass filled with water on a sheet of graph paper, which also serves as background. Twisted, folded and placed in the clear liquid, the graph paper in the glass on the graph paper produces shadows, amplification and projections. Similar yet distorted, content and background in their projections and deformations open multiple spaces within the same space. The inside and the outside are conflicted but the water remains in the glass (see figure below).

**Figure 25: Glass with paper (Grete Stern, 1931)**

This inter-textual articulation putting diverse vases in dialogue (containing, projecting, amplifying, placing and re-placing) produces a highly spatialized narrative of resistance. All these repetitions and alterations of the bottle and its surroundings (its reflections, the cork sealing it, the background of the bottle) manage to point at one aspect specifically: what the bottle demarks, the space that this container makes available, a "meta" space within a space, a space that is "other."

The inner space that the bottle suggests is the only aspect that seems to remain intact throughout the photograph and photomontages. Throughout the years of depicting vases/bottles, Stern has chosen to modify the contents. They have shifted from water and paper in 1931, to a woman in 1950, to water acting as a magnifying glass and projector in 1960, to vanishing woman in 1967.

There is also a sense a continuation in the depiction of the transparent container in its multiple variations. The vase/bottle seems to remain constant in its reverberations, as a strategy to counter traditional narrations via diverse photographic texts. Resistance, therefore, seems to come down to echoes, the repetitive yet-changing recipient and in its reverberations demark a void as a mutant, alternative space within narration.

The empty spaces vacate the private voice taken over by Richard Rest's analysis. This void resists the magazine's erasure of the individual, giving both the artist (Stern) and the dreamer/reader/public/audience/writer agency to participate in their own narration.

***Taller (1975)***

Narcisa Hirsch is one of the most visible figures of Argentina´s experimental film, an under-studied cinematic expression, a counter-culture artistic manifestation spanning from the late 1960´s to the early 1980´s. Following the international trends, this cinema rebelled against commercial cinema, its official alignment and its pretentiousness. Experimental filmmakers in Argentina mainly used amateur film formats such as Super 8.

The amateur cinema in Argentina witnessed a period of intense experimentation; they dared to question issues of authorship, production, exhibition and distribution. Taking full advantage of formal limitations, experimental cinema emerged from the impulse and the inertia of the local conditions to produce films in the country, as articulated by Pablo Marín (13).

Argentine visual arts became more open to the moving image, thanks to the experiences of Margarita Paksa and Marta Minujín, within the context of the Instituto Di Tella.[150] In the 1970´s, experimental filmmakers (such as Narcisa Hirsch, Claudio Caldini, or Marie-Louise Alemann, among others) grouped around the Goethe Institute under the name "Grupo cine experimental argentino."

Safeguarded within the context of an international institution, the experimental filmmakers functioned as a collective throughout the 1970's, resisting not only the mainstream cinematic productions of the time but also the rising problems with civil

[150] According to Andrés Di Tella, some of the experimental filmmakers played an active rol in Minujin's projects post-Di Tella; such as Claudio Caldini, who covered with his Keystone camera the underground events of Buenos Aires for Minujín's pop news-show *¡Buenos Aires!¡Hoy!¡Ya!* (1971). *(Hachazos,* 2011, 46-47)

liberties and censorship. The films were exhibited to a small but loyal audience of twenty to twenty five spectators. The experimental status presented itself as the counterpoint of mainstream circulation of images. Creativity and a wide array of personal aesthetics flourished.

Influenced by the description of Michael Snow's film *A Casing Shelved* (1970) (a film of a voiced-over 35mm slides), Hirsch produced *Taller* (1975), her third film, as a voiced-over, 11 minute, one-take film which aims at positioning Hirsch, "the artist," by describing a space, her studio. Hirsch focuses on a collage on the wall to describe her workshop. The collage can be confused with a photograph, thus neglecting its moving-image status. This gestures to the non-mainstream, pre-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary.

According to the film, the space of the artist (the studio) is limited to a wall. The rest of this space is mostly left outside the frame. Hirsch demarks her studio solely by describing its walls. The avoidance of the studio's images gives the audience an opportunity to play an active role in narration.

The film starts with a black screen and an off camera dialogue between Hirsch and a man, "Shall we go? Want some tea? Some sugar?" This brief conversation is repeated as an image appears on the screen, right after the first utterance. The image seen is a collage placed on the wall (see figure).

**Figure 26: Taller (Hirsch, 1975)**

Hirsch starts describing it, “It is a window to the Pacific in Chile. Then, the next is a gorilla and underneath there is a river in Bariloche […]”. She continues explaining the image that the spectator sees until she says, “then the wall goes on,” and she keeps describing the wall that cannot be seen in the film, “and then, to the left there is another poster.”

Hirsch’s voice-over describes the room and how it is pierced by connecting meta spaces, “ a window that does go anywhere,” that “it is just a frame,” “another photograph which looks at the Pacific in Chile,” “and then the wall finishes and another wall starts,” “then a real window. And the window looks to a balcony.” Later she describes images and tools, “on the window there is an X-ray of my skull” and, soon after, she gives details of pieces of art and equipment in the studio. Next, she asks the man in the room, “will you want more tea? Some toast?” “OK”, he replies. They start eating with full mouths, though continuing to speak. The dialogue becomes incomprehensible. She describes the tools she has used to do underground films but, later, she declares that her new artistic

aspiration is to “make films on the ground,” as “I am trying to get very near to things.” “And then there is another wall,” she utters. Subsequently, she points out at a blackboard and explains how the blackboard is the “place” where things are written and wiped out, “and then you need to think of something new.” Suddenly, color becomes saturated, then shifts to red, to white and to black. As the image is totally dark, Hirsch asserts, “the light is out and there is no more workshop. No more room. It finishes there.”

The only image presented is a collage, a multiplication of frames in the form of the frame within the frame. The off-camera voice-over describes what remains outside of the frame. This 16mm film by Hirsch is a meditation on the nature of the filmic medium, producing fragmented spaces in the duplication and multiplication of sounds and images, while the image (a collage) remains the same. She proposes the interlacing of narratives in an empty space; in their repetition, this interlacing produces a mise-en-abyme.

The initial conversation in the dark (black screen resembling a void) is repeated once there is an image. Reminiscent of a photo, or a film-still (static fraction of a film), the sound is what gives the film a sense of evolution and movement. Ultimately, the sound makes this piece a moving image. In *Taller* the single shot framing one fragment of one atelier’s wall, duplicated by a verbal description, reproduces its visibility and expands it. This duplication is made possible by the de-synchronization between vision and sound, the multiplication of vistas embedded in the collage-format and its oral echo.

The off-camera dialogue describing the things in the room outlines the borders of the room so that the margin becomes the center of the composition. Similar to Kohon’s workers, these brick walls end up interconnecting the inside and the outside (poking

holes) via repetitions, color manipulations and the black screen, both at the beginning and the end of the piece. Besides, these manipulations give the film a sense of circularity, a loop-structure.

Fragmentation and displacement strategies put the margin (off camera image) in the center of composition via sound. This is Hirsch´s strategy to reposition herself "closer to things." For that purpose, she explicitly asserts that she needs to "move" from the "under" to "the ground" in order to achieve this closeness. However, her "movement" to get closer to things is articulated by another marginal narrative, one within the realm of experimental film, the film "other." This movement is attempted by constantly escaping from traditional film format, the illusion of the photograph or film still, as well as the inclusion the of the collage on the wall, or the X-Ray.

In addition, the artist constantly stresses the impossibility of wholeness. Countering traditional discourses (which follow uni-linear, chronological, cause-effect logic), her piece suggests the narrative potential of fragments. This is achieved via meaningful interruptions, with the insertion of windows and meta-windows across the "taller," her space. Moreover, the blackboard (an empty void, a black space, a rudimentary and vulnerable medium) is specifically the place where you think of something new, as the place to counter hegemonic narration.

In order to "get near" to things, she brings the margin to the center while breaking the duality "under"/ "mainstream." Further, she deepens the meaningful interruptions by articulating the void as black screen (twice), by repeating the initial conversation, and by transforming the conversation into a babble while eating the crunchy toasts.

Meta-images, such as an X-ray on the window and meta-windows to the sea, the river, and a balcony, point out to a fragmentation in relation to conflicting spatial notions. The conflict between inside and outside is suggested as the spectator sees/hears about the distorted image achieved by penetrating impenetrable spaces (X-ray), the access to immensity (the sea), to fluidity and movement (the river) and to in-between spaces (the balcony).

This last effort to resist traditional narration also aims at dismantling the complementarity of image and sound in film, showing what cannot be grasped via the voiceover narration. The lack of image (void), the repetition of sound and the uncanniness of sound distorts this image/sound coherence in two ways. On one hand, as it transgresses the voiced-over technique of ethnographic documentaries which tends to explain in detail, in a uni-linear temporal progression and cause-effect logic, what is being illustrated by the image. Audio-visual ethnographic piece rely on the unconflicting complementarity between image and sound. Moreover, these techniques outline an alternative space by the contradiction between audio and vision (the two intrinsic aspects of the audio-visual piece), while they also gesture to inter/pre-disciplinarity.

In sum, the void outlined by the studio walls carves a space of agency for both the non-mainstream artist and the audience. *Taller* counteracts cinema as an aesthetic. The crossbred photographic/audio-visual exploration by Hirsch "trying to get near to things" ends up focusing on the margin, bringing the "underground," "the other," to the fore. There is a closeness that can be achieved, not by mainstream circulation of sounds and images, but by a subversive framework surfacing in the borders of mainstream cultural

production. These marginal texts give voice to both the independent artist and its audience.

## 3.6 Carri's "avant-garde"

### 3.6a The aesthetic genesis of *Los rubios*

The audio-visual project *Los rubios* has been nurtured by an aesthetics of resistance conceived prior to the film *Los rubios*. Precisely, two marginal short films produced in the turn of the millennium, *Barbie también puede estar triste* (2001) and *Aurora* (2001) constitute the aesthetic foundation of Carri's film of memory. These two experimental pieces break free from the conventions of the form (genre/discipline) and challenge the formal restrictions in order to subvert chronological, cause-effect coherence.

Specifically, *Aurora* (2001) is a voiced over photomontage rooted in the *foto-novela* style. It tells the story of a fetishistic relation between a woman and a cheese-dish. This parodic montage questions narrative coherence in melodramatic plots. Similarly, *Barbie también puede estar triste* is a pornographic melodramatic animation characterized by Barbie dolls. The film´s intention is to reverse sexual stereotypes and to dismantle the mass-produced image of womanhood. The director subverts the commoditized body (Barbie) by intervening their figures and by engaging them in non-normative sex.

These two projects were conceived in a particular moment. Having just worked for a major production, María Luisa Bemberg's *De eso no se habla* (1993) and the independent film by Martín Rejtman *Silvia Prieto* (1998), the director felt at ease

exploring diverse production paradigms. At that time, she was in the post-production of her own first feature film *No quiero volver a casa* (2001) and she had run out of funding. Feeling trapped by the lack of funding and the limitations of a traditional production systems, she engaged in projects outside of the film industry.

Carri's experimental/avant-garde pieces benefitted from alternative funding. Particularly, *Barbie también puede estar triste* was made possible by non-traditional funding/production paradigms as the *Fundación Antorchas* financed the film. Both experimental pieces gesture to the margin of industrial film, embracing the low budget, non-mainstream filmic formats such as the animation/B-movie/pornographic hybrid, in one case; and the pre-disciplinary photomontage and the residual *foto-novela* (the by-product in print of cinematic plots), in the other case.

Born in a time of profound socio-political and economic unrest in Argentina, these projects were a reaction to the consumption of mass images and sounds during the Menem administration (1989-1999), an era of neoliberal rule. Specifically, *Aurora* uses parody and consumer fetishism to expose the mechanism of melodrama, disrupting the meaning and syntax used to portray traditional "woman's tales" of romance and passion. *Barbie tambien puede estar triste,* on the other hand, exposes how commodification plays into gender representation. Particularly, she explores this commodification in dialogue with seemingly antithetic aesthetics like children's narratives, pornography and (non) normative gender representations.

***Aurora (2001)***

I find in *Aurora* a reaction to mainstream film by gesturing to precursors in moving images, such as Stern's photo-montages and Fernando Birri's photo-documentary *Tire Dié* (1956-1958), the still images that originated the acclaimed homonymous film. Experimentation is made possible due to two reasons: the low cost of the technology and the lack of limitations embedded in the format because editing is not constrained to the rules of cinema.

The hilarious story of a cheese-dish that fascinates a woman to the point that she no longer needs a boyfriend, reveals the system of meaning entrenched in mainstream filmmaking, particularly in melodrama. Absurdity in *Aurora* destabilizes melodramatic syntax and the strategy is to expose the narrative codes via meaningful interruptions.

As far as the visual elements, the black and white coloring and the plain fashion makes it impossible to attribute the images a specific time/period. The difficulty in assigning the images a specific time/context problematizes identification. The spectator is not given certainties. The love story lacks verisimilitude due the characters' age, the timeless look -which makes unclear the time period in which the story takes place-, and the uncanny actions of the characters.

*Aurora* uses rampant montage, like Kohon's *Buenos Aires*. This editing choice de-automatizes the audience because the narrative suture is conflicted –not confirmed- by the montage. Specifically, Carri mixes medium shots and extreme close-ups of parts of the woman's face. This extreme emphasis on the facial expression (emotion) has a

distortive effect, as the spectator cannot recognize the enlarged images and assign those body parts to a specific person. At times, a gigantic mouth seems to belong to a different person.

Like Hirsh's piece, the voice-over in *Aurora* dismantles the audio-visual logic. The collage of images is voiced over by a fake Spanish accent. Images and voice tend to not cohere, particularly as the voice increasingly makes nonsensical utterances.

The impossibility to identify with the characters, the rampant editing, the fake voice over and the awkward use of scale turn the woman's character in an empty signifier, carving a void in narration. All of these factors engage the spectator in a contemplative exercise where humor is the only way to make sense of what is being watched. Soon this disconnection becomes the main narrative device as the story is not the tale of a cheese-dish, but a counter-narrative of traditional melodrama.

The utterances mentioning traditional topics of romance are used nonsensically. For example, the female voice asserts, "My name is Aurora. My body is like a feather and I came to tell my story," or "cheese without cooling becomes cream." *Aurora* uses these sentences to counter romantic tropes due to the director's interested to expose what makes no sense.

Some of the phrases are syntactically awkward, such as, "During dinner, it would be, my new cheese-dish, Juan, my new cheese-dish and me." The duplication of the cheese-dish is its doubling and its erasure. The duplication of the same functions as mirrors in a mise-en-abyme: this doubling pierces a void in narration. The cheese-dish is a surrogate; it stands for the commodified object of the main character's affection.

Different from Hirsch's full-mouthed babble, the gibberish in speech is made evident only when paying attention to the nonsensical talk. Both babbles have the same purpose, to fill the void with accumulation, but Hirsch's includes incomprehensible talk while Carri opts for a seemingly logical romantic chat that becomes gibberish in its syntax.

***Barbie también puede estar triste (2001)***

In *Barbie también puede estar triste,* voice-over narration disconnects the characters from the animation, and reconnects them inter-textually with diverse media production. Ken's character has a Spanish accent (played by Eucebio Poncela) reminiscent of traditional dubbing in pornographic films that were available in Argentina in the 1970's and 1980's; the upper-class, porteño accent of Barbie's character (played by Juana Molina), is an homage to Marcela Balsam, Molina's fictional character of the early 1990's (Carri, 2013); and Arbie's voice (Divina Gloria) connects to humorous characters played by Gloria in the comic show *No toca boton*[151].

During an interview, the director explained that her intention was for *Barbie también puede estar triste* to emulate the science fiction films or TV programs of the 1960's and 1970's. Exposed error and brusque movement highlight the doll's materiality as well as the erasures needed for natural flow of movement in animation.[152]

[151] Lead by Alberto Olmedo, this show was screened on air TV for half a decade in Argentina in the 1980's.

[152] Animated images are made possible by the manipulation of dolls, the accumulation of images, and the exact concatenation of those images.

Moreover, the dolls have been manipulated in order to have articulated extremities, genitalia and facial expressions. The Barbies have the gummy *Play-doh* texture of handmade alterations. These alterations are deliberately imperfect and noticeable[153] (Carri, 2013). Like a Frankenstein, full of sutures, the dolls become monsters (see figures below).


**Figure 27: Barbie también puede estar triste (Carri, 2001)**

[153] "Intenté marcar mucho las imperfecciones haciendo evidentes, por ejemplo, las rebarbas de los muñecos, los escenarios, las voces, etcétera. La idea general de la animación también pasaba por ahí" (Carri, Reflejos en la oscuridad 2013).

Paradoxically, brusque movements and visible sutures make the dolls shockingly real. In their shift from mass-produced smoothness (waxed plastic) to rough and textured interventions, they are given a personality with which the audience can identify. Erasing the Barbies' code of perfection and similitude (non-identity) as well as exacerbating excesses, these alterations provide a difference that becomes extremely powerful in its representation potential. They dismantle the mass-produced doll.

The subversion also emerges out of the imperfections such as mismatched body parts or the different colors and shapes of those pieces that have been added. These imperfections interrupt the similitude code. The altered bodies become a realistic representation of diversity.

Uncanny combinations, like the disconnection between voice, image and the amended body fragments, weave the fabric of *Barbie también puede estar triste.* Mismatched compositions carve a void in-between disparate fragments brought together by Carri. The diversity suggests inter-textuality and the role of the audience in renovating hegemonic narratives. The deficient combinations, as visible sutures, become the center of the composition. Like Coppola´s centered margins, the experimental piece focuses on the residue to articulate a narrative of resistance.

In *Aurora* and *Barbie También puede estar triste* the genres are disarmed, the melodrama deactivates its purgative effect and pornography is presented as part of the mass circulation of images that is affected and affects both the notion of childhood and established gender stereotypes. Further, *Aurora* and *Barbie También puede estar triste* suggest a textual fabric articulated vis-à-vis the fragment that confirms inter-textual and

inter-media frameworks. This fragmentation not only disassembles mainstream narratives but also suggest new modes of narrative suture.

As Carri has pointed out during a recent interview (2013), both *Barbie También puede estar triste* and *Los rubios* follow a similar path: the mechanism of the cinematic illusion is dismantled so that things can be observed from a different perspective.[154] According to Carri, the sutures of the amended Barbies create a sense of detachment that allows the spectator to see things form a new standpoint and, paradoxically, to become involved. This is the strategy created for *Barbie También puede estar triste* that also Carri pursues in *Los rubios*; a strategy of fragmentation and inclusion.

### 3.6b Carri's reverberations

#### *Restos (2010)*

*Restos* is a short film directed by Carri for the bicentennial of Argentina's independence. As part of the *Cortos del bicentenario*, the film gestures to both the mainstream and its counterpart. State commissioned, the compilation was conceived as a collective in its public funding and distribution in theatres. However, after a brief showcase during the county festivities in commercial venues, the short-films accessed their publics mostly via YouTube as individual pieces, most frequently in relation to their authorship.

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[154] "(About *Los rubios*) Para mí, evidenciar al cine en sí mismo era algo necesario para el relato. No sólo porque quería contar el derrotero de mi equipo intentando contar una película sobre lo sucedido (hay una frase que lo deja claro: "tengo que encontrar algo, algo que sea película") sino que sentía que era necesario exponer ciertos mecanismos para generar distancia en el espectador. En ese sentido es parecido a las rebarbas de los muñecos en *Barbie*…. Me parecía totalmente innecesaria la catarsis ya que creía que lo importante era alejar al espectador del drama y que pueda verlo sucedido de otra manera."

*Restos* is Carri's reaction to Fernando M. Peña's personal initiative to search for and archive the abundant corpus of "desaparecido" film during 1976-1983 dictatorship as a result of state censorship. Carri gestures to Peña's research and the hundreds of hours of found footage in his archive but avoids including frames of this record. It is important to notice that one of the famous "desaparecido" films is based on Roberto Carri's script on Isidro Velazquez. Again, Carri narrates memory by avoiding the self-referential and the tangible vestiges of the past.

On the contrary, she engages in a process of creation and erasure. Instead of including found images of the past, the director opts for creating images, placed vis-à-vis a voiced-over text. Written by Carri's partner Marta Dillon the voiced-over text resonates with avant-garde manifestoes, also highlighting avant-garde visual aesthetics. As acknowledged by Wolfgang Bongers, Carri embraces these aesthetics, particularly, as her plastic, poetic and tactile choices remind the viewers of the experimental cinema produced after World War I, such as the films by Man Ray, Hans Richter and Marcel Duchamp [155](72).

The text starts with a question, "Is accumulating images a form of resistance?" and continues describing the fate of the numberless films that vanished as a result of state repression. Following Nelly Richard's ideas about the need to activate a proliferation of narratives that are capable of multiplying schemes of narrativity (*Cultural Residues*, 23), I contend that *Restos* confirms that this accumulation has an underestimated potential for memory. Moreover, I believe that the images to be collected must not necessarily be

[155] Bongers, Wolfgang. *Archivo, Cine, Política: Imágenes latentes, restos y espectros en films Argentinos y Chilenos*. Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Facultad de Filosofía, Instituto de Estética, 2010. Web.

images of the past, but an ad-hoc assortment that fills the vacated void of the unattainable past. If the short film's creative mold activates memory (Cossalter, 1), the strategies used for this activation point at fragmentary strategy that demarcates the void. This empty space makes the loss palpable and memory fluid. The storytelling activates memory in the avoidance of the monolithic version.

Sound and images disperse, confront and complement each other in their variety. Like many of the pieces studied earlier, *Restos* subverts traditional storytelling by distorting the relation between image and sound, conflicting the connections between vestiges/fragments and documents brought together, and by neglecting of the uni-linear, chronological, cause-effect progression.

The manifesto discloses the details of the fate of "desaparecido" film. The images, however, do not use real footage. Instead, Carri opts for a naked man in the forest, piles of film cans, dirty water, colors in water, and film that is subject to manipulations (scratched, burnt, erased with chlorine, painted over, superimposed to film and projected). Manipulations illustrate violence in a very material way. The damaged film, the naked man, the coloring and movement are not only captivating but somehow hypnotic.

In the claim that there is an unexplored potential in more creative processes, documents are completely avoided. The mold suggested by Carri to create images is nurtured by an avant-garde tradition and many of the tropes used have been crafted as aesthetics of resistance.

Specifically, *Restos* is introduced by the image of a naked man. (see image below)

**Figure 28: Restos (2010)**

This image recalls Maya Deren's *A Study in Choreography for Camera* (1945), the collaborative project between Deren and African-American ballet dancer Talley Beatty. (see image below)

**Figure 29: A Study in Choreography for Camera (Deren, 1945)**

The image of the primitive embodies a space that is empty, like the blank text to be written in Jara's words. But, to add more complexity to Deren's primitism, rooted in U.S American avant-garde; *Restos* could be read from a peripheral perspective. From the Latin American point of view, as contended by Fernando Rosenberg, this primivitism is a concept that does not go back in time (historically, before progress). Latin American avant-gardes, on the other hand, propose an alternative space of enunciation since the peripheral position is more sensitive to the backward place that the master narrative of linear modernization assigned them (25). The naked man offers an empty space to start narrating the "desaparecido" film. The void is relational. It does not go back to a primal phase, but it engages with other peripheral positionings while maintaining its own individuality.

The same void is carved by intervening film, marking it, burning it, and erasing it. (see figure below).

**Figure 30: Restos (Carri, 2010)**

The creative process is replaced by a destructive action in line with avant-garde local expressions like *Arte destructivo*, conceptually articulated by Aldo Pellegrini's *Fundamentos de una estética de la destrucción* (1961) and materialized via a collective exhibition at Galería Lirolay in 1961.[156]

Here Carri traces her heritage in relation to a local expression that reversed the traditional dynamics between periphery and center as well anteceded and exposed transformations in social, political and cultural practices. As contended by Andrea Giunta the local *Arte destructivo* anticipated global trend [157] (7) as well as the violence that would impregnate local social, political and cultural practices for more than two decades[158](8). The exhibit showcased objects such as worn-out coffins, voluntarily damaged paintings, torn-apart dolls, burnt wax heads, and wrecked, unskillfully painted bathtubs.

The materiality of violence as well as the reluctance to be fully immersed in a specific discipline (with its production constraints) can also be appreciated if the direct scratching on the film is studied is relation to avant-garde pre-disciplinary explorations. In particular, direct scratching on the film recalls the *Rayographs,* pre-discplinary and inter-discplinary camera-less images innovated by Man Ray, in which the artists

[156] The exhibition had works by Enrique Barilari, Kenneth Kemble, Jorge López Anaya, Jorge Roiger, Antonio Seguí, Silvia Torras and Luis Alberto Wells.

[157] According to Giunta "Arte Destructivo" connected with dadaist-surrealist post war expressions, yet the Argentine version anticipated a global art trend.

[158] Specifically Giunta asserts "Parecería también posible pensar esta exposición como una visión desbordada de imágenes generadas desde una violencia con sentido estético a las que la violencia cotidiana y creciente que durante los veinte años siguientes impregnaría las prácticas sociales, políticas y culturales, volvería, sin embargo, tímidas prefiguraciones."

imprinted film strips by placing objects directly on the film and exposing it to light (see figure below).

**Figure 31: Rayograph (Man Ray, 1922)**

Carri violently destroys or marks the films strips with a puncher making confusing images and providing them with tangible fissures. The images are vacated by both destruction and scratching (see figure below).

**Figure 32: Restos (Carri, 2010)**

In its evolution, from the marks with a puncher to the burnt film and the chlorine water in which film is being bathed, the marks of narration via the intervened film strip point at the void, the vacated space. Carri marks (highlights) in order to erase, displace or reposition. According to Pellegrini's manifesto, destruction reveals the secrets of the essential structure (298). In a similar way, Carri's creative process involves destruction as creative means. Therefore, destruction is conceived as a way to disclose the essence of audio-visual expressions. As a consequence, this disclosure makes narration in film available and independent.

The painted film also engages in different process to narrate the void. Ink in water, diverse colors, mixing and matching, all gesture to fluidity and imagination in the void. In a reflexive and hypnotic style, the colors make memory unstable and hopeful (see figure below).

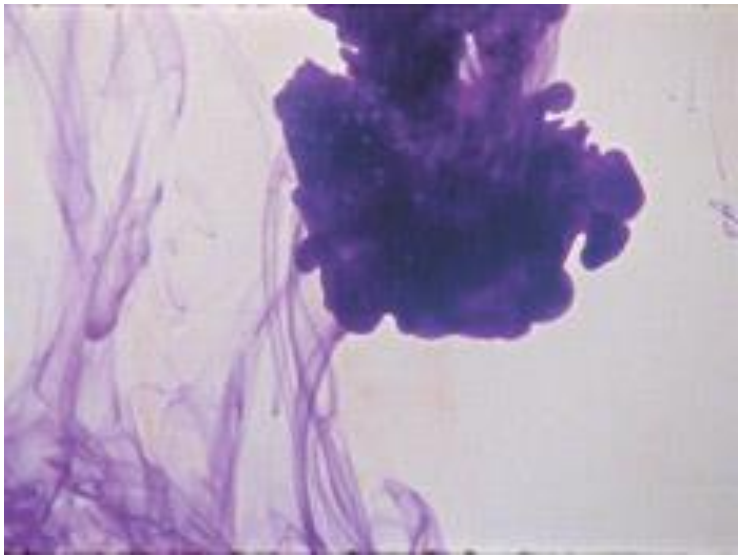

**Figure 33: Restos (Carri, 2010)**

Finally, *Restos* avoids linear evolution, not only by the randomness of fragments, but by the circularity of the storytelling. Both the images of the naked man and the notion of the accumulation of images are repeated at the end. This circularity contests the chronological evolution of traditional tales of memory.

The circularity becomes a spiral, as it reinstates the void as a creative space. This "página en blanco" proposed by Jara, is made available by spaces being defined, filled and vacated via the trope of the primal; the marks, like wounds, directly inflicted on the film strip; the playful and random movement of colored fluids, hypnotic as a lava-lamp and the cloud of disintegrated film in chlorine. In its circularity and its aesthetic resonances, the piece also reinforces its inter-textuality with *Los rubios*, thus amplifying the spectator's participation in the memory of the traumatic past.

The last words of the short-film confirm the thesis by stating that to accumulate images is a form of memory and that to make those images available is vital to disclosing the path through which we can continue.[159] In this spiral, the audience is left with a blank page and the agency to contribute to the narratives of memory. The spectator can fill that void with a personal story, with an individual feeling, or with a private and wordless wound. While the remembrance is personal, "the" path through which we can continue," in singular ("la" huella por donde seguir andando), suggests a community.

Both collective and personal, the shared past becomes a mutant form with the capacity to represent across time, geographies, groups, and social classes. Carri's work

[159] "acumular images es una forma de la memoria. Volverlas disponibles es necesario para desglosar la huella por donde seguir andando."

suggests a confidence that there are still many voices to be heard in memory. This confidence is confirmed in *Los rubios* and is continued in *Restos*, as the *Los rubios* project. This constellation by Carri makes available an individual space for those voices to surface.

## Conclusion

(about Guillermo Kuitca's "Nadie olvida nada", 1982)

"The nada captures the absence, the void into which Argentinean desaparecidos have been thrust. Implied in the tile, of course, is the idea that everyone remembers everything. But such a statement is impossible because what happened to each desaparecido in captivity cannot be remembered as long as it remains undocumented. Suddenly there is an added significance to the fact that all figures in the series are drawn schematically and seen from behind. The absence of faces point to the voiding of individuality by State terror. (…)

By linguistically and pictorically wiping out the subjective experience and objective representation of the state terror, the imaginary state of memory –and memory is always imagined, not real- is preserved all the better. More immediately, this denial of self and subjectivity stands in a long line of tradition from Franz Kafka to Samuel Beckett. It is one of the major tropes of modernism, and Kuitca makes selfconscious use of it, thus subtly giving visual shape to a very specific historical moment in Argentina –the anticipated end of the military dictatorship"

Andreas Huyssen, *Guillermo Kuitca: Painter of Space*. 2010.

Andreas Huyssen, a specialist in holocaust and memory studies in Germany has also studied in depth the role of the visual arts in relation to Argentine post-dictatorial memory in a number of texts. This fragment of Huyssen's work on Kuitca's art brings together many of the issues this project discusses. Specifically, it captures the notion of the void as a constructive space in memory; the replacement of the subjective stance and objective representation. Huyssen suggests absence– a void, as the shape of memory- as a trope embedded in the modernist tradition.

In the quotation that introduces this chapter, the scholar describes “Nadie olvida nada” (1982), a series produced the last year of the dictatorial rule in Argentina (see figure below).

**Figure 34: Nadie olvida nada -fragment (Kuitca, 1982)**

Huyssen suggests that the “nadie-nada” double presupposes an affirmation in the replication (two negatives equal positive), therefore in the double negation there is memory. However, this does not mean that everyone remembers everything, which is an impossible; quite differently, it suggests that everyone remembers something.

The lack of identity (disfiguration of the faces) in the painting cancels the personal stance, desubjetivizing the remembrance. It is not that individual memories are neglected; on the contrary, in their lack of identification, they accumulate. By not representing anyone in particular, they have the potential to represent them all. Narratives, then, multiply and memory is brought back into the realm of the shared and

the collective. Without the "one" story, on behalf of all, the void is a vacated space for representation.

Huyssen believes that Kuica's "nada" gives a visual shape to dynamics of memory. Apart from the figures devoid of an identity, aesthetically, the "nadie-nada" duality also functions as a mirroring construction; it suggests the reflection of the same-yet-different; like a deformed echo "nadie" turns into "nada." The word "olvidar" in the center has a similar function as the colon in-between *Los rubios* and "*cartografía de una película."* Forgetting lays in-between the double negation, forgetting is a void in narration that allows this proliferation of individual and anonymous stories. The void in both pieces communicates and negates access to the past, de-individualizes the narrative in an exercise that, according to Huyssen, preserves memory all the better (2010, 25). The subjective experience and the objective representation of the past are then replaced by a space that can be inhabited by a variety of subjects willing to participate in narratives of memory.

The visual form designed by Kuitca traces its aesthetic roots to modernism (specifically, the avant-garde in the case of this study), a longstanding tradition of resistance. The avant-garde aesthetic mold gave memory a non-chronological framework that can trace relationships throughout the 20$^{th}$ century and into the new millennium.

The scholar also believes that this 1982 set of paintings anticipated the collapse of the dictatorial rule. Foreseen, the politics of memory during that transition and the search

to give memory a visual form, Kuitca opted for silhouettes, which also anticipated the 1983 street art "El siluetazo."

As contended by Huyssen in a different piece (his contribution to Marcelo Brodsky's volume *Memory Works*), the aftermath of systematic human rights abuses by brutal Dictatorial Governments posed the challenge to the return to democracy. These traumatic experiences questioned whether memory could bring closure, whether forgetting would bring about social reconciliation, and whether the post-dictatorial trauma could be represented artistically (2003, 9).

Lila Pastoriza deepens this inquiry by questioning if memory is a return to the past based on data and archives or a selective reappropriation of the past, which fails to be neutral and aseptic. In her questions she conceives memory as a vessel, "cántaro," to be filled with papers and documents[160] (87). It is interesting that Pastoriza uses the vessel-to-be-filled trope, as there is a famous saying in Spanish warning about the dangers in filling the void: "the vase constantly goes to the fountain and the fountain breaks."[161] Continuing her thesis, Pastoriza brings Pilar Calveiro's voice who says that there are many was to articulate memory, each way will depend on its political use. The question remains: How can trauma be represented artistically?

President Néstor Kirchner (2003-2007) promoted legislation of and funded projects for memory. These policies were continued by the Cristina Fernández de Kirchner administration (2007--). The officially supported politics of memory in

[160] "¿hablamos de cántaro vacío que hay que 'llenar' con recuerdos y documentos?"
[161] "tanto va a el cantaro a la fuente que la fuente se rompe."

Argentina re-defined the output and the rhetoric of memory in the new millennium (as mentioned earlier). Some of the mainstream films of memory born in the core of the system in the realm of the post-2003 politics of memory may have resulted in a new "one" legitimized voice encompassing all, this time incarnated by the son or daughter of "desaparecido" parents.

Precisely, the film *Infancia Clandestina* (2011) by Benjamín Ávila, a son of "desaparecido" parents, is determined to take over the space held by *La historia oficial* (1984) as the mainstream post-dictatorial narrative. *Infancia clandestina* tells the story of Juan, a twelve year-old boy whose parents are militants escaping the law and planning subversive acts during the dictatorship. From the perspective of a boy, Ávila unleashes his own case as son of "desaparecido" parents, with a solid script and the economic resources to capture life in 1970's.

The film, an international co-production that included a cast of Argentina's and Spain's famous figures, amassed recognitions at Cannes Film Festival, Toronto International film festival, La Havana Film Festival, and San Sebastian Film Festival, while securing exhibition venues in Argentina and abroad. Moreover, *Infancia clandestina* was selected to represent Argentina in the foreign film competition for the *Oscar Prize*.

The renovation included production and formal aspects. Produced by Luis Puenzo (the filmmaker behind *La historia oficial) Infancia clandestina*'s cast reverberated with the choices of the 1985 counterpart. Not only does the 2011 film include Ernesto Alterio,

son of Héctor Alterio (who performed the villain father in *La historia oficial),* but Ávila and Puenzo envisioned that the baby in *Infancia clandestina* was Gaby, the kidnapped, abducted and illegally adopted daughter in the 1985 production (Pérez Zabala). The links between these films of memory illustrate how one voice can be legitimated as the only voice of memory.

In relation to the politics of memory, Pastoriza asks: how can we avoid unique discourses and owners of memory[162] (86). She contends that what is needed is to expand and unfold the debate to broader segments of society. Recalling Sandra Lorenzano's ideas, Pastoriza stresses that memory is a social narrative in multiple voices which does not aim at reconciling diversity into a unique voice but, to present contradiction, difference, tension, ambivalence, ambiguity and silence (Lorenzano in Pastoriza, 88).

This entire project aims at acknowledging how Albertina Carri, also daughter of "desaparecido" parents, articulated a pathway for memory that is not self-referential, but open to the participation of others. So far, this study has analyzed *Los rubios* as a reaction to an entire tradition of political film, including militant cinema as well as officially-funded films of memory. However, the complementarity and the influences across mainstream and non-mainstream expressions are undeniable.

The void reacts to the instructional/educational goal of political film but embraces and redefines many of the strategies used by these political cinematic narratives. Carri needs the intertextual relations, in order to articulate counterpoints, similar to *Documents'*

[162] "¿Cómo evitar discursos únicos y dueños de memoria?"

use of inter-textual references to other prestigious magazines and, thus to destabilize their perspectives. Moreover, the void revitalizes strategies used by now-canonical militant films such as *La hora de los hornos* (1968), where the interruptions dismantle the cinematic illusion by transforming the passive experience of watching a film into an active "cine-acto." Concluding, the fact that Carri embraces a different affiliation does not mean that Carri dismissed the political film prior to *Los rubios*.

The *Los rubios* film was visionary because it could set memory free from the restrictions of the official will or the legitimized source, the filmic founding and the cinematic industrial and technical limitations. The inter-textual inter-weaving deepened the potential of the project *Los rubios*, allowing it to go beyond time, space and disciplinary boundaries. Moreover, the aesthetics developed around the strategy of the void speaks of a rare talent in audio-visual art. Carri's void is the "cántaro" that remains relevant, an always empty vessel that never breaks and, because of that, it can secure the renovation of memory to prevent its crystallization.

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