

Archival Logics and the Politics of Truth in Ricardo Piglia's *Respiración artificial*

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“En un sentido, dijo después, este libro era la autobiografía del professor. Éste era el modo que tenía él de escribir sobre sí mismo...Son tres carpetas, con documentos y notas y páginas escritas con una letra firme y clara” (“In a way, he said later, this book was the professor’s autobiography. This was the fashion in which he wrote about himself...these three folders, with documents, notes, and pages written with a strong, clear script” [Piglia 217]). A collection of folders, loose documents, notes, and some handwritten pages: letters that will form the basis of an epistolary novel within a novel: this archive contains, as we are told by Ricardo Piglia’s *Respiración artificial*(1980), the autobiography and the testimonial of the scholar Marcelo Maggi, handed to his nephew, Emilio Renzi.¹

Maggi, a historian, spends his time in the hinterlands of Argentina working on the historical archive and biography of a (fictitious) nineteenth-century national formation-era political figure Enrique Ossorio. Ossorio’s legacy is the mapping of the brutality and difficulties of the battles between Gen. Juan Manuel de Rosas’ *federalistas* and the *liberales*—most notable among them Domingo Faustino Sarmiento. The fictitious Ossorio begins as a member of Rosas’ sphere of influence and ends as a traitor to his cause. Both participants in and victims of the political repression of General Juan Manuel de Rosas, Ossorio’s figure doubles the representation of victimization—archival and actual—in the novel, as he forces the historian to confront his own situation. Alluding to Maggi’s victimization, Ossorio's fragmentary archive also forces the reader to inhabit the political violence of Argentina’s history as a nexus of contiguities. His incomplete biography is not only a nod to Maggi’s future

disappearance, but becomes an archive of possibility actively representing what is witnessable and writeable politically in uncertain times.²

This essay will both read and use Piglia's novel to suggest how he addresses national trauma through an adaptation of *testimonio* that does much more than either fiction or bearing individual witness itself could do. More than allusions to or traces of political criminality, Ossorio's documents are not *fictional*, historicized representations of the nineteenth century, but *fictionalized* insertions of real moments of Argentina's Dirty War period (1976-1983) into that past context. Through the story of Maggi and his archive, then, Piglia narrates his era's criminality, as Maggi's reconstruction of Argentina's history is frustrated by his "disappearing" by the military regime. Maggi thus fails to represent the past encompassed in his archival collection, an act ultimately represented *in absentia* in the present by the papers, documents, and the legacy of an unfulfilled national project.

Such an archive, compiled and unfinished, can be called a testimony insofar as it signifies an individual's labors in making history, giving evidence and texture to its movements. By affirming the subject's relation to such an archive, as Derrida notes, we can identify a moment of commencement emerging from the archive's arrangement: the birthplace of a nomological principle (related to the law and legality) and a material foundation for the inscription of inclusion, exclusion, community, commandment, and authority (Derrida 4). Yet how does identifying such an archive as the story of an individual subject who compiles it create a particular ecology of agency, force, and position—in this case, in reference to the lengthy history of Argentinean political violence? Answers to this question are difficult enough when the subject is self-identifying, narrating her or his experience as *testimonio* with the presumed authority of lived experience. But what if the archive is, as the case with *Respiración artificial*, a historian's reconstruction of *another's* legacy?

In Piglia's novel, as is familiar, the archive in question is Maggi's attempt to come to terms with the legacy of the fictional exile Ossorio's traitorous history as a victim of nineteenth-century dictator Juan Manuel Rosas. While alluding to the position of Dirty-War era exiles writing from without and without hope of being read in their

nation, Ossorio's archive still claims its own historical place. But this archive is not merely the simulacrum of a historian's work, it represents the possible, a counterfactual that implicates more than one person and one time: *Maggi will never the finish the biography, but he does compile the archive, leaving intact a performative possibility, a taking charge of what is, after all, another's story.* Through this, the archive of an absent other becomes the site unraveling the mystery of identity and loss, the point at which the personal and the political converge. "[P]ienso que en estos papeles encontrará usted todo lo que necesite saber sobre él, todo lo que yo no puedo decirle" ("I think that in these papers you will find everything you need to know about him, everything I am unable to tell you" [217]).

This passage near the end of the novel reminds the reader of two important points, burdens placed on them by the story: first, Maggi's identity is reduced to the archive by the novel's suggestion of his abduction by government forces—his identity is interlaced with a politics not part of the narration, nor part of Ossorio's political activities. Second, the archive bears witness as the *construction* of an intended intervention into the novel's dual sphere of historical meaning—adducing either a meaning intended by the archivist, or one that exists as a derridean trace for the reader to uncover, inserted by an author who cannot openly speak, due to the threat of violence or censure.

In Piglia's hands, the still-present archive that substitutes for the absent other is a *testimonial*—the inscribed and deliberate narration of a particular history presented as a political-historical understanding endured by a collectivity and vocalized by an individual. Attempting to construct an allegory for Dirty War trauma, Piglia places the archive into the "specific economy of interaction" of a testimonial narrative. It emerges in the form of a novel written under political repression and instability, offering the possibility of a new inscription and demarcation of expression. Reminiscent of historical fiction, Piglia's novel tropes the manner in which history, narrative, and archival reconstruction work act as testimonial for a particular period's political traumas. After a fashion, then, Piglia argues for the possibility that an archive contains more than the markers of the past, or the testimony of an individual.³

The archive in *Respiración artificial*, I argue, is marked by two main functions.

First, the archive functions as the space of collective vocalization for the trauma of the violent Guerra Sucia period (1976-1983), recovering traces scarcely narrated in public voices but still present in this single collection of documents, ready to speak if revealed. Marked by the constant disappearance of intellectuals, students, and other dissidents, Argentina's Dirty War stands as the great trauma of the Argentinetwentieth century. In consequence, the period's overwhelming trauma requires a new historiographic and narrative technique to represent Argentina's traumatic history. If, as James Berger contends, traumatic writing represents history's unrepresentable kernel, then Piglia's text narrates this particular traumatic moment, when voicelessness and suffering challenge the military junta's official censorship and the psychic muting of Piglia's own voice. Thus the interpolation into the novel of historical facts from the Dirty War—beyond their inclusion in the altered form of the historian's archive—actually serves the purposes of narrating the period's trauma.

Second, I argue that the specific form of the novel's archive is not merely a narration of the historical moment, but rather works as a new genre of testimonial, or in the Spanish-American context, *testimonio*. Contemporary critics generally define *testimonio* literature as the work of an individual or collective retelling their history; the *testimonio* is most effective in challenging the authority of a dominant culture's narrative. Instead of reconstructing the hegemonic "truth" of an historical period, then, the *testimonio* asserts its position as a possible narrative which refuses to reduce history into a single master narrative. Concomitantly, *testimonio* literature is linked to the narration of the traumatic and violent historical events of twentieth-century Central- and South-American nations, and the emergence of a call for a special literary witnessing for progressive political and social movements in Latin America.⁴

In this essay, therefore, I propose a linking of the epistemic possibilities of *testimonio* as a genre—a type of witnessing that Elizabeth Sklodowska calls the para-textual apparatus inherent to a *testimonio*. That is, I link that genre to the operation of an editor, figure, or set of materials that insert the *testimonio* into the particular epistemic and aporetic economy, setting true stories against fictional story to correct the

public record by other means. The presence of a veridical archive (a space of truth-telling, *absent* the truth-teller) in Piglia's *Respiración artificial*, I believe, works much in the same way that the "partial truths" work in the proto-new journalism novels of Rodolfo Walsh and Elena Poniatowska—by testifying through archival insertion to the factual status and facticity of political violence and trauma, even in the cases where no one exists to tell the story.

From this perspective, *Respiración artificial* becomes more than an allegorical novel complicating the historicity of national identity and political violence: it interpolates archival vocalizations to express the contemporary historical suffering of Piglia's own period.

By linking the hidden archive to the actual events of political trauma, Piglia creates a new possibility for testimonial literature—the fictitious archive constituting an otherwise silent period's traumatically induced testimonial. In this fashion, Piglia breathes new life into both fiction and the testimonial genres, disrupting the possibility that either functions as a meta-narrative, yet enhancing fiction's opportunity to testify to the trauma of lived experience. This new reading of Piglia's *Respiración artificial* reconfigures the novel's allegory to reveal how its allusive aspects (unifying the centuries of traumatic national history) are exceeded by its power as testimonial. By including the archive, Piglia links the novel's allegory with a narration that directly witnesses Argentina's dictatorial present. Written in the very historical center of Dirty War terror, *Respiración artificial's* archival manipulation of the present—linking it allegorically to the tumultuous past of the Rosas dictatorship—thus exceeds its allegorical concatenation as an alternative *testimonio* genre, rendering what started as a historical biography an act of truth-telling to the present.

The Historical Moment and Trauma of *Respiración artificial*

Piglia's novel was written, as I have noted, in Argentina's most bloody period *La Guerra Sucia*, or Dirty War (1976-1983), which arrives with the arrest of previous president Isabel Perón, her expulsion to the Patagonian province of Neuquén, and the assumption of all political power by a junta of military leaders: Lieutenant General

Jorge Rafael Videla, Admiral Eduardo Emilio Massera, and Brigadier General Orlando R. Agosti. Gen. Videla was installed as Argentina's *de facto* president. Instantly, the military government initiated policies to stave off the massive economic crisis inherited from the Perón regime.

During the Dirty War, any student, teacher, intellectual, worker, or other private citizen suspected of political disagreement with the government could be secretly arrested by government-sanctioned right-wing paramilitary units—generally under the cover of night and with extremely quiet means—and extradited to unknown localities.⁵ The use of state terrorism went beyond the mere creation of instruments of suppression. While under arrest, the identities of the opposition would be stripped from them; they would be issued a number to keep their identities secret from even their captors, leaving them anonymous and at the utter mercy of their jailers. Period records describe massive torture camps and execution facilities—some carved in the interiors of mountains—where citizens suffered sustained torture before being either released to an unknown location or assassinated. Current estimates vary widely, with official governmental organs listing the disappeared at 9,000, and human rights organizations listing up to 30,000 victims.⁶

During the period, some of the more notable writers, artists, and intellectuals of Argentina went into exile—forced to flee to escape death or imprisonment. Ricardo Piglia, however, stayed, often narrowly avoiding capture. And under the specter of this brutality, *Respiración artificial* was written and published.

Despite the fear of recrimination and physical harm, Piglia's novel occasioned ambiguous but open criticism of the Dirty War landscape. As Seymour Menton points out: “if he wanted to deceive the censors, why did he spell out the significance of the novel's title on its back cover: ‘*tiempos sombríos en que los hombres parecen necesitar un aire artificial para poder sobrevivir*’” (Menton 126). In need of “artificial respiration,” a breath of life to resurrect him from among the near dead, Piglia indicts the regime for creating the dense, tragic affect of his nation, choking the lives of human subjects. In this way, *Respiración artificial* provides the breath necessary to

counter Piglia's voicelessness, as it narrates this traumatic history by inserting contemporary political headlines into Enrique Ossorio's archive, creating in essence a joint archive shared two eras of Argentinean everyday life.

As the reader watches Ossorio's motivations develop, the political machinations of the nineteenth-century Argentinean nation-building movement turn increasingly violent and disillusioning. In this way, Piglia suggests openly that this violent, decadent political project of bringing modern Argentina into existence is being repeated as the novel is written and published, 1976-1980. Further implied is the presence of an alternate contemporary archive that challenges the official propaganda of the military junta—the reader is challenged to ask that question. Nonetheless, the “biography” never narrates politics directly. Instead, Piglia sidesteps a direct authorial critique of the Argentine political climate by means of fiction's defamiliarizing power, which eludes censorship while at the same time pointing to the text's core of facticity and truth feared by repressive regimes throughout the world.

The nature of this facticity and witness may be developed by arguing that *Respiración artificial* is a text of historically traumatized memory, one that produces an event of commemoration and begins a memorialized, non-hegemonic collective narrative about Argentinean violence, based on the availability of a written archive. Nearly the whole of Piglia's works struggle with the way narrative, commemoration, and archival preservation are an integral, inherent part to the development of an alternative ordering of meaning for the national identity. In his 2005 essay collection, *Formas breves*, Piglia explicitly ties Argentine literary reflection to a conjunctural analysis of politics, writing, and national identity: “habría que estudiar los efectos de la política en la lengua de una época. Se trata, por lo demás, de una tradición nacional.” (Piglia 27)

Trauma is indeed the center of the project of Piglia's *Respiración artificial*. By dissimulating Argentinean current events within Ossorio's archive, Piglia creates a double negotiation for his readers, an envagination of meaning, where the moment's truth and the historiography are enlaced to reveal multiple truths. In the juxtaposition of biographer and subject, the author forces historiography back into that space of national

trauma, forcing the reader to confront both the past and the present on a new level, to breathe life into a necessary discussion that has been silenced while calling into question the very capacity of the disappeared voices to narrate. Trauma, which Žižek defines as “a shock which dissolves the link between truth and meaning, a truth so traumatic that it resists integration into the universe of Meaning” (Žižek 182), creates a wound for narrative that Idelber Avelar suggests forces *Respiración artificial* into the unresolvable space of the *metaphantasm* that structures the reproduction of meaning: “disertar infinita, neuróticamente, acerca de la imposibilidad de narrarnos; así como de la imposibilidad de no narrar esta imposibilidad (Avelar 182).

Thus, in Avelar's reading, trauma may be the politico-affective condition of our contemporary age. From the *Shoah* to the Dirty War, society's history has been marked by the sustained, often sudden, but always horrific and bloody violence of war and oppression. But unique to the contemporary age is the systematic and innovative torture, oppression and murder of dissidents for political and cultural reasons—the willingness of twentieth-century military-industrial complexes to plan and execute the suppression of whole classes who might challenge them.⁷ But the link of trauma and testimony has been less common, although it seems to be the situation addressed here.

Trauma can be defined psychologically, as a wound, a mark, or the suffering of violence that indelibly and permanently marks the sufferer as a traumatic victim. Akin to Althusser's notion of interpellation,⁸ whereby subjects realize their own personhood by virtue of the naming of their social alterity, traumatic experience marks the subject as subject. Yet as Petar Ramadanovic argues, it also “involves, in other words, an incapacity of imaginary identification and a (constitutional) inability of the ego to incorporate the event” (Ramadanovic 185). Recent work linking individual experiences of this sort to questions of history and narrative suggests also that trauma disrupts the construction of meaning necessary for an individual's negotiation of pain.

Yet trauma is not only experienced by individuals. Scholars of trauma—psychoanalysts and literary scholars alike—also insist that trauma can and must be understood and narrated to be survived, which implies a community of

understanding. Trauma's narration serves a therapeutic effect insofar as it names conditions and symptoms that victims of a collective trauma may share *with that collective*. By giving shape to the traumatic condition, trauma sufferers might come to terms with their fractious histories. When trauma takes the form of narration, however, it also serves what I pursue here as an alternate political function: it reveals how the moment of trauma is structurally circumscribed by human activity and considerations, reflected in its narrative's truth—even a supposedly individual act of narrative is heavily implicated with the historical-political site on which it is undertaken. Trauma is thus not simply the free expression of an individual's mourning, nor does the impossibility of fully signifying a traumatic memory necessarily instantiate an individual expression of experience—trauma is always part of a knotted and hence partially inaccessible symbolic and ideological chain of signification, as elaborated in the accounts of Jacques Lacan⁹ and Slavoj Žižek.¹⁰ All traumatic writing, I claim, is necessarily politicized by the semiotics of ideology and inherently recognizable in that ideology's phantasmatic chain of signifiers.

Based on the Freudian account of memory and trauma, Žižek's analysis of trauma forces the reading of traumatic testimony and memory as a necessarily politicized event—an event that, despite its traumatic content, is always laden and fraught with social meaning. Diana Taylor (2003) has argued the contrary: that traumatic memories are anti-archival and traceless, since experience of trauma disrupts remembering. Instead, she argues for testimony in a commemoration made possible by the *repertoire*, a series of individual bodily memories and transmissions that can affectively remember through the performatives of gesture and movement, rather than words. However, as I argued earlier is the case for Piglia, the traumatic archive is always available to the collective as a representation of trauma *after the fact*. It struggles to incorporate in linguistic expression otherwise censored affective and cognitive possibilities of horror and suffering—to express the inexpressible, by testifying for the existence of the traumatic moment, witnessing what is known only subconsciously.

This is, I believe, especially the case for politically induced trauma that has created individual narrative articulations but which not an acknowledged, shared

“master narrative” (a common term for the narratives available in Lacan's symbolic order). In either form, the master narrative's composition is necessarily collective and often instantiates what Slavoj Žižek termed ideology, in the form of individual utterances.¹¹ This is, I believe, the way that Piglia's text operated in its historical moment, to provide an alternative to historical accounts that underrepresented the distress Argentina was suffering. Thus despite its avoidance of direct commentary on the current political situation, Piglia's novel acts as a counter-ideological marker, a point of defiance challenging the function of ideology (here: in the form of the master narrative of the state), yet still not censurable by the owners of that master narrative. In Žižek's words, the purpose of that gesture “is not to offer us a point of escape from our reality but to offer us the social reality itself as an escape from some traumatic, real kernel” (*The Sublime Object of Ideology* 45). That social reality thus itself becomes an archive, available to future manipulation -- the unconscious has become signified.

However, the traumatic kernel of this experience (its historic center) does not determine the structure for all *subsequent* traumas from this history; all traumatic experience is *not* of one origin, one type, or one location within the subject's identity because each subsequent "reader" of the archive will assess it differently—the particular art of Piglia's narrative in showing an archive rather than a finished narrative that would have to function as a (censurable) alternative to the nation's master narrative. In this way Maggi's archive can stand for more than just the disappeared of Piglia's present or Ossorio's past, it sponsors access to political trauma itself in the space of Argentina. Thus Maggi can testify to possible essential structures for trauma in any collective configuration in his space, past or present. The archive thus sets into play a basic arrangement of understanding for the reader—an ideological matrix tracing the essential trajectory of the ideological forces of symbolization and psychic negotiation produced by the original and subsequent traumatic moments for a subject *ideologically* within its socio-historical space.

Returning to the necessarily collective aspect of all trauma, Žižek offers the critic here a possible ground centering readings of trauma and its political and ideological consequences. Žižek seems to allow for little in the way of handling trauma

as a testimony aimed at countering a dominant master narrative. Reading ideology in this way, as the direct consequence of a trauma turned by the individual into a state of mind and state of being, argues for the subject's very formation in history by means of trauma. That is, the subject cannot offer independent testimony to the trauma, but rather *is* the trauma.

In other words, to quote Žižek again, if we simply read ideology as a mere repetition that emerges from the “traumatic, real kernel” of history, we also, in essence, read the subject as a “void, ...an empty place in which his or her whole content is procured by others, by the symbolic network of intersubjective relations...if this were all, Lacan’s last word would be a radical alienation of the subject” (Žižek 46). Thus if trauma forms the subject, then the subject is in some way not real. And if we as readers are left with the “radical alienation of the subject” from any intersubjective connection (such as the relation between citizen and polity), then all trauma naturally would only reveal the absolute fecklessness of the subject against the social fabric, and against that fabric's lack of narrative. In *any* situation, in consequence, trauma theory would then have to acknowledge, the subject would never be “normal,” but always already traumatized by its alienation, its lack of narrative substance. In this reading, then, trauma can never be represented in simple contradistinction to the normal subject or in terms of healthful intersubjective relations, because the trauma itself constitutes those subjects. Trauma, in other words, would here be defined as the natural state of being for *subjects* as such, because the formation of individual identity is not just individual, but the product of a traumatic beginning and a coeval, necessitated symbolic response within an intersubjective grouping. Concomitantly, the affective responses of trauma—rage, sorrow, loss—would become mere system effects of the trauma formation.

In such an account, trauma's potential for witnessing is radically undervalued: trauma’s unrepresentability rests on an absence of signification, a vector of difference within the intersubjectivity of society. Here, trauma needs always to be defined as a state *different* from the standard way in which subjects connect; intersubjectivity cannot be modeled as resting on the unrepresentability of a traumatic event. Thus, what is required to narrate such trauma is not the existence of adequate significations (they do not exist),

but the mere willingness to narrate the trauma in spite of its seeming unrepresentability—personal commitment. Conceived thus as an unrepresentable pain and represented in melancholia, trauma exists not as a repressed memory leaving in its wake a chasm of non-meaning, but as a constant reference to the traumatic moment that is present but not itself legible and hence in some way insurmountable. As Brett Levinson points out, “without access to re-presentation or memory he/she confronts not the absence of trauma but its interminable living presence” (Levinson 216). Melancholia, as Julia Kristeva has outlined,¹² signals at least one face of the experience requiring signification -- a first gesture where the unnarrated becomes accessible. In melancholia, current ways of enunciating the truth may not prove sufficient to account for the horrors of contemporary life; individuals are not given access to a collective; narrativity has no value as signification.

I believe that Piglia allows Ossorio's archive to offer quite a different account of testimony and trauma, offering the possibility of memory, thought, and speech itself to take the place of the presumably abducted Maggi, just as it can for those who have witnessed yet another moment of violence that cannot be narrated. The *absence* has in fact a set of traces that necessarily point back to a narrative, albeit one repressed by the censorship of the national master narratives. For an Argentine reader of Piglia's generation, the ability for an individual to have the language to talk about Maggi is largely foreclosed by the actuality of Dirty War regime violence and by the folding and disruption of identities which it instantiated, but their place of experience remains.¹³

But that does not exhaust the novel's structure in linking testimony and trauma in acts of signification. If we take Maggi's nephew Renzi and the Polish émigré Tardewski (who gives the archive to Renzi and alludes to Maggi's disappearance) as the witnesses to and survivors of his historic period—as Piglia himself actually was—, then it is necessary to see them as what Dori Laub calls as “*being inside the event*”: they are witnesses who endure the “very circumstance of *being inside the event* that [makes] unthinkable the very notion that a witness could exist, that is, someone who could step outside of the coercively totalitarian and dehumanizing frame of reference in which the

event was taking place” (Felman and Laub 66). Renzi and Tardewski remain to reenact and locate the event of trauma that Maggi, vanished witness-turned-experiencer, leaves behind—the *structure of the event* as based in collective narratives, not just its affect.

Piglia here points at a broader aspect of trauma in narrative. To avoid the repetition of traumatic injury, writers of trauma narrative (especially in the act of "witnessing" so critical within studies of Holocaust literature, or of our era's traumatic political events) renarrate and rememorialize traumatic events. In so doing, they produce an aporetic of meaning and representation situated on the gap between unmemorable traumatic event and the impulse to narration and rememorialization—they act in the space of that gap. As individuals narrate or repress a trauma, therefore, that act places the trauma in a symbolic network where it loses its isolated and isolating character and enters a potential space for public discussion. In this sense, even the ideological model of Žižek allows for a *secondary* trauma to disrupt the ideology of the first and call for a new symbolic renegotiation of the traumatic moment.

That is, when a trauma is narratized, an experience not contained in the original trauma narration can emerge along one of the vectors connected to it; that new experience might well emerge to challenge the authority of the narrative and to reshape it. In this way, ideology is always shown to be at some level secondary to the possibility of trauma—a traumatic, real moment can occur that disrupts ideology by challenging the tried and true methods of symbolization and reveals their biases. In this way, a text like Piglia’s locates a traumatic absence within history and hence uncovers one of the vectors remaining after the original trauma event is seemingly lost (or disappeared); through it, citizens are called to come to terms with the possible instability of their own ideological presuppositions.

I would like to argue now that the metafictional technique of joining archive and *testimonio* is Piglia’s way of renarrating (or opening up a possibility of renarrating) the trauma of the Dirty War—it is more than simply a stylistic marker of literary pedigree. Piglia’s discussion of his own narratology reveals his metafictional proficiency not as merely Borgesian experimentation, but rather as suggesting that a truer story is being told underneath the metafictional layers:

El cuento es un relato que encierra un relato secreto. No se trata de un sentido oculto que dependa de la interpretación: el enigma no es otra cosa que una historia que se cuenta de un modo enigmático. La estrategia del relato está puesta al servicio de esa narración cifrada... Segunda tesis: la historia secreta es la clave de la forma del cuento y sus variantes. (Piglia 87)

The short story is a tale that enclosed a secret history. It does not deal with an obscured meaning which depends on interpretation: the enigma is nothing more than a story told in an enigmatic fashion. The strategy of the short story is put into the service of that encoded narration... Second thesis: the secret story is the key to the short story form and its variants.

The “secret story” to which Piglia refers is the key to the story as political, ideological action upon the reader. Piglia's narrative is thus designed not to tell a single master narrative to counter the administration, but to reveal from within the presence of another fictive possibility—or in the case of *Respiración artificial*, a “real” story of Argentine political violence, left to each reader to find in their own versions, yet grounded in shared experience and narratives.¹⁴

Of further consequence is how the secret story in *Respiración artificial* acts both as an occulted narrative hiding from the powers of domination and hegemony, and as an explicit challenge to the dominant order, one which reconfigures margin and center by narrating an unauthorized counter-hegemonic Argentine political history. In this reading, the novel becomes what James C. Scott famously called a “hidden transcript of discourse,” which typically challenges the orders of domination configuring any linguistic expression in a situation of vigorous hegemonic enforcement—this transcript is opposed to the more naturalized and unreflected hegemonic ideations generally termed false consciousness.

Idelber Avelar ties the hidden story to a way of uncoding, an “arte del desciframiento,” that allows for a renovation of the political possibility of literature away from merely evading censorship. And David Kelman ties the secret story to the traitor as a figure that disrupts the idea of a strict “historical heritage or inheritance” (Kelman 242). Functioning as both codes under censorship and the capacity to situate,

however negatively, the multiple demands and dimensions of reading under censorship, we nonetheless must recognize that the secret story is not secret *to the reader*, but rather we decode it along the lines of an allegory of ruins¹⁵ that will nonetheless be fructiferous if *collected* as an archive—an act that each reader performs in their reception.

What unites these ideas in Piglia's work is the political redeployment of a metafictional strategy that is only structurally possible when we acknowledge that a narrative is imbedded within the narrative. In consequence, we are led to agree with Shoshana Felman's analysis of how trauma and narrative are related, who points out that the layering of an archive like Ossorio's creates “a certain tension, a certain aporia that inheres between the allegorical and the historical qualities of the event: the allegory seems to name the *vanishing of the event* as part of its *actual historical occurrence*” (Felman 103). The “literality of the [political] event,” in Felman's words, within a narrative like Piglia's, serves to “make its literality vanish”; it questions the aporetic model of Piglia's witnessing as it questions the mode of understanding history she calls “a *failure to imagine*” (Felman and Laub 105), as it opens up multiple possibilities of re-narrativizing the narrative ground of experience.

Nonetheless, I have said earlier, precisely that trauma of Piglia's era is *reimagined* by this text of an archive that has a possible new role as testimony about persistent cultural patterns, not just an individual's *testimonio*. And Felman concurs with Žižek that such an act is necessarily political, or ideological: “Literature bears testimony not just to duplicate or record events, but to make history available to the imaginative act whose historical unavailability has prompted, and made possible, a holocaust” (Felman 108).

Consequently, Piglia's text, a literary text with an unstable point of origin in an archive rather than a narrative with a finished ideology originating from an author or a known single point, emerges as the only way in which the trauma and crime of the Dirty War can be narrated. He uses literature to reconfigure the cognitive possibilities of the reading subject, when the reality of the events hidden in Ossorio's archive is understood by his readers, each in their own way. “The narrative is testimony to an apprenticeship

to history and to an apprenticeship of witnessing insofar as this historical crisis of the witness brings about a certain form of *cognition*” (Felman 110).

In this sense, Piglia’s text bears unique witness to the period's trauma by altering the very (un)knowability of the moment, as the fictional archive it contains signals from across the literary divide the veridical “apprenticeship of history” that Felman suggests is the function of a testimonial literature. The reader comes to understand and be able to structure the political violence of (contemporary) Argentina through the narrative of its frustrated independence, as each reader understands it. Concomitantly, Piglia's narration of the historical moment achieves a cognitive form that allows for a *reading* of the historical moment, a first bringing of its traumatic ground to legibility for each reader—a first step to a new understanding. Further and finally, Piglia’s text serves as a firsthand account of the era's brutality. As “the task of testimony is to impart that knowledge: a firsthand carnal knowledge of victimization, of what it means to be ‘from here,’” *Respiración artificial* thus serves as the first literary witness to the specific trauma of the Dirty War. It may also be the first negotiation with a deeper historical understanding about how the political processes of Argentinean history laid the groundwork for that Dirty War—the ideologies that cause the trauma thus emerging from behind a too-simple act of witnessing trauma as the *effect* of the Dirty War rather than coincident with it.

A few further points illustrate further connections of *Respiración artificial* with the autobiographical and non-fictive genre of the *testimonio*. In the next section, I argue that, despite the differences between Piglia’s text and other *testimonio* literature, Piglia’s complicated and highly cultured text coheres at the level of trauma and witnessing with the straightforward and primarily oral form of *testimonio*, as it gives voices to a voiceless resistance of the silenced masses enduring the stifling quiet of Dirty War repression.

With this reassessment of Piglia, we must reconsider the status of *testimonio* itself as a political-biographical intervention, as it is usually considered. Critics¹⁶ agree that *testimonio* literature emerged to address the problem of voicelessness from the extraordinary pressures and sufferings caused by over 80 years of

political instability and violence, and from the frustrated hopes and desires of oppressed classes across Central and South America. *Testimonio* is defined as:

a novel or novella-length narrative...told in the first person by a narrator who is also the real protagonist or witness of the events he or she recounts, and whose unit of narration is usually a “life” or a significant life experience. *Testimonio* may include, but is not subsumed under, any of the following textual categories...autobiography, auto-biographical novel, oral history, memoir, confession, diary, interview, eyewitness report, life history, *novella-testimonio*, nonfiction novel, or “factographic” literature. (Beverley 31)

This definition gives *testimonio* a literary *fiat* that few other genres possess. Its primary characteristic being the actual witnessing for which it is familiar, *testimonio* is a literary intervention that denies the narratological strictures of genre conventions as it creates a textual moment presenting an historical moment---often one denied or silenced by hegemonic voices. Yet, in a case like Piglia’s, the absence of a first-person narrator threatens critics’ general vision of *testimonio* as the individuated presentation of experience. This implies that the *testimonio*’s importance must lie with the narrator and not with the refashioning of possible political and historical narrative.

Yet *testimonio* contains within its demarcations a search for those meanings that lie underneath or outside the hegemony in which it exists. *Testimonio* always implies its witnessing as a discovery—a revelation from the margins to the center announcing the matrices of power that connects them. *Testimonio*, as Elzbieta Sklodowska points out, relies on specifically “forensic patterns of argumentation as well as on the narrative conventions of autobiography and the traditional realist novel” (91). Sklodowska’s identification of the “forensic pattern of argumentation” clarifies how an ineluctable part of the *testimonio* is the presence of a new archive, or field of material, that sets into motion the discovery and exposition of unknown and unforeseen truths. Narrative conventions in *testimonio*, as Sklodowska and Beverley both argue, tend toward those generally employed in realist fiction, not just first-person narrative.

Piglia's approach to *testimonio*, however, extends this paradigm. To be sure, narratological conventions understood as being at the service of the archival and consciousness-raising project of *testimonio* literature might be challenged as

interventions of fictive techniques designed to make *testimonio* more palatable to audiences accustomed to the novelistic form. This, in turn, raises many epistemological and textual questions that have been thoroughly discussed within *testimonio* studies (despite remaining unanswered).

However, I do not propose here to engage the more fundamental issues of how narrative may occlude the truth by means of the author's hand. I argue here instead for a broader understanding of the narrative work of testimonial as an intentional intervention signifying against, or amongst the hegemony of signs circumscribing a witness's lived experience. As Shoshana Felman puts it: “[t]he literature of testimony, therefore, is not simply a statement (any statement can lag behind events), but a performative *engagement* between consciousness and history” (Felman and Laub 114). As a testimony based on performative *engagement*, Piglia's novel intervenes as what Felman further names a “struggling act of readjustment between the integrative scope of words and the unintegrated impact of events” (Felman and Laub 114). By using the novelistic form's ability to occlude responsibility by dispersing it across an archive as opposed to the fictive voice to which an author always has recourse, Piglia nonetheless readjusts his multiply “unintegrated” event archive as an intervention, aimed at reconfiguring the standard narration of Argentina's Dirty War from within its historical parameters.

The question still remains concerning how the archive in *Respiración artificial* actually is intended to function as witness and legitimator of the testimonial for the particular case of Argentina. The next section briefly sketches how the archive works as both witness and guarantor of authenticity. Despite relativistic challenges from artificially constructed archives such as the Museum of Jurassic Technology, ¹⁷Piglia's work argues the archive itself as implying a structure affirming the authority of witnessing.

Archive and the Law: Supplements to *Testimonio* and Testimony

As the earlier quote from Derrida signals, the archive functions as a moment of nomological emergence: in it, the law, a structure and configuration of inclusion and exclusion that gives birth to master narratives, is born from the presence

of the archive's matter. But can we not say that what is at stake in an act of *testimonio* like Piglia's is precisely the *power* of the archive's configuration as a *witness* to the *nomos* being instantiated? In this sense, the archive, unworked, unrevised, or uncollected, is neither archive nor potential archive, but something that configures the very possibility of archiving and witnessing.

Derrida claims that the archive is always already configured under the power of *consignation* (Derrida 3), the “gathering together [of] signs,” intended to legitimate, organize, or configure signs and signification in a collection that authorizes the archive's facticity, or minimally, its truthfulness for those witnessing it. As Derrida puts it:

Consignation aims to coordinate a single corpus, in a system or a synchrony in which all the elements articulate the unity of an ideal configuration. In an archive, there should not be any absolute dissociation, any heterogeneity or *secret* which could separate (*secernere*), or partition, in an absolute manner. (Derrida 3)

In sum, the archive demarcates the possible parameters for naming, organizing, and conferring existence on elements of history. Further, history itself is implicated, although somewhat fatuously, as not the act of *consignation* as such, but rather as a site from which heterogeneities, or *secrets* could emerge, or be partitioned apart from the “ideal configuration” of the archive's signification node (the configuration and reading enforced by entities and agencies at the basis of a nation's master narratives, for example). Derrida affirms this operation of the act of *consignation*, its *auto-deconstruction*, as it were, as signaling the presence of “whatever secrets and heterogeneity would seem to menace even the possibility of *consignation*” (Derrida 4).

From within, an archive affirms possibility and membership, yet at its outermost boundaries, voices may challenge the hegemony of history, unsettling the resources of authoritative powers for stifling and eliminating opposing voices. In this sense, the archive is only ever challenged from *within* the consignatory power, confronting those in control of the archive with the presence of an uncontrolled alternate facticity. Thus the archive in its openness constantly challenges the power of historical representation; it can enact a testimony (or vectors leading to testimony) that, in spite of

overwhelming odds, challenges the power structure through the durability and portability of archival material.

Maggi's disappearance, then, is given a hopeful sense by the nomological-political challenge presented in an alternative archive—he has not disappeared as a subject, when the archive persists. Piglia represents this moment by signaling how the archive's nomological principle necessarily reduces human subjects to a type of representation—a moment in a consignatory continuum that allows for a challenge from the officialized archive to the hegemony of representation. For Piglia, Maggi's archive stands in for him, and thereby gains the political subjectivity and freedom denied to him as a human subject:

. . . el professor me ha dejado lo único de lo que necesitaba desprenderse para quedar libre. Desprendido de eso que era todo lo que en realidad tenía, ahora, él, esté donde esté, el professor, ahora ya no tiene nada que temer. (Piglia 217)

. . . the professor has left me the only thing he needed to release to become free. Freed from what, in truth, was all he really had, now he, wherever he may be, the professor now has nothing to fear.

This passage lets the reader in on the archive's secret: its ability to stand as testimony for a moment, person, or collection of moments unrecognized by the contemporary political and historical milieu. In this sense, Professor Maggi's testimony challenges the master narrative of the Argentinean historical archive as he leaves behind his historical legacy. Unifying his physical identity, subjectivity as a scholar, and proper name with the incomplete archive of Ossorio, Maggi's name engages a greater project revealing the violent ground of Argentinean political history.

Necessarily, then, the fictional archive and testimony—comprised, as the reader knows, from the Dirty War's real historical archive—serves the same function as a *testimonio*, the “displacement of the master subject of modernist narrative,” to cite Beverley (31). Further, the insistence by many critics on the first personness of *testimonio* (itself called into question by virtue of the genre's birth from the labors of intervening activist anthropologists) does not hold true in face of the greater claims of the political and veridical efficacy of a *testimonio*, irrespective of a specific authorial source or master narrative guaranteeing its legibility. Citing Greimas, Sklodowska

argues instead that the stakes of a *testimonio* are not the production of a situation with empirical verifiability, but rather a “veridiction contract between the speaker and the addressee” that allows for the instauration of a discourse whereby the exchange and evaluation of “truth meaning effect” is at play (Greimas 657, cited Sklowska 87). Thus, what is crucial for a *testimonio* is that “the modern reader... [is] persuaded to interpret the discourse as truth-saying” (Sklodowska 88). Piglia's Maggi bears witness to the fundamental truth of his and Argentina's historical archive: those seeking to give it shape have all too often disappeared, leaving the narrative's building blocks for others to read.

An important connection between the archive's historical power, the fearsome possibility of political reprisal, and the necessity for archive as testimony thus emerges from Piglia's novel. Maggi himself recognizes the possibility of his own demise:

En fin, queria decirle, en estas nuevas circunstancias del país me encuentro un poco desorientado respecto a mi futuro inmediato. Distintas complicaciones se me avecinan y preveo varios cambios de domicilio. Estuve pensando que por el momento lo mejor va a ser pasarle el archivo (con los documentos y las notas y con los capítulos que ya he redactado), a alguien de mi entera confianza. Esa persona podria, llegado el caso, llevar el trabajo adelante, terminar de escribirlo... Para mi se trata, antes que nada, de garantizar que estos documentos se conserven porque no solo han de servir para echar luz sobre el pasado de nuestra desventurada república, sino para entender también algunas cosas que vienen pasando en estos tiempos y no lejos de aqui. (Piglia 74)

Finally, I wanted to tell you that in this country's new circumstances, I find myself a bit disoriented as to my immediate future. Certain complications are nearing me and I predict various changes of residence. I was thinking that, for the moment, the right thing to will be to pass on the archive (with the documents, notes, and chapters I have already edited) to someone in my whole confidence. This person could, if it were to be the case, take the work forward and finish writing it... For me it has to do with, above anything, guaranteeing that these documents are conserved because they will not only serve to bring light to the past of our unlucky republic; but also to understand something's happening at the moment, not too far from here.

This passage illustrates the archive's importance serving as both literature as a

testimony to history (demarcating the lines of influences, ordination, structures of possibility for the contemporary moment), and as *atestimonio* to the present. By laying out a potential map for the political dynamics of how the archive might be used in the present, using materials from the past, the historian Maggi's archive testifies to a possible political critique enduring past his disappearance—to the *archive* as a testifying voice in the absence of the witness or experiencer, as would be the case in traditional *testimonio*.

Of course, Maggi's desire to leave the archive in his nephew's hands is motivated by his being “un poco desorientado respecto a mi futuro inmediato.” That note itself is a letter, another layer in or doubling of the archive Piglia works within the text, and so, at the level of this disorientation and at the level of the archive, the testimonial of the anfractuous political moment becomes ratified for the reader. Further, knowing as we do of Maggi's eventual disappearance, presumably by the military regime, the reader realizes that the prediction of repression is itself a type of testimonial, accentuating how a political reality allows a victim to *predict* his or her fate as a condition of the master oppressing narrative. And thus the act of witnessing is combined with the gesture of announcement, illustrating the force of *testimonio*—traumatic or otherwise—in its explicit designation as representing a particular social milieu, a “situation of the narrator . . . that must be representative of a social class or group” (Beverley 33).

And despite claims that the *testimonio* involves a “sort of erasure of the function, and thus also of the textual presence, of the ‘author,’” it is nonetheless important to signal that the very function of *testimonio* facilitating “the entry into literature of persons who would normally . . . be excluded from direct literary expression” (Beverley 34): the figure of a singular narrative expression still affirms the force of the *testimonio*. As Beverley identifies in the case of Rigoberta Menchu: “the dominant formal aspect of the *testimonio* is the voice that speaks to the reader in the form of an ‘I’ that demands to be recognized, that wants or needs to stake a claim on our attention” (34).

Thus, whether affirming or effacing the presence of the author, the



authorial activity can be placed in suspension to allow an “I” to be textually recognized as an act of witness and collective representative, as well as a site of individual trauma and breath for the group's trauma. Piglia’s novel as fictional text is given the ability to articulate the horrific collective oppression and fear sustained by the Argentine population during the Dirty War without being limited to a hegemonic representation or the stabilization of the narrative archive. Furthermore, the novel’s disruptive qualities produce a possible model for expressing the dynamism of affect and memory that marks a personal and collective reckoning with history.

The Strengths and Challenges of *Testimonio*: Some Conclusions

As seen today, Spanish American *testimonio* literature gives voice to the traumatic history of a vast array of generally subaltern groups—landless peasants, marginalized indigenous peoples, victims of neoliberal labor systems—and places the speaker in direct confrontation with the listener through narrative. Furthermore, *testimonio* is tied to resistances to differing institutional frames united by the idea of bringing a corrective element to a literary and cultural history formed in repression.

The specific history of *testimonio* is that of a literature emerging in the struggles for political promise that left-wing movements of the 1960s-1980s brought to Spanish America. Explicitly tied to these struggles, *testimonio* literature proposes a solidarity among communities struggling for recognition against hegemonic forces. It is a literary modality that, since its inception in 1968 with the Casa de las Americas prize, has transcended national borders in Latin America, becoming a viable and crucial form of literary expression. *Testimonio* has reconfigured the possibilities of subaltern representation and the ethical and legal call to justice it demands, requiring a particular configuration of the speaker and their capacity for legitimation. Victoria García has written about the figure of the *testimoniante* as juridical witness, arguing in exemplary terms that

testimoniante pone en palabras un desplazamiento subjetivo por el cual él, cuerpo leso de la víctima que ha sobrevivido, toma distancia de sí y de los otros —también vícti- mas: sus compatriotas— para ver el crimen desde fuera, como testigo, y proceder a juzgarlo. (García 75)

Beyond the scope of my analysis are the political projects of the many indigenous and subaltern communities using *testimonio* to vocalize their frustrations, fears, and political programs. Instead, in offering a final assessment of Piglia's contribution to our understanding this textual genre, I propose to take a slight deviation and return the discussion to what *testimonio* literature actually testifies to.

Returning to Beverley's model of the protagonist's real participation in

the witnessing of *testimonio*, might we not see the conditions of repression and marginalization of Piglia's period as requiring the same types of challenges and witnessing that the traumas of the *testimonio* literature attest to? This is indisputable. However, challenges against including any fictionalized representation in the genre of *testimonio* are vigorous and telling. On the one hand, the *testimonio* is necessarily understood as unique, given its utility to give voice and literary credibility to subaltern communities, as they are embodied in a witness and her unique experience. As such, it has a simplicity and affective directness that the complicated fictions of Ricardo Piglia purportedly lack. It is important, therefore, to signal the way in which *testimonio* literature also illustrates and in some way challenges the reification of class and educational boundaries between the lettered population of Spanish America and its primarily oral indigenous population.

In spite of these criticisms, I believe that the truth function of the archive's material as Piglia casts it (its birth in Argentinean political violence and the need for a new vocabulary to handle this pain) affirms how his novel can function as a *testimonio*, as a more complicated analysis of the country's traumatic political epistemology.

In general, I agree with Beverley that literature "is deeply marked by its own historical and institutional entanglements, its 'tradition of service'" (59). Nonetheless, I would argue that to overread and overemphasize the *epistemic* consequences of this "tradition of service" — that is, to be unable to cross or effectively undo the binaries of identity: city/country, indigenous/European, enfranchised/subaltern—, *testimonio* literature needs to be seen as reimagining social relations and, in this refashioning, achieves the same promise and prowess that other literatures do. Through the *testimonio*, the given is refashioned, and contemporary traumas and truths are reported to those not called to write.

As Beverley concedes, "testimonio...represents a new sort of aesthetic agency in political struggles" (61). At some level, then, the only distinction among the genres of trauma, as I would like to call them, is the narrative formation—not the political, psychic, or affective impulse for the writing. In Piglia's text, the archive thus

stands as the archive of trauma, the hidden witness who will testify to the Dirty War's crimes. In this fashion, I argue, Piglia's text reveals that, for witnessing to live and breathe, "aesthetic agency" is the hope of all narrators. 19

The danger of presenting *testimonio* as an alternative literary, as Alberto Moreiras has argued, is to fetishize *testimonio*'s

aesthetic agency as a transgressive cultural production that nonetheless reifies the literary critic's practice of naming the tropes of cultural expression from the site of the metropolitan intellectual centers. *Testimonio*'s counter-hegemonic possibilities must, in turn, destabilize standard critical modes, and instantiate an "alternative politics of knowledge." (Moreiras 189)

In my exposition, I have taken this injunction seriously, insofar as the postmodern distaste for master narratives has led to a hunger for a new politics of knowledge, especially for Latin America—a politics genuinely attentive to the epistemic consequences of new genres developing from the putative margins of intellectual production, despite late capitalism's ability to use every narrative form in its spectacular economy. In the case of *Respiración artificial*, I have argued that the challenge for today's critics is to see how the nexus of literary production, historical suffering, and archival politics coincide, so that the lines between *testimonio*, testimony, and fiction are seen themselves as political and in need of interrogation.

Simply put, I am not arguing that we need merely to include Piglia's archive as *another* form of *testimonio*; nor I do believe that an archive can necessarily testify without intervention. I only hope that pointing to contingencies between the structures of Piglia's text and *testimonio* literature helps to construct a new politics of knowledge that will negotiate, describe, and positively intervene against the constant traumatic character of the neoliberal era.

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Notas

1 The figure of Emilio Renzi is pseudonym, metonym, and amanuensis for Ricardo Piglia (full name: Ricardo Emilio Piglia Renzi), operating in at least 5 of Piglia's novels. The relationship between the substitutive logic of the pseudonymous Renzi for Piglia is supported by a strong bibliography. For a series of useful readings on this topic, please see: "Emilio Renzi como el doble invertido de Ricardo Piglia" (Télam - Agencia Nacional De Noticias - Cultura. N.p., n.d. ; web, accessed 21 May 2015), and Susana Inés González, "Piglia y Renzi: el autor y un personaje de ficción," in *Proceedings of the 2. Congresso Brasileiro de Hispanistas*(São Paulo (SP): n.p. 2002; online accessed 21 May 2015)..

2 Piglia's work continues to provide insights on the limits of expression and writing during the Dirty War period in Argentine history, to the extent that the novel is read as the foundational document for the very reconstruction of the Argentine cultural field. A recent article by Verónica Garibotto and Antonio Gómez, "'Releo mis papeles del pasado para escribir mi romance del porvenir': Respiración artificial y el programa de refundación del campo cultural argentino" *Revista Iberoamericana*, Vol. LXXV, Número 226, Enero-Marzo 2009, 229-242, argues that *Respiración artificial's* narrative structure, use of internal and external exiles, in conjunction with its historical moment is the substrate for a cultural field where exile writers and those who stayed might find a common space for cultural production and dialogue.

3 Mauricio Souza argues in his 2000 article, "La figura del archivo en la narrativa de Ricardo Piglia," that the archive figures a desire for a utopian arrangement of truth similar to Borges' Universal Library. This is a standard reading of the archive in literary theory and bears mentioning, despite the fact I will not address it in this paper. I cite this article to illustrate the plurality of critical interventions on Piglia's work: he is linked to Joyce (see Sergio Waisman, "Piglia entre Joyce y Macedonio" [2004]), Borges, and Arlt, each of whom makes a different case than I am making here. Of further interest are articles which place Piglia in the continuum of historical commentators on the Argentinean dictatorial period; see, for example, Alejandra Ali, "La trama de la historia" (2001).

4 For an extended historiography of testimonio with a detailed account of the early publications and their institutional uses, see Verónica García's article: "Testimonio literario Latinoamericano: Prefiguraciones históricas del género en el discurso revolucionario de los años sesenta," *Acta Poética* 35.1 (2014): 63-92. Web.

5 There is nearly an interminable bibliography on the crimes of the Dirty War, and the crimes of the dictatorship are still being judged in the Argentine courts—as recently as 2014, ex-dictator Reynaldo Bignone was sentenced to 23 years in prison (<http://www.latercera.com/noticia/mundo/2014/10/678-599153-9-tribunal-argentino-condena-a-23-anos-de-carcel-a-ex-dictador-bignone-en-juicio.shtml>) (accessed May 2015).

6 For a harrowing but exhaustive detailing of the dictatorship's crimes, see the report by the National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons, Argentina. "¡Nunca Más!" 1984. Web. 29 May 2015.

7 Trauma studies have generated a great deal of interest since the publication of Dori Laub and Shoshana Felman's seminal *Testimony* (1992). For more extended discussions

of the link between trauma and the act of narration, see: Dominick Lacapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, (2001); and Cathy Caruth, ed., *Trauma* (1995).

8 Louis Althusser (1971). "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)," *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York: Verso: 1970, p.11), available online at <<https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/althusser/1970/ideology.htm>> (accessed 26 May 2015).

9 Lacan's model for the mutual implication of an individual and what he calls the symbolic order can be found in the essay "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience," included in *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English* [trans. Bruce Fink] (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2006): 75-81.

10 Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2006. Print.

11 See Slavoj Žižek, "Cynicism as a Form of Ideology," *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989): 28-30; available online at <<http://www.egs.edu/faculty/slavoj-Žižek/articles/cynicism-as-a-form-of-ideology/>> (accessed 25 May 2015).

12 In her seminal text on trauma, *Black Sun*, Julia Kristeva defines melancholia as "the institutional symptomatology of inhibition and asymbolia that becomes established now and then or chronically in a person" (9). Thus, the problem of testimonial always tends to remind the critic of the unstable structure of signification and the necessarily social function of every enunciation. Sufferers of trauma then cannot effectively live within the confines of the social bonds that unite subjects (the selfsame subjects and bonds that are often behind the cause of trauma). Melancholia, then, is a traumatic recession from all nodes of engagement with alterity. Testimony and *testimonio*—irrespective of narrative structure—are rebellious engagements with alterity against the fabric of Melancholia.

13 Brett Levinson argues that, in spite of the active repression of knowledge practiced by military dictatorships, their crimes are essentially public affairs, and what is crucial for the process of post-dictatorial reconciliation is the dictatorial avowal of criminal complicity. As he argues: "Truth, rather, is the *acknowledgment* by criminals or by the government itself of their acts: confession" (Levinson 222). However, can it not be argued that confession itself changes the very status of the archive, arguing for the necessity for agreement on the historical archive of crimes committed?

14 For other notable interpretations of this fictive archive, see Avelar, (1995), Wirsching (2009), and Kelman (2007).

15 To cite only one book would be a disservice, but for a powerful and thorough account of the social history of Dirty War crimes, please consult Marguerite Feitlowitz's *A Lexicon of Terror* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011).

16 The classic argument for this is provided in the collection by Arturo Arias, *The Rigoberta Menchu Controversy*. Minneapolis, MN: U of Minnesota P, 2001. Print.

17 See <<http://www.mjt.org>> (accessed 26 May 2015) for the actual museum challenging the paradigms of representation.

18 Scholars and critics are well aware of the epistemological concerns brought up by anthropologist David Stoll in his challenging text *Rigoberta Menchu and the Story of All Poor Guatemalans* (1999), which instantiated what is widely known as "the

Rigoberta Menchu controversy." For further information on the intricacies of this debate see the eponymous text, *The Rigoberta Menchu Controversy*, ed. Arturo Arias (2001).
 19 Piglia's own work on writing reveals an intense commitment to the politicized 'aesthetic agency' possible in writing. For a more detailed development of this point, please Ricardo Piglia and León Rozitchner's: *Tres propuestas para el próximo milenio (y cinco dificultades)* (Mexico: Fondo De Cultura Económica, 2001).

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