INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.

Bell & Howell Information and Learning
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346 USA
800-521-0600

UMI[®]

**· CAVEAT EMPTOR:
CONSUMER CULTURE AND THE
POST-DICTATORSHIP NUEVAS NARRATIVAS
OF ARGENTINA, CHILE AND SPAIN**

By

Juliana Starkman

A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Comparative Literary Studies

Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario
26 June 2000

© Copyright
2000, Juliana Starkman

National Library
of Canada

Acquisitions and
Bibliographic Services

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Bibliothèque nationale
du Canada

Acquisitions et
services bibliographiques

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Your file Votre référence

Our file Notre référence

The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

0-612-57628-0

Canada

The Undersigned recommend to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
acceptance of the thesis

**Caveat Emptor: Consumer Culture
and the Post-Dictatorship
Nuevas Narrativas of Argentina, Chile and Spain**

submitted by

Juliana Starkman, B.A.,

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

C. Faulkner, Director, Institute for Comparative Studies
in Literature, Art and Culture

J. Leandro Urbina (Thesis Supervisor)

G. Rojo (External Examiner)

Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada
August, 2000

Abstract

CAVEAT EMPTOR: CONSUMER CULTURE AND THE POST-DICTATORSHIP NUEVAS NARRATIVAS OF ARGENTINA, CHILE AND SPAIN

Author: Juliana Starkman

Degree: PhD

Year: 2000

Institution: Carleton University

Supervisor: J.L Urbina

This dissertation is a study of the Nueva narrativa literature of Argentina, Chile and Spain, and its links to the discourses of late 20th century globalized consumer culture. The novels and short stories of young writers including Rodrigo Fresán, Alberto Fuguet and José Ángel Mañas represent a genre which emerged along with, or following, the political and social transition from dictatorships to democracies in the above countries. The narratives choose and develop some of the more powerful discourses of the period, creating fictional worlds that emphasize the role of consumption in shaping society, beginning with the role of the individual. The question is raised; what is one's identity beyond the labels s/he wears? National identity is also renegotiated, and even denied, in keeping with a strong desire to be globalized.

This literature is emphatically urban and middle class, inhabiting a privileged cultural space shared with the American literature of writers like Brett Easton Ellis and Jay McInerney. It is a literature of surplus where malaise is a symptom which is considered a fair exchange for the pleasures experienced. The protagonists of these narratives lack for nothing except perhaps something or someone to believe in.

Acknowledgements

I would first like to acknowledge the role played by the elegant waiters of downtown Buenos Aires. Their well-timed infusions of coffee and sandwiches de miga (tostados) were invaluable. Also, the fellows at Libreria Gandhi who let me take notes from all the books I could not afford.

Cristina Civale and Prof. Mario Margulis provided generous critical input.

Rodrigo Fresán allowed me to bombard him with frantic e-mails and reminded me that the texts belong to the reader.

For Gastón, Isis, Cristian, Consuelo, Ion and Lilia and everybody who filled me with food, music and critical, but always unconditional, encouragement.

For Vildana who never lets me get away with anything and Dimitrije who lets me get away with everything.

For Gregorio and Lucy, whose discerning computer ate the third chapter.

For Abba and Mom who found me on the doorstep again with more books than when I left, and opened the door anyway.

A great part of this work was born of loud discussions in the kitchens, classrooms and offices of Prof. José Leandro Urbina. Mil gracias to my teacher, mentor and friend who reminded me of the value of dissonance.

For my colleagues and professors who went through the wars with me.

And for my Joaquín; proud instigator of much of my madness and a devil's advocate incarnate who reads out loud. Sos un sentimiento.

Table of Contents

Introduction: Context	1
The Planeta Boys.....	10
Selection and Reception of the Texts.....	21
Speaking Worlds.....	26
 Chapter One: Consuming the Intertext.....	 36
Reviving the Body.....	61
 Chapter Two: A Time and Place In-Between.....	 84
Nostalgia: Mediating the Banal.....	92
Crossing Thresholds.....	100
Inhabiting the Parenthesis.....	113
 Chapter Three: The Identity Process; A Skeptical View.....	 129
The City as Seen From Above.....	135
Conceiving the Consumer.....	144
An Aesthetic of Survival.....	149
Music as a Conductor of Identity.....	161

Chapter Four: Apathy and Activism

Identifying the Enemy: An Exercise in Frustration.....	174
A History of Non-Action.....	186
The Road Less Traveled.....	199
Places of Resistance.....	208
Conclusion.....	212
Works Cited.....	226

Introduction

Context

Muy despacito/sobre un abismo/ volare
-Los Piojos

Dicen la juventud no tiene/ para
gobernar experiencia suficiente/
menos mal que nunca la tenga/
experiencia de mentir "Los Salieris de
Charly" León Gieco

Traditionally, one of the more problematic aspects of textual analysis lies in determining the relation of the text to society. Attempts to alternately claim total discursive independence for the text, or to suggest that the text may be read as a faithful mirror of "reality", lose force in that they lack the perspective derived from contextualization¹. To situate a text after all also implies a reading through the poetics of the genre and its relation with other literary works. Although the reader may gain valuable critical insight into the generic or historic standing of a given text in relation to other, similar works, the location of the same text with respect to non-literary discourses presents more intricate challenges. Part of this difficulty lies in the inability of fictional texts to present an authoritatively exclusive portrait of a particular time and place, mediating as they do between the past and the present. Tzvetan Todorov, in the article

¹ Some schools of literary criticism including Formalism have traditionally excluded context as a legitimate source of discussion. The text, according to this belief, was to be studied and analysed as an independant entity. The possible value of social or historical sources and influences were deemed irrelevant, or extraneous to the critique.

“La lectura como construcción²”, pointed out the difficulties which inevitably arise when the reader attempts to seek a representation of reality in a fictional text. “Sólo sometiendo al texto a un tipo particular de lectura construimos, desde nuestra lectura, un mundo imaginario. Las novelas no imitan la realidad; la crean” (Jofre 57).

Texts do however appropriate, adapt and often subvert many of society’s dominant discourses with varying degrees of subtlety, thus giving a view of selected corners of the world that the readers activate from their cultural experience. The cultural contribution of the text lies in its ability to emplot, disseminate and stimulate social discourses. Since fiction is not limited to superficial portrayals of society’s discourses, texts may also suggest imaginary alternatives for the problems which they foreground. The text possesses the capacity to simultaneously reproduce and critique; through this imbalance worlds are configured. It is, therefore, important for the reader to be aware of the extra-textual world whose discourses are adapted and addressed, in order to bring the greatest quantity of thematic and lexical familiarity possible to his/her reading experience.

The corpus of fictional work which will be studied in this dissertation emerges from within societies where globalization has developed into the dominant political and cultural process of the past twenty years. As such, its rise is inseparable from the discursive experiences of the writers and readers of the *Nueva narrativa*, and is re-created within the stories and novels as the system within which the characters circulate. Globalization itself is supposedly anchored in the dismantling of traditional national barriers and the free circulation of goods and ideas. In a more general sense, it involves

² Originally published in French in *Poétique* 24 (1975): 417-425.

a supposed minimization of perceived distances between physical places through the creation of technological links, along with a seemingly unlimited expansion of possibilities for consumers and citizens who are “logged on”³. The literature that I will analyze has been branded by the influences of this vast new community where access is easily obtained to information as well as previously unavailable foreign products. Globalization as a cultural phenomenon involves much more than just the opening of American businesses like McDonald’s outside the United States. The late 20th century has witnessed the rise of the global village which Marshall McLuhan spoke of in the 1960’s, but in a much more sophisticated form than he could ever have conceived. The phenomenon of easy admittance has led to a sense of inclusiveness which brings Santiago closer to New York City, but also makes the inhabitant of the former more aware of the cultural and economic distance which continues to exist between the two. While some innovative cultural ties have been created by the unifying strategies of globalization, the consequent weakening of local power has led to the disintegration of more traditional connections which have been replaced by new concerns and priorities. As Baudrillard explained in his article “Consumer Society” (1988), “a new and specific mode of socialization related to the rise of new productive forces” (49) exists. Morley and Robbins describe it in *Spaces of Identity*; “(n)o longer constrained by, or responsible to, a public philosophy, media corporations and businesses are now simply required to respond to customer demand and to maximise customer choice” (11). This decline in

³ Naturally, the question arises; who can gain entry into this apparently borderless state? Yes, a student from Chile can download research information from the American Library of Congress, but only if s/he has an internet server, or for that matter, a computer. While the effects of this easy-access system are far reaching and will eventually influence the lives of even those who

accountability to the public at large, and the trend toward the desires of the individual cum consumer, are both signs of a shift in cultural perceptions and practices.

An oft-mentioned characteristic of contemporary globalized society, related to this shift, has been what Daniel Bell dubbed “the end of ideology” in his book of the same name⁴. Terry Eagleton, in *Ideology: A Reader* (1991), lists 16 possible definitions of ideology as a concept. These are divided into explanations which range from the vaguely positive, such as “the process of production of meanings, signs and values in social life” (1) and “action oriented set of beliefs” (2), to the clearly negative, as with “systematically distorted communication” and “false ideas which help to legitimate a dominant power” (1). Those critics who would bury ideologies tend more towards the latter definition of the term, but would also contest the validity of the former as being irrelevant and overly essentialist. The argument is made that ideologies are merely a false front for a hidden hegemonic agenda⁵, or worse still, they are represent an emptiness surrounded by the noise of discourse. Bell, for example, focused on what he believed to be a sense of empty rhetoric, especially among the Left, that would soon lead people to abandon ideologies, but not necessarily utopias. The distinction appears

have no computers or cable television, the “deprived” will benefit much later than those members of the public who have the tools of globalization at hand.

⁴ This text was originally published in 1966, and completely failed to foresee the political and ideological struggles which characterized the 1960’s and 70’s in the United States and elsewhere (i.e. the anti-Vietnam movement, the attraction of revolutionary figures like Che Guevara, and the force of political organizations like the Montoneros in Argentina or the MIR in Chile). Today it is amusing to read that Bell believed “social reform does not have any unifying appeal, nor does it give a younger generation the outlet for ‘self-expression’ and ‘self-definition’ that it wants” (405).

⁵ This was a fairly common accusation in Latin America in the 1970s. One “justification” for the military takeovers in Argentina and Chile was the claim of the coup leaders that groups like the Unidad Popular in Chile, pre-1973, were in fact fronts for a plan to “sell” the country to the Soviet Union.

to lie in the cynical belief that utopias, and the desire for a better world, are a desirable, or at least fathomable goal, while ideology is a delusive tactic which can never deliver on its promises. It is a means that never leads to the end promised.

The “end of ideology”, as read in the year 2000, pre-supposes that ideology⁶ as a concept and some in particular, such as Marxism, have faded away⁷. This disenchantment is, however, due in part to a disbelief in the same utopias Bell wished to salvage. The rejection of both ideologies and the solutions they propose cannot be traced to a single source. It is the result of a combination of historical events including the numbing aftermath of murderous coups d’état in Chile, Argentina, Uruguay and other Latin American countries, the hypocritical selling out of the Vietnam generation (i.e. Jerry Rubin of the Chicago Seven becoming a stockbroker, this becoming part of the hegemony he encouraged others to fight), and the intense disillusionment experienced by those who witnessed the rise of ineffective democracies in countries that had clamoured for a change of government. The loss of faith is equally a product of the skepticism expressed by Deconstructionists and Post-Modernists who theorized the collapse of great projects, of the subject, and of ultimate truths.

Terry Eagleton sums up bitinglly what he sees as the root of the claim made for the irrelevance of ideologies:

⁶ Especially in its positive definition as “an action oriented set of beliefs”.

⁷ For example, Marxists who had looked to the Soviet Union as an ideal to be copied, saw the collapse of the Eastern Bloc in the 1980s as the betrayal of a dream which had appeared concrete.

The abandonment of the notion of ideology belongs with a more pervasive political faltering by whole sections of the erstwhile revolutionary left, which in the face of a capitalism temporarily on the offensive has beaten a steady, shamefaced retreat from such ‘metaphysical’ matters such as class struggle and modes of production, revolutionary agency and the nature of the bourgeois state. It is, admittedly, something of an embarrassment for this position [...]when it was denouncing the concept of revolution as so much metaphysical claptrap, the thing itself broke out where it had least been expected, in the Stalinist bureaucracies of Eastern Europe (xii).

Even if one rejects the probability of the death of all ideologies, this is not to say that the place and relevance of ideologies within a globalized consumer culture should not be re-examined. A number of South American theorists have considered what they agree is not the disappearance of ideology per se but rather a silencing of previously popular ideologies by one victoriously hegemonic one. Some, including Eugenio Tironi, Tomás Moulian, Dalia Szulik, Silvia Kuasñosky and Eduardo Rosenzvaig, state clearly that the name of this masked force is neo-liberalism, more specifically in its consumerist aspect. The old, “outdated” ideal, which was, according to Membas & Velázquez:

retratado bajo el principio del internacionalismo proletariado, se ha realizado irónicamente bajo el modelo del ‘anónimo mercado universal, simbolizado por

un puñado de nombres de marcas icónicas y dominado por las multinacionales⁸

[...] (Generación 188).

The strength of this hegemony and its policies, along with historical events of the past 30 years, have led to a generalized malaise on the part of youth, and to their marginalization on the political and public stage, even in countries where traditionally they were extremely active. Eugenio Tironi discusses the discrepancy between the past and the present in *Los Silencios de la revolución. Chile: La otra cara de la modernización* (1988), and explains that while young people in the 1960s and 70s were “objetos de veneración⁹” for their political passion and convictions, today the younger generation “se han transformado en blanco de sistemática sospecha¹⁰” (46).

A legacy of societies that tagged them as subversive and troublesome, this mentality continues to exist even after the actual desire to act has been dissolved through decades of witch-hunts and propaganda¹¹. For the generation who were “niños concebidos en medio del optimismo de los años sesenta” (Tironi 43), raised in the politically turbulent 1970s, participation was just not worth the trouble. A Chilean rock group from the 1980’s, “Los Prisioneros”, aptly described the position of many of their

⁸ “Created under the principle of a proletarian internationalism, it was realized, ironically, according to a model of ‘the anonymous universal market, symbolized by a handful of iconic brand names and dominated by multinationals’”

⁹ “the objects of veneration”

¹⁰ “they have become the target of systematic suspicion”

¹¹ The fear that one’s children might be involved in politics that were not State-sponsored reached a peak of absurdity in the article “¿Qué hace usted para que su hijo no sea guerrillero?” (“What are you doing to make sure your son is not a guerrilla?”) in the popular Argentinian magazine *Gente*.

contemporaries with the title of their song “El baile de los que sobran¹²”. Having experienced great historical moments including wars, dictatorships and economic disasters, the young people are those who found themselves left behind. Having been discouraged for so long from taking their place on the political stage, the possibility to affect change in society lost its appeal for these survivors. In some cases, due to their young age, they experienced only the tail end of the above disasters, which left them unworthy of the veneration often paid to their slightly older contemporaries who lived in the eye of the storms. After witnessing what happened to their predecessors under military rule, or in the case of the Vietnam-era United States, under President Nixon, the majority of the “post-dictatorship” generation chose to invest their energies in less risky pursuits, like shopping and video-games, where any risk is virtual. Baudrillard theorized this choice, locating it not within the same cultural framework as political or activism, but instead emphasizing that “affluence and consumption are not the realization of Utopia, but a new objective state, governed by the same [...] processes” (51). This option was one which was open only to a specific sector of the population, although the dominant political system encouraged and facilitated this move.

This is not to say that this generation has remained silent in regard to how their societies develop and their lives unfold. On the contrary, this belief is countered by the sheer quantity of literary texts written and published by this generation of authors. The desire to express opinions about the rapidly changing societies the writers inhabit is complicated only by the number of critical arguments concerning where to place the texts politically. Do they critique the societies they fictionalize or do they mirror its

¹² “The Dance of the Left-Overs”

characteristics? This dissertation will examine some critical studies of the *Nueva narrativa* and attempt to clarify whether any one is able to give a comprehensive picture of the nature of the genre. The focus will be placed on a group of authors who, having grown up with the demise of earlier, more ideologically oriented discourses, and the rise of the new consumer cultures, were and are very aware of the commercial aspects of literature. The narratives, which have been baptized with diverse names, including “the literature of consumption”, “post-dictatorship”, “yuppie writing” and “new narrative¹³”, depending on the country of origin, are all the syncretic result of the social discourses of their time, filtered through the unique, not always enviable, perspective of youth. The complicated and extremely similar social renaissances which Chile, Spain and Argentina, and particularly their younger citizens, experienced were textualized with a force and fury which was originally confused with superficial vapidness and the supposed refusal of youth to take an interest in the “real issues”.

¹³ “Post-dictatorship” and “new narrative” refer to the Spanish language texts, while “yuppie writing” is associated with novels written by American authors like Easton Ellis and McInerney

The Planeta Boys

Run run se fue pa'l norte/ no se
cuando vendra -"Run run se fue
pa'l norte" Violeta Parra

The resulting uncertainty about the role of youth in newly democratic societies like Chile, Argentina and Spain and their understanding of the increasingly powerful influences of globalization were textualized in a literature most commonly referred to as the "Nueva narrativa", or the "new narrative". The "newness" of the novels and short stories that form the literary core of this dissertation is, of course, relative. The label refers less to the form of the narratives than it does to a marketing strategy of the late 1980's, designed to capture the youth and novelty of a series of narratives. These books were written by relatively young authors in countries including Chile, Argentina, Spain and the United States, countries undergoing far-reaching social and political changes at the moment that this flood of literature began. Chile was dealing with the last days of a long dictatorship and was on an economic rollercoaster ride which undermined the extremely brief period of affluence its citizens had enjoyed in the late 1970s¹⁴. Argentina was recovering from its own military rule, a disastrous war with England in

in the years immediately prior to the rise of the Planeta Boys, who are discussed in the next section.

¹⁴ See for example Eugenio Tironi's *Los silencios de la revolución* (1988) where he discusses the unequal growth of the Chilean economy and how it lead to a drastic widening of the gap between rich and poor.

the South Atlantic¹⁵, hyperinflation and a new democratic government. Spain was emerging from its first Franco-free decade and stepping into an all-encompassing relationship with the European Union which called into question the cultural character of the country. The United States, under Ronald Reagan's and later George Bush's guidance, had finally witnessed the demise of the Soviet Union and the rise of both the stock market and a lifestyle later baptized "Yuppie" for the Young Urban Professionals who partied and shopped their way through the 1980's. While clearly, some of these events had greater immediate international repercussions (i.e the fall of the USSR) than others, even the less obviously political issues were disseminated by the media, television in particular, and made themselves felt within other cultural spheres outside the United States.

The literary roots of the *Nueva narrativa* may be traced to a wave of young authors whose work exploded on the literary scene during the abovementioned affluent Reagan era in the United States; most prominently Jay McInerney, Brett Easton Ellis and Tama Janowitz. These writers were a new generation with a new agenda; to live well or die in the attempt¹⁶. The topics they explored were not terribly different from the preoccupations of previous generations, who had also claimed that everything had been

¹⁵ It was equally disastrous for the military and for Argentine society in general. For an analysis of the effect this war had on those young men who were conscripted, see Daniel Kon's *Los chicos de la guerra* (1982).

¹⁶ This happened as well in the movie industry with the creation of the Brat Pack, a group of twenty-something actors whose drinking and partying exploits were tabloid fodder for most of the 80's. Appropriately, many of these actors (including Michael J. Fox, Robert Downey Jr. and Andrew McCarthy) went on to star in the film adaptations of McInerney's *Bright Lights Big City*, and Easton Ellis' *Less Than Zero*.

ruined by the older generation¹⁷. The difference lay in the suggested solution to the perceived discontent. Rather than encouraging a policy of change and innovation, the choice was made to spend themselves into an early, designer grave.

The U.S based urban novels of the 1980's offered a view of North American society that could be best compared to the cocaine rush so often described by protagonists in the great majority of the narratives, including Alejo in Fresán's *Historia argentina*, Matías in Fuguet's *Mala onda*, Carlos in Mañas' *Historias del Kronen*, Patrick in *American Psycho* and earlier examples like the protagonist in McInerney's *Bright Lights Big City*. In a situation familiar to those readers who experienced either the promise-laden transitions to democracy in Argentina and Chile, or the excitement of the economic boom of the 1980s in North America, the fictional characters experienced an initially exhilarating burst of boundless opportunities and confidence which quickly eroded, leaving the user empty and "wasted". In the case of Chile and Argentina, rather than seeking excitement in political activism, as in the previous generation, the moment arrived, following the aggression of the dictatorships, in which the pleasure previously derived from disobedience ran out, and many sectors of sympathizers went quietly home. In both McInerney and Ellis, the protagonists were whiny, self absorbed "victims" of this society of mass consumption; more specifically of the upper echelons

¹⁷ The parents portrayed in novels including *Less Than Zero*, or *American Psycho* (both Easton Ellis) only reinforce the image of absentee, useless, uninvolved parents with too much money. The lack of supportive or nurturing relationships between the generations was later reproduced in many of the Chilean and Argentinian narratives. For example, Fresán's protagonist in "El aprendiz de brujo", whose parents ship him off to England when they do not know how to handle him, or Fuguet's *Mala onda*, where the father refuses to act as an authority figure, instead trying to win his son's friendship by treating him to prostitutes and cocaine. This type of relationship provided one of the foundations for Rodrigo Cánovas' description of the characters

of this society. The narrator in Ellis' *Less than Zero* (1985) describes the world he inhabits:

We have been in Beverly Hills shopping most of the late morning and early afternoon. My mother and my two sisters and me. My mother has spent most of the time probably at Neiman- Marcus and my sisters[...] have used my father's charge account to buy him and me something and then to MGA and Camp Beverly Hills and Privilege to buy themselves something. I sit in the bar at la Scala Boutique for most of this time, bored out of my mind, smoking, drinking red wine (23).

The characters simultaneously disdain and actively participate in the rituals of self-creation and self-destruction through consumption.

A fine textual line is drawn in these stories between success, or *being* a success, and disaster. Consumption in the form of dressing well or always having access to good cocaine, as in *American Psycho* where this is emphasized, may be the mark of a talented stockbroker, but in its most exaggerated version, consumption also refers to Patrick Bateman's predilection for eating his victims. The ensuing gamble and risk recalls the stock market which, in the 1980's, became a renewed focus for the late 20-something crowd, ushering in a period of boundless consumption not seen since right after World War II. This hedonist attitude became the latest in United States exports to the Third

and narrators as "orphans" in what is probably the most comprehensive studies of the genre until now, *El Abordaje de los huérfanos*.

World and proved especially attractive to those readers who recognized a kindred boredom with politics.

Beyond the parallels of youthful themes and a unity which in both cases is based mainly on publicity tactics, the link which was to develop between the Americans and the South American or Spanish version of this literary movement was a connection based on admiration, creative coincidence and a certain degree of bold-faced piracy¹⁸. Any attempts to write about heroes or characters from popular or working class backgrounds faded out, and the stage was taken over by an upper middle class which proceeded to universalize its own worries.

The literary flood beyond the American border began in earnest, it is said, with the publication of a collection of short stories called *Sobredosis* by the young journalist, Chilean Alberto Fuguet in 1990. While chronologically this was not the first book published in this genre, the combination of characters, attitude, language and the unashamed overall decadence earned the book a great deal of attention. The stories textualized the experiences of a disenchanted younger generation, who had too much money and too much free time. Except for “Pelando a Rocío”, a short story from *Sobredosis* which addressed the problem of confronting the hegemony of the Chilean dictatorship, the question of politics was roundly ignored. Subsequent publications, as well as the eventual identification and grouping of later texts, relied to a great degree on the powerful publishing house Editorial Planeta, and a series which they established for the Chilean and Argentine branches as early as 1986, known as the “Biblioteca del sur”.

As a result, within a matter of 4 or 5 years, on either side of the Andes, a unit of young writers, mainly from journalistic backgrounds¹⁹, were recruited and published. In Chile, the list included Fuguet, Sergio Gómez, Carlos Franz, Darío Oses, Arturo Fontaine and later, women like Andrea Maturana. The Argentinian contingent was centred around Rodrigo Fresán, Juan Forn, Martín Rejtman, as well as some older writers including Rodolfo Fogwill who, thematically²⁰, were similar to the Young Turks of Planeta. Women writers in both countries were published in the same series but were often marketed separately. One further link among many of the Chilean authors was forged in the writing workshops which many of them attended, run by the Boom writer José Donoso and later also by Antonio Skármeta.

In Spain a frenzy was set off by a 23 year old writer, José Ángel Mañas, who won the prestigious Premio Nadal in 1994 for his novel *Historias del Kronen*. The success of this young author sparked a quest by editors for more youthful talent. The search for young writers became desperate. In a retrospective synopsis of the phenomenon, in the collection *Páginas amarillas* (1997), the hysteria is put into perspective.

Ser “jóven” llegó a ser una especie de “patente de corso” y las editoriales se afanaban en una loca carrera en busca de jóvenes escritores; cuanto más jóvenes

¹⁸ There is for example a scene in Easton Ellis’ *Less Than Zero* involving the protagonist Clay and a tube of athletic ointment which is later reproduced almost verbatim in Alberto Fuguet’s *Mala onda*, albeit with a Chilean product of a different name.

¹⁹ Argentinians including Fresán and Forn wrote, and continue to write, for *Página 12*, while Alberto Fuguet and Arturo Fontaine wrote for *El Mercurio* in Chile. Some of the Chileans also wrote at different times for *La Época*, which ceased publication in 1998.

mejor, para intentar repetir las cifras de venta [...] sin preocuparse por la calidad literaria, y, en ocasiones, en claro menoscabo de la misma²¹ (X).

In Chile and Argentina the publishers never quite reached this level of recklessness, but a strong courtship of potential authors nonetheless existed. One author, Carlos Franz, author of *Santiago Cero*, described the attention he received from a Planeta editor:

Una vez que se gana el plebiscito, Savane se empieza a mover. Aquí empezó el baile. Me acuerdo de una cosa rarísima, que me invitó a almorzar a un restaurante carísimo, pedimos los mejores vinos, salió una cuenta increíble, y yo tenía diez páginas escritas, cosa que era absolutamente impensable dos años antes. Savane, que era un editor con olfato, estaba oliendo lo que había pasado en España y en Argentina y que forzosamente iba pasar en Chile. Y ocurrió de hecho²² (Cortínez 15).

²⁰ Writers like Fogwill tackled subjects including the Punk movement in Argentina, and the devastation of the younger generation by the war in the Malvinas.

²¹ “Being “young” ended up being a sort of authorization in itself and the publishers outdid themselves in a crazed contest to find young writers; the younger the better, in order to try and repeat the sales figures...without worrying about the literary quality, and on occasion, with an obvious lack of it.”

²² “Once the plebiscite was won, Savane began to move. Here the business started. I remember the strangest thing; he invited me out to eat at a very expensive restaurant, we ordered the most expensive wines, and got an incredible bill, and I had written ten pages, something that was unthinkable two years earlier. Savane, who was an editor with a great instincts, got a whiff of what had happened in Spain and in Argentina, and was likely to happen in Chile. And that is in fact just what happened.”

Planeta's international character²³, along with the internationalization of this type of literature, combined effectively to facilitate the production of novels and stories that addressed and portrayed the simultaneous globalization of culture and capital in a flattering light. A transparent marketing strategy was implemented. Cooperation between the two trans-Andean units was played up to give the impression of cohesion and a certain generational solidarity²⁴. Paratextual complements and thanks were exchanged by the authors, with Fuguet, Forn and Fresán in particular thanking each other more than once in their introductions and/or epilogues. These thanks were considered important enough to merit titles and an epilogical place among the paratexts. Forn entitled *Nadar de noche*'s dedicatory section "Friends indeed when a friend's in need" and Fuguet chose to end his *Mala onda* with a little "Buena onda". In a further move, numerous interviews were given (often as a group in the case of the Chileans) in which an apparently spontaneous collective line was espoused. The image of a general shift was created, in which a generation moved away from the past, and addressed the present on its own terms.

A concerted effort was made among these upper middle class writers to remain "independent" of the troubles plaguing their respective societies and, more importantly, to avoid being linked openly with any political groups, or to the literary or ideological "mistakes" of previous generations of writers. Franz summed it up thus:

²³ They have offices in Argentina, Chile and Spain.

²⁴ Interestingly, some of the authors later denied having participated in the marketing and were quite indignant about not belonging to the group. Alberto Fuguet for example was quoted in *La Época* as insisting his writing did not even belong within the *Nueva narrativa*: "ni por la edad,

¿Por qué diablos tengo yo que escribir, si no me interesa, sobre la denuncia histórica o pronunciarme frente a la historia? [...] Sentí muy claramente un alivio en ese período en que se levantaba el mandamiento histórico y entrábamos en un período de libertad creativa donde podíamos evitar hacernos cargo de dos cosas: la literatura de anuncio, que yo indentifico con los años 70, con la creación novísima de Skármeta y el anuncio de una nueva época, y, también dejar atrás la literatura del denuncia. Ni anuncio ni denuncia (Córtinez 10-11)²⁵.

With these comments, some of what were later perceived to be the generational boundaries of this literature were established. Time wise, it focused on a post-1970's, post-*novísima* moment which began at the end of the 1980's. With the exception of authors like Jaime Collyer or Carlos Cerda, who were a bit older and had just returned from years in exile, the attitude in public and in many of the texts appeared to treat politics or ideology with a disdain born of years saturated with it²⁶. No apology was made for the lack of social or political commitment, although the tendency to shy away from activism was explained at a conference held by *La Época* in Santiago where

el currículo, ni por la estética, ni siquiera por la ética. Tampoco son mis amigos" (*La Época*, April 20, 1994).

²⁵ "Why the hell do I have to write, if I don't want, about historic denouncements or take a stand against history? [...] I felt a lot of relief during the time that the historical mandate was lifted and we entered a period of creative freedom where we could avoid taking on two things: the literature of announcement, which I identify with the '70's, with the *novísima* creations of Skármeta, and the announcement of a new time; and, also, to leave behind the literature of denouncement. Neither announcement nor denouncement."

²⁶ Born and raised in the last years of the Vietnam War, of Franco's regime, or during the Chilean and Argentinian dictatorships of the 1970's and 80's, it is not difficult to understand the breakdown or the exhaustion induced by years of hyper-politicism.

writers and critics got together to try and define the movement once and for all.

Rodrigo Cánovas depicted it thus in *Nueva narrativa chilena* (1997):

Aparece en escena, primero, una legión de niños abandonados, iluminada en su centro por la figura del expósito, ser sin protección, guía ni contento. Niños envejecidos tempranamente, jóvenes sin ilusiones, chivos expiatorios de otras gentes, de otros sueños. El resentimiento contra la voz del Padre (el abandono, la derrota, la utopía derrumbada, la traición afectiva) se expone paradigmáticamente en la novela *Santiago cero* [...]:

“[...] La tranca de mi generación es que nos vendieron erotismos de segunda mano. Nadie pensó en nosotros, en nuestra talla. Como esa ropa americana usada que nos ponemos todos y que siempre nos queda grande. Causas ajenas, parchadas, con los codos vencidos...”²⁷ [126] (Olivares 21-22).

The attitude taken in many of the texts had a great deal in common with a radical version of post-modernism which theorists including Patricia Rosenau have defined as “skeptical”. This branch took the stand, among others, that the grand political projects and struggles of the past were outdated and irrelevant. More drastically however, these critics rejected as pointless the pain and sacrifice of previous, more

²⁷ “There first appears on stage a legion of boys, abandoned, illumined in the centre by the light of exposure, neither guided not protected. Boys who have grown old early, disillusioned youth, the scape goats of other people and of other dreams. The resentment towards the voice of the Father (the abandonment, the loss, the collapsed utopias, the affective treason), is exposed paradigmatically in the novel *Santiago cero* [...]: “[...] The drag for my generation is that they sold us second hand eroticisms. Nobody thought about us, about our size. Like that used

politically involved, generations. As the skeptics saw it, even when one fought, nothing changed. Patricia Rosenau outlined the position of the skeptics in *Post-Modernism and the Social Sciences* (1992):

Little results, they contend, from dramatic, heroic, political commitment...This pessimism applies not only to mainstream political participation but also to left and right wing organizations and to the new social movements supported by the affirmative post-modernists... (140).

The parallel school of thought, those post-modernists known as “affirmatives”, while not wholly rejecting the idea of action, chose to limit themselves to a smaller field, avoiding what they still saw as utopic movements. The fictional texts, as a group, appeared to support neither the left nor the right wing in any strong way. Although some of the writers could be called more radical²⁸ than others, there was, publicly, a rousing vote in favour of abstention. Why participate? What was the point?

American clothing that we all use and that is always too big. Foreign causes, patched, with the elbows worn...”[126]”

²⁸ Fresán, for example criticized the South Atlantic War, with the story “La Soberanía nacional”. Arturo Fontaine’s novel *Oír su voz*, on the other hand, has a distinctly more neo-

Selection and reception of texts

No se qué quiero/ pero se lo que no quiero/
se lo que no quiero/ pero no lo puedo
evitar/ puedo seguir escapando/ y aún lo
estoy pensando "Dónde anda marinero"
Andrés Calamaro

To gain a clear, broad-based understanding of this literature as a genre²⁹, and of the context which gave rise to the abovementioned skepticism, it was not simple to select a limited number of texts from within the multitude for critical analysis. Any study of a genre must necessarily include not only the most typical examples of it but also those more marginal texts that help the reader/critic to better perceive the borders and limits. For the purposes of this dissertation, and in the interest of keeping it as concise as possible (i.e., not citing five examples to back up each concept), many novels and other narratives were excluded. This is not due to any particular lack of innovation of typical characteristics, but rather because there were some which better highlighted than others what I judged to be the pertinent questions and themes that this dissertation wishes to address.

The preoccupation with consumer culture is best represented by two distinct literary tendencies within the movement, with each direction having a different emphasis. In the first group, the codes, practices and systems of consumption have

liberal tinge to it, although he does critique the social repercussions of the Chilean economic "miracle".

²⁹ The term genre here will be used to refer not to a specific literary form, i.e. the novel, but to a literary movement based on shared thematic and contextual characteristics.

taken centre-stage, and appear to represent the primary concern of the texts to the point that they define, for example, characterization. In these novels and stories, consumption is a central theme. The second stream within these texts appears at first glance to obey many of the same rules, and address the same issues of consumer culture writing. Nonetheless, in this second group there are a series of underlying questions which reach beyond the apparent superficiality of problematizing consumption to textualize more pressing, far-reaching problems of how to inhabit time and space, and the relation with the recent past. In the case of the first stream, the questions of consumerism revolve around the characters' development, whereas in the case of the second group the emphasis is placed more upon a preoccupation with space and its negotiation in the urban centres of the 1980's and 1990's. "Negotiation" refers to an ability not only to physically and emotionally find one's place within a given expanse (ubicarse), but also to the possibility of using spaces to mediate one's intimate experiences. There are, for example, a surprising amount of references to shopping malls in the *Nueva narrativa*. These monoliths of modernity take over as places of social encounters and in the case of one of Fresán's protagonists, it becomes as intimate a space as his own home. His parents even choose the mall as the place to tell him about their impending divorce. Most of the texts selected for this dissertation address both tendencies to some degree, but emphasize one more than the other.

The chosen literary corpus includes, first of all, some early members of the group; the original Planeta Boys Alberto Fuguet, Rodrigo Fresán, Sergio Gómez and Juan Forn. Although all four have written prolifically, I believe that Fuguet's *Mala onda*, Fresán's trilogy *Historia argentina*, *Vidas de santos* and *Trabajos manuales*,

Gómez's *Adiós Carlos Marx, nos vemos en el cielo* and Forn's *Nadar de noche* most concisely represent the textualization of the post-dictatorship generation's voices. Furthermore, the writers themselves, particularly Forn, Fuguet and Gómez have demonstrated an interest in linking their own work with that of their contemporaries all over Hispano-America and even Spain. Curiously, given the authors' willingness to acknowledge the influence of their contemporaries, there has been little mention of the American sources which have informed this literature. While Forn edited a collection of the *Nueva narrativa argentina*, Gómez and Fuguet collaborated in the edition of *McOndo*. This compilation became, soon after its publication, a password for academics and readers of the genre. Until the release of *Líneas Aéreas* by the rising editorial power, Lengua de Trapo in 1999, *McOndo* was considered the definitive anthology of the *Nueva narrativa*³⁰. Finally, the editors' prologue is one of the first paratexts in which a project is mentioned, along with a more comprehensive idea of where the binding connection lies between the texts.

American Psycho by Brett Easton Ellis was an unavoidable choice; not only due to the author's place in the original U.S incarnation of the genre, or the thematic content of the novel which revolves around a young man's destructive relationship with consumerism, but also because the book is referred to by characters in other, non-

³⁰ There can really be no comparison between the two collections. While *McOndo* was inarguably the first literary text to address the phenomenon as more than just a Chilean or Argentinian trend, the editors are guilty of keeping the list of invited authors similar to the original Planeta line-up (i.e Forn, Fresán and Rejtman as the only Argentinians). *Líneas aéreas* on the other hand features a number of female writers as well as less famous but equally gifted authors including Marcelo Birmajer and Federico Andahazi. The anthology is in fact a companion to a collection of Spanish short stories published by the same editorial under the title *Páginas amarillas* (1997).

American novels! Given that it is rare to quote a contemporary³¹, this cross cultural movement is particularly interesting. Although other texts including *Less Than Zero* by the same author and *Bright Lights Big City* by Jay McInerney address many of the same questions, *American Psycho* combines representative themes of the genre with a sense of what happens when characteristic aspects of consumerism are taken to an extreme.

When *American Psycho* was released, there was a terrible outcry due to its graphic portrayal of what happens when “nice” people³² behave badly. More interesting though than the reaction of the moral majority is the response from half a world away, as Mañas’ Madrid-based protagonist from *Historias del Kronen* assimilates not only the stylistic lessons of the novel but the thematic ones as well. The juxtaposition of textualization with real life experiences is complicated further by the obvious process of intertextuality. Although the relationship between Carlos the reader and *American Psycho*’s Pat Bateman is textual, the fact that Carlos tries to apply Bateman’s philosophy to his “life” adds a further dimension that blurs the lines which strictly define texts and that which is extra-textual.

Cristina Civalé too explores the potential inherent when worlds collide, as in the above case. “Perra virtual” moves beyond an analysis of the classic reader-text relationship, to question the possible outcome when a text created on-screen in a computer chat room moves onto the fictional street. *Hijos de mala madre* too examines the interaction of unlike discourses by locating the literary phenomenon of the *Nueva narrativa* within a broader socio-political and artistic framework.

³¹ In post-modernism for example, older texts are generally quoted and transformed.

³² In Spanish known as GCU or, Gente Como Uno.

Finally, *Buenos Aires vice versa* is a narrative of a different sort; a movie to be precise. Notwithstanding the obvious difference with the printed texts, this film, directed by Alejandro Agresti³³ acts as a unifying core where the other narratives and the world of the readers collide. Released at the tail end of the movement (in 1998), *Buenos Aires vice versa* could be considered the culmination of many of the problems approached within earlier texts. Thematically, like the literary texts of the *Nueva narrativa*, it addresses the political and social obstacles encountered by young people as they attempt to forge their own identities within consumer culture. Again, this dissertation could easily have become a life- long project by undertaking a study of all the diverse works released between 1989 and 1999. As it is, this is a first attempt to locate, to read and to comprehend, based on an educated sampling filtered from dozens of novels, short stories and pseudo-memoirs.

A first level reading of the novels and stories reveals a series of clearly outlined issues which form a common thread throughout all the narratives. These topics of discussion also form a stronger and more detailed common denominator than relying on the popular explanation which uses the influence of “globalization³⁴” to explain the striking similarities in texts produced in unlike places and environments. In other words, the thematic parallelism present in the novels and stories is not due exclusively to the dissemination of like images by the media in the United States, Argentina, Chile and Spain. While one would not want to underestimate the contribution made by technology and socio-economic internationalization to the dissemination of literary and other

³³ who is himself of the same generation as Fresán, Fuguet, et al.

cultural texts, there remain a number of other historical and political elements which have proved equally influential in the sparking of like ideas.

Speaking Worlds

Qué piensas cuando te hablo/ de
todo lo que pasó/ viste que todas
las cosas/ se saben con el tiempo/
suelto y aún viviendo
“Mensajes del alma” León Gieco

The most fundamental element in beginning to read the texts as a group is the question of language. Being the raw material of narrative, words contain all expressible thought as well as all attempts to enunciate the unspeakable, or to name the unnamable. Given the obvious discrepancies between English and Spanish, and also among the varied versions of Spanish spoken in Spain and South America (not to mention between Argentina and Chile³⁵), the likelihood of writers encountering a common vocabulary with which to express themselves would seem minimal. It would be easier, for example, to speak of the universally unifying character of the brand-name material goods whose presence permeates the texts. While there are many highly divisive elements among the different narratives and their chosen lexicons, these are outweighed

³⁴ This is not to say, in any way, that globalization is not a factor; merely that it is an umbrella term which covers a multitude of situations.

³⁵ A very basic example of the differences is the Argentine use of “vos” instead of “tú” for the second person singular; or the Spanish use of “vosotros” for the second person plural as opposed to “ustedes” which is used in Chile and Argentina. Many nouns differ as well, such as “jeans” which may be “bluyines” in one country and “vaqueros” in another.

by the many unifying characteristics which allow the reader, after initial confusion, to identify a trend which has emerged in register, language, and some specific, easily traceable systems of references. Characters in the novels may refer to their “camisetas” in Spain, “remeras” in Argentina, their “poleras” in Chile or their “t-shirts” in the United States, but they are all thinking of the same product, and often, of the same brand name. The language of consumption and its cultural off-shoots, banality and surplus, act as the great equalizer in this literature. The vocabulary can also be read as a stock of goods with which the fictitious worlds are furnished.

In contrast to what has been described as the “lenguaje del barroquismo que había en Carpentier y en otros hispanoamericanos...”³⁶ (Cortínez 22), the ‘Nueva narrativa’ has drained, or at least minimized all traces of what could be deemed extraneous or ambiguous. The banal, apparently, is neither tricky nor elusive. It demands that things be as they appear; “que cuando se hable de orden o libertad sea eso y no otra cosa, que no haya objetivo rimbombante”³⁷ (22). No fictional discourse functions at only one level, and language is never innocent, but as with the apparent rejection of ideologies, the insistence on clarity in language is in part a product of exhaustion felt by those who can still recall great political debates over nuance and meaning, which led to nothing. They also recall the complicated textual elaboration characteristic of modernism, which limited access to greater markets. The focus has now shifted back to commercial imperatives, with a greater emphasis on the role of the

³⁶ “the baroque language which existed in Carpentier and other Hispano- Americans”

³⁷ “That when one speaks of order and liberty that they be just that, and not something else; that there should be no ulterior objective”.

editor, and a lesser interest in the “literariness” of the texts. Literature, like other types of information, is measured more by its market value than by its purely artistic merit.

The novels and short stories demonstrate heavy textual reliance on a language which often owes more to the focus and blatancy of Nike’s famous “Just Do It” ads than to earlier literary works. “Just Do It” could be appropriately be re-phrased “Just Say It”, as stress is placed on not talking around issues, but rather on enunciating them directly and clearly. The level of sociolect locates itself firmly within the slang-filled, urban settings of Santiago, Buenos Aires and Spain. One of the more important trends in this literature has in fact been the recuperation of the colloquial and of slang, in its respective local versions. This is the case with all the texts, Chilean, Argentinian and Spanish, as well as with *Buenos Aires vice versa* , where the oral speech of the dialogues is of a very regional, urban, colloquial register³⁸. A clear rejection emerges in the *Nueva narrativa* regarding what is perceived to be the more traditionally literary manner of expressing oneself. Curiously though, any shock to the reader comes not from the proliferation of “huevón”s or other ‘non-literary’ choices of language, but rather from the richness and sheer creative force of the resulting texts³⁹. Along with fashionable catch phrases, the overwhelming constant mention of product names, and an insistence on local, colloquial vocabulary, one must also add the language of rock and roll to the mix.

³⁸ This includes the indiscriminate use of swear words, and the very Buenos Aires habit of reversing syllables in words, for example “telo” instead of “hotel”.

³⁹ I wish to emphasize that this creativity stems not from any particular compositional talent on the part of the authors, but is the result of the contact between different registers of language.

Some of the firmest links established between the narratives and the outside world are built on bridges, sustained equally by marketing and by the untempered passion and angst of contemporary music. In fact, the lyrics becomes a distinct subtext of the narratives, with the lyrics often quoted in the novels and stories as one would more traditionally quote Shakespeare. More interestingly, the words of the songs are occasionally inserted as a substitute for the characters' own words. This leads to the problem of choice. The selection of songs, or of products for that matter, mentioned in the novels and stories, is far from arbitrary. In the case of the former, the reference to music by certain pop groups reflects very specific lifestyles and attitudes towards everything from family to politics. This link signifies a pre-existing system which penetrates the fictitious universe through its daily codes and practices. The texts are marked by the choices and consequently expand towards the broader cultural text. In the case of the products, the same is true. However, loyalty to a band tends to outlive loyalty to a brand name, and implies a more personal, vital individual choice. Just as in the case of real youth culture, the fictional characters who reflect them may wear specific shoes or boots that are in fashion, but it is less likely that they will be portrayed as listening to popular groups whose music they do not enjoy. The preference for given brand names remains a part of the production of identity. For this reason as well, the insertion of references to music in the text is a helpful way of getting inside the characters' minds. Through this series of choices and selections, a community for readers is created which possesses, or identifies with the codes of the text.

As a means of studying and analyzing the creation and dissemination of some of the codes, particularly those associated with youth cultures and with non-literary

discourses like music, this dissertation refers in some detail to the field of cultural studies and particularly to concepts of popular culture. One of the more innovative aspects of the literature of the *Nueva narrativa* is precisely its ability to absorb and even critique notions from other discourses within the bounds of the text. Although these other disciplines play a large role in helping the reader to appreciate facets of the novels and stories, the literary texts themselves remain the undisputed centre of this dissertation.

The language of the novels and short stories did not develop in a vacuum. All the elements, social, political or otherwise, which have contributed to its creation and dissemination can be traced to more or less specific places, times and events which sparked a need to enunciate experiences and desires in a unique manner. Each generation tells its stories according to its ability and its understanding, and some of these will eventually become the dominant version of events. Simultaneously, the texts may also be shaped by external pressures of varying subtlety. For this reason, the critical focus of this dissertation is not limited to the period within which the narratives occur, but also to that time which preceded the telling, influencing the formative years of the writers and of the readers, and therefore of the characters in the fictional world. While this juxtaposition of the textual and the “hors-texte” may be potentially problematic, their relation of mutual modification is in fact both logical and necessary. The nature of the texts, almost without exception, is such that the ability to catch hints and the subtly clever references is paramount. These novels and stories are intended for public consumption as such but end up targeting a very specific group of readers, capable of reading the signs and of inhabiting the type of highly exclusive world

defined in the fiction. For this reason, at times it becomes difficult for the reader to distinguish between voices or to draw a clear line between those who speak in the texts and those who respond by reading.

Notwithstanding a tendency to dismiss the concept of the targeted reader because of the emphasis it supposedly places on the role of the author, the *Nueva narrativa* not only appeals to a carefully cultivated part of the reading audience, it then goes on to flaunt the texts' relations with its knowledgeable readers. One could argue nuance here. Notwithstanding the irrelevance of whether the authors consciously set out to attract a preconceived audience, the texts of this genre foreground a strong presupposition of what the readers' competence must be in order to achieve a relatively comprehensive reading. These narratives all exist within a strong author-text-reader triangle which does not so much privilege the writers' intentions as it avoids reducing the relationship to a duo. In this universe, the author is also a reader and vice-versa, through the process of textualization which occurs in the act of resignification. The complicity created within the aforementioned triangle is first and foremost of a generational and classist nature, based on familiarity with moments and events. Also central to the fulfillment of the expectations of both texts and readers is a common ground anchored in the social and linguistic codes of urban youth. These expectations are part of the aesthetic which seeks immediate pleasure through recognition rather than of a culture which opts for the distancing which allows for observation and the postponement of satisfaction. The codes are not always local, as Alberto Fuguet and Sergio Gómez, acting as writers, editors and critics, mention in the prologue to their anthology *McOndo* (1996):

El mundo se empequeñeció y compartimos una cultura bastarda similar, que nos ha hermanado irremediabilmente sin buscarlo. Hemos crecido pegados a los mismos programas de televisión, admirado las mismas películas y leído todo lo que se merece leer[...]. Todo esto trae, evidentemente una similar postura ante la literatura y el compartir campos de referencias unificadores (18).

Interestingly, notwithstanding the sense of expansion caused by a globalized media, a grounding in the local is reinforced, as many writers assume that their national concerns are familiar all over the world. The novels and short stories make few allowances for readers who do not have the necessary tools to crack these codes. None of the texts take the time to give history lessons or offer cultural dictionaries. The narrators and characters discuss defining moments in their respective national imaginaries including the first plebiscite called by General Pinochet in Chile, or the war in the South Atlantic between Argentina and Great Britain. The events are mentioned almost in passing though in the language one would use to speak to a compatriot familiar with the whole story and able to pick up the threads of the narrative and reconstruct the story alone. The same occurs when musical groups or television programs are named. The reader is by default an accomplice, and as such takes the strange position of confidante in some cases. Here again, the text opens itself up and points towards the exterior world, constantly re-examining the connection between the two.

The act of reading is textualized in many of the novels with an attitude approaching reverence; implying a belief that the text, when disseminated, has the power to influence and transform the reader. In *Historias del Kronen*, as was mentioned earlier, Easton Ellis' *American Psycho* is treated by the narrator-protagonist Carlos as a folk hero, and as a potential behavioural guide, with the psychopathic narrator Pat Bateman ultimately assuming the role of prophet and model. In Fuguet's novel *Mala onda*, narrator-protagonist Matías finds himself able to act and react to his perceived unhappiness only after devouring Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*, and reading about the choices enacted by Holden Caulfield, whom he sees as a kindred spirit. There is a constant, occasionally multi-layered, dialogue between the "world" and the text, with comments flying simultaneously in both directions, weaving an intertext that presumes complicity between the two parties.

These intertexts and the manner in which the references are understood are the basis for Chapter One. In this chapter the critical focus is divided between the significance of intertexts in general within the narratives and the overwhelming presence of intertexts related to the culture of consumption. The infiltration of a language previously associated with advertising into the literature appears as a further mark of the influence of this highly structured media on the lives of the characters and the reading habits of the readers. Questions emerge concerning the ability of a reader to not only unfold but first identify intertexts which are sometimes notable for what they do not say rather than what is written in black and white on the page. In an attempt to explain the central role of the intertext within the *Nueva narrativa*, I have chosen the theories of Michael Riffaterre as a framework, based on his analysis of presences and

the abovementioned absences, which I feel best describes the nature of the intertext in the literary corpus of this dissertation.

Chapter Two addresses the socio-political context within which the genre developed, beyond the well-known story of the marketing machine which eventually disseminated the *Nueva narrativa*. The emphasis is placed mostly on the texts from Chile, Spain and Argentina, in an attempt to define the local events and social discourses which informed the narratives and to comprehend what it is that fundamentally distinguishes the texts from these three countries from the American novels, seen as models. This chapter locates the narratives within the transitory periods related to the transitions from dictatorships to neo-liberal democracies. The argument is made that what has become known as the post-dictatorship generation has been forced to exist and evolve discursively within strict confines which dissuaded and discouraged rather than nourished them, a situation which was not wholly remedied with the fall of the military governments. Last, this chapter explains the sources behind much of the generation's cynicism as it is textualized in the *Nueva narrativa*.

The strongest clue as to how experiences in the "real world" have left their textual mark is through an examination of those characters who are both the product and contributing voices of their times. In Chapter Three the question is raised, how can one define them as a group or as individuals and finally, how do they define themselves? Is it even viable to speak about identity? The problem of seeking one's identity is not a new one in literature. Nonetheless, the ways in which the rampant, obvious instability manifests itself, and is eventually resolved or not, is a faithful reflection of its time. Between the rejection of absolute subjectivity by some post-modernists and the tension

caused by discrepancies between an idealized concept of membership in a global village and the occasional nationalist backlash, there are less and less ways in which one may delineate his/her identity without resorting to slogans or brand names accessories to fill the gap. Identity, as Rob Shields points out in *Identity Shopping: The Subject of Consumption* (1992), becomes confused with the act of identification. The chapter examines how the sudden awareness of an inability to take off the purchased mask is textualized.

The final chapter, Chapter Four, challenges the popular critical belief which claims the post-dictatorship generation is politically uninvolved and cynically self-interested. By looking at the text as a social construct and also, by examining the strategies that have informed real-life resistance to a system seen as unfair, the question of how literary and other social discourses interact is reconsidered. This chapter focuses on a language based-resistance that is practiced both by the characters and by the readers.

Chapter 1

Consuming the intertext

Casi casi nada me resulta pasajero.../ La
realidad duerme solo en un entierro/ y
camina triste por el sueño del más
bueno.../y en un bolsillo tiene/ amor y
alegría/ un diós de fantasía/ la guerra y la
poesía.
“La colina de la vida” Porsuigieco

Intertextuality is, unquestionably, the textual practice chosen and privileged by the writers addressed in this dissertation in constructing their respective fictional worlds. These worlds revolve around locations which include Alberto Fuguet’s contrasting upper and lower neighborhoods of Santiago de Chile, Rodrigo Fresán’s shopping centres or London restaurant kitchen cum punishment cell, and José Ángel Mañas’ frenetic night time Madrid. Intertextuality also provides the theoretical framework which allows critics of the *Nueva narrativa* to analyse the dynamics of these novels and stories. The practice of intertextual referencing is a linguistic and discursive entanglement which resembles nothing so much as a Gordian knot, in that readers who are capable of untangling the multiple references become part of a prestigious group. These readers often identify themselves with a specifically urban, elite, group described in the texts, and whom I will define in more detail later in this section. What interests me in this chapter is to see how the intertext functions. As is often the case with intertextuality, this particular puzzle is doubly twisted, in that the texts may allude to the

extra-textual⁴⁰, thus involving the daily world of the reader, and all the mysteries this may involve.

The incidents of intertextuality (both exophoric and to a rather surprising degree⁴¹ endophoric) to be discussed here are manifested in multiple forms, and with predictably varying results when they are implemented. The purpose of this chapter is to reveal some of the systems of intertextuality at work in these novels and short stories in an attempt to untie the web(s) of language and discourse.

The consequences of intertextuality are, of course, strongly linked to the role of a targeted reader as potential accomplice and to his/her reaction and participation in the interpretative code-breaking of the text. This reader's potential capacity to untie the intertexts is a study of occasionally painful and uncertain processes and not only of specific results. In our case, the overly clever tactics of Alexander the Great, who merely slashed through the problematic knot he encountered, is not a viable option.

In his essay "Discourse in the Novel", Bakhtin posited the idea that "...the language of a novel is the system of its 'languages'" (Holquist 262). The weaving of these "languages" is the procedure which contributes to the singular character of a text. In the case of the corpus of texts to be discussed in this chapter, the choice of "languages" which form the prevalent model of discourse belong, overwhelmingly, to the globalized consumer culture and to the media of the late 20th century which is an unquestionably influential contributor to the contextual foundation of this dissertation. The hybridity Bakhtin suggests is an extension of his more fundamental theories which

⁴⁰ I refer here to that which is not found in the specific texts under investigation here, rather than suggesting there is a wholly separate "hors-texte".

address this very quality, but at the more basic level of language. This inherently composite character is known as *heteroglossia* and was described thus:

The social and historical voices populating language, all its words and all its forms, which provide language with its particular concrete conceptualizations, are organized...into a structured stylistic system that expresses the differentiated socio-ideological position of the author amid the heteroglossia of his epoch.
(Holquist 300)

This description of language's composite nature and, more importantly, of the link between language and ideologies, emphasizes the inevitable infiltration of social discourses into all literary writing, as well as the intrinsic contribution to these same discourses which is made by literature.

The fiction of writers including José Angel Mañas, Rodrigo Fresán, Alberto Fuguet, Sergio Gómez, Cristina Civalé and others belongs to a specific discursive time and place; an urban, late capitalist, end of millenium culture of consumption. Notwithstanding their chronotopic foundations, the texts which have emerged manage to maintain a crucial distance and subtlety which allow the reader to distinguish them from the merely transparent or the hackneyed (as may occur with more concrete social discourses including the political or sociological), and to extract their critical surplus. This ability to provoke discriminating thought within what appears to be an overabundance of signs is not only a unique accomplishment, but is the hallmark of this

⁴¹ Especially in the case of Rodrigo Fresán and Alberto Fuguet

genre of writing. The social imagination of the novels and short stories which form the core of this dissertation emerges from within the noise of the intertexts. It is not a coincidence then that the first reference in Fresán's opening short story "El aprendiz de brujo" is Disney's *Fantasia*; a film whose own narrative about an emerging young character⁴² surges forth from within a storm of dancing images and noises.

From the numerous approaches to intertextuality which attempt to clarify and explain this textual phenomenon, I have chosen to work primarily with two, each of which complements and completes the other. Both approaches are concerned with appearances, and re-appearances. The first focuses on an overpowering, saturated aesthetic presence within the text, while the second explores less tangible, but no less powerful, cognitive aspects of intertextuality including recuperation of the absent, mediation and the role of social reference. The former is of a more "scientific" nature and the latter, a more elusive, social and personal manner of identifying and evaluating the intertextual. In both cases however, the primary focus is, and always remains, the text itself. Even when speaking of the social, or of the referential, the text always has the last word.

Michael Riffaterre has, over the past few decades, presented a still- evolving theory of the intertextual which is especially attractive to those critics and readers who place equal emphasis on all elements of the triangle composed of text, reader and society; questioning and focusing on the roles of knowledge and forgetting when one reads. Syllepsis, the mechanism mentioned early on by Riffaterre in his 1980 article "Le

⁴² This character/ apprentice is of course Mickey Mouse, overcome by hubris which leads him to believe he can bypass the training of his sorcerer-father and "create" something new.

sémiotique de l'intertexte", is a means of understanding both intertexts and intertextuality as an ongoing process. As a trope or figure of thought, syllepsis is the simultaneous understanding of a word, or phrase, in two ways; literally and figuratively. It subsequently represents the equivalence of both the "meaning" of a given sign and its "significance"⁴³, privileging neither. What nonetheless must not be ignored is that the link between the sign and any consequent referent is dependent on the presence of pre-supposed knowledge on the part of the readers, allowing them to invest the sign with more than its face value. This re-symbolization then becomes a driving force in the production of meaning in the text. Readers who share, and participate in the culture of the text are able to carry out this process.

Riffaterre took this process one crucial step further in a 1987 article entitled "The Intertextual Unconscious", insisting that although interpretation may be based on extra-textual information brought to the text by the reader, the procedure is nonetheless intrinsically textual, with the presence of specific codes or components in the text, which function mnemonically, being responsible for setting off the chain reaction which (often unconsciously) ignites the reader's own mechanisms of association. It is, in a manner of speaking, the meeting of two unconscious:

[...](T)he absent referent is still clearly outlined by elements of the text that need the complementarity or the opposability of an intertext to be units of significance.[...]The intertextual unconscious that the reader maps out by

⁴³ Significance here does not refer to the value of the work within the canon, but to the value which it may have for the reader on a more personal level

bringing to light, step by step, successive intertextual correspondants of what trouble him in the text. (385)

It is the sharp division between this absent intertext and the hyper-presence of referents of a different sort which concerns me in this chapter. The striking juxtaposition in the texts of those allusive signs which are so constantly present as to almost erase themselves before the reader's eyes, through sheer overuse, with a series of shriekingly loud absences which cannot be ignored, are the axis upon which this approach to understanding the intertext, and therefore the worlds configured by the texts themselves, revolves. Mike Featherstone, analyzing the loss of stable meaning as discussed in Jean Baudrillard's *Simulations* and *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities* (both 1983) writes that "the masses become fascinated by the endless flow of bizarre juxtapositions which takes the viewer beyond stable sense" (Featherstone 15). Beatriz Sarlo takes an even more far-reaching approach to understanding the pervasive numbness supposedly achieved through an unceasing projection of visual images, as in television programs, commercials and music videos. "La imagen ha perdido toda intensidad. No produce asombro ni intriga; no resulta especialmente misteriosa ni especialmente transparente" (57)⁴⁴. The thrill of discovery is dulled, and the stakes involved in producing a reaction from the viewing public are raised ever higher.

These above two quotations and proposals suggest two, not wholly inseparable, scenarios. The first, based on Baudrillard's understanding, implies that sensory overload

⁴⁴ The image has lost all intensity. It produces neither shock nor intrigue; it seems neither especially mysterious nor especially transparent.

has reduced the reader or spectator to a passive receptacle, and an ineffective one at that. Second, and perhaps more disturbing, is Sarlo's argument that the images themselves have been emptied of all meaning and significance. Furthermore, it appears from her statement that they (the images) are uninteresting and therefore exhausted, as are the readers/spectators, in that they are incapable of eliciting any reaction whatsoever. When this insensibility crystallizes, when everything looks and sounds the same, as in the following dialogue in Easton Ellis' *American Psycho*, the result is at once frightening, funny and sharply critical:

'I'm into, oh, *murders and executions* mostly. It depends.' I shrug.

'Do you like it?' she asks, unfazed.

'Um...It depends. Why?' I take a bite of sorbet.

'Well, most guys I know who work in *mergers and acquisitions* don't really like it,' she says.

'That's not what I said', I say... 'Oh, forget it.' (206, my emphasis)

At the beginning of this chapter I mentioned the presence of an intertext which appears as both an overpowering and saturated aesthetic within the texts. The references which flood the novels and short stories are resolutely linked to the language of excess, and in their sheer, overwhelming presence give rise to the critical question; what is missing here? The surplus of signs leads the reader to wonder at their textual and cultural antithesis.

Before delving into the absences potentially evoked by the mention or omission of certain referents or intertexts, it is first necessary to dispense with the popular myth, which suggests that the appearance of brand names in literature is a superficial and wholly unimportant trait of this generation. This attitude suggests that this characteristic merely reflects a general tendency to be easily manipulated by the advertising industry as well as an overall sense of vacuousness. While at this point I am not suggesting any particular ulterior motives for this emphasis on intertexts which glorify consumption, it would be naïve to dismiss the privileged place given to this particular, consumer-oriented series of references.

Baudrillard, in his broader analysis of reader/viewer reactions to the calculated plethora of images in *The Transparency of Evil*, has offered some relevant insight into what at first glance is a superficial textual strategy. He argues that it is not the saturation of signs which ought to be foregrounded, but instead the inevitable calm which exists within this storm. He insists that once removed from the bombardment of images, the reader, or subject "...rediscovers the imagination" (151). Before addressing the voice(s) within the noise, which provides the cultural and intertextual background for all of the fiction under consideration in this chapter, one must establish what this "noise" is composed of, and how it is, and has been, emitted with such force and range.

The constant mention of *things*, a most calculated and blatant form of general intertextuality employed in our novels and stories, is in part the product of the end-of-the-millennium information age in which we live. The development of characters, local spaces (predominantly urban), and their respective identities through reference to brand

name items, goes far beyond the merely descriptive encountered in Fuguet's hero Matías' mention of his "bolso Adidas...polera Hering y los Levis blancos" (25)⁴⁵, reaching, at times, a degree so absurd (most notably in Ellis' *American Psycho* and some short stories by Fresán) that it dares the reader not to notice. In the short story "El Lado de afuera" from *Historia argentina*, Fresán manages, in one short paragraph, to not only superficially 'globalize' his protagonist's experience by listing and mixing brand names and references to popular culture from (at least) three different countries, thus, in the language of consumer culture making him a "citizen of the world", but then reduces his own country, Argentina, to the sum of its consumer inventions.

Bajó el vidrio del Renault y tiró a Grace Jones por la ventana. Buscó en el bolsillo izquierdo de su camisa y encontró a Glen Gould tocando las *variaciones Goldberg*....Paró en un pueblo, compró una *baguette*, la cortó a lo largo y la untó con dulce de leche Chimbote, su marca preferida. Oh, birome, colectivo, dulce de leche, grandes inventos de la patria mía (102)⁴⁶.

Fuguet's Matías delves even deeper into this categorizing, reducing even the foreign to the familiar through a process of naming which is in no way offhand.

⁴⁵ "Adidas bag...my t-shirt and Levis." (*Bad Vibes* 21) It is interesting to note how in the English version, a brand name gets lost (possibly because Hering is a South American brand and therefore not worthy of translation).

⁴⁶ He lowered the glass in his Renault and threw Grace Jones out the window. He looked in the left pocket of his shirt and found Glenn Gould playing the *Goldberg Variations*...He stopped in a village, bought a *baguette*. cut it lengthwise and spread it with *dulce de leche* by Chimbote, his favourite brand. Oh, fountain pen, city-bus, *dulce de leche*, great inventions of my homeland.

“Cuando algo parecido a una depresión comenzó a rondarme, cambié de tema y me concentré en las vitrinas; caché, por ejemplo, que las poleras O’Brian se venden en todas partes. Me sentí más seguro” (10)⁴⁷. The process of Matías’ reasoning is, although bizarre, inarguable. There is a direct, constantly reiterated link in the texts between the fetishization of brand name items and the sense of alienation exuded by the narrators and protagonists. In this way, brands (in Matías’ case “O’Brian”) become not only a patriotic form of description as in the quotation from Fresán, but also a highly personal affirmation of desired stability and order through consumption- inspired controls. This control is dual in that, despite popular belief, there is an interactive element, best illustrated by the most famous control of all-the remote, described by Beatriz Sarlo as “una base de poder simbólico” (62)⁴⁸.

In an attempt to regain some measure of control, and at the same time establish convincing links with their environment, the characters develop alternate strategies. As befits a superficial culture, the approach taken often lacks subtlety. It would not take a great leap of imagination to describe the *zapping*-like practice of ‘listing’ in novels and short stories by Easton Ellis, Fresán, Fuguet, and others of this group as an exercise in incessant name dropping. The fast and furious pace of itemization and reference to both local and international goods paraded through the texts, resembles nothing so closely as a session of late twentieth century channel-surfing, or *zapping*, as it is now also known in Spanish-speaking countries. This may not be merely coincidental, when one

⁴⁷ When something similar to depression began to move in on me, I changed topics and concentrated on the shop windows; I realized, for example, that O’Brian t-shirts are sold everywhere. I felt more secure.

⁴⁸ A base of symbolic power.

considers the fact that both the writers and the great majority of the characters in the texts belong to the *blank generation* of the 1970's, the first age-group⁴⁹ to experience, *en masse*, the rise of globalization through mass-media, most significantly television. The expression refers to the glazed, detached look common to those who watch too much television.

At times, these new codes (i.e. the mention of brand names) used to delimit both personal and foreign space, take over to the extent that the subject being defined becomes lost or overtaken by the sheer quantity of identifying “characteristics”. A textual case in point is the disquieting strategy employed by Patrick Bateman, the protagonist/narrator in *American Psycho*, who depicts his acquaintances by listing in minute detail the brand name items in which they are clothed.

Hamlin is wearing a suit by Lubiam, a great-looking striped spread-collar cotton shirt from Burberry, a silk tie by Resikeio and a belt by Ralph Lauren. Reeves is wearing a six-button double-breasted suit by Christian Dior, a cotton shirt, a patterned silk tie by Clairborne, perforated cap-toe leather lace-ups by Allen-Edmonds, a cotton handkerchief in his pocket, probably by Brooks Brothers; sunglasses by Lafont Paris lie on a napkin by his drink and a fairly nice attaché case from T.Anthony rests on an empty chair by our table. (87)

⁴⁹ Particularly in the Southern Cone and Spain.

An immediate and inflexible hierarchy of capital⁵⁰ is thus established by the narrator; first come those marks of distinction, those brands, which are known but must be qualified or prefaced by a “fairly nice”, or a “great looking”, and then, higher up on the scale, those hallmarks which need no introduction or explanation due to their unquestionable acceptability on the basis of what they represent in terms of values, wealth and status. Names of characters, of acquaintances and even of the narrator’s fiancée⁵¹, are interchangeable and of little consequence. For Patrick, who is slowly losing his sanity, as for Matías half a world away vacationing on the beaches of Río, brand names are an anchor of sorts; a final link to stability and the recognizable and therefore understandable. What then, if any, is the difference between the Easton Ellis text and the Fuguet text; or between Easton Ellis and *any* of the non-U.S texts that appear to employ the same referential strategies?

The fragmented, post-modern characters are first reduced by the Easton Ellis’ narrator to their personal space (they are not placed temporally or spatially, beyond their own bodies), and finally even this grain of individuality is denied them as they are labeled with other people’s names- Ralph Lauren, Dior, Clairborne, or even Patrick Bateman. The narrator acknowledges this instability himself, explaining that “(m)yself is fabricated, an aberration. I am a noncontingent human being. My personality is

⁵⁰ “Capital” here refers to Pierre Bourdieu’s description of the varied types of capital employed in everyday life, “social capital”, “educational”, etc., which establish systems of preferences and hierarchies.

⁵¹ This is taken to absurd lengths in the “Christmas Party” chapter, during a gathering at Bateman’s fiancée Evelyn’s house. He insists on calling her Cecelia, in order not to confuse a potentially lucrative business acquaintance who believes Patrick is someone else named Marcus, and calls Patrick by that name. As Marcus’ girlfriend’s name is Cecelia, Patrick

sketchy and unformed...”(377). This character portrait is faithful to the description offered by Rosenau in *Post-Modernism and the Social Sciences: Insights, Inroads and Intrusions* (1992), in which she suggests that one of the foremost characteristics of postmodern writing is the presence of a “disintegrating patchwork of a *persona*...” (55), rather than a “strong singular identity” (54). In the case of Pat Bateman, he is configured as a series of clothing tags sewn expertly together. At first glance, which is the one that counts according to the narratives, the readers and the texts have both moved beyond more traditional psychological character descriptions linked to the Freudian discourse.

The well-known U.S obsession with identifiable labels, as exemplified and exaggerated in the previous quotation from *American Psycho*, serves as a model, a peak to be aspired to by other countries who are still playing consumer catch-up, i.e. Chile, Spain, Argentina. Any comparison of the U.S and non-U.S fiction must take into account particular contributing elements which were not present in the conception of the American novels. One of these is the political background which precedes the rise of consumerism in countries like Chile and Argentina. According to Chilean sociologist Tomás Moulian, “(e)l desarrollo y expansión de una matriz cultural individualista-hedonista es una herencia de las dictaduras militares o de otros procesos de constitución de una capitalismo neoliberal” (26)⁵². Before exploring the deeper repercussions (political and social) of this phenomenon and its literary offshoots, I would like to examine how this situation has evolved historically and technically.

pretends that is Evelyn’s name, so as not to arouse suspicion, and play along. Evelyn does not even notice, or care.

⁵² The development and expansion of a cultural, individualist-hedonist matrix is the inheritance of the military dictatorships or of other processes constituting a neoliberalist capitalism.

The sudden accessibility of U.S.- made merchandise (cars, electronics, mass-produced designer clothes) to the middle-classes outside of North America, beginning in the 1970's, created a new, self-defining series of references and discourses which has continuously developed, expanding markedly into the permeable field of literature. At this juncture, it is also important to note yet another link; the fact that in the case of Chile and Argentina, this economic period of increased consumption was both instigated and supported by the respective military dictatorships in government at the time. Furthermore, the sudden increase in both the ability to consume and the quantity and quality of products available for the chosen could quite fairly be seen as a reward for those who allied themselves with the military regimes; or in terms Bourdieu might use, those with the correct political capital were privileged.⁵³

This bond between consumption and dictatorial governments is played out repeatedly in the texts, through thematic choices and occasionally through direct references to economic issues which were raised both before and during the dictatorships. In *Mala onda*, the protagonist's mother takes a decidedly anti-Allende stance, insisting that the military coup d'état of September 1973 was a necessity which allowed her ensure that the 'communists' "...no le iban a quitar el placer de prepararles a sus hijos unos bavaois como la gente" (139)⁵⁴, after having been "deprived" of a steady flow of condensed milk under the Chilean Unidad Popular government. Even in pseudo- testimonial writings such as Gabriela Cerruti's *Herederos del silencio* (1997)

⁵³ I am not exaggerating when I say "overnight". In the case of the Chilean coup, items which had been unavailable for months miraculously appeared on shop shelves the morning after September 11th.

⁵⁴ ...were not going to deprive her of the pleasure of making a proper bavaois for her children.

the spectre of North American goods and their power rears its head, with Cerruti describing “todo el mundo” who “se hacía rico de un día para el otro⁵⁵” (75) thanks to the military government’s finance minister Martínez de Hoz, whom she describes as “el hada madrina”⁵⁶ (75).

The bridge between the social phenomenon of an apparently overnight consumer frenzy and its insertion into the literature is grounded in the fact that in the past twenty years, there has been an increasing infiltration of the language and styles of ad-copy into the realm of fiction⁵⁷. This is not to suggest that the problematic is a completely new one. As far back as the late 1940’s Henri Lefebvre took an innovative approach, linking the act of consumption with the manipulative power of language in a connection which is still being developed and studied by theorists.

The act of consuming is as much an act of the imagination...as a real act...and therefore metaphorical...and metonymical...This would not matter if consumption were not accepted as something reliable, sound and devoid of deception (90).

Today, at the cynical end of the century, it is accepted knowledge that advertising campaigns, and indeed any language employed with the idea of encouraging purchase or consumption is far from neutral or objective. “The value-production process

⁵⁵ Became rich overnight.

⁵⁶ the fairy godmother

⁵⁷ Of course, this is far from being the only social discourse to rise to prominence in contemporary literature, as I expect to show in later chapters of this dissertation.

is *insatiable* as meaning systems are abstracted, appropriated and carved up to fit the agendas [...] necessary to fuel the engines of commodity sign production” (Goldman and Papson 10, my emphasis). Aesthetically speaking, ad-copy is composed of the same mind-blowing overabundance of signs as the kindred texts by Easton Ellis and his contemporaries, which could quite easily be mistaken for ads in their own right- albeit unfocused ones.

Here lies the fine line of difference between the advertising campaigns and the fiction. While there is a shared understanding that it is increasingly complicated to isolate the competing signs and images with which the viewer/reader is constantly bombarded, fiction appropriates this aesthetic as a way of critically highlighting the problematic issue⁵⁸ of saturation, while the ads cynically recycle this problem as a fashionable aesthetic. In other words, the marketing industry chooses to see this emptying of the sign, along with the increasing lack of attention span of their viewers, as an opportunity rather than a worrying dilemma, or even just a fact of contemporary life.

As a further example of the insertion of a marketing mentality and vocabulary into literature, a number of critics (Fowles; Goldman and Papson) have noted the importance of intertextuality as a strategy for creating effective ad-copy. In advertising, intertextuality is used to create a web of references which speak to each other and to the consumer, relying heavily on a “reader response” to complete the partial message emitted. In other words, hints are given during the course of an advertisement to link it to a series of other, recognizable, ads in a sort of ping-pong effect leading to a final

message about the product. For example, the ads may be run in a series, telling a story. The viewer should, ideally, see all installments/segments of the campaign in order to get the full impact of the message. Another option is a subtle reference to ads made by the competition with the idea of creating a sub-conscious comparison without explicitly saying so.

The end result of this is meant to be the creation of a target “an interpretative community based on reflexivity”, though “the greater probability is a fractured...fascination with the isolated and fleeting moment of signification” (Goldman and Papson 81). An example of the former (the consumer capable of subconsciously making the correct associations) can be seen in the free-flow monologues of *American Psycho*⁵⁹, in Fresán’s “La forma del shopping center” and is best exemplified by Matías, the protagonist of *Mala onda* and Third World dream-child of the ad agencies, as he walks into an American-style fast food restaurant in Santiago and smells the grease:

Es el olor de Estado Unidos, pienso. Olor a progreso. Me acuerdo de Paz, me acuerdo de Orlando y de Disneyworld, de Miami, de McDonald’s, y el Burger King, y el Kentucky Fried Chicken, y el Carl’s JR. y el Jack in the Box...⁶⁰(92)

⁵⁸ The aesthetic is also adopted as a way of organizing the novelistic universe.

⁵⁹ “J & B I am thinking. Glass of J & B in my right hand I am thinking. Hand I am thinking. Charivari. Shirt from Charivari I am thinking. Fusilli I am thinking...” (80) .

⁶⁰ It’s the smell of the United States I think. The smell of progress. I recall Paz, I recall Orlando, and Disneyworld, and Miami, and McDonald’s, and the Burger King and the Kentucky Fried Chicken and the Carl’s JR. and the Jack in the Box...

With the advent of the information age and the subsequent mass dissemination of images and text, this system of advertising references has become an even broader forum, ideal for the introduction and circulation of issues considered relevant to a global community and of a particularly hegemonic perspective. As Francisco Vacas pointed out in a 1996 review in the electronic journal *Telos*, referring to television as the great disseminator:

...la TV ... hace con las formas de expresión de los otros medios y los convierte en un lenguaje propio, colocándose en el centro irradiador de toda cultura, necesariamente masiva, que uniformiza todo mensaje, incluso las posibles disidencias contra el sistema.⁶¹(*Telos*)

Mass media, much like literature, has a broad capacity to assimilate social languages and discourses. Moulian puts it even more bluntly in *Chile actual*, mentioning a world image “que proviene de una fuente principal, la ideología en sí, expresada también en la propaganda, en la televisión” (22) The novels and stories in my corpus take advantage of the easy, perhaps inescapable, access to this uniformized rhetoric of globalization and attempt to re-create within it the a-political, a-historical space implied through the intertextual language of surplus. This space is more often than not a shopping centre, or some other neutral space, as I intend to discuss in the next chapter.

Critics are of course divided on the true impact of globalization as it may or may not affect language and critical reception. Some, including Hernán Vidal⁶² have chosen to focus on it as a positive process which provides opportunity and broad access to information and international cooperation which were previously unthinkable. Others have chosen to emphasize its more negative (or perhaps realistic) aspects, based on the fact that *not* everyone has access to the information super-highway, especially outside of the so-called First World, and upon the knowledge that power is still concentrated in the hands of the same people and centres as before. The Chilean critic Nelly Richard for example, is very clear about what she considers a “horizon of problems”, within the possibilities of post-modernism in a globalized world, including:

...the transnationalization of capital and the globalization of information, *the supersaturation of images and the hypermediatization of the real*, the fragmentation of subjectivity and the pluralization of social identity, and the dissemination of power...(229 my emphasis)

In Latin America many leading academics and theorists, including Sarlo, José Joaquín Brunner, and Martín Hopenhayn have taken the position that while the material

⁶¹ TV...uses forms of expression from other media and converts them into its own language, locating it in the radiating centre of every, necessarily massive, culture, uniformizing all messages, including those which may have dissenting views.

⁶² See his response to Nelly Richard's article “Cultural Peripheries: Latin America and Post-Modernist De-centering” in *The Postmodernism Debate in Latin America* (1993), in which Vidal decries the local approach to politics taken by, in this case, a Chilean journal, when they could aspire to “...global and drastic reforms, communicating with other groups through networks...” By not doing so, Vidal accuses them of carrying out an “elitist or minority project” (221).

benefits of globalization may be inarguable for the upper and middle classes in urban centres, there remain a number of serious, unresolved, problems, including what appears to be a continuation of the same, soft cultural and economic colonization and U.S-led hegemony which began with cable television. One of the most easily appreciable results, and one of the most significant by-products to emerge from this global body of texts with its webs of references and allusions, is a common language, a model which establishes specific limits and boundaries to delimit textual space of discussion established by the authors. This new language has become the basis for socialization processes and identity construction within the texts and sometimes beyond them. For example, the references and brands mentioned are overwhelmingly elitist in that they are generally exclusive and are, curiously, often unavailable in Latin America. In the case of Fresán and Fuguet's narrators⁶³, there is a constant reference to rare, underground rock bands and singers (all North American). This creates an isolated narrator/character who is actually, ironically, marginalized by his very ability to access this music. Moreover, the trend in nearly all of the texts is of a desperate loneliness and insularity within a frame of abundance and of an internationalism marketed as shared experience.

-¿Tiene algo de Josh Remsen?

- No lo ubico- me dice la vendedora de la Feria del Disco que, como es típico, está repleta de liceanas en uniforme, mirando cassettes en español.

...- ¿ Le suena el álbum *El coyote se comió al correcaminos*?

⁶³ Many of whom are called "Forma", pointing again to the apparent superficiality of the consumer discourse.

-No- me responde con cara de asco.⁶⁴ (Fuguet 271)

Many of the intertexts are so select as to be prohibitively so; in other words, purposely indecipherable, except for the purpose of demonstrating the aforementioned exclusivity. This is of course a double-edged sword; at once bestowing a desired selectness and condemning the protagonist to an alienated solitude. British critic Don Slater contextualized this problematic within the broader framework of contemporary culture in his *Consumer Culture and Modernity* (1997). There, Slater follows the anti-social practice of consumption through to its conclusion.

A modern world based on pure individual self-interest ironically leaves the individual in a chronically weak condition [...] open to manipulation and the most subtle forms of unfreedom. [...]. Advertising looms very large in this literature as a model of modern unfreedom. (72-3)

This “unfreedom⁶⁵” is the bind in which the characters find themselves; a false liberty of purchase which can never be satisfied. There is no conceivable way to free oneself from the continual demand of the marketing machine which encourages the

⁶⁴ -You have anything by Josh Rensen?

-I don't think I know him- says the salesman from the Feria del Disco which, as usual, is full of schoolgirls in uniform looking at cassettes in Spanish.

-Do you know the album *The Coyote Ate the Roadrunner*?

-No- he answers me with a disgusted look.

⁶⁵ This expression is particularly apt in relation to advertising, as it recalls commercials for a certain soft drink in the 1980's which was referred to as “the un-cola”.

belief that consumers are acting in their own “self interest”, and developing themselves as individuals.

One of the ways in which a great number of the novels and stories establish the concept of exclusivity is through a tendency for all, whether Spanish, Argentine, Chilean or American, to mention similar, prestigious, names and brands in their narratives. This is understandable due to the identical products being disseminated and publicized all over the world; the J&B scotch ordered repeatedly by Easton Ellis’ narrator is the same as the “jotabé” ordered by Mañas narrator Carlos. The only difference lies in the local pronunciation and transcription of foreign words. It is fascinating to see how Pat Bateman of *American Psycho* becomes another commercial personage in Mañas’ *Historias del Kronen*, and is even mentioned as an icon of mindless materialism on a number of occasions. One character, Roberto, explains- “(s)abes que he terminado de leer Americanaico? Es cojonudo. Te juro que Beitman es todo un filósofo: me ha enseñado a despreciar la humanidad...Pat Beitman nunca diría que no a una proposición así⁶⁶” (1994: 190). Bateman, being American, represents both the pinnacle which non-American characters aspire to (consciously or not), and a literary constituent of the center of consumption and abundance around which all else revolves.

An overpowering insinuation emerges from the non-U.S texts. It implies that outside of the climate controlled global consumption of the centre (often portrayed textually in the form of shopping malls, where the belief is encouraged that “...todo el

mundo converja allí...⁶⁷" [Fresán 1994: 183]), there is only weakness and want. In the U.S text the centre itself is all-consuming, able it seems to absorb even such aberrance as murder and torture. No real need arises to consider alternative spaces (i.e. those occupied by the numerous homeless people who pepper the text) as they serve only as annoyances, and are easily taken care of and eventually subsumed by an efficient and unforgiving centre. In perhaps the most drastic case, Bocha, the homeless boy in the film *Buenos Aires vice versa* is shot and killed in a mall by its security guard, an armed symbol of the system.

If language is potentially a site of resistance to the global onslaught of information and references, and is capable of assimilating even the most international ideas and discourses through a filter of "local" peculiarities, then what better than literature to publicize this potential or, alternately, refute it? Although critics including Beatriz Sarlo have debated whether countries like Argentina still effectively retain any vestige of a true cultural "local"⁶⁸, the collective memory which preserves at least the *image* of the local, if only for its growing absence, is the tool wielded by many of the texts in occasional cynical attempts at recuperation. In *Historias del Kronen* the definition of the true "local" is debated:

-Pues yo me voy con mi novia al Burguer. ¿No os hace venir?

⁶⁶ "Did you know I finished reading American Psycho? It's fucking great. I swear, Pat Bateman is a real philosopher; he's taught me how to despise humanity... Pat Bateman would never turn down a proposition like this."

⁶⁷ "The whole world converges there."

-Yo la verdad es que comería algo, pero preferiría una buen bocata de tortilla.

-Bah, tú lo que pasa es que no eres español.

-¿Cómo que no soy español? Joder, me gustan las tortillas.

-Pero las tortillas y esas cosas son para los turistas. Yo las como en mi casa y prefiero no tomarlas fuera⁶⁹ (Mañas 60).

From the last comment, the reader could easily get the impression that the local is something to be hidden behind doors, or practiced with a caution of sorts. This attempt to either address the local, or in other cases, to unearth it from the tomb to which it has been relegated, is a central area of convergence for author, text and reader. To give voice to the local, or to revive its previous voices, is not as straightforward as it may seem, as it disturbs a carefully constructed social fabric, designed to create a certain image, based on codes which tend to include progress, modernity and political and social stability. One need look no further than Gabriela Cerruti's story of the expensive dolls with "caras de porcelana y cabellera natural"⁷⁰, her entrepreneur father got stuck

⁶⁸ Sarlo explains that in the case of television, "todas las subculturas participan de un espacio nacional-internacional que adopta características locales según la fuerza que tengan las industrias culturales de cada país" (111).

⁶⁹ -Well, I'm going to the Burger with my girlfriend. You don't want to come?

-I actually wouldn't mind eating something, but I'd prefer a decent piece of tortilla.

-Your problem is that you're not Spanish.

-What do you mean I'm not Spanish? Shit, I like tortillas!

-But tortillas and that stuff is for tourists. I eat them at home but I prefer not to have them when I'm out.

⁷⁰ "porcelain faces and natural hair"

with because the newly opened market meant that “el país se había inundado de juguetes importados mucho más atractivos por la mitad de precio”⁷¹ (75).

Nonetheless, the desire to withdraw to narrower borders, to regroup and reconsider rather than giving in entirely to the language of globalization is not merely an option which appears innocuously from a vacuum. Any discourse forcibly suppressed by society always reappears later, in the incipient cracks of the hegemonic discourse(s), as would a skeleton hidden in a closet. The epigraph chosen by Mañas to grace both the beginning and the end of *Historias del Kronen* is an appropriate illustration of the latent power of a buried past:

The sun is high and I'm surrounded by sound.../

I'm thinking of things I'd hoped to forget./

I'm choking to death in a sun that never sets./

I clogged up my mind.../

and now the past has returned to haunt me (The The, “Giant”)

Having looked at the part played in the novels and stories by the abundant presence of certain signs and references, and at the manner in which they seem to assume control of much of the characters' lives, these lyrics remind the reader of what can occur when one is lulled into a sense of security, or has their mind “clogged up” by

⁷¹ “The country had become inundated with much more attractive imported toys at half the price.”

a profusion of goods. The characters are surrounded by the “sound” of dominant discourses, and eventually the noise must become deafening.

For the reader, the challenge lies in discovering what it is that is able to cut through this din, divert the characters’ attention, and remind them of what they want to forget.

Reviving the Body

I never thought I’d miss you/ half
as much/ as I do...How can it be
that we can/ say so much/ without
words?- “It Must be Love”
Madness

Counterbalancing the mind-clogging multiplicity of copyrighted signs⁷², is Michael Riffaterre’s interpretation of intertextuality as the silence within the storm, the recovery of the absent and the impossibility of effectively compensating for those references which the reader does not or can not identify.

This concept is particularly apt because even when the majority of the names and trademarks which pepper the text are easily identifiable, the entire fabric of the piece may be affected if even one hole is left unfilled by the reader. The dormant body of the text must be repeatedly revived if it is to remain undiminished in its potential, yet this

becomes possible only when a collective language or experience is shared by writer and reader. The intertextual game relies on the "jeu entre l'auteur et le lecteur, où l'écrivain tente de partager une culture commune..."⁷³ (Van der Klei 1996: 1). In other words, there must be presuppositions, decoded and interpreted by a reader, and based on his/her subjective knowledge. The deciphering and subsequent understanding of signs as having both a superficial value and a deeper one is, then, the act which sparks meaning production in the text.

The complex networks, or... these textile intertwinings, alter the mimesis. This leads to anomalies that are simultaneously the points at which the text has the tightest hold on the reader and markers allowing the reader to discern...the outline of the significance (1983: 118).

This fairly logical description of how intertextuality works was re-examined in 1990 by Riffaterre in *Fictional Truth*. He indicated that while the reader's general need to access extra-textual knowledge in order to complete the picture was inarguable, the procedure for unlocking the abstract allusions was nonetheless wholly textual by nature. In other words, Riffaterre suggested that the text itself must contain clues responsible for sparking a response, and setting in motion the mechanisms of intertextual association. "It should be clear by now that the intertext of the narrative acts as the

⁷² See for example Pat Bateman's description of the furniture in his office on p.65. In the space of one paragraph he refers to the following brand names or names of stores: Aiwa, Pancrizzini, Black Forest , Beauty and the Beats at Trump Tower.

unconscious of fiction and that readers recover or discover that intertext because the narrative itself contains clues leading back to it” (91).

How this process operates remains somewhat unclear, but at the most basic level, one definite possibility is the presence/absence dynamic or the category of intertextuality Riffaterre calls the **complementary**, according to which every sign has a reverse and an obverse⁷⁴. The reader notes the absence of something (often subconsciously at first), setting off a need to discover which could well lead beyond the text. This desire to investigate is twofold; the first need is to confirm a suspicion that there *is* an absent element which has left its trace in the text, the second is a highly individual and often emotional search for the specific factor. The **interpretant**⁷⁵, or motivated re-symbolization, is the link between the text and the eventual discovery of one or more intertexts.

Having now examined texts such as those discussed in this chapter, which are inundated with an overpowering *presence* of items and references, it is not at all difficult to imagine that this great presence must necessarily be balanced by a great absence of some sort. The gap, or rather the attempt to discover that which is missing, leads the reader beyond the text per se to the “outside” world, in order to establish what *ought* to have been discussed and was not. Notwithstanding the possible origins of the

⁷³ “game between the the author and the reader, where the writer attempts to share a common culture...”

⁷⁴ Riffaterre mentions two other types of intertextuality at the same time; the **mediated**, in which the text refers to an intertext through a 3rd text functioning as the interpretant, and the **intratextual** which is partly encoded in the text and conflicts with it because of stylistic or semantic discrepancies.

reference, this obscured and recovered intertext must be within the realm of knowledge which may *legitimately* be brought to a reading. In other words, it emerges based on a comparative reading rather than a sudden “double take”, as Riffaterre calls it in *Fictional Truth*, which is the other common mechanism employed in discovering intertexts.

The collective language shared by the authors, the characters and the targeted readers is a careful demarcation of territory and resolution. By making these discursive and linguistic decisions the topics of debate and/ or consensus are established. This too contributes to the ultimate filtering process for what may and may not be considered a legitimate intertext. Beyond the obvious generational slang which itself denotes a particular narrative and interpretative slant, most strongly in the Spanish language texts and to a slightly lesser degree in the Chilean narratives, there are choices made to include or exclude certain discourses. In some cases, including texts like *Historias del Kronen*, it is clear that the highly stylized language used is very exclusive and limiting for those readers of another generation, or even social group. For example: “ Dos yonquis nos ofrecen costo, costo muy rico, jaco, jaco, chocolate⁷⁶” (Mañas 20), Or, “¿sabes algo del Raro?... El chollo allí se acabó. El Raro está en una situación muy chungu⁷⁷”(43). Even for Spanish speakers a discursive barrier is erected due to the choice of language and a series of specific relations to region, class and generation. This

⁷⁵ All of these terms are developed on p. 81 of *Semiotics of Poetry*, and then later in *Text Production* (1983), where the critic says “For intertextuality to exist, an interpretant must be present to tie the two texts together” (237).

⁷⁶ “Two junkies offer us stuff, really good stuff, hash, hash, chocolate.”

⁷⁷ “Do you know anything about El Raro?... The deal there is over. El Raro is in a really messed up situation.”

is not to say that readers with a different experience or background will be unable to approach the text in either its mimetic or deeper sense, but that those elements which may tempt readers to reconsider the text, or re-direct their own readings, will necessarily emerge from a different and possibly more restricted contextual and cognitive framework. The probability of an uninitiated reader being able to react impulsively to a shift in language which is unfamiliar to begin with, is considerably lessened. As well, some of the more culturally oriented codes will remain unbroken, at least in initial readings.

The presence of a discursive boundary, or the absence of specific discourses does not always imply a comprehensive restriction for the reader. In one example to the contrary, when Rodrigo Fresán makes a point of boasting in the epilogue to *Vidas de santos* that “estoy casi seguro de que no aparece ni una sola vez la palabra *Argentina* en ninguna de las páginas de este libro⁷⁸” (310), he draws attention to this omission in a manner which encourages further questions from the reader. Is this comment of the author/ narrator’s meant to be positive, a statement of intent; or is he pointing to a shortcoming in the text which he now wishes to rectify as an apparent afterthought?

If the reader returns to some of the other texts, not only by Fresán, but also by Gómez and Fuguet, this manner of directing attention through textual strategies of blatant emphasis and an unsubtle questioning of the reader⁷⁹ may be seen as more than coincidental here. Repetition, for example, is favoured. In the more indirect case, Gómez’ short story “De cómo el horoscopo chino” is remarkably similar in style and

⁷⁸ “I am almost sure that the word *Argentina* does not appear even once on any of the pages of this book.”

content to Fuguet's "Pelando a Rocío"⁷⁹. More shocking perhaps, is Fresán's self-repetition, the use of a paragraph from his own *Vidas de santos* in *Trabajos manuales*. The first version is slightly longer, with a parenthetical comment which is absent in the later version.

Comenzaré diciendo que una hora dentro de un shopping center no dura lo mismo que una hora en cualquier otro sitio. Dura más. O menos. En cualquier caso, una hora en un shopping center puede transcurrir como un lento parpadear o puede arrastrarse como vértigo de tortuga. Allí adentro se hace fácil entender la Teoría de la Relatividad (¿fueron siete los siete días de la creación?, ¿fueron tres los tres días que Jonás languideció dentro de una ballena tan grande como un shopping-center?), y la memoria se agiliza y tropieza porque cada vidriera nos recuerda algo o a alguien⁸¹. (73)

⁷⁹ For example the last line of Fuguet's "Pelando a Rocío", "¿Y tú, galla, qué creís?" (85).

⁸⁰ Both narratives concern the fall from social grace of a 'good girl' who becomes involved with the left wing in Chile, evidenced by her involvement with a man who wears Chilote sweaters, and whose final destiny is not quite clear (more so in Fuguet's story). In both cases the narrator is a former best friend who is confused by the rebel's change in lifestyle, and is, in the end, forced to question some basic tenets of her heretofore pristine world view.

⁸¹ "I will begin by saying that an hour in a shopping center does not last as long as an hour anywhere else. It lasts more. Or less. In any case, an hour in a shopping center can go by as quickly as a slow blink, or it can drag out like a turtle's vertigo. In there it becomes simple to understand the Theory of Relativity (did the seven days of creation really last seven days? Were the three days Jonah spent in a whale as big as a mall really three?), and memory becomes more agile and trips because each window reminds us of something or of someone".

The second appearance of these musings on the nature of time in a mall resembles this same tenuous act of memory described by the previous narrator, as the reader is reminded of some things and deprived of others:

Comenzaré diciendo que una hora dentro de un shopping center no dura lo mismo que una hora en cualquier otro sitio.

Dura más. O menos.

En cualquier caso, una hora en un shopping center puede transcurrir como un lento parpadear o puede arrastrarse como vértigo de tortuga. Allí adentro se hace fácil entender la Teoría de la Relatividad ,y la memoria se agiliza porque cada vidriera nos recuerda algo o a alguien⁸².(73)

It is especially significant that in the shorter rendition, the elements which are missing (the memory which trips over clues and the narrator's questioning of the accuracy of a text) are those which are linked to the intertexts of absence; those evasive hints which spark the reader's curiosity. In a variation on my earlier comments suggesting that a language of surplus points to a lack, here, and in the "no Argentina" comments by the narrator, the reinforced absence highlights an elusive presence, or an undercurrent in the text.

⁸² "I will begin by saying that an hour in a shopping center does not last as long as an hour anywhere else. It lasts more. Or less. In any case, an hour in a shopping center can go by as quickly as a slow blink, or it can drag out like a turtle's vertigo. In there it becomes simple to understand the Theory of Relativity, and memory becomes more agile because each window reminds us of something or of someone".

There are a number of possibilities. First, it is important to mention the author's wink to those readers who are aware that Fresán's first book was in fact called *Historia argentina*, and consisted of, among other things, a radical re-writing of mostly recent, harsh, events in Argentine history, for example the South Atlantic war in the Malvinas⁸³. Furthermore, in a rare intertextual twist, a number of the characters in his second book bear the same names and personal histories as the central characters of the first one, although at no point is there any mention in the text to suggest that *Vidas de santos* is a conscious sequel to the earlier narrative. If this text is not meant to follow the introspective, insular national stage set by *Historia argentina*, there is no expectation on the part of the reader that the word "Argentina" will necessarily appear. Finally, any possible confusion should surely be dispelled in an introduction or in the narrative itself, rather than as an overly self-conscious afterthought blurted out in the epilogue.

Through strategies such as the one outlined above, the absent is brought to the forefront with an irony which suggests that to try and ignore it would be fruitless, since the reader will surely be aware of its presence as it forms part of a broader more inclusive discourse. As is suggested by Riffaterre's theory, the text holds the illuminating clues as well as the key to an eventual decoding. Indeed, he goes so far as to propose that in some cases, "(a)lthough the unmarked term is absent from the written text, it is nonetheless present in the "mental text" made up of stereotypes" (*Text* 70)⁸⁴. This is *not* to suggest an extra-textual basis for the referent; rather it is a defiant

⁸³ This, in the story "La soberanía nacional" in *Historia argentina*.

⁸⁴ This reminds us to the comment by Henri Lefebvre, mentioned in the first section of this chapter, that "the act of consuming is as much an act of the imagination...as a real act" (90).

extension of the text, moving from the simple page to the broader text of the reader, as a continuous act of becoming.

If we go back to Riffaterre's earlier writing⁸⁵, the terms "indirection" and "ungrammaticality" crystallize; those latent elements which disrupt the unity of a text's mimetic function and redirect the reader towards "...the one word left unspoken- a disillusioned 'nothing', the answer to the question, and answer that the speaker can not bring himself to give in its literal form" (*Semiotics* 3). In Fresán's case, the speaker's singular insistence on denying that which has been left unsaid in the main body of the text, even as he enunciates it in the epilogue, forcefully steers the reader to a retroactive reading or consideration of the text and a subsequent shattering of the above-mentioned unity achieved through the first reading. I do not intend to begin a detailed analysis of the nature of the unsaid at this particular point, as it will form the theoretical focus of a later chapter. Rather, I would prefer to concentrate on the more cognitive, even intuitive, aspect of the intertextual decoding which Riffaterre, and to a great extent the authors here and therefore the readers, are reliant upon.

In *Mala onda*, the strongest trace of the absent may have a less sardonic or absurd edge than that displayed in the above mentioned case of Fresán, but this does not make it less discernible to the novel's readers. One of the central threads of the novel's

⁸⁵ It is crucial to emphasize here that Riffaterre, in *Semiotics of Poetry*, is of course working exclusively with poetry. Nonetheless, at my own risk, I have chosen to focus my critical work in this chapter on those theories developed by Riffaterre in this text as his work, particularly in the areas of silences and polarization, is by far the most appropriate I have encountered for "unlocking" my corpus of fiction. Similarly, to counter any questions of it being "outdated", I must reiterate the same comment; it is the most comprehensive and insightful analysis I have come across, and furthermore, has formed the basis for the critic's own continuing, innovative work. Thus, it can hardly be accused of being stuck in an irrelevant time frame.

narrative, in fact the time line for the plot, is the week leading up to the plebiscite held by the Chilean military junta 1982 . Without going into any more detail than is strictly necessary, the protagonist talks about people voting SI or NO, but does not provide any detailed socio-political explanation of what a vote for either group signifies. The bloody history of the military dictatorship in Chile is described in superficial, even dismissive, terms by the narrator, and the impression given in the text, once the SI (pro-Pinochet) vote has won is one of placidly detached contentment. “El SI ganó con un 67.7% y eso que nadie en la familia tuvo ánimo ni fuerzas para ir a votar. La Alameda, por cierto, se llenó de gente que salió a celebrar...a brindar por la seguridad, por la promesa de que ya nada malo vendrá. Ojalá sea verdad. En serio⁸⁶” (293).

This comment “.. de que ya nada malo vendrá”, beyond its simple shock value⁸⁷, both reinforces the mimetic world vision set forth by the narrator of *Mala onda*, and remits the reader to the incidental “ya”, and following the “double take”, to a consequent re-reading. The inclusion of this qualifier in the sentence is one example of the textual “indirection” mentioned by Riffaterre; a small ripple in the text which alerts the reader to possible ambiguity. The choice of language implies, at the most apparent level, that something negative was expected by the people of Chile in the event of a different plebiscite outcome. However, the phrasing of the statement also has undertones of problems already experienced. It is, in other words, a mixture of anticipation and recollection. The apparently innocuous language acts in this case as the

⁸⁶ “The YES vote won with 67.7%, even though nobody in the family was in the mood, or had the strength, to go and vote. The Alameda, of course, filled up with people who had gone out to celebrate...to toast security and the promise that now now nothing bad would happen. Hopefully it will be true. Really.”

intertextual and interdiscursive thread which helps the reader to retrieve and revive the absent. Riffaterre is even more direct in positing that it is this type of “allusion, which is...the sign whose special function is to stand for memory” (*Fictional* 100).

Many other examples of the above intertextual process occur in other stories by the post-dictatorship generation, but the most transparent example, linked to the paradigm presence/absence actually appears in the title of the Chilean, Carlos Cerda’s, book *Una casa vacía* (1996)⁸⁸. The title refers to an “empty” house, actually a former torture centre in the neighbourhood of Ñuñoa in Santiago, which is purchased by a young couple, the protagonists of the story. The emptiness of the house is contested throughout the plot, as a suppressed presence insists on making itself felt through indicative strategies including sound (voices, and the sound of a tree branch banging on a window), and touch (the shallow feeling of the steps to the basement, the number of said steps, and the unfinished concrete walls), which challenge all those who come into contact with and therefore “read” the house:

Julia entra corriendo al baño porque ya en el sótano estaba a punto de vomitar...aquello que venía desde muy adentro pugnando por salir de su cuerpo, eso que su cuerpo (¿sólo su cuerpo?) quería expulsar, eso que ya no podía contenerse entre los límites de su pobre materia...¿Qué fue entonces ese presentimiento que tuvo en el instante mismo en que vió la casa...? ¿Qué fue lo

⁸⁷ After all, it implies that General Pinochet is a protector rather than a murderous dictator.

⁸⁸ I will not be delving too deeply into this book as Cerda, age-wise, belongs to a previous generation of writers. Nonetheless, this novel, and its plot, follows many of the characteristics

que gatilló ese miedo?...y sin embargo, muy en el fondo había una certeza en el origen de sus convulsiones: esa casa tenía un pasado que a ella le tocaba más directa y peligrosamente que todo lo que su consciencia y su memoria estaban en condiciones de establecer⁸⁹ (123-4).

The experiences related in this novel, and in particular in this paragraph, rely heavily on a combination of unexplainable intuition and physical/ textual traces and leads, “sparked” (“...lo que gatilló...”) by an unknown yet undoubtedly present and concrete entity. The reader too faces the challenge of unraveling not only what is physically before them but also that which remains felt but is not immediately visible.

“Nor is linguistic competence the sole factor. Literary competence is also involved: this is the reader’s familiarity with the descriptive systems, with themes, with his society’s mythologies, and above all, with other texts” (Riffaterre 1978: 5). Those readers possessing the requisite interpretative skills are able to read between what are often carefully broad lines, and to follow the elusive trail of references which leads to the bodies beneath the text; to the un-enunciated. Naturally, when speaking of “mythologies”, Riffaterre is referring as well to the great narratives of any given

and questions many of the same issues found in the writing of the present generation, focusing especially on the question of transition which is the core of Chapter 2.

⁸⁹ “Julia ran into the bathroom because in the basement she had already been on the verge of vomiting...that which came from deep inside, fighting to get out of her body, that which her body (only her body?) wanted to expel, that which she could no longer contain within the limits of her poor being... What was that premonition she had the moment she saw the house?... What sparked the fear?...and yet, deep inside there was a feeling of certainty about where these convulsions originated; the house had a past which was related to her, more directly and more dangerously than her conscience and her memory were capable of establishing.”

generation, as well as to those passed down as a (possibly unconscious) cultural legacy. The characters, readers and authors of my fictional corpus are both the subjects and the uneasy and often unwilling inheritors of two primary narratives which overshadow all else in both the texts and their interpretations. The first, and perhaps the most complicated of these, is the lingering shadow of the military dictatorships in Chile and Argentina of the 1970's and '80's, including the consequent transition periods to democracy; also, in the case of *Historias del Kronen*, the later Franquist and early post-Franquist period in Spain. This last novel contains one of the clearest vocal refusals by a narrator or character to link himself to any point in history but the immediate present, or to consider himself as part of a broader discourse:

El viejo comienza a hablar de cómo ellos lo tenían todo mucho más difícil, y de cómo han luchado para darnos todo lo que tenemos. La democracia, la libertad, etcétera, etcétera. El rollo sesentaiochista pseudoprogre de siempre...Ni siquiera nos han dejado la rebeldía: ya la agotaron todos los putos marxistas y los putos jipis de su época...Pero paso de discutir con él⁹⁰ (Mañas 67).

At first glance, there is no desire on the part of the protagonist to discuss, much less to argue the point. The vocabulary employed by the narrator in the above passage is significant for its potential to spark associations through “ungrammaticalities” including

⁹⁰ “The old man began to talk about how they had had it much worse and how they had fought to give us all that we have. Democracy, freedom, etcetera etcetera. The same pseudo-progressive 1968 story as always...They haven't even left us rebellion as an option. The fucking marxists and hippies wore it out in their day...Still, I decide not to argue with him.”

the disdainful “etcétera, etcétera...”, which follows concepts as important as liberty and democracy. At the same time though, it is important to note the complaint, which pivots on the argument that all has already been said and done. For all the protagonist’s protests, there is a verbalized feeling that no opening has been left for the present generation to enter the dialogue. The anger expressed is not just the son shutting out the Father. It is also a indication of frustration and futility for a generation which is familiar with the story but can not wholly re-appropriate it or affect it. Riffaterre approaches this supposed wall of inaccessibility in language and literature by insisting that intertextuality is by nature capable of tumbling or negating these self- imposed barriers. “...ils sont tout aussi bien des systèmes descriptifs qui ne sont plus rattachables à leurs textes originels et qui ne relèvent plus que de la conscience linguistique du lecteur⁹¹” (1981: 6). Thus, the timelessness of this mechanism is one probable reason for the prevalence of intertextuality within this genre, which at first reading professes a disinterest in linking itself to the past, and yet maintains an undercurrent of stubborn inquiry and the right to “re-associate” texts as they see fit within their own context.

The second grand-récit to influence the novels and short stories is that of globalization, the textual repercussions of which were introduced earlier in this chapter. Both narratives (globalization and the legacy of the dictatorships), in a sense, are still being written, but the texts bear the scars of specific moments in history. Carlos, the protagonist/ narrator of *Historias del Kronen* touches the surface of this, his reality, near the beginning of the novel when he explains:

La poesía es sentimental, críptica y aburrida...no hay nadie que pueda vivir de la poesía en estos tiempos. Es una cultura muerta...La única realidad de nuestra época es la de la televisión. Cuando vemos algo que nos impresiona siempre tenemos la sensación de estar viendo una película. Ésa es la puta verdad...Somos los hijos de la televisión como dice Mat Dilon⁹² en Dragstorcauboi⁹³ (42).

While globalization, is both foregrounded and acknowledged, as seen in the overwhelming intertextual references to mass consumption, the discourse of the years of repression is generally laid bare only through a second, insightful reading. This particular combination of focuses, the base for the social imagination of the novels and stories, parallels the practices of reading in its levels of apprehension and discovery. Carlos' disenchantment with poetry as a reader, due to the nature of the genre (which requires just this type of "cryptic" approach mentioned above, and the ability to carry out a comparative reading), falls squarely in line with the projected sense of "the superficial as desirable", and the insistence on flattening all experiences into copies of what is seen on the screen, which inundates the texts of this generation.

⁹¹ "...they are all also descriptive systems which are not re-attachable to their original texts and which relieve only the linguistic conscience of the reader."

⁹² In this admission of the power of mass media over this generation, there is nonetheless a stubborn trace of the local in the way that the names of these global figures (Matt Dillon) and films (Drugstore Cowboy) are written/ pronounced.

⁹³ "Poetry is sentimental, cryptic and boring...no one could live from poetry these days. It's a dead culture...The only reality of our time is that of television. When we see something that

Moving beyond this cultural and literary superficiality and attempted mimetism, Riffaterre has expanded the field of intertextual association far beyond the traditional textual confines of language and societal myths, asserting that “l’intertexte est un corpus indéfini...il s’agit de bien plus que de métalangage...il s’agit d’un phénomène qui oriente la lecture du texte...qui est le contraire de la lecture linéaire⁹⁴” (1981: 4-5). The foreseeable, traditional order has no place here. There is no final, definitive reading and no predetermined limit to the potential intertexts. The concrete does not take priority over the intuitive or the elusive. Furthermore, a second reading is generally not enough to reach the required level of knowledge or of recognition needed to unearth the critical level of the narratives. Rather than attempting to subsequently classify and label the categories and characteristics of intertextuality, Riffaterre insists again that it is not so much the presence of an intertext which must be studied, but instead “c’est la perception dans le texte de la *trace* de l’intertexte⁹⁵” (5). By inserting this somewhat ephemeral vocabulary of perception and trace into the intertextual process, and the reading process in general, it becomes easier to understand the privileged, and occasionally exaggerated place of intertextuality in these novels. A tenuous bridge is created between the narrators, the readers and the restraints imposed by the great narratives, permitting a certain degree of leeway which accepts and acknowledges such heretofore unacceptable and indefinable concepts as a reader’s instinct.

affects us we always get the feeling that we’re watching a movie. It’s the fucking truth... We are the children of television as Matt Dillon says in *Drugstore Cowboy*.”

⁹⁴ “the intertext is an undefined corpus...it is a matter of more than metalanguage...it is a matter of a phenomenon which orients the reading of the text...which is the opposite of linear reading.”

⁹⁵ “It is the perception within the text of the *trace* of the intertext.”

At this juncture I want to mention briefly an important link between this hazy, indefinable idea of instinct, and another phenomenon of the late twentieth century, intrinsically connected to the texts being read in this chapter, which has also defied (and in a sense continues to do so) the bounds of the understandable or the prosaic. I am of course speaking about the creation of a new class of people, neither living nor dead, but missing; *los desaparecidos*. Concentrating specifically on the parallels between Riffaterre's vision of intertextuality and the inaccessibility of those who remain beyond our reach, one must ask; what is the decoding of an intertext if not an order of *habeas corpus*, an attempt to recover a disappeared body with the intent to return it to the land of the living? When seeking wholeness, whether in literature or other discourses, all tools, no matter how unorthodox, are legitimate, and even necessary. "Words may lie yet still tell a truth if the rules are followed" (*Fictional* xiii).

One of the most resonant keys struck in *Mala onda* (to use one example) could be taken as an explanation of sorts of why intertextuality is so heavily fore-grounded as a strategy in the novels and stories discussed so far in this chapter. If, as I have been hinting, there is something dark lurking at the edges of the discourse, why not bring it directly into the literary light and critique it in full sight of the reader? If narrators including Matías or Mañas' Carlos wish to break with discourses representative of their parents, why instead do they not attack the myths and discourses of the Father full on, and shatter or negate them? While I hope to address this in much more detail in the second chapter of this dissertation, devoted specifically to this inability, I believe that one of the reasons behind this purposely cryptic encoding of issues and problems is the

need to discuss whether “significance can not be produced without first voiding, displacing or repressing an established meaning, whether this meaning originates in the sociolect or in the context” (Riffaterre *Fictional* 83). These texts at their deepest level are a result of, or a compensation for, something else. In other words, the frustration and the teasing evasiveness which characterize the intertexts of most of these novels may in fact be the whole point of the exercise. Perhaps the intent is to demonstrate that not everything is always reachable through traditional, linear processes, or logic or the discursive practices privileged by societies at particular moments. The reader must acknowledge that yes, something important is missing here and all our readings, no matter how careful and well-informed, will be coloured from now on by its vexatious absence. A significance, or a non-mimetic comprehension will emerge and become visible in the wake of admission of this absence. Nonetheless, it will never have the same function, or power, as that which, paradoxically, can not be expressed; the phantom limb, as it were. The ache remains, betraying all reason or tangibility.

Fresán’s narrator in “La forma del verano” from *Trabajos manuales* (1994) understands the futility of trying to achieve (self)completion by filling in all the empty spaces, or as it were, appreciating the “unified harmonious whole” (Riffaterre *Fictional* 99):

Forma ahora piensa que, antes de llegar al placer y a la exactitud al generar los impulsos exactos en el lugar correspondiente, debería exponerse a largos años de búsqueda, hasta encontrar el código... Un punto de luz en una de sus neuronas le

informa que no dispone de tanto tiempo; que ya ha vivido lo suyo y que mejor que otro se ocupe de esos asuntos⁹⁶. (Fresán 125)

The language used here by the narrator, including words like “impulsos”, emerges of course from within a specific narrative context in which reference is made to electronic impulses, an image connoting human whim or inspiration. Nonetheless, read in the larger context of the other stories and novels in the corpus, along with the continuing problematic of recovery and discovery of intertexts we have been examining, we find the same concept which appears in *Mala onda*, *American Psycho* and others; that one should not even aspire to wholeness or exhaustive searches, whether personal or textual.

The reasons for this are twofold according to Fresán’s narrator. First, because seekers are doomed to live in their own time and to therefore understand the world or the text through the mechanisms available during that period⁹⁷. While Riffaterre argues that intertexts must be able to surpass their era in order to function, the tension between the ability to break this barrier and the occasional rigidity imposed by one’s own experience fuels the dialogue between text and reader, and leads to potential interpretive, decoding practices which may appear intrusive as generations who inherit the great narratives wish to re-read and re-write them.

⁹⁶ “Now Forma thinks that before reaching pleasure and perfection by generating the exact impulses in the corresponding places, he ought to expose himself to long years of searching, before finding the code...A small point of light in one of his neurons informs him that he does not have that much time; that he has lived out his time and it would be better for someone else to take care of these matters.”

The second explanation for the ennui says that the responsibility inherent in conducting a search to reveal the potentially unpleasant unknown is just as easily passed on to others. This is what is known as a “cop out”, and falls comfortably in line with the widespread belief that this post-dictatorship, consumer-oriented, generation is loathe to involve itself in important causes or issues, preferring instead to limit its politics to trendy slogans printed on its designer t-shirts. The best example of this defeatist attitude is textualized in *Mala onda*, with Matías’ eventual decision to abandon his search for truth and sincerity in Santiago, in order to return to a home which is hypocritical, perhaps even tragic, but familiar. His initial desire to unearth and confront societal narratives and myths includes confronting racism: “La verdad es otra. Y la supe por casualidad...El antisemitismo, por ejemplo, lo huelo a un kilómetro, y viviendo en Chile, paso con la nariz ocupada⁹⁸” (146). But, in the end, one step before questioning the deepest, most painfully unspoken political issues, Matías returns home.

Volví a mi casa, claro. Era lo que debía hacer...dudas tuve, las tengo y las tendré, [...] más allá de lo plausible [...] de todo aquello que parece ajeno e inútil pero está mucho más incrustado en mí de lo que estoy dispuesto a creer [...] no es sólo mi padre, soy yo [...] Cuando uno juega fuerte, se mete en caminos difíciles, no transitados, no puede esperar salir sin topes⁹⁹ (292).

⁹⁷ Carlos’ comments in *Historias del Kronen*, concerning the end of the age of poetry and the superior power of television are a typical example..

⁹⁸ “The truth is different. And I learned this by accident...I can, for example, smell antisemitism a kilometre away; and living in Chile, my nose is often busy.”

⁹⁹ “Of course, I went back home. It was what I had to do...I have doubts, have had them and will have them...more than I ought to... about all that stuff which seemed strange and useless but ran

These “topones”, as with those elements of “ungrammaticality” which trigger intertextual awareness, are explained here as obstacles in one’s way or surprises in an otherwise smooth personal route; unforeseen hindrances in short. While Matías does not appear to espouse the same negativity or sense of futility that Fresán’s narrator does, preferring instead to see these above-mentioned stumbling blocks as necessary nuisances in his growth process, he nonetheless refuses to endow them with any value beyond this superficial one. He similarly refuses to acknowledge that beyond his own privileged experience they are neither inevitable, nor is one always able to climb over them and continue effortlessly with one’s trajectory with the ease Matías would have the reader believe. His enclosing of what we could refer to again as the “ungrammaticalities” of his experience within a temporal enclosure, (“cuando uno juega fuerte”¹⁰⁰, or the timeline of the novel), is a delusion which diffuses their true importance, which is in fact beyond the reach of these constraints.

These ungrammaticalities are the most effective and conspicuous, not just because they disturb verisimilitude, but because in a time-oriented context they focus on an unchanging intertextuality, deriving their significance from their reference to an intertext that has no past, no future, no temporality...or again, the

much deeper in me than I am willing to admit...It’s not just my father, it’s me. When you play hard, you end up on difficult, unwalked paths; you can’t expect to get out without tripping.”

¹⁰⁰ “when one plays hard”

equivalent of the locked-in unconscious that an analyst deduces from an analysand's symptoms (Riffaterre *Fictional* xviii).

This insistence on the de-temporalization of the intertext does not imply that the issues at stake were not conceived within a particular moment and/or socio-historical context. Rather, it shifts the weight and responsibility of temporality to the reader, as we suggested before. The undiscovered intertext will always make itself known, if only through the absence it creates, yet this lack too is both a-temporal and potentially infinite. There can never really be any compensation. Moreover, even if the intertext is retrieved by the reader, it creates a space for continued or future debate once inserted back into the text itself.

How then are readers to understand the sharp intertextual polarization of, on one hand, the immediacy of “now”, the visual, the commercial and the superficially mimetic, and the a-temporal, symbolically inaccessible and profoundly important on the other? I would suggest that the reader return for a moment to the link to the advertising industry which was examined earlier in this chapter. Very few people believe that advertisements in their final form are composed solely of what is seen on screen by the watching masses. There is a great awareness among the same consuming public, whose reputation is nonetheless forever tied to that of easily-led sheep, that the messages disseminated by commercials go much deeper, and are more multi-faceted than that. These of course are what are known as subliminal messages. These counterparts to the highly visual side of the ads are sneaky and intangible; hard to pin down but

undoubtedly there. The true weight of the images lies therein, but remains in the realm of myth, much the same as in the case of the intertexts of absence.

In order to reconcile some of the apparently conflicting tendencies which have arisen in the course of this chapter, including the need to begin a search but the inability to follow through, or the reliance on the visual, almost caricaturistic in order to define character, the next chapter of this dissertation will focus on the multiple textual character-sketches of this globalized generation. By doing so, the language games and systems favoured by the authors of this corpus, and present both within and outside of the texts will be contextualized, socially and historically,. Through this contextualization, I expect to address the emergence of what I am calling a “transitional generation” which, while especially well defined in the texts from the Southern Cone in the world of non-fiction by scholars including Guillermo O’Donnell, may also be found in texts from other countries including Spain.

Chapter 2

A Time and a Place In Between

The old is dying and the new cannot be born: in this interregnum there arises a great diversity of morbid symptoms

A. Gramsci

One of the central propositions of this dissertation is to examine not only common socio-discursive traits present in the chosen texts, but also to hypothesize the possible social and political repercussions which these characteristics may unleash, while keeping firmly in mind the relationship of these texts with both their authors and their readers. At this juncture, therefore, I believe it would be timely to discuss the socio-historical context of the novels and short stories, and to clarify those mediations which have led, and continue to lead, to the creation of these texts, whether fictional, testimonial, literary or visual (films). The organizing concept around which this study will revolve is that of the transitory, or the interlapse.

In broad terms, when one speaks of that which has occurred “in-between”, in the interstice, the reference is to one or more informal moments, which tend to take place in between events considered critically more worthy of mention and analysis. In literature, this can be seen as manifested by extensive studies of the Western Canon formation and, until relatively recently, by the scant attention paid to non- canon texts. The “in-between” as a concept, may be grasped as a limited interval or a fleeting moment that has soon passed. Nonetheless, it would be a grave mistake to discard the critical importance of these moments, which despite their ephemeral nature, create not only

their own referential frames and discourses, but also a series of corresponding times and spaces which are immediately relegated to the margins. These temporal and spatial margins have been excluded from the institutional critical discourse for a variety of reasons. Perhaps due to the difficulty inherent in categorizing them, or the fact that they tend to interfere with the neatly organized order of other, more formalized elements, which are consequently removed brusquely from the critical or ideological place assigned to them by more institutionalized critics. To address the marginal, that which is often difficult to classify, always carries with it the threat of a potential de-stabilization of the official discourse and thus, a questioning of fundamental principles. It is also crucial to explain at this point that the “in-between” is not limited to definitions of time and space alone, in that it may be applied as a concept to a variety of interrelated situations which will be examined in this chapter.

I would like to focus here on two sides of a single theme; first, the visible, or the central/official and next, the less obvious marginal/alternative. At issue here is the manner in which the two perspectives emerge as a problematic in those texts which form the corpus of this thesis. For the purposes of this chapter, the specific texts which best illustrate the theoretic intricacies of the socio-cultural interlapse in-between the two systems of governance will include “Mañanitas” from *Hijos de mala madre* (1993) by Cristina Civalé, the film *Buenos Aires viceversa* directed by Alejandro Agresti (1997), the short story “El borde peligroso de las cosas” from *Nadar de noche* (1991) by Juan Forn, the memoir cum social exposé *Herederos del silencio* (1997) by Gabriela Cerruti as well as a number of other non-Argentinian, Hispano-american texts including

writings by Alberto Fuguet and the Spaniard José Ángel Mañas. The varied experiences discussed in these texts, along with the resulting textual and extra-textual effects, are eminently applicable beyond national borders, as the texts themselves will show. The many faces of globalization mentioned in the previous chapter may again be invoked here, with a marked emphasis on its ability to surpass limits and borders; not always to societies' advantage, but rather in terms of those questionable aspects of global consumer society which have led, for example, to a recent polarization of wealth and poverty.

The transitional period, the first interstice which I would like to examine here, is, in its broadest sense, a rather long time between nationalist populism¹⁰¹ and neo-liberal democracy. This period was launched with the coups- d'état of the 1970's in Chile and Argentina, and continued, contrary to all expectations, with the return to democracy in the Southern Cone. In the case of Argentina, the active memory of the repression suffered during this time has, until recently, been much more public, and therefore more accessible, due in part to the relatively short, yet terribly intense period (7 years) that the dictatorship, and its subsequent violence, endured. The case of Chile, on the other hand, has been more subtle. This is due both to the much longer period of military rule experienced there, and to the less open, and less widespread, public attempts to admit and confront the crimes committed during this era. In the past year, 1999, with the attempts led by Spanish judge Baltazar Garzón to bring General Pinochet to justice, and subsequent efforts in Chile to have him brought home for a possible (although

¹⁰¹ In the case of Chile the Unidad Popular government led by President Salvador Allende, and in Argentina the Peronist movement.

uncertain) trial, public attention and the press have ignited and encouraged a more open debate.

This period of transition, considered by critics including Guillermo O'Donnell¹⁰² to be a long and convoluted process, forms a web or entanglement within which many sectors of the population have remained trapped, unable to enter effectively the mainstream of societies being touted as reconstructed and democratic (in the neo-liberal reincarnation). This same social discourse has re-emerged in the contemporary literature exemplified in part by those texts mentioned in this thesis. The confusion, as experienced both in society and, as far as is possible, in the words enunciated by literary characters is indeed so great that, as I will discuss further along, a certain misgiving has been expressed (in both social and literary discourses) as to whether democracy is really worth the difficulties which have followed its inauguration, and whether the present system can in fact be defined as a democracy.

It is crucial to emphasize that the return to a democratic system of government ten years ago, as in the case of Argentina, has not meant a corresponding end to the transition process which is beginning to appear eternal; neither within society, nor at an individual level. This is due, in large part, to a series of long-standing problems which may be considered the remnants of that which has been left unresolved, due to the inherent and potential difficulties present in any society which makes the conscious

¹⁰² O'Donnell has published a series of articles in the past few years questioning critical analysis of the "new" democracies in Latin America. According to O'Donnell, it is true that democracy, even with a yet-unstable character is "vastly preferable to the assortment of authoritarian regimes that it has replaced" (Working paper #222, March 1996). Nonetheless, he insists on calling attention to the denial of both rights and of the full participation of citizens in these democracies.

choice to confront and/or judge the acts of its citizens. The Pandora's box of self-awareness is notoriously hard to close once opened. Alternately, and perhaps more commonly, stagnation may occur when the same society is incapable of facing its internal conflicts, allowing them to fester. The tensions created by this endless moment have evolved into a social purgatory of sorts, due not only to the long, exhausting wait, but due also to the promised eventual "prize", which is not just democracy itself, and the subsequent end to tyranny, but also the consequent expected economic entry into the "First World", with all the benefits long dreamed-of.

At this point I would like to introduce briefly the equally important flip-side of the temporal interlapse, which is its spatial aspect. While evaluating her compatriots, classmates in the eternal waiting room which present-day Argentina resembles, Gabriela Cerruti has written: "...apenas sobrevivimos en un territorio que no es nuestra invención. No somos los héroes de nuestras hazañas: somos los espectadores de nuestra tragedia¹⁰³" (239). This well known dichotomy which plays off the active (positive) against the passive (negative), and the temporal against the spatial, is, I believe, of potentially invaluable assistance in analyzing the voices of a generation which has never known a socio-political reality beyond the ideologically ambiguous interlapse; the group which the author Cristina Civalé has baptized "Hijos de mala madre". These divisions are useful not only due to their fundamental and therefore primary nature, but also in light of the fact that activity and passivity are mentioned with great frequency as critical

¹⁰³ "We barely survive in a territory which is not of our own invention. We are not the heroes of our actions; we are the spectators of our tragedy."

measures of the character of present day generations¹⁰⁴. I would like focus as well on the dichotomy between, on the one hand, the active invention, appropriation and adaptation of vital spaces by a generation and its creative options, versus a passive spectatorship of the demise of the same group. The decision to act creates a filter through which the frustrations and anger are funneled, leaving a concrete product as a result. In the case of those who choose not to act, the anguish itself becomes overpowering and inhabits spaces to the exclusion of all else.

The voices which are most pertinent for their value in comprehending this era are those which narrate the stories of social and spatial margins during the period of instability. These are the voices which, in the case of social groups, did not appear, then or now, on the nightly news or in the mass media ; also, those fictional voices which, judging by what until very recently has been an utter critical silence, are not considered “literatura”, or worthy of analysis. By speaking here of “spatial” margins, the intent is to treat it both as a metaphor and as a reality, in the same manner which may be seen in the disquieting text by Gabriela Cerruti, where the narrator defines those horrifying margins which silently mapped out her adolescence:

Un campo de concentración funcionaba a veinte kilómetros de la plaza donde yo coqueteaba con mi primer novio... Yo reía a carcajadas del otro lado de la pared

¹⁰⁴ The choice as to which group deserves which title is of course a highly subjective value judgement, as Moulian, for one, has pointed out, and as such is important primarily for the social myths it has inspired.

del sótano donde estaban torturando con picana eléctrica a una madre frente a su hijo. Quizá sabía, quizá no¹⁰⁵. (28)

Although Cerruti paints a clear image of the physical spaces of her youth, she is less able to define her own interpretation of these spaces, or her place within them. Until the final sentence, Cerruti refuses to place herself on the other side of the wall; the side whose horror negates the neutrality of the "plaza" and the innocence of her flirtations.

It would be impossible to study the phenomenon known as the transient, particularly as it has been expressed in texts produced in present day Chile and Argentina, without first focusing on the group which, in the long term, has been perhaps the most affected by the instability which characterizes this period. Certainly, one could speak of a number of sectors of the population which have been overwhelmed by the steady social and economic decline suffered by newly democratic societies. One group stands out in particular for its diversified nature; youth. A diverse group which includes those who were raised under the dictatorship as well as those born during the transition to democracy, the affected young people are a heterogeneous mixture in terms of social class, education and interests, as well as their political leanings and beliefs. They possess, nonetheless, a number of important cultural traits in common, for example the music they listen to, which has not only had great commercial success but more importantly, has had a great impact on the generation in its broadest sense. The impact is, and has

¹⁰⁵ "A concentration camp operated twenty kilometers away from the square where I flirted with my first boyfriend...I laughed loudly on the other side of the wall of the basement where they used the *picana* to torture a mother in front of her son. Perhaps I knew, perhaps not."

been, expressed particularly through the works of certain cultural icons with an ambiguous status within the market. I will address some examples of the symbolic power of music at a later point.

The textualization of this group's experience has emerged, with few exceptions, from a perspective strongly linked to the reality of an urban, globalized middle class. This position, which at first seems ideologically restrictive, actually includes broad variations whose influences may be felt by way of an active and ever-changing language, which appears to constantly defer meaning. In the past decade, youth sectors have become targets not only for the suspicions of a uneasy society, but also of a series of intellectual musings published in numerous articles¹⁰⁶, blaming them on one hand for the increased level of violence and on the other for their supposed passivity and inertia in the face of those social issues which affect not only the countries of the Southern Cone, but the entire globe. The issue in this case is the widespread comparison which many see between what was supposedly the much more idealistic youth of the previous generation and the youth of today which, according to the official discourse, refuses to commit itself politically. Both the juvenile narratives and the development and use of specific language represent a mentality and a specific moment which can not be critically approached with worn-out tools or concepts such as the exoticized, mystic,

¹⁰⁶Note, for example, the harsh comments of Eugenio Tironi who wrote that while the youth of the 1960's were considered "objetos de veneración", nowadays "se han transformado en blanco de sistemática sospecha" (1988: 46).

Latin Americanism which typically defined many readings of Boom literature¹⁰⁷, to give one example.

Nostalgia: Mediating the Banal

I'm looking through you/ Where
did you go?/ I thought I knew
you/ What did I know?/ You
don't look different/ but you have
changed/ I'm looking through
you/ You're not the same "I'm
Looking Through You", The
Beatles

In Alejandro Agresti's film "Buenos Aires vice versa", Daniela, a twenty-something woman personifies that which occurred during the politically ambivalent interlapse stretching from the 1976 coup to the democratic reconstruction, with all its sad and confusing variations. Looking for work at a time when it is scarce, she is hired by an elderly couple. They ask her to record a short documentary about the streets of Buenos Aires with their video camera. Emotionally and physically weakened by both national and personal history, many years have passed since the couple has dared to leave their house. They decide to employ Daniela in order to see what they imagine must be the wonders of this much lauded "First World" capital city through a mediating eye which they expect to be young and therefore optimistic.

¹⁰⁷ This is of course an oversimplification, as the criticism of the Boom literature is much more complex and varied than this. The images of the exotic and the magical, as in the texts of García Márquez, are nonetheless prevalent among readers.

When the couple views the results of Daniela's filming, portraits of street people, garbage, graffiti demanding justice, they become almost violent, accusing Daniela of inventing and falsifying the images, and of trying to fool them. It is impossible, they say, that the city could have changed so drastically since the days when they walked its streets. What could have happened in the meanwhile? The couple sends their young, very confused camera-woman back out and tell her that she has one more chance to bring them "the truth" about the city.

The daughter of disappeared parents, with no real memories of them, Daniela passes her fictional life moving from one "non-space" to another, in search of a barely perceptible place which she, and the spectator, recognize only at the end of this violent narrative. It begins in an "albergue transitorio", a discreet hotel for lovers, where she meets her boyfriend, as much to fight as to make love. "¡Yo no te puedo cuidar. Es que vos no sos normal!", he accuses her, as their sexual relationship reveals his own impotence, trapping him in an emotional purgatory which is as impossible to escape, to relieve, as Daniela's is.

Daniela escapes to a small shack, built years before by her idealist father, in a nameless, poverty-stricken neighborhood. There, she meditates on her dead family, surrounded by record albums, and the voice of Charly García, who sings of a time when "fui libre de verdad"¹⁰⁸, and of the moment he finally encountered the single person he

¹⁰⁸ The significance of certain songs which appear in the texts and films of the group must not be ignored. Charly García's song, "Canción para mi muerte", has its disturbing antecedents in the well known Argentinian film, "La noche de los lápices", where the song appears as a hymn to persecuted, idealist youth. The re-appearance of this song in "Buenos Aires viceversa" can not be seen as a mere coincidence, given Daniela's ideological and personal search.

sought¹⁰⁹. Accompanied by the sudden memory of another song, she takes the search for traces of her missing parents to a shopping mall, transitory space *par excellence*, where the terrifying strength of insignificant sites and localities makes itself suddenly felt, demonstrating the stunning violence which is the potential result of an end to this long, painful process¹¹⁰. Bocha, a street kid with emotional ties to Daniela is shot and killed in the mall by a security guard, an ex-torturer with a new uniform, who in the course of the film reveals his as yet unsatiated taste for horror. Daniela is robbed by the system; first of her parents and now of this adopted son, who is a child of the street, but also of her impotence. There are no guarantees that an ending, any ending or closure, would be preferable to the unending search. Daniela becomes semi-aware of the gravity of her situation only in the last moments of the story as she is locked in a final non-space. Her only true link with the past, both personal and national, is her piercing shriek of pain and her refusal to either accept or comprehend her fate.

Daniela is neither here nor there. She has been distanced from her past, first through her ignorance of her personal history (she asks an old friend—"¿yo la parezco a mi mamá?"¹¹¹), and later due to having survived it. Nor is she able to find her place in the '90's, notwithstanding her attempts to trap the present within the lens of her camera. This double-rejection produces a sort of paralysis which is at once artistic, emotional

¹⁰⁹ In a bizarre twist, García, who is known for his eccentricities, engaged in a painful front-page debate this year with Hebe de Bonafini, the president of the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo, when she came out publicly against his idea to liven up an open air concert by throwing dolls out of helicopters into the nearby Rio de la Plata. This re-creation of the "death flights" carried out by the military in the late 1970's sparked a great deal of controversy among young people who were divided as to the possible value of the gesture.

¹¹⁰ At the same time, one could see the intensity of the rediscovered music as a vision of sorts which prefigures the death of the boy, which then adds a link to the unending chain of losses.

and social. "Vos no sos normal" she is told. Yet, how does one measure normalcy within a state of social and personal transition which has no horizon and no borders? Daniela is caught in state of affairs whose long-term repercussions are much more torturous and complex than run of the mill teenage angst, because there is no sign that an onset of maturity will either resolve the sense of all-encompassing alienation, or even be attainable within a society which is itself chained to an instant of tormented youth¹¹². It is a moment "in which we seem increasingly incapable of fashioning representations of our own current experience", as Fredric Jameson has said (21). It is a symptom of the desperation of contemporary society, which he called, in his analysis of late capitalism, "nostalgia", that is the inability of a generation to place itself within its social and historical space.

I would like to go off on a small tangent here to re-inforce the choice of Jameson's term of nostalgia for the context under consideration here. The nostalgic sentiments manifested in previously discussed texts, as well as in others by diverse writers and/or film makers of the same generation is articulated within the two constitutive perspectives of the narrative, the temporal and the spatial. Spatially, it is a matter of environmental alienation, shown in the film through Daniela's escape from the city centre, and her final moment of desperation as she withdraws into the smallest space she can find. One characteristic of this problem, discussed by numerous critics, is the drastic metaphoric reduction of space, from the breadth of an entire city to the self-

¹¹¹ "Do I look like my mother?"

¹¹² The image of youth described here does not, obviously, refer to Argentina's lack of history or years. Rather, the reference is to a state of immaturity which has endured *despite* the country's vast, complicated history.

contained body of the character¹¹³. Following this line of thinking, we, as spectators, follow the same trajectory of minimalization, watching a Daniela who is ultimately reduced and completely incapable of relating to her physical and social surroundings. From a panorama of the city, as seen through her vision of it, she is eventually reduced to the sum of her screaming mouth and blank, staring eyes.

In temporal terms, this tyrannical nostalgia is manifested as an obsession with a present which has been marked invisibly by the past, and the subsequent lack of comprehension of possible consequences of one's actions or decisions. To be more precise, it is an uncontrollable present which acts as a mediator between an impenetrable past and an inconceivable future. The sociologists Szulik and Kuasñosky, authors of a number of uniquely insightful articles on Argentinian youth culture, have taken this concept further, dividing the intangible future into two possible outcomes; the "inevitable" (passive and understandable), and the "transformable" (active, utopic and inconceivable) (271).

Chilean sociologist Tomás Moulian follows Jameson's line more closely, explaining that: "perdida la nutrición de una ideología capaz de conectar el presente con el futuro, han caído en la banalización"¹¹⁴ (62). The banal as it is manifested in contemporary society could be described as a widespread state of cynical disinterest

¹¹³ A series of ideas converge here. On the one hand, as Tomás Moulian explains, a concentration/reduction of the individual develops as a consequence of consumer culture, which isolates the individual from his/ her social environment (see p.119). From another perspective, the reduction appears as a symptom of the rejection of great socio-political projects and of the new emphasis on the "micro" which has emerged as a characteristic of both postmodernism (see Rosenau) and late capitalism (see Jameson, p.160).

¹¹⁴ "Having lost the nutrition of an ideology capable of linking the present with the future, they have fallen into banalization".

compounded by a belief in the inherent futility of action. This emerges in the fiction through constant expressions of a boredom so ingrained it can never wholly be overcome. The narrators and characters approach the problem in one of two ways, generally. The first tactic is in fact a non-approach, a conscious decision to not waste one's breath or energy on what in any case is irresolvable. As Carlos explains in *Historias del Kronen* "Pienso en responderle que justamente lo que nos falta es algo por lo que o contra lo que luchar. Pero paso de discutir con él"¹¹⁵ (67). The other popular method of surviving a constant state of banality is of course to create another, preferably chemically-induced, reality. A conscious decision is taken by the characters to alter their reality by avoiding it as much as possible. "...(M)e trago la cápsula verde-con-blanco del Paz, no sin antes sentir algo de culpa y bastante malestar por lo que estoy haciendo: drogándome a esa hora demencial, para tener fuerzas. Para seguir adelante"¹¹⁶ (Fuguet 138). The banal is also a flattening of one's experience into a one-dimensional state. The defining term which has resulted from this situation is the phrase "Blank Generation"¹¹⁷, which refers to the glassy, disconnected stare of passive spectatorship, and to the need to fill what seems to be an unending time doing absolutely anything designed to distract. The textualizations of the expressions of utter boredom are numerous, and have a tendency to involve aimless wanderings of one sort or another,

¹¹⁵ "I think of answering him that actually, what we're missing is something to fight for or against. But I pass on arguing with him."

¹¹⁶ "I swallow Paz' green and white capsule, not without first feeling somewhat guilty and pretty bad about what I'm doing; drugging myself at this demented hour to keep up my strength. To keep going."

¹¹⁷ Usually used in relation to a specific group of American writers including Brett Easton Ellis, Jay McInerney and Tama Janowitz who defined the literary generation which preceded what would become known as Generation X

i.e. Fresán's narrator in "La Forma de los shopping centers" who meanders through the malls searching for music he knows he will never find there, or Fuguet's Matías who does the same, but in downtown Santiago while skipping school. Of course the prize for reacting badly to an overwhelming sense of boredom goes to Patrick Bateman, the American Psycho, who assimilates the banality so completely that he loses the ability to comprehend the moral or social implications of murder, or dismemberment, if indeed he was ever aware.

Keeping in mind the ties between recent history and a distant future, the textual force of Jamesonian nostalgia, with its emphasis on ineffective searches for original forms of relevant expression in our time, is inarguable. Daniela's final scream is Cassandra-like in its eloquence, and ability to capture this frustration. Along with the difficulty in trying to access a recent history which has been constructed through multiple versions, both official and alternative, young people (including Daniela) have remained in a temporal space which is the above-mentioned "in-between".

At this point it is important to expand upon the concept of space in the "in-between". Jameson, in his analysis of late capitalism and the subsequent re-adjustment of inter-personal relations, problematizes the roles of space and time, implying that the temporal has been relegated to the background, and that "the new spatial logic...can now be expected to have a momentous effect on what used to be historical time" (18). In other words, the temporal may have given way to the spatial, or, may have absorbed it in the sense that the spatial has become the more prevalent mode of measurement. The "in-between", in its literary and socio-political incarnation, resembles a long space in a permanent state of flight or evasiveness. A hall, or passage, with entrances and exits

which are clearly marked but remain inaccessible. The entry, in other words history, which should act as a backing, remains behind, locked up with a series of potential keys which include the official discourse, marginal versions, and those which have never been told but which continue to bear the considerable weight of the repressed and the unbearable. Ahead, barely perceptible, the distant light of the exit to present-day society and eventually the future and all that this implies; opportunity, or perhaps a repetition of the violence witnessed almost prophetically by Daniela.

Gabriela Cerruti openly questions the euphoria which marked the end of the dictatorship, and the opening of what appeared to be a new beginning. More upsetting is the sense the reader gets that she wonders whether democracy, with all the soul-searching it implies, has done more harm than good. “Vaya confusión. Somos cínicos, si querés ponerle ese nombre...no porque no hayamos visto nada, sino porque vimos demasiado...Si la historia hubiera terminado en 1983 quizá todo sería más sencillo”¹¹⁸ (238). The seen and the unseen, then, form a cruel partnership which is both inevitable and inseparable. For this very reason, strategies are sought with which to confront this nostalgia and come out ahead, in today’s world. Two texts in particular come to mind as helpful in illustrating this problem.

Crossing Thresholds

Turn off your mind/ relax and
float down stream
"Tomorrow Never Knows", The
Beatles

...si tu vanguardia aquí no se
vende/ si quieres ser occidental de
segunda mano/ porqué no se van?
"Porqué no se van", Los
Prisioneros

The first case comes from Agresti's film. In a public scene, without dialogue, a young blind woman is seen participating in a demonstration against impunity and demanding the incarceration of officers and collaborators of the dictatorship who committed crimes in the 1970's and 80's. In one highly graphic scene the focus is placed not only on the faces of the demonstrators but also on the many oversize posters showing the faces of young people who have been disappeared¹¹⁹. In the midst of the demonstrators a cage appears, full of giant, grotesque puppets, meant to represent the military chiefs. The young woman approaches the cage in order to feel the figures with her fingers, thus attempting to comprehend and assimilate that which she can not see, by employing alternative senses. Her insistence on participating, and her demand to take an active part in unlocking the past, represent a response to the passive and harmful nostalgia, and to the sense of prevailing impotence and of an inevitable future, which

¹¹⁸ "Talk about confusion. We are cynics, if you want to give it that name...not because we have not seen anything but because we have seen too much. Maybe, if history had ended in 1983, everything would be a lot easier."

¹¹⁹ I purposely use this verb in its passive (and therefore grammatically incorrect) form, to follow the Spanish expression "fue desaparecido". This is in order to emphasize that the disappearance was a conscious plan carried out by the military, and that these people did not just vanish of their own accord.

are imposed both externally by society and internally, as the resulting defeatist/nostalgic attitude. There is, then, an attempt to counteract the double disenchantment, both structural and subjective.

On the other hand, however, the reader encounters the case of Javier, the confused protagonist of “El borde peligrosa de las cosas” by Juan Forn. Javier is a perfect example of the minimization mentioned earlier, focusing more and more on the body of the individual as he progressively retreats from his social surroundings, physically as well as emotionally. The character consciously abandons everything; his family, his job, his home and his professional and domestic future in order to dedicate himself, for a time, to his own personal development. The “in-between”, as lived by Javier, possesses two equally potent elements. The first is the party, the liminal space he escapes to with his friend Manú, who acts as a guide in this parallel world which Javier slips into, and the other is his insistence on abandoning himself to all those hedonistic pleasures available in the unstable society so carefully defined at the beginning of the narrative. Ironically, Javier does not see himself as a victim of this existential instability. Instead, he chooses to experience it in an exaggerated and even bizarre manner.

Lo suyo no era en absoluto el esfuerzo nuestro cotidiano de reprimir la pregunta que aquel año no conseguíamos ahuyentar de nuestras cabezas. La pregunta del

millón: ‘¿Por qué nos tuvo que tocar justo a nosotros este lugar y esta época de mierda para ser jóvenes?’ No, no, no¹²⁰. (124)

Javier dives head-first into the transitory pool, following the example of his friend Manú who, apparently, has wallowed in his own version of the same uncertainty and instability that many young people complain of; leading an unfettered existence, without social responsibilities or personal commitments. In contrast with the case of the blind woman in “Buenos Aires viceversa”, Javier attempts to understand what he believes to be reality, but without any awareness of his actions or of the potential consequences. He is a dilettante in an environment which demands that Javier pay a much greater price than he is initially aware of. “...Javier entraba ahora en un mundo bizarro, del que nunca había sido ciudadano registrado ni volvería a serlo, con un poco de suerte¹²¹” (139). Javier is the exception. He belongs to a turbulent society, and moreover, to a group (young people) constantly confronted by perceived difficulties. Nonetheless, Javier is incapable of either relating to his society or of finding his place within it. He must cross the threshold, an almost magical limit, in order to achieve the desired epiphany and thus supposedly become a different person. Javier does not represent those young people who believe in a transformable (active, utopic) future, but rather is a cynical combination of the passivity born of the “inevitable” combined with a dangerous innocence; much like the narrator in Cerruti’s text.

¹²⁰ “His was definitely not our daily effort to repress the question which, that year, we did not succeed in banishing from our minds. The million dollar question: Why did it have to be us that had to be young in this place and this shitty period? No, no, no.”

As Jameson has implied, historic time is undoubtedly affected by a new, overpowering, spatiality; in this case the interjacent space of the ideological interlapse which is constantly expanding. As he leaves the party, Javier realizes he is unable to judge the amount of time which has passed while he has been inside. More worryingly still, he finds himself incapable of separating his hallucinations from his now precarious reality. He finds himself in a state which is very similar, in terms of his confusion, anguish and sense of guilt, to that described by Gabriela Cerruti at the moment that she woke up to the socio-political reality surrounding her, as she watched the military trials which took place after the return to democracy.

Like Daniela in Agresti's film, Javier must face the possibility that in order to exist exclusively in the present, in today's world with its seductive, yet inherently alien spaces, leads only to solitary misery and an irreparably permanent violence which will not allow him to return to his previous life¹²². He is equally unable to reach the future he had been led to believe was guaranteed him.

Javier's is not the only case of narratives which link these fictional representations of socially transitory spaces (parties, gatherings) with the growth of a violence born of a combination of desperation and the banality discussed earlier. Whether the aggression is aimed at society or at oneself, a notable amount of narratives

¹²¹ "...Javier was now entering a bizarre world of which he had never, and with luck never would be, a registered citizen."

¹²² Both the Shopping Center where Daniela, about to finally connect with her desired pass, encounters the terrible violence of her society, and the flat where Javier passes the night searching for an elusive consciousness, are unreal spaces in the sense that they are entirely unconnected to the physical or social spaces surrounding them. The shopping centre exists as an consumer-oriented, climate controlled island in the middle of Buenos Aires. The apartment

address the extreme darkness which appears in the non-spaces of the in-between. Carlos heterotopic spaces of choice in *Historias del Kronen* include bars (The Kronen for example) and a freeway where the speed is uncontrolled and if in the mood, one can even tempt fate by driving against traffic. He represents what is perhaps the most drastic manifestation of the tendency to violence as amusement. First, there is his interest in snuff movies¹²³, and in the fictitious but nonetheless disturbing habits of Patrick Bateman (from *American Psycho*).

-Estás estresado, Roberto. Lo que te hace falta es liberar toda esa energía negativa sobre algún objetivo adecuado.

-¿sobre un vagabundo por ejemplo?

-no está mal como ejemplo. Vas aprendiendo las lecciones de Pat.

-Y si descargo mis pulsiones sobre ti ¿qué pensarías¹²⁴? (191)

Next, as Szulik and Kuasñosky discuss in "Los extraños de pelo largo", there is a complete lack of comprehension or awareness when it comes to facing the eventual

Javier enters gives the impression of other-worldliness due to the strange characters he encounters.

¹²³ These films, which document the real murder of victims on camera for the audience's viewing pleasure, occupy their own bizarre non-space. They are almost an urban legend in that for a very long time it was not known if they really existed or were just a verbal extension of the public's growing insensitivity to extreme violence.

¹²⁴ "-You're stressed out Roberto. What you need is to let some of that negative energy out on an adequate target.

-like a bum for example?

-that's not a bad example. You're learning Pat's lessons.

-And if I let out my impulses on you, what would you think?"

consequences of one's actions. Since Carlos delights in endangering himself and his friends for the sheer amusement value of it, the combination becomes lethal.

() Eso es. Continúa riéndote , Fierro, que te vamos a atar. () Así. Primero las manos...y te atamos bien a la sillita para que no te puedas mover...()Que no seas llorica joder. Aunque seas diabético un poco de alcohol no te va hacer nada...() Métele el embudo ahora en la boca, Roberto. () Eso es. Ahora traemos la botella de güisqui y la vertemos dentro del embudo...() Qué pasa Fierro. ¿ Ya no te mueves? ¿ Ya has terminado la botella?... () ¡ VENGA, DESPIERTA FIERRO!...Mierda de Fierro. Otro débil¹²⁵. (Mañas 223)

There is a textual counterpoint to the dark manifestations of frustration and boredom as certain voices and characters experience what could be called a rude awakening in the wake of the violence, and in this way manage to take a first step towards acknowledging a future. In the case of *Historias del Kronen*, Roberto, a friend of the protagonist, ends up in therapy after the death of Fierro, in an attempt to comprehend the fascination with anger and aggression which he and his peers felt (including their fascination with fictional violence like *American Psycho*).

¹²⁵ “() That's it. Keep laughing Fierro, we're going to tie you up. () Like this. First the hands...and we'll tie you properly to the chair so you can't move... () Fuck, don't be a cry-baby. Even if you're diabetic a little alcohol won't do anything to you...() Now put the funnel in his mouth Roberto. () That's it. Now we bring the whiskey bottle and pour it into the funnel...() What's up Fierro? You're not moving anymore? You finished the bottle?... () COME ON. WAKE UP FIERRO!...Fucking Fierro. Another weakling.”

Todo aquel rollo que llevábamos nos embruteció¹²⁶ tanto que a nadie le pareció rara la idea de Carlos. Yo creo que si Carlos nos hubiera propuesto matarle, tampoco nos hubiera extrañado nada...No sé, el rollo era mental más que real. Pero el resultado es lo mismo: hay un muerto¹²⁷. (237)

In the short story by Sergio Gómez with the cumbersome yet intuitive title "De cómo matar ninjas eléctricas sin el sentimiento de culpa que produce matar en una sola lección y todas las cosas que ocurrieron entre medio", the narrator describes a not-quite accidental shooting in which a young girl is badly wounded. In relating the story some months later, the narrator is able to draw (not wholly consciously) some very significant conclusions which go beyond the paralyzing fear and confusion expressed by Roberto, and which indicate a desire to continue and to function eventually in the world. Gómez' narrator is less affected by the near-death of an innocent person than he is by the fact that his future has been compromised, and put on hold for a little while longer, thus prolonging the amount of time he will remain trapped in the transitory. "Pero lo peor es que no le voy a perdonar el asunto...que se fue a las pailas y con ello la mitad, y un poco

¹²⁶ The "brutalizing" is just another facet of the banalization described by Moulian in *Chile actual*.

¹²⁷ "That whole deal we had going numbed us so completely that nobody found Carlos' idea strange. I think that if Carlos had suggested we kill him it also would not have seemed strange to us at all...I don't know, it was more a mental deal than a real one. But the result is the same: someone is dead."

más, de nuestro futuro...Pero ahora estoy solo y aburrido...Me paso en los videos de Giocco todas las interminables tardes...¹²⁸” (35).

A different sort of violence is suggested in “La Forma del shopping center” from *Trabajos manuales*. Fresán’s narrator sketches the figure of Forma’s unorthodox, unseen sister who is known only as “La dinamitera loca de los shopping centers”. The aggression implied by her nom-de-guerre is of a different nature than that which has been addressed thus far in that it is neither mindless (as with Mañas’ Carlos), nor self-serving (Forn’s Javier); nor is it inspired by boredom or inability to cope (as in the case of Gómez’ shooter). On the contrary, the *Dinamitera*’s reason for wanting to blow up malls is ironically altruistic; a final utopian desire to destroy and thus erase what has become perhaps the most widespread, easily recognizable, symbol of the in-between and all of its negative aspects. With a rare appreciation of the transitory and its dangers, Forma’s sister cum guerrilla fighter attempts to instruct and warn her mall-rat brother of the potential traps in what appears to be the physical source of endless consumer possibilities. “ La gente desaparece en los shopping-centers, te lo rejuro¹²⁹” (182). The choice of verb “disappear” is not a coincidence and serves to remind the reader that violence takes many forms, including the invisible or the clandestine, and that in the recent past it has been masked and contained by other public buildings or institutions¹³⁰. In order to cause a disappearance, something as small as a compromise may be a

¹²⁸ “But the worst is that I will not forgive him this...that he went down and with him half, or a bit more, of our future...But now I’m alone and bored...I spend the unending afternoons at Giocco’s video.”

¹²⁹ “People disappear in shopping centres; I swear.”

sufficient trigger. Consider, for example, the above statement by Forma's sister. The unwitting use of the term "shopping-center" instead of the Spanish equivalent (i.e. centro de compras, paseo cubierto), in the mouth of someone who seems to recognize the significance of globalizing space (but not, apparently, language) and purports to fight against it, is just one example of the all-encompassing power which has contributed to the banalization and frustration of a generation, most of whom are not nearly as culturally or politically aware as the *Dinamitera loca*. While there are no overt references linking this character with any other, external, texts, her very name suggests a historical and political function within the story. Beyond the thematic association the reader may draw between the *Dinamitera* and references to anarchy in European literature¹³¹, one may note that during the Spanish Civil War, one of the women most feared by the Franquists was a member of the Juventud Socialista Rosario Sánchez Mora, known as *La Dinamitera*.

The shopping malls fulfill a function which goes beyond merely replacing the traditional public square as a place of interaction (or, as in the case of the mall, non-interaction and regulation). They also represent a new approach to self-definition. In other words, they offer not only a transitory space, but also provide the packaged lifestyle(s) which goes with it. The disappearance of consumers within its boundaries is not limited to the externally imposed physical elimination, or metamorphosis, of people; rather it is a lifestyle choice, as we will see further along.

¹³⁰ Without going into too much detail, one can point to the National Stadium in Santiago de Chile as just one example of a public place of entertainment which was turned into a torture centre.

¹³¹ For example Dostoyevsky's *The Devils*.

The Chilean critic Rodrigo Cánovas, author of *Novela chilena nuevas generaciones: el abordaje de los huérfanos* (1997), has considered the problem of a culturally orphaned youth in transit from the other side of the Andes. Cánovas, speaking of what would correspond to Javier and Daniela's generation, explains with a degree of cynicism that "El presente les parece degradado (respecto al modelo estadounidense) y el pasado chileno de cultura política, prehistórico..."¹³² (79). In other words, they inhabit the same empty world mentioned earlier, controlled by a past which stills weighs heavily and has never been reconciled. According to the characters which appear in the books, whether Chilean, Argentinian, or other, they are aware of their place, and of their situation on the edge of common experience, yet they lack what one protagonist calls the "el saber insertarse en el mundo"¹³³ (79). Instead of changing the world, this generation must adapt and/or recreate itself in order to be able to belong to the inevitable world which surrounds them. The construction of one's identity, which I will address in more detail in the following chapter, depends, therefore, not on a fundamental core or essence, but rather on the ability to adapt or to shop for one's identity according to what the fashions of the season, dictated by the market, demand.

The fictional texts which have emerged in this generation concentrate, then, on narrating both the processes of assimilation into society and its simultaneous rejection. Looking first at the latter eventuality, the narratives can be read as a series of active responses to the homogenous accusation of banalization, pacification and the loss of

¹³² "The present seems degraded to them (compared to the U.S model) and the Chilean past based on a political culture, prehistoric ..."

¹³³ "knowing how to insert oneself into the world"

coordinates (inability to locate oneself) analyzed by Tomás Moulian¹³⁴. Moreover, there is in a number of the more representative narratives a marked tendency to textualize the ways in which one may crack the facade of the externally imposed banality. This may be accomplished through choosing alternate coordinates/ materials with which to work and with which to confront both society and a traditional literature which is unfulfilling and alien, as I will discuss.

These materials are often characterized by their highly creative, non-hierarchical nature. The *bricolage* of musical texts, film (including Disney), television references and just about any other available scrap is almost completely devoid of judgmental exclusivism. This generation, often labelled post-modern¹³⁵ in its tastes, has, in the case of these writers, effectively learned the value of appropriating whichever tools or discourses may be necessary in the struggle for self-expression. A brilliant case- in- point is the reconstruction of the master chef's kitchen in Fresán's "El aprendiz de brujo". The nameless narrator is trapped in a position where he is unable to advance professionally as an apprentice in a London restaurant. For him regression is both absurd and impossible:

Y me informa que, de aquí en más, mi tarea específica en el Savoy Fair será la de limpiar hornos, todos los hornos. Shastri se pone un poco nervioso cuando el

¹³⁴ The result of a neo-liberalism which in many cases is guilty of having fed and maintained the present status of the "in-between".

¹³⁵ The use of the term post-modern in this context does not reflect a rigorous critical understanding of the concept by the public at large. Rather, it is a term which has been appropriated by the mass media and which has, to the general public, come to mean an aesthetic where "anything goes".

commis-chef le explica en un temeroso susurro que lo único que he hecho desde mi llegada al restaurante es limpiar hornos¹³⁶. (24)

As a response to the double banality of an aching dull job and the unimaginative punishments of his boss, the protagonist takes matters into his own hands and subverts the very order which has been stifling him. The repressive official discourse is represented in this case by an obsessive, repressive boss who insists on being called "Master". By moving the chef's implements just a wee bit higher than he is accustomed to finding them, the official discourse is effectively disarmed and publicly rendered ridiculous. "Tendrías que haber visto a tu jefe...Extendía los brazos y no alcanzaba a agarrar nada...El hombrecito empezó a llorar frente a las cámaras y se lo llevaron envuelto en una frazada¹³⁷" (32). By appropriating and realigning the very space which contained and restricted him, Fresán's apprentice is able to conceive of further possibilities, and of a future, no matter how blurry. "Entonces la sentí volver...la música que pone en movimiento todas las escobas del universo. Y el aprendiz de brujo experimentó por primera vez el regocijo intimidante de saberse Maestro Hechicero¹³⁸" (32). The text itself goes through a similar process of discovery as it takes a well known Disney movie (*Fantasia*) and demonstrates that it is perfectly legitimate to look to a

¹³⁶ "And he informs me that from now on, my specific job at the Savoy Fair will be to clean ovens, all the ovens. Shastri gets a bit nervous when the *commis-chef* explains to him in a worried whisper that all I've done since arriving at the restaurant has been cleaning ovens."

¹³⁷ "You should have seen your boss... He was stretching his arms but he couldn't reach anything...The little fellow started to cry in front of the cameras and they took him away wrapped in a blanket."

children's movie as a way to express oneself.; that an animated feature film with dancing broomsticks may be as significant a life influence as the great philosophers or religious thinkers.

I suggested previously that these narratives could be read as either a vocal rejection of society or as a manual of methods for assimilating into and accepting it (no matter how unwillingly). The choice is not always as cut and dried as that; indeed it is occasionally a hard call for even the most sensitive, informed reader, or the narrator, to make. In the case of *Mala onda*, Matías, upon discovering that he is unable to adapt the stagnant space around him to suit his evolving needs, attempts instead to actively take possession of a more neutral space, the hotel room, and therefore of his own destiny. In these transitional lodgings, unfettered by the past which he finds unavoidable both at home and at school, he (initially) gains access to a future in which he can take an active role. It could be argued that the primary reason that Matías never truly breaks out of his rut, or achieves a rupture with his surroundings, is that even in his moment of rebellion he continues to employ the language of the banal, the repressed and the dependant. When he runs out on his parents' stifling cocktail party, Matías first arms himself with symbols of the very order he professes to despise, a blank cheque and cocaine, both taken from his father's wallet. Although like Fresán's narrator he works with what is at hand, Matías lacks the innovative spirit and the awareness of both his tools and his methods which in the end makes all the difference. Matías continues to believe, until very late in the narrative, that he has made a clean break with his past and that he is

¹³⁸ "Then I felt it return...the music which moves all the brooms of the universe. And the sorcerer's apprentice felt, for the first time, the intimidating ecstasy of knowing he was a

inventing something completely new and uncontaminated. This, of course, is impossible.

This generation has demonstrated its desire to develop an effective vocabulary with which to voice their concerns. The perceived need for this form of expression demonstrates the constantly growing chasm between the glorifying language of globalization (Argentina or Chile as a First World country, Spain as Europe, the United States as Global), and the system of mass consumption and cultural and affective underdevelopment which surrounds them. In order, however, to bridge this gap, and to pass through the transitory and exit safely into the present (or even the future, in optimistic cases), the members of the group must be aware of the cultural and political space they inhabit and of the discourses in play. To attempt to build a wholly superficial new project (as in *Mala onda*) would be the equivalent of building on a fault line. The structure, no matter how attractive, could conceivably come tumbling down due to unforeseen, or buried, elements.

Inhabiting the Parenthesis

Y cuando mi balsa este lista
partire hacia la locura/Con mi
balsa/ yo me ire a naufragar
"La Balsa" Los Gatos

The first, and perhaps most important, step towards constructing a present and a future is taken by considering the problem of the past and what really took place during those moments which had the strongest impact on the present generation of authors, the

Wizard Master."

writers of the “new narrative”. The act of confronting a not-so distant history is then crucial to the ability to locate oneself effectively within the present. In numerous cases, discussed in the stories and novels of this genre, including *Historia argentina*, *Trabajos manuales* and *Vidas de santos* by Rodrigo Fresán, *Mala onda* by Alberto Fuguet, or *Nadar de noche* by Juan Forn, the “in-between” has served as a mediating space; not only between the social and the individual, but also among those internal spaces (including values, family relations, internal politics, etc.) which represent the doubts and conflicts of an entire literary generation. One could almost compare these spaces with the more traditional image of the public *plaza* which served as an open space ideal for quiet contemplation, but also appropriate for political speechmaking and demonstrations. The unavailability of adequate arenas for expression, due to socio-political changes which have neutralized the potential of traditional spaces and removed the individual from them, has led to the adoption of alternative places.

One of the more interesting and more contemporary treatments of this topic appears in the first story “Perra virtual” in the book of the same name by the Argentinian writer Cristina Civalé. The protagonist and narrator of this story describe an encounter in an internet chat- room which loses strength and appeal when it progresses to a real room in an apartment building. Uncomfortable silences emerge when the characters find themselves face to face. They are at a loss without the nicknames they are used to employing in the chat room, and feel too exposed without a computer screen to act as mediator. The daring questions which seemed so easy to ask (type, actually) become awkward and non-communication becomes preferable. The novels and short

stories of this generation have, to a degree, served the same purpose as the fictional chat room. A field of discussion has been created within the text (itself a place of mediated debate); a self-regulated space within which a language of re-writing and possibly of social conscience has been permitted to develop.

In her book *Hijos de mala madre* (1993), Cívale addresses the problematic and highly charged combination of history, fiction and mediating spaces which has clearly marked numerous compatriots of her age. Her initial emphasis, however, is on time, and, taking a crucial step back, on the specific moment that if it did not quite stop, it began, at least, to tick more slowly, and with a different rhythm.

Era el golpe. Llegaba la realidad de una crónica fuertemente anunciada. A las tres y veintiuna, por la cadena nacional de radio y televisión, los que todavía estaban despiertos pudieron escuchar el comunicado número uno del gobierno *de facto*...pero los hechos fueron, también, según quienes los vivieron¹³⁹. (33-4).

Immediately following this temporal metamorphosis, Cívale acknowledges the rapid, decisive, switch in focus from time to space, studying the locations which coincide with the moment that time took a backseat. The mediating space does not develop in this case as an attempt to force connections between historical events, testimonies and fictional texts; rather as a desire to construct ties between moments

(time), places (space) and expressions (language)¹⁴⁰ and to comprehend this innovative and very particular form of appreciating what it means to live in the globalized, fin de siècle world of the Southern Cone. Under consideration is a temporal trajectory, a process lived between moments, both individual and social, which is *expressed spatially* through the mediating symbols of our globalized era; shopping malls, discos, cinemas, or even the bare, windswept islands of the South Atlantic War¹⁴¹. The cultural borders of these places are not fixed in the traditional sense and their elusive owners are both questionable and changing. Where then is the link between space and writing?

Manipular, subvertir, copiar, encarar la realidad encaramándose, escapándose, comprometiéndose. Armar una coartada con la ficción para desnudar el alma y dejar al descubierto su zona luminosa o miserable. Disimular, pretender, mediar...pero sobre todo componer mundos...¹⁴² (Civale 167).

¹³⁹ "It was the coup. The reality of a strongly foretold chronicle hit. At three twenty, on national radio and television stations, those who were still awake could hear the first communiqué of the de facto government...the facts also occurred according to those who lived them."

¹⁴⁰ These elements, time, space and language, and the relation between them, are based on the work of Mikhail Bakhtin and specifically on his concept "the chronotope". As Sue Vice explains in her book *Introducing Bakhtin* (1997), the chronotope is a way of measuring, in a particular moment or genre, the articulation of the "verdadero tiempo y espacio histórico" and the "personajes históricos" (Civale 201).

¹⁴¹ A literary sub-genre has emerged, focusing on the experiences of young Argentinian soldiers in the South Atlantic War. Examples include "La soberanía nacional" by Fresán, or the novel *Los Pichiciegos* (1994) by Fogwill. Civale, in *Hijos de mala madre* dedicates a large part of one chapter to the war which, for her generation, seemed "un nuevo acto de la muerte como espectáculo" where "...volvíamos a ser sobrevivientes" (93).

¹⁴² "Manipulating, subverting, copying, facing reality by raising oneself up, escaping, getting involved. Creating an alibi through fiction in order to bare the soul and uncover one's luminous or miserable zones. Pretending, expecting, mediating...but above all, creating worlds."

The above paragraph from *Hijos de mala madre* is a diamond mine of potential details with which to approach and analyze the literature of the post-dictatorship generation. At the same time, it camouflages the dangers of a mine field beneath it. The first three verbs (to manipulate, to subvert, to copy) with which Civalé chooses to describe the act of writing, as practiced by her peers, suggest that the resulting narratives have been, in effect, re-writings or re-worked adaptations of pre-existing fiction in terms of both content and style. While the mention of acts of literary manipulation or subversion may intrigue the reader and critic due to insinuations of re-creation or a possible creative or political agenda, the final idea, copying, carries highly negative connotations and little hope of creative redemption or innovation. What ought to be emphasized here is not what appears at first glance to be a strange admission that this group of writers excel at copying and can consequently lay little claim to originality. The citation goes on to say that fiction serves, in fact, as an alibi of sorts, an opaque cover through which transparent emotions and intentions may be bared and expressed. It is a contradiction in terms which is hard to reconcile; "to create an alibi...in order to bare the soul and uncover one's luminous, or miserable, zone". It sounds almost as if the intent is to create a justification, a safe discursive space within which to operate. The fact remains that a shift in literary priorities has occurred and what has consequently emerged is an extremely strong emphasis on creating, and taking advantage of space *everywhere*. The point is to "create worlds" at all costs, with all possible materials. If this can be achieved only through pretending, simulation or mediation, so be it. If it must be qualified with apologetics to allow for broader consumption, this too is

acceptable. The point is to create and to initiate *within* the instability of the transitory rather than wait for it to end. There must, therefore, be a basic acceptance of the present and of its potential usefulness. In this way as well, a first step is taken, away from nostalgia. Fuguet, in “La verdad o las consecuencias” from *McOndo*, textualizes the unease which eventually leads to action:

Pablo siente que todo esto es un paréntesis. Los paréntesis son como boomerangs, cree. Incluso se parecen. Entran a tu vida de improviso y seccionan tu pasado de tu presente de un golpe seco y certero. El shock te deja mal, en una especie de terreno baldío que no es de nadie y tampoco es tuyo. Quedas a la deriva, atento y aterrado, inmóvil. En vez de actuar, esperas...Pablo siente que este tiempo muerto se está alargando más de lo conveniente. Se está acostumbrando. Eso es lo que más le asusta¹⁴³. (109)

Here the reader encounters the fictionalization all of the temporal and spatial elements which this chapter, up to this point, has attempted to present as defining characteristics of a generation stuck in the present which it can not even claim as its own. The powerlessness imposed, and the paralysis felt, are outweighed, as Fuguet so brilliantly points out, only by the terrible sense that one could become used to the

¹⁴³ “Pablo feels like this is all a parenthesis. Parenthesis are like boomerangs he believes. They even look alike. They enter your life unexpectedly, and section off your past from your present with a dry, sure blow. The shock leaves you uneasy, in a sort of vacant lot which belongs neither to you nor to anyone else. You stay waiting, attent and terrorized, unmoving. Instead of acting, you wait...Pablo feels that this dead time is stretching out more than seems convenient. He is getting used to it. This is what scares him most.”

situation; that one could become if not exactly comfortable than at least numb, in this frozen non-space.

The fictional worlds textualized by this generation have been placed today in the literary foreground more for questions of publicity and market interests than through any social or ethical impulse. These texts do not pretend to address a future or even to conceive of one. They do define the present in its own terms, but continue nonetheless to belong to the purgatory of the “in-between” because they are still nothing more than a bridge to contemporary reality. This is not completely negative. “Pablo siente que no debería estar aquí, pero no se le ocurre otro lugar mejor. Si uno va vivir entre paréntesis, lo menos es que haya espacio, piensa¹⁴⁴” (109). To give another textual example of what happens when one gives up trying to be somewhere s/he is not and works within the given (physical) boundaries, the ultimate “bottom” is reached in Fogwill’s *Los Pichiciegos: visiones de una batalla subterránea* (1994). In this novel, the Argentinian conscripts are forced by a combination of hunger and survival instincts to burrow into catacombs of sorts. These dug-outs, on the one hand parallel to the cells occupied by the disappeared on the mainland, also represent a metaphorical tunnel whose only conceivable exit is an end to the war and a subsequent end to the dictatorship¹⁴⁵. The need to still “mediate” and “pretend”, the fear of *too much* open space is a remnant of the paranoia and the survival instincts developed by a society which spent many years wearing masks and covering the truth with silence or lies. “Lo primero que hizo

¹⁴⁴ “Pablo feels like he should not be here, but he can’t think of a better place. If someone is going to live within parenthesis, there should at least be space, he thinks.”

¹⁴⁵ In this eventuality, however, one wonders how someone used to living in a non-space adapts to “normal” life.

Pablo...fue vomitar. Pablo no tiene claro si fue la altura, la atmósfera demasiado limpia, la emoción, o...esta vista que se abre y se pierde¹⁴⁶” (109).

The decision to work within an in-between space may be related as well to a more generic question, which is the need for this new generation to re-evaluate what until recently has been the inescapable shadow of the literature of the Boom. The highly stylized, often magical, Latin America which was portrayed in the novels and short stories of writers including Alejo Carpentier and Gabriel García Márquez is not only unappealing but, more importantly, appears to be a completely alien territory for the present generation of Chilean and Argentinian authors. The magic, per se, which appears is external and wholly foreign, as with the Disney Fantasia themes which influence and excite Fresán's narrator. The only "alternate realities" and witchcraft in the texts are self-generated. For example the protagonist of Civalé's *Perra virtual* who uses the magic known as technology (the laptop and a chat room) to launch an alternate version of herself. It is far from a mere coincidence that what for the moment is the definitive collection of short stories by young Latin American writers¹⁴⁷ was given the meaningful (and more than slightly ironic) title *McOndo*. The creation of this hybrid name provides what is at once the most cynical and the most candid admission of what is at issue, in the broadest possible socio-literary context. Beyond the unique problematic which may affect each country on its own, and therefore influence its subsequent literary creations, there is a definite statement being made here vis-a-vis the

¹⁴⁶ “The first thing that Pablo did...was vomit. Pablo is not sure if it was the altitude, the overly clean atmosphere, the emotion, or...this view which opens up and becomes lost.”

¹⁴⁷ Edited by Alberto Fuguet and Sergio Gómez, *McOndo* contains short stories by writers from Argentina, Costa Rica, Chile, Bolivia, Mexico, Uruguay, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru.

language with which the contour lines of Latin American cultural space is ultimately to be defined by this generation. Somewhere in between the consumer paradise of McDonald's and the essentialist utopia of Macondo there lies a heretofore unclaimed space which generates its own stories. It is a virtual space where the consumer generation is able to freely write their experience and express their understanding of society. The trick then is how to reconcile the world as it was expressed in the past by the Boom writers and those (still out of reach) which are portrayed in urban, wholly consumerized novels like *American Psycho*. Manhattan remains as distant and as mythical as Macondo in most cases, although some writers would like to convince their readers (and themselves) otherwise¹⁴⁸.

The choice to include Spanish authors both in this thesis (José Angel Mañas in particular) and, coincidentally¹⁴⁹, in the *McOndo* collection is linked to the idea of inhabiting the space created in McOndo. Although this thesis places great emphasis on texts produced in the Southern Cone of Latin America, the underlying, fundamental issues at stake and under investigation here have to do with a "globalized" generation which exists not only in Chile and Argentina, but of course in the at once idealized and alienating United States and in Europe as well. The individual expressions which emerge in each case, filter very global concerns through the realities of the local. In Chile or Argentina the narratives often focus on a discursive stumbling block caused by

¹⁴⁸ In a statement which appears in the introduction to the English translation of *Mala onda*, Alberto Fuguet claims that "this book should probably have been written in English". Beyond the astonishing lack of self-awareness demonstrated by this comment, the reader is left more certain than ever that interpretation should never be left to the author.

¹⁴⁹ I say coincidentally because I had been working with texts by Spanish authors, whose work I considered relevant to the topic, before I ever read a copy of *McOndo*.

the officially endorsed repression of the recent past. In post-franquist Spain there may exist a need to confront a discourse which insists that there is no reason for a generation born in democracy to complain about their lives, since they never suffered the horrors of the civil war, or the dictatorship which followed it. “Es un coñazo viajar, es un coñazo viajar. ¿Qué no es un coñazo para ti?...Vosotros los jóvenes lo tenéis todo: todo. Teníais que haber vivido la posguerra y hubierais visto lo que es bueno¹⁵⁰” (Mañas 67). The problems faced by this generation, stemming in great part from the overwhelming power wielded by consumption and all that this implies (i.e. lethargy, banalization, low attention span, lack of social solidarity), combined with the contradictory accusations that the social fruits of globalization and consumption are a privilege rather than a cause for complaint, are, ironically, truly global. If we return for a moment to the scene discussed earlier from *Buenos Aires vice versa* in which the blind woman faces the cage full of dictator puppets, a disquieting paradox emerges which forces one to re-think the initial, optimistic reading/ viewing of the film and its script. The scene is not a reflection of any reality but rather the projection of an ideal time and place in which the criminals go to jail and everyone, including those who can not see, are able to participate in society. Seen, however, within the context not only of earlier scenes in the film, but also in relation to other narratives which have been mentioned here, the spectator could understandably reach the opposite conclusion, that the woman, who represents her generation is in fact the one caged. It is common knowledge that the great majority of the war criminals of recent dictatorships have gone free after serving little or no jail

¹⁵⁰ “It’s a drag to travel, it’s a drag to travel. What’s not a drag to you?...You young people have it all; everything. You should have lived during the post-war period and then you’d see what is

time. The woman, being (symbolically and physically) vision impaired, is able to comprehend only what is told to her, thus limiting her mobility and her capacity to judge developing situations. Furthermore, as may be observed in the scene in which she is attacked, she is actually less free in her movements than the aforementioned ex-torturers and murderers. She is restrained by a system and a society. The desperation felt has two potential outlets: a frontal attack (the transformable future), as in the case of this character, or a silent, weeping paralysis (the inevitable future) which is the path taken by another character, the eavesdropping hotel employee.

To return to the question of defining a literary space, as we have already seen, the texts oscillate between the past and the present, just as they vacillate between the space they are expected to occupy and that which they *wish* to occupy. The eternal question of language and how it both enunciates and ultimately occupies the spatial and temporal transitory resurfaces. In *Historia argentina*, a text which could be considered the launching pad for a narrative which has been spun out over four collections of short stories, the question of national space and its significance for the generation raised during the dictatorship is confronted head on in the story "La Vocación literaria". Whether the story is or is not biographical, as some have said, is completely moot¹⁵¹. The narrator, reflecting on his experience as a child, employs a vocabulary, at certain junctures in the narrative, which is not unsuited to a contemporary fairy tale. In fact he acknowledges that "lo mejor es atenerse a las convenciones del género, pisar terreno

good. "

¹⁵¹ As another narrator explains in an earlier story, "el de las biografías es el más mentiroso de todos los géneros literarios"(1992: 82).

seguro, allá vamos. *Había una vez...*¹⁵²” (189). From recycling a traditional opening to the tale, the narrator advances steadily towards a new framework for his expression. “Había una vez un padre, una madre, y un hijo que cuando grande quería ser escritor...Excúsenme de explicarles lo que era un hogar clase media en un país que debía haber estado en Europa pero no¹⁵³” (191). Although the slightly ironic tone continues to play with literary conventions, there is an immediate qualification “pero no” which displaces the topos of the narrative, leaving in its place a negative space which defies description according to traditional methods. The reader would naturally expect more details to be forthcoming, but they are not only scarce but continue to follow this pattern of definition which emphasizes the negative. “Quizás convenga aclarar aquí que la gente nacida en mi hoy inexistente país de origen no sólo tiene pésima memoria sino que también parece enorgullirse de ello¹⁵⁴” (193).

Fresán’s “había una vez” may not pinpoint a specific chronological moment, but its adherence to the conventional code of the fairy-tale opening and literary time nonetheless imparts a concreteness to it. Cristina Civalé on the other hand, though she begins her narrative with the words “antes y después” (“after and before”), focuses right from the opening of the book on the question which has defined a great part of her generation; the temporal instability within which everything began, and which would later mark the perception of the young writers and readers.

¹⁵² “The best is to stick to the conventions of the genre, stay on safe ground, there we go. *Once upon a time...*”

¹⁵³ “Once upon a time there was a father, a mother and a son who wanted to be a writer when he grew up...Please excuse me from explaining to you what a middle class home was like in a country which should have been in Europe but was not. ”

Antes y después. Antes y después de la dictadura. Antes y después del 24 de marzo de 1976. La vida dividida, atravesada por la vara oscura de una fecha inolvidable. Después nada sería igual, aunque no lo supiéramos... Todo empezó muy temprano, a la hora en que los días se confunden, cuando hoy es todavía ayer, pero es hoy, es el 24 de marzo¹⁵⁵. (1)

The decision to reject a previous reality, because a choice is made to start anew, and to inaugurate the world from a generational perspective can be highly satisfactory. When there is no such rejection due to an ignorance of the past, or when the past remains hidden by the shadows of contradictory versions and half-truths, of white lies or the intent to hide the traces of a crime, there is no such satisfaction. One can not choose to ignore the past because it is unwittingly ignored. This causes an uneasy sense that someone has robbed one of this possibility. "Después nada sería igual, aunque no lo supiéramos..."¹⁵⁶.

This instability which we have examined up until now is notable not only for the obvious difficulties which may be encountered in any period of great social change- for example revolution, or the return to democracy- but also because in the cases of the Southern Cone (Uruguay, Chile and Argentina) the horrific experiences have left behind

¹⁵⁴ "It might be worth clarifying that people born in my now inexistent country of origin not only have dreadful memories, but also seem proud of it."

¹⁵⁵ "Before and after. before and after the dictatorship. Before and after March 24th, 1976. Life divided, traversed by the dark spectre of an unforgettable date. Later, nothing would be the same, although we would not know it...It all started very early, at the hour when days become confused, when today is still yesterday, but it is today; the 24th of March."

another tenacious trace, namely, the question "what would our lives have been like if there had been no coup d'état"? Just as Javier, in Forn's story "El borde peligroso de las cosas", becomes nervous at the thought that he may be missing out on "something important", and forces himself to experience everything in order not to be left wondering, or with regrets, Civalé writes "la cinta flúor de nuestro recorrido hubiese marcado otro rumbo. Nunca sabremos cuál y nunca sabremos cómo"¹⁵⁷ (39). To comprehend the significance of this statement, one must compare it with one made in Cerruti's *Herederos del silencio*. Cerruti's narrator questions whether life would not have been simpler and/or easier for her generation if they had remained frozen in 1983. Besides the obvious reticence to confront reality which is implied in this rather bizarre and dangerously counter-productive suggestion, the narrator goes beyond even Javier Messen's hallucinatory desperation in her inability to inhabit society, "un territorio que no es nuestra invención" (Cerruti 293). What's more, as befits a true child of "silence" (as the title of the book would have it), Cerruti's narrator seems alternately incapable of and unwilling to appropriate and subvert this silence as others have done, thus, giving precedence to both the present and the unflagging desire to express oneself.

There is a strong nostalgia for the unknown, for that which will forever remain unreachable. It may be a desire for that which was stolen (true democracy, a transparent history), that which was exhausted or trampled (political and social idealism) and/ or that which could have been and now will never be. This nostalgia appears, at first glance, to be full of self-pity, but Civalé's narrator immediately admits that there is a

¹⁵⁶ "Afterwards, nothing would remain the same, although we would not know it..."

painfully ironic privilege gained by having reached this uncomfortable present state of affairs.

Otros doscientos cincuenta chicos y chicas de entre trece y dieciocho años fueron secuestrados en sus casas, en las calles o a la salida de los colegios. Después fueron asesinados. Ellos son los que nunca tendrán treinta¹⁵⁸ (3).

Those young people, the dead and the disappeared, have remained in another mediating space, between the past and the future, between life and death; a state of permanent youth, which is in itself an “in-between” age. Taken from concrete, mapable spaces including homes and schools, these young people were, in a sense, condemned by their perceived inability to assimilate effectively into the world, as Cánovas might say¹⁵⁹, and for not having accepted the inevitability of what was occurring in the world around them. To opt for Szulik and Kuasñosky’s “transformable” world is never without its risks. Perhaps it is this knowledge, or the still partly buried cultural memory, which has left its mark on the present generation. Something important has been lost, and is still being lost, in this “in-between” space which prevents the current generation from concentrating on living the present. Worse still, it appears to have impeded the development of a transformable future. The most upsetting comment made thus far

¹⁵⁷ “the fluorescent ribbon of our trajectory would have taken a different turn. We shall never know which and we shall never know how.”

¹⁵⁸ “Another two hundred and fifty boys and girls between the ages of thirteen and eighteen were sequestered from their homes, on the street, or coming out of school. They were later assassinated. They are the ones who will never turn thirty.”

¹⁵⁹ See p.79 *El Abordaje de los huérfanos*

concerning the link between the damage done in the past and that which continues today was made recently by the author and critic Martín Capparós. “Yo creo que ya llegó la hora de olvidar los setenta... Creo que es la última derrota que nos inflingieron los militares: que 15 o 20 años después, todavía sigamos saliendo a la calle para pedir por nuestros muertos, cuando los vivos están muy jodidos¹⁶⁰ (14)”.

In order to speak of the present social and political situation in the Southern Cone, it is crucial to first enunciate that which has been repressed or silenced for so long. At the same time, there is a need to move forward in order to reconcile oneself to the force of the present day consumer market. The power of the market must be acknowledged and confronted through language, in order to prevent being consumed by it. This dissipated future has create a generation who at times resemble sleepwalkers. A highly developed textual cynicism rejects the traditional political solutions, preferring instead to create untouchable, internal, worlds. “Quizás, algún día, sea posible escribir una verdadera historia de amor con final feliz, y en ella exista otra clase de destino para los tipos como Javier Messen. Mientras tanto, de qué vale despertarlo¹⁶¹” (171). The ability to awaken not only the texts but also the silent interstices to be found therein would then be fundamental for a comprehensive, effective analysis of the literature of those who reject or accept their own assimilation into what today appears inevitable.

¹⁶⁰ “I think the time has come to forget the seventies...I believe this is the final loss which the military has inflicted upon us; that 15 or 20 years later, we could still be going into the streets to ask for our dead when the living are so messed up.”

¹⁶¹ “Maybe, one day, it will be possible to write a real love story with a happy ending, and within it to create a different kind of destiny for guys like Javier Messen. In the meantime, what’s the point of waking him up?”

Chapter III- The Identity Process

A Skeptical View

Quisiera saber tu nombre/ tu
lugar, tu dirección/ y si te han
puesto teléfono/ también tu
numeración –"Canción para mi
muerte" SuiGeneris

The human struggle to forge and subsequently project identity is a theme which has occupied Western literature since the time of the Bible. Initially, creative and critical emphasis was placed on the essential character of an individual or of a group, treating this as "nature" and as a birthright which one could follow or fight against, but never escape. One's identity was tantamount to one's destiny. The most celebrated case of this is of course the drama of Oedipus Rex, the man who discovered that ignorance is no escape from one's fate. Alternately, and in fact contrarily, identity has been conceived and studied by the social sciences, within diverse ideologies (Marxism, to give one example) as an externally imposed construction strongly determined by social, historical and political circumstances. This approach represented a small epistemological opening in that it liberated identity from the concept of biologically or spiritually inherent characteristics. Notwithstanding, within the field of literary representation it did little in the way of empowering certain fictional characters, nor did it provide the means to escape from pre-determined karma. Although the nature of

identity formation has been, and continues to be, discussed endlessly, its elemental comprehensiveness and relatively stable wholeness as an existing phenomenon have traditionally been accepted as a given. The methods and process of discovery were disputed critically but the final form or the plausibility of the premise itself were never questioned. Identity was as binding and inflexible as an iron mask; who or what was responsible for securing it was relatively unimportant.

With the advent of literary postmodernism and its varied tenets, the question of stability or unity in fictional characters has been largely discredited, or has, at least, forced a general re-evaluation of categories in social discourse. In a very basic description, in tune with new literatures, of some of the more widespread arguments both for and against what has been called the "death of the subject", Patricia Rosenau provides a critical overview of the issue, dividing the conflicting voices into the more hard-line "Skeptics" (more common in the humanities) and the "Affirmatives" (generally present in the social sciences where the complete disappearance of a subject is more problematic). The former, as Rosenau explains, " 'resist' the unified, coherent subject as a human being or a concrete reference point" (21), while the latter, instead of focusing exclusively on the demise of the subject, prefer to address the perhaps more constructive "the birth of the post-modern individual" (21).

In the literary corpus of this chapter there is evidence of the widespread nature and textual implementation of, first, the wholehearted rejection of a unified subject and, second, of attempts to critically posit the birth of a character who has been reconceived according to "new" methods and tactics. It is important to note from the very beginning that a complete and final integration of the character's identity is never achieved in any

of the texts. Although it would be both misinformed and naïve to suggest that no continuity exists in the theoretical understanding of identity, between previous knowledge and post-modern developments, this fact will necessarily remain the greatest textual rupture. Nowhere more than in the literature of the post-dictatorship is this more clearly, or more powerfully manifested.

If one adds the power of consumerism and of the market as a guiding, shaping force, as much in the lives of the characters as in the lives of the readers, the subjectivity equation becomes even more complicated, triggering questions and potential conclusions which break with traditional theories. The post-industrial forces of globalization have demonstrated (and continue to demonstrate) their far-reaching powers of socialization; working steadily with a concrete purpose and strategy which, ironically, simultaneously glorifies and undermines the individual. The former may be seen in its commercial “Just Do It” configuration, while the latter may be witnessed, in the gentlest case scenario, by the contradictory attempt by the same company¹⁶² to sell their trendy tools of individual realization and redemption (read: sneakers) all over the globe. To define oneself, or to be defined by external forces, can no longer be approached as a process with a foreseeable or a desired end in sight. Rather than an inspired search or a quest for the elusive and yet ever-present self, it has, instead, become an exercise for its own sake, within which an eventual decision or concretization is actually *counter-productive*. An often confusing yet highly complementary blend of flexibility and fragmentation, as we will see further along in this chapter, are the corner stone of contemporary identity formation and character

creation. Consumer culture has blurred the fine yet divisive line between identity and identification, leading to the replacement of one by the other and to a seemingly easy interchangeability which belies an underlying social and literary tension.

Before expanding on the more critical and theoretical side of identity and its repercussions, I would like to remain, for a moment, within the territory of the "in-between" which was examined in the previous chapter, in order to briefly emphasize a basic and inescapable point; the link, from the perspective of the overwhelming majority of the characters and, that of the informed reader, between youth cultures in the fictional societies and the societies from which the fiction stems. The connection is critically important because of the simple fact that youth is the period in one's life when identity is most intensely developed, tested and concretized. As Erik Erikson described it in *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (1994):

(I)n the later school years, young people, beset by [...] the uncertainty of the adult roles ahead, seem much concerned with faddish attempts at establishing an adolescent subculture [...] They are sometimes morbidly, often curiously, preoccupied with what they appear to be in the eyes of others as compared with what they feel they are, and with the question of how to connect the roles and skills cultivated earlier with the ideal prototypes of the day (128)

Erikson's analysis then continues by suggesting that adolescence is marked by the need of youth to encounter "men and ideas to have faith in" (128). The reader may

¹⁶² In this case Nike.

find this in *Mala onda* for example, in Matías initially good relationship with his literature teacher. A more radical case would be the apparently sudden interest of Marce Santelices in student politics in Gómez's "De cómo matar ninjas". Erikson qualifies his statement however by explaining that this tendency to trust is not always visible, that "the adolescent fears a foolish, all too trusting commitment, and will, paradoxically, express his need for faith in loud and cynical mistrust" (129). Whether the malaise expressed is "real" or merely a manner of avoiding the embarrassment of baring one's feelings, it nevertheless exists through its enunciation. The adolescent stage represents not only a symbolic break with one's parents or elders, but also the questioning of those authorities who up until this point have been considered a trustworthy or even unique source of information. As such, adolescence (and literary interpretations of it) ought to logically serve as a rich breeding ground for typical conflicts, doubts and resolutions as well as the external social phobias linked to adolescence¹⁶³. If one combines this period of personal instability, emerging doubts and developments with the dismantling of the subject which characterizes postmodern thought, then the attempt of a generation to write itself into existence becomes an exercise in frustration and according to some, futility.

Equally relevant are the potential tensions created by one's condition as a citizen of the Third World, inhabiting societies susceptible to high levels of unemployment, corruption and unstable governments, or as a resident of the First World who may or may not actively resist being constantly defined and manipulated by commercial

¹⁶³ The widespread suspicion or mistrust of young people, particularly those with even slightly "abnormal" appearances.

enterprises and ad copy¹⁶⁴. In the case of Latin America, the geopolitical division of developed and undeveloped takes on a somewhat arbitrary guise, with some big city neighbourhoods (i.e., Las Condes in Santiago, Barrio Norte in Buenos Aires) possessing a decidedly first world air, while others, a short distance away, remain firmly planted in the realm of the backward and of the have-nots.

Perhaps as an acknowledgement of this discrepancy, the *Nueva narrativa* more or less openly engages in a series of confrontations with all levels of the societies. These clashes manifest themselves primarily through the re-reading, critique and re-writing of previously existing narratives in a hyper-conscious, brashly public process of creation, construction and dialogue. Notwithstanding, possible contradictions arise even in the earliest stages of this multifaceted attempt to narrate contemporary worlds. If these stories and novels are an attempt at writing as an attempt to construct identity, how can we reconcile this with the supposed impossibility of textualizing a cohesive subject? If the cohesive subject has lost critical legitimacy, is the project doomed from the start?

Taking the postmodern approach to subjectivity as a critical base, or general backdrop, it is clear that this continuing debate is in fact made up of a series of contemporary theories of identity crisis which converge and occasionally overlap, in order to make a case for the critical demise of the subject. One must then ask, which are the primary, most effective, theories of subjectivity (or the death thereof) for a globalized, consumer-oriented generation, and how are they manifested or disputed in

¹⁶⁴ The Seattle riots of the fall of 1999 are a good indicator of this trend among some young people in the United States

the fiction of this generation? In a world in which borders are blurred by the much touted easy access to all corners of the globe, how does one reconcile the ever-forceful needs of still- developing national identities (because they do still exist, albeit in different forms, and must in no case be denied) with what we have already seen to be a textual tidal wave of self-enforced assimilation?

The City as Seen from Above

Vivo en Libertador/ entre Canning
y Salguero/ tengo un coche sport/
una estancia y un velero "Soy un
bacan" La Jóven guardia

Un pseudo punkito, con el acento finito/
quiere hacerse el chico malo/ tuerce la
boca, se arregla el pelito/ toma un trago y
se vuelve a Belgrano . "La Rubia tarada"
Sumo

I mentioned in an earlier chapter that the texts of the *Nueva narrativa*, and therefore their protagonists, can unhesitatingly be characterized as belonging to an overwhelmingly middle class, urban environment. This applies in the case of the Latin American texts, where characters in texts by Fresán, Fuguet, Gómez, Cívale and others travel, shop for imported records (Fuguet- *Mala onda* and Fresán- "La Forma del shopping center") and make professional dates in chat rooms (Cívale- *Perra virtual*). This is also the case with Mañas' character Carlos, in the Spanish *Historias del Kronen*, who does not have to work during his vacations, and whose father suggests "Si quieres,

te podríamos enviar a Francia, como a tu hermana¹⁶⁵" (66), in a vaguely enthusiastic attempt to keep his son off the late night/early morning highways of Madrid. Finally, it may be assumed that the literary model of identification here is *American Psycho's* Patrick Bateman, the well-groomed epitome of the young urban moneyed classes, as was discussed extensively in Chapter 1. The imaginary city where he lives plays and hunts, Manhattan, is also the city against which all others are measured throughout the corpus. As Matías explains to the reader in *Mala onda*, "...ir a Nueva York huevón; meterse al CBGB, cachar a la Patti Smith en vivo. ¡Esa es vida pendejo, no esto! Un día en Manhattan equivale a seis meses en Santiago¹⁶⁶" (58).

The shared economic and spatial experience of the characters, which is the rule rather than the exception in the literature, acts as a force of both inclusion and exclusion in the narratives, often simultaneously. The upper middle class financial and physical freedom which the characters have, along with their ability to move within "progressive", Americanized¹⁶⁷ spaces, allows them a certain freedom which does not pass unnoticed, for example, by those who narrate the fictional experience of other characters who reside in smaller towns. "La gallada es más tranquila que un poster, más tropical y en familia, envidiosos de los locos reventados que aparecen en los cuentos de

¹⁶⁵ "If you want, we can send you to France, like your sister."

¹⁶⁶ "Or go to New York man; go to CBGBs, go see Patti Smith in concert. That's life, man, not this! One day in Manhattan is like six months in Santiago" (57)

¹⁶⁷ Wagner tackles this concept in *A Sociology of Modernity: Liberty and Discipline* (1994), complaining that the theoretical positioning of the U.S at the head of modernization, or as a model modern society is all too widespread, and is too easily accepted. He further locates this not wholly complementary tendency within a "non-American" critical space, stating that "then it takes the form of 'Anti-Americanism' (180). Wagner argues that "concretely, these phenomena have very little to do with the US. The reference [...] indicates nothing other than that the US tends to be seen as a more (liberal) modern society" (180).

Fuguet¹⁶⁸" (Gómez 28). The narrator here draws a comparison between his own experience and that of the big-city boys who he admires, although they in turn would rather be in New York, experiencing the intensity of life in Manhattan. Apart from Mañas' Carlos, who does not seem to suffer any envy towards the U.S (be it vis-a-vis products or an imagined, unattainable lifestyle), or conceive of it in the mythical-mystical manner many of his contemporaries do, a great percentage of the protagonists, particularly in texts by Fresán and Fuguet, define their personal space in terms of what they lack due to their pitifully non-North American condition. "En otro shopping-center Forma carga su walkman con canciones de Jonathan Richman...No se venden CD's de Jonathan Richman en los shopping centers. Forma siente esto como una verdadera injusticia¹⁶⁹" (Fresán *Trabajos* 185).

Notwithstanding the attractions and undoubted advantages of big-city living, the constantly changing high stakes make it difficult for the great majority of the characters to be certain of their position or of their identity from one moment to the next. Easy economic access also means a dizzyingly quick social overturn, fads which last less and less time, and as a result, an unwavering ability to finance one's stay at the top and thus remain within "the market". The key to effective survival in the upscale urban jungle is to be identified with whatever is new. Matías, in *Mala onda*, becomes extremely upset when he realizes that the surprise (cocaine) which he brought his friend from Brazil has not only already become old hat within their group of friends, but that he himself was

¹⁶⁸ "The guys are calmer than a poster; more tropical and family-like, jealous of the crazed nuts who appear in those stories by Fuguet."

left out of the group initiation because he was travelling. All at once the exclusivity of travel abroad loses its cachet, having been confronted with the impossibility of being everywhere at once, so as to be "in" on everything. Similarly, Patrick Bateman and his cronies can not move an inch without their Zagat restaurant guides, and become not only confused but completely disoriented when non-rated restaurants are mentioned. The tension caused by the permanent quest for material belonging, and thus a certain prestige, leads to an incredible frustration whose eventual outlet is often the cathartic questioning and challenging of the system which feeds and therefore perpetuates this frenzy *ad nauseum*. Ultimately, the characters' sense of identity, which is intimately linked to the act of appearing in the trendily correct places is thrown off balance. Just living in a certain city is not enough to confirm one's identity; it is more important to be seen in the chosen parts of the city.

In the case of Buenos Aires, the sociologists Margulis and Urresti are among those critics who have addressed the matter of the intense love-hate relationship which youth cultures appear to maintain with urban settings. The pros and cons of the city are debated by the characters of more than one novel, often with the same inconclusive result. The protagonists of Gómez' "Extrañas costumbres orales" can not seem to make up their minds about Santiago, changing their opinions of the city almost whimsically:

-La cordillera se ve rosada. ¿Qué ciudad del mundo puede ofrecer un espectáculo así?

¹⁶⁹ "In another shopping centre, Forma puts some Jonathan Richman songs into his walkman...They don't sell Jonathan Richman Cds in shopping centres. Forma feels this is a true

-¿Suiza?

-Pero eso es un país. Amo esta ciudad.

-Hace un rato dijiste que te caía mal.

-Tiene cosas buenas y cosas malas¹⁷⁰ (137).

In *Historias del Kronen* Carlos and Roberto discuss Madrid in some detail, with what amounts to the same vacillating attitude taken by their Chilean contemporaries :

-Tengo ganas de irme, ya estoy hasta el culo de todo esto. No aguanto más esta ciudad. Necesito aire puro, playas, esas cosas...

-A mí me gusta Madrid. Aquí nadie te pregunta de dónde vienes ni se preocupa si tienes una camiseta de Milikaka o no. Cada cual va a su rollo y punto. Cada movida tiene su zona...

-Nada. A mi también me gusta Madrid, pero tiene muchas cosas malas¹⁷¹ (95)

injustice.”

¹⁷⁰ “-The mountains look pinkish. What other city in the world could put on this kind of show?

-Switzerland?

-But that’s a country. I love this city.

-A minute ago you said you couldn’t stand it.

-It has its good and bad points.”

¹⁷¹ “-I feel like leaving. I’m sick of all this. I can’t stand this city anymore. I need pure air, beaches, that stuff...

-I like Madrid. Here nobody asks you where you’re from or worries if you’re wearing a Milikaka t-shirt or not. Every one has there own thing and that’s it. Each group has their own area...

-No, I also like Madrid, but it has good and bad points”

Although the protagonists' attitude vis-a-vis the city appears changeable at first, the relation is in fact one of intense emotions, which may swing between exaggerated love and hate with surprising ease, as may be seen from the above quotations, but which are never truly arbitrary or trivial . One of the main focuses of Margulis and Urresti's article are the so-called "urban tribes" , who are described as a sub-culture which manifests an "actitud contestataria al enmarañado paisaje urbano"¹⁷² (4). Certainly the city and its codes of inclusion and exclusion (some of which are imposed by the young people themselves) are a natural point of conflict for young people, especially those from the lower classes who bear the double burden of their age (which makes them automatically suspect) and their socio-economic condition which often triggers even harsher prejudices, and prevents them from acquiring those "necessary", market-approved, products which act as their passport to the inner circle. Although the characters in the fictional corpus enunciate their discontent vis-a-vis the cities they inhabit, in no uncertain terms and with certain symbolic spaces (i.e. shopping centers) bearing the brunt of the attacks, one can not speak of a tribal or even a group situation within the literature itself. The struggle being realized is not a collective one at the textual level. This is not to suggest that there is no discussion of particular groups and the exclusive circuits¹⁷³ and geographies within which they move in the city. Matías for example mentions **Juancho's**, a pub which "es el local de los elegidos, el de la juventud dorada...no cualquiera tiene acceso, eso es verdad. Hay una guardia en la puerta para

¹⁷² "A contentious attitude to the tangled urban landscape"

¹⁷³ This is perhaps a more apt word to use than "spaces" because as we see in cases like *Mala onda*, the characters truly are on a circular track which as wide as it may appear, will still lead them back to their origins.

cuidar que todos los que ingresan sean G.C.U.¹⁷⁴.." (54). Similarly, the narrator in Gómez' "De cómo matar ninjas electricas..." delineates other urban spaces which are associated with specific groups. "La galería del Plaza es para los volados rascas del Liceo Enrique Molina. Para los compadres del Charles de Gaulle y el Alemán están los videos de la galería Martínez¹⁷⁵" (28). There are also clear comparisons made between large and small cities, which have different social and commercial dynamics. "...no hay comparación con ir a Providencia en Santiago. El Mercado Municipal equivale aquí al Mall Panorámico¹⁷⁶" (28).

Finally, the privileged positions occupied by those who live in the capital cities of the Southern Cone remain one of the more influential elements, and a factor in the development of a critical reading of these texts. Taking as a reference point the discrepancy between what one can see and do in Manhattan as opposed to in Boise, Iowa, the gaps between, for example, Buenos Aires and the rest of Argentina (except for perhaps cities like Rosario and Córdoba) are culturally insurmountable. This of course is only relevant as far as the middle class is concerned. Above or below a certain level of income, the location becomes irrelevant to one's social position and possibilities, and the ability to become "globalized" fades significantly¹⁷⁷.

¹⁷⁴ "the local spot for the chosen people, golden youth...not everyone has access, it's true. There's a guard at the door to make sure that everyone who comes in is 'our kind of people'."

¹⁷⁵ "The Plaza mall is for the spaced out trash from the Liceo Enrique Molina. For the guys from the Charles de Gaulle and the Alemán, there are the video places in the Martínez mall."

¹⁷⁶ "There's no comparison with Providencia in Santiago. The Mercado Municipal here equals the Mall Panorámico."

¹⁷⁷ In the sense that the rich always have access to the world, and the poor are unlikely to attain this access, or to be able to enjoy its benefits.

Although there are numerous references to specific social groups, the relationships which are critiqued in the narratives, and which are placed under the strongest microscope by the various narrators, are realized almost exclusively at the individual level, although the repercussions of the process itself may bear traits which are applicable at a generational level. The literary quest for identity remains a mirage for the individual, even in a time and a place where the subject as a concept has been dismantled and stripped of value, except perhaps as a publicity concept. What has changed is the overwhelming sense of despondency which comes mixed with an extremely high level of expectation from life if not necessarily from society. This expectation, combined with other socio-political factors which were examined in earlier chapters, points textually to a widespread sense that something is missing. Perhaps Jameson's use of the term "nostalgía" is imprecise in that the textualized and fictionalized longing is not necessarily for what once was and now is lost. Carlos' whining in *Historias del Kronen* that even rebellion is pointless, is *not* actually the voicing of his inner desire to rebel as youth once rebelled. It is instead a highly cynical response to the outdated, patronizing discourse which assumes that therein lies the problem- that today's youth do not know how to properly assume what has been the traditional mantle of youthful revolt. There is a sense that something is not quite right, or is lacking. It would however be a mistake to assume that there is a general longing for the way things appear to have been, according to the cable TV documentaries on the 1960's and 70's which have assumed the role of main supplier of the past. The project which emerges in the literature, more than an attempt to narrate a life, or a living

process, is a cynical testimony to how an individual may swim a little before s/he sinks along with everyone else. This extremely dark proposition does *not* in any way preclude the characters from confronting what they consider to be problems within their respective societies. If this seems contradictory, then the wrong critical criteria are being employed.

The superficial comforts and material potential of the lifestyle enjoyed by the greater part of the narrators and protagonists, are made clear at the beginning of a number of narratives. Occasionally they form a foreground rather than just a backdrop for the narrative, as in the case of the short story "Extrañas costumbres orales" by Sergio Gómez. In this short story from *McOndo*, there is an unending murmur of ongoing assessments of material and social capital, ranging from porcelain tea sets to rumoured invitations to attend mass with the royal family of Monaco. A detailed picture emerges, of the stratum of society which has, to all appearances, benefited the most from the changes wrought by globalization and the rise of consumerism. Ironically though, these same people make a noted effort to obscure the fact that this privilege and status is newfound rather than generations old. "Tus viejos se hicieron socios del Regine's antes de que se instalara en Chile, según tus cálculos. Compraron acciones como hicieron para ingresar al Country Club¹⁷⁸" (Fuguet 116).

The time of the narratives, within which the characters develop, begins therefore with the rise of the buyable, whether the products in question are material goods or the ability to gain entrance into previously impenetrable areas of society, thus feeding a

¹⁷⁸ "Your parents were members of Regine's even before it opened in Chile, according to your calculations. They bought stock, like they did to get into the Country Club"

certain image that becomes class identity. Even more innovative though, and intimately linked with this image-related purchase, is the ability to buy a personal identity, as we will see in detail further on. The idea of identity as a commodity or a product to be bought and sold, it must be noted, was not created in a vacuum. The social, economic and political process which led to its success and its widespread implementation were carefully thought out with a target public in mind; none other than the same middle class which appears in its fictionalized form in the novels and short stories being analyzed here. Rather than returning to the extremely telling link between the dictatorships of the 1970's and 80's and their decision to impose neo-liberal economic models, a significant fact which may be taken as a given at this point, and which was mentioned in previous chapters, it would be more productive at this juncture to focus on the resulting central figure, better known as the buyer/consumer, as s/he has been defined by theorists of the globalized consumer culture.

Conceiving the Consumer

No estoy solo, puedo salir a comprar
-Los Divididos

Tomás Moulian, a Chilean sociologist, first introduced the idea of the "credit card citizen" in his book *Chile actual: Anatomía de un mito*. Although the spectre of this character, whose nature already existed to some extent in the theories of earlier critics of consumer culture in Europe such as Henri Lefebvre, Moulian's analysis and

conclusions are particularly relevant here because of the comprehensive approach adopted; one which goes well beyond superficial attempts to define consumption as a self-sufficient phenomenon which either existed since time immemorial or was created recently out of nothing. Moulán is eminently clear about the phenomenon which he perceives to be the end result of a long process which took place in the country he insists on calling "Chile Actual". In this country, whose relevant history we can trace back to September 11, 1973, "la identidad del Yo se construye a través de los objetos"¹⁷⁹ (106). In defending this position, Moulán, like Eugenio Tironi and José Joaquín Brunner, has no qualms about linking contemporary developments in the market and all its manifestations to issues of the past, or to other discourses including politics and of course the re-vamped formation and/or destruction of the individual. The responsibility for the present, deplorable, troubles with identity and citizenship are laid squarely at the feet of external agents. In this case external does not refer to a foreign element but rather to a force outside the power of the individuals themselves. Moulán does not pretend at any point that the current disintegration of the cohesiveness that existed previously¹⁸⁰, even if only in the imagination of those condemned to live in the present, is the result of a decadence of the individual. Throughout *Chile Actual* and later in its follow-up *El Consumo me consume*, Moulán insists on locating this phenomenon within both its global and national context. More curious perhaps in this day and age is Moulán's examination not only of cultural but also long term ethical repercussions.

¹⁷⁹ "One's identity is constructed through objects." This direct association of the self to products is directly linked to ideas expressed by Baudrillard in "The System of Objects".

Following the more flexible or "affirmative" model which Rosenau ascribes to social scientists, Moulán does not address the death of the traditional subject in much detail, but concentrates instead on the emergence of a new character whom he refers to alternately as a "weekend citizen" or a "credit card citizen". The core of Moulán's theory is based on the idea that the access to material goods, as was mentioned earlier, forms the base for both "the construction of subjectivity and the relation with society" (41), questions which are, for all effects and purposes, inseparable.

Pensé en Chile y en mi vida, que es como lo que más me interesa. Cuando algo parecido a una depresión comenzó a rondarme, cambié de tema y me concentré en las vitrinas; caché ,por ejemplo, que las poleras O'Brian se venden en todas partes. Me sentí más seguro¹⁸¹ (Fuguet 10).

A close analysis of Matías' interior monologue on the beaches of Río illustrates how a fictionalized version of Moulán's "citizen" not only actively defers his identity, or the thought of it, but also chooses to allow himself to be subsumed by a publicity-based consciousness. Moulán suggests that consumption gives purpose to life. While this observation is easily justified in novels like *Historias del Kronen*, or more

¹⁸⁰ The sense of togetherness and unity which one often encounters in memoirs of past times, particularly of the 1960's and early 70's, which often reeks of an incomparable nostalgia far removed from what one could call actual occurrences.

¹⁸¹ "I thought about Chile and then, of course, about my life, which is what I seem to think about most of the time anyway. A few times I felt that cloud of depression coming over me, then I'd just quickly change the topic- like, I'd study the t-shirts in the store windows. It was somehow comforting to see the same shirts in the shops and know that they're sold here too, not just in Chile. It made me feel more safe, or secure, somehow." (2)

drastically in the case of *American Psycho*, where the concepts of consumerism and identity join in the twisted mind of the protagonist to form a cannibalistic process of appropriation which is in fact consumption in its most basic form, the reader would not be mistaken in seeing a trajectory whose final, albeit forced, result was the practical equation of life and consumption.

A “depression” begins to filter into Matías’ consciousness as he analyzes his own “subjectivity” and “relation with society” (Moulian 41) . As this could conceivably lead to questions and uncomfortable conclusions, it is quickly smothered by a taught and assimilated publicity-based discourse which is never put into question. The alienation experienced by the narrator/protagonist as he soaks up the sun is placated only by his conscious attempt to divert his attention from his internal, personal anxiety, from his disconnectedness to that which is superficial and external. There is indeed a blatant discrepancy between the glorifying, pacifying language of globalization and the consumer society, and the increasing discontent, if not the withdrawal and alienation of the population. What has become increasingly thematized and apparent in this literature is that from the initial role and function of consumption as a force capable of deferring or masking the profound importance of the rejection, disintegration and loss of coherent identity, a metamorphosis has occurred in which the self is not only consumed endlessly but in fact becomes commodified for re-sale in a different package. Matías’ recognition of an international brand name is not an orienting factor meant to help him locate himself within an international framework, in a country far from home. His relief, which

is more important, is at having recognized himself in the shop window. His identity is for sale, just as the shirts are.

A similar process occurs in "La Forma del Shopping Center" by Fresán. In this short story Forma, the mall-strolling protagonist, undergoes a commercial-like moment of existential doubt. It resembles a television commercial, because the reader can easily visualize the narrative as blocked out by a camera, with the final sequence showing the protagonist, relieved at having discovered the one product which he really needs to complete his happiness. Unfortunately for Forma, in this culture of consumption there is never an end to this search. There is always one more product missing and thus an unending process of deferral. In this story, a foil to the belief system is provided in the guise of Forma's sister, known only as "La Dinamitera loca de los shopping centers" (the Crazy Shopping Center Dynamiter). Whereas Forma seems to believe in the potential contentedness and completeness which one can find in the mall, he can not help but recall his sister's comment that "La gente desaparece en los shopping-centers, te lo rejuro"¹⁸² (182).

Here we return to Moulán's comment about consumption regulating one's ability to interact within society. Both he and other critics of consumption, including the rather more optimistic Rob Shields- author of *Lifestyle Shopping: the Subject of Consumption* (1992), have emphasized the changing nature of the relations between the individual and his/her surrounding community. For example, while Moulán acknowledges the public, or social role of the mall as an "espacio intercomunal, un

¹⁸² "People disappear in shopping centres; I swear."

lugar de peregrinaje¹⁸³¹⁸⁴”, Shields at first implies a more productive relation, speaking of “consumption as a form of social exchange through which community, influence and micro powers...are actualized” (99). Later in the same text however he admits to a “frustration with shopping centres... and reactions to their failure to deliver on promises of an experience of social centrality” (110). Read in the context of the eventual, often powerful disenchantment with this remodeled society as experienced by Forma, Matías, Roberto and of course Daniela in *Buenos Aires vice versa*, the topic for debate here is not so much the sense of betrayal but rather the articulation of a great frustration, or alternately, the succumbing to an unsatisfactory but somehow pleasurable system.

An Aesthetic of Survival

Please don't wake me/ no don't shake me/
leave me where I am/ I'm only sleeping –
“I'm Only Sleeping” The Beatles

The expression which best defines Fresán's Forma's floating, never-ending attempt to somehow keep his head above water and thus secure some sort of identity, knowing full well the impossibility of said exercise as expressed through his lack of a name, is

¹⁸³ “intercommunal space, a place of pilgrimage”

¹⁸⁴ This statement is in a sense highly self-contradictory. A place of pilgrimage is only communal because many people go there. There is generally little interpersonal contact in these

pinpointed by Argentine critic and writer Eduardo Rosenzvaig. “Ni participar, ni ser, ni evolucionar: **zafar**, dicho en el lenguaje coloquial argentino¹⁸⁵” (*Símbolos* 4). The verb **zafar** is not effectively translated by the supposed English equivalent “to survive”, as survival as a concept does not contain the same deeply inherent sense of desperation and short-term exaltation felt by those who have, even for a little while, outrun the long hand of inevitable failure and mediocrity (or in the best case scenario, stagnation) experienced and proclaimed by the protagonists of globalized, post-dictatorship literature. **Zafar** is perhaps better, though still not perfectly, translated by the expression “to save oneself”, due in particular to the rather more selfish nature of the phrase.

Fresán’s character Alejo is another, more disturbing fictionalized manifestation of this propensity for surviving at all costs with one’s head down. He is the personification of the eternal survivor, of the verb **zafar** in its truest meaning, surfing more or less unscathed through a dangerous time and place. Alejo survives the Argentine-English South Atlantic war in “La Soberanía nacional” in *Historia argentina*, a fairly substantial drug habit in both *Vidas* and *Trabajos manuales*, and finally his potentially deadly habit of falling down staircases:

Alejo rodando por una escalera. Y más atrás aún, Alejo rodando por otra escalera. La colección de escaleras por las que rodó Alejo. ¿Cómo? ¿Me vas a

places; rather the contact takes place between the pilgrim (who is himself generally there for a selfish purpose) and the object of the pilgrimage (a saint, wise person, etc.)

¹⁸⁵ “Not to participate, not to be, not to evolve; *zafar*, as they say in colloquial Argentinian.”

*decir que Alejo no rodó todavía por tu escalera? Pero si lo conocés desde hace años. Pensé que eran íntimos amigos*¹⁸⁶ (86).

Alejo is fated to bring bad luck to all those around him, but is never seriously harmed himself, or killed, in the ridiculous situations he experiences¹⁸⁷. Ideally he interact minimally on a personal level with those around him because of his tendency to inadvertently causes them harm:

El médico, en cambio, no fue tan afortunado...El primero de una serie de ataques cardíacos. El nacimiento de Alejo hizo girar la llave en la cerradura de la muerte de ese doctor...Mala suerte. Se sabe que Alejo tuvo, trajo, tiene y trae mala suerte. Guardar en un lugar seco y oscuro. Manténgase lejos del alcance de los niños...¹⁸⁸ (86)

In the reader's mind, this character begins to take on a strange, almost superhero-like cast due to his persistent invincibility. He does not inspire loathing or even fear; a fact that may seem strange in relation to a character who causes so much pain, including to his small daughter Selene. Alejo is a survivor. The text contains

¹⁸⁶ "Alejo rolling down a staircase. And even farther back, Alejo rolling down another staircase. The collection of staircases which Alejo has rolled down. *What? Are you telling me Alejo has never rolled down your stairs? But you've known him for years. I thought you were close friends.*"

¹⁸⁷ See for example the second last chapter of *Trabajos manuales* in which Alejo confesses to his brother that he was in Waco, Texas right before the fatal confrontation.

¹⁸⁸ "The doctor, on the other hand, was not as fortunate...The first of a series of heart attacks. Alejo's birth turned the key in the lock which was the doctor's death...Bad luck. It is known that Alejo has, brought, has and brings bad luck. Keep in a dry dark place. Keep out of the reach of children..."

various references to Alejo's effect on his surroundings, accepting both it and his inability to kill himself as both unavoidable and natural. Curiously, Alejo is not shunned by his family or friends, nor is he ever openly accused of causing harm to others. Instead, a more cosmic approach is taken, as in the above quotation with the reference to the keys of life and death. Alejo appears there in the guise of a benign Angel of Death. He is absolved completely of any responsibility because his actions are excused as being his sad fate. At times Alejo appears in what, surprisingly, could be called a positive role, serving as a life force to those around him rather than as a magnetic Grim Reaper:

“Señores pasajeros, tengan a bien no tener miedo; si yo estoy aquí no les pasará nada...Todo el tiempo me están pasando cosas espantosas. Pero siempre sobrevivo. Esto del avión es apenas una más de esas cosas espantosas. Y, como yo no voy a morir, supongo que ustedes tampoco...”¹⁸⁹ (154).

In this way Alejo becomes a poster-boy for his era. He does not actually possess an identity in the traditional sense; instead his character is a collection of externally-programmed tendencies, a conduit for the articulation of personal relationships which are almost never described in terms of exchange or enrichment, only destruction or at the most survival. Alejo, rather than an identity is the bearer of an identification, or a name-tag which he no longer tries to evade. By having assumed this label, he allows himself to be subsumed, by it in the same way that the young girl in

Cristina Civalé's "Perra virtual" (from the book of the same name) becomes a prostitute every time she assumes her chat-room name "Luz"¹⁹⁰.

Alejo enters the physical orbit of others and changes their lives permanently, but without leaving a calling card as it were. More than a character he is a force, forcing the reader to wonder whether an allegorical reading is not in order. He makes people disappear¹⁹¹, even as he himself has disappeared into a cloud of unwanted and perhaps unwarranted survival skills. Luz too is forced to disappear, or to suppress her feelings and identity in order to pass through society. Disappointed by the discrepancy between the upper class, sophisticated voice in the chat-room and the gaggle of virginal teenage computer geeks she encounters in real life, Luz reverts to product mode, becoming her assumed character rather than herself. "Con los ojos cerrados hizo el amor con cada uno de ellos y trató de que ninguno notase cómo una única lágrima le rodaba por la mejilla, creando una recta perfecta que terminaba en su mentón que ahora temblaba¹⁹²," (*Perra* 24).

One of the more curious and perhaps contradictory combinations which has emerged from readings of the literary texts is a strong correlation between the concept

¹⁸⁹ "Fellow passengers, please do not be afraid; if I am here nothing will happen to you...Dreadful things are always happening to me. But I always survive. This business with the plane is just one more of those dreadful things. And, since I am not going to die, I doubt you will either..."

¹⁹⁰ This short story examines the importance and the power of labels, focusing on names and the effects they produce independently in people who have no way of knowing the person behind it. "Su doble apellido la impresionó...Desde que leyó ese nombre sabía que de él iba enamorarse, del nombre..." (Civalé 1998:18).

¹⁹¹ One fascinating example of this is Selene, Alejo's small daughter who we first meet in *Vidas de santos*, hiding permanently behind a Ninja Turtle's mask.

¹⁹² "With her eyes closed, she made love to each of them and tried not to let them see the one tear which rolled down her cheek, making a straight line which ended at her chin, which trembled."

of disappearance or self-repression and conversely, the ability of a character to maintain some vestige of his/her identity. To be present in the mall, or the culture of the mall and to disappear are in no way contradictory ideas. In fact, it may be that only by disappearing in the way that Rosenzvaig conceives of it, by effectively ceasing to evolve¹⁹³ or participate, that one may in fact “**zafar**”. Forma, notwithstanding his elegies to the wondrous nature of malls, remains present as a character and as a not-yet wholly extinguished or compromised identity because of his quiet, still unsatisfied search for the elusive Jonathan Richman CD; a quest he maintains within the parameters of apparent (public) contentedness. In cases where the protagonists raise their textual heads and shatter the complacency by demanding more than the all-providing system can offer, no matter how trivial or frivolous the request, they put themselves at risk and become targets in the best tradition of literary youth searching for an identity.

Connected to the idea of mere physical or social disappearance (as in the ability to be “alone” in a public place, unnoticed) is that of an emotional self-burial, the fatal suppression of any last vestiges of an identity which occurs in both *Historias del Kronen* and *American Psycho*. The case of Roberto, in the former, is in many ways more typical and more disturbing than that of the sociopathic Bateman. Roberto, discussing with a psychiatrist the episode in which Fierro is accidentally killed during

¹⁹² “With her eyes closed, she made love to each of them and tried not to let them see the one tear which rolled down her cheek, making a straight line which ended at her chin, which trembled.”

¹⁹³ Evolution must in no way be confused here with change. The characters and persons in the texts in fact change continuously; as often as they change their outfits or fads. Evolution and its suggestion of continuity leading to a more developed, more sophisticated being, would in a sense go against the numbing, pacifying nature of the consumer beast as it is portrayed in the novels and short stories.

his own birthday party, confesses the difficulty he had in hiding his secret emotional, sexual desires from his friends. In order to successfully cover up his sentiments, Roberto allowed himself to be swept along with whatever the group was doing, even at the cost of potentially losing himself in the process.

-Pero no puedes seguir escondiéndote siempre, encerrándote...

-Eso es lo que hace Carlos. Se encierra, se encierra, nunca dice lo que siente, es como...Lo desnudaba en mi mente. Me imaginaba situaciones y conversaciones. Inverosímiles desde luego, pero es que a fuerza de encerrarme, esas fantasías eran mi única salida ¿comprende? Eran mi pequeño secreto, un residuo de libertad fuera del opresivo círculo del grupo¹⁹⁴ (Mañas 231-2)

Eduardo Rosenzvaig has theorized a similar situation, at a more general societal level. He explains the manner in which the subject begins to fragment while attempting to adapt to a more hegemonic discourse capable, ultimately, of destroying identity. Just as in Roberto's case, priorities are sacrificed and inverted in order to avoid conflict and maintain the social status quo.

¹⁹⁴ -But you can not keep hiding, closing yourself off...

-That's what Carlos does. He shuts himself up, shuts himself up, never says what he feels, it's like...I undressed him in my mind. I used to imagine situations and conversations. Impossible of course, but after closing myself off, these fantasies were my only way out, you see? They were my little secret, a trace of liberty outside the oppressive circle of the group.

El impacto sobre la esencia creadora del sujeto social conduce al deterioro de la autoestima, a inmersiones de impotentización...si pierde el proceso identificador, entonces sobreviene su fragilización subjetiva. Oirá como único el discurso de adaptación posibilista, generando pasividad frente al cuadro de explotación y denigración; un sometimiento raso...Un sujeto escindido, jerarquizando aquello que lo somete, abdicando de necesidades y sentimientos, identificándose con el agresor...sumisión del cuerpo, obturación de las actitudes críticas¹⁹⁵ (*Zonas* 19).

This final secret, this one last bit of identity which was withheld from group scrutiny is typical of the diminished core of being which acts a final anchor of an ever-less apparent identity in a great part of the characters. In Roberto's case, as in the case of Javier Messen, discussed in the previous chapter, this remaining thread of self surfaces only after the breaking point, which in both cases involves a death. In both cases as well, it is only these most intimate matters (sexual orientation and procreation, respectively), which can even attempt to guard the vestiges of identity, due to their own position deep down inside one's being; hidden often even from oneself. Unfortunately, in the case of *Historias del Kronen*, once the dam breaks and a decision is made not to just *zafar* but to resurface and actually live, a tendency emerges which leads to self-

¹⁹⁵ "The impact on the essence which creates the social subject leads to the deterioration of self-esteem, to an immersion in impotence...if the identificatory process is lost, a subjective weakening follows. The only discourse heard will be one of adaptation, generating passivity in the face of scenes of exploitation and denigration; a total submission...A fragmented subject, hierarchizing that to which s/he submits, abdicating from needs and sentiments, identifying with the aggressor...submission of the body, twisting of critical attitudes."

destruction by turning the formerly repressed emotions into a self-directed anger at not having expressed oneself sooner. One could call it guilt but that would minimize the damage done. It is the difficulty experienced by those who are shocked to find a solid core within themselves which is at odds not only with the world around them but also with their previously held perceptions of themselves and their being. In many texts the shock of finally confronting a self, or the closest thing to an identity, rather than a constructed image or mask results in a withdrawal or an abrupt about-face concerning the process of self-discovery. This reversal, felt most strongly in stories including “Perra virtual” and in *Mala onda*, may seem like a betrayal to the reader¹⁹⁶ who expects a continuation of what in the latter appears to be a defiant attitude towards the surrounding culture and in the former seems like the protagonist’s power to confront the world on her own terms. Luz, by succumbing to the aristocratic last name (and therefore identificatory package) her supposed client gives her on-line, and by crossing the emotional line between Luz the prostitute and her true self, ends up unable to escape the label which she herself has chosen. Matías, after publicly challenging and alienating his parents, his school, his friends, and in a sense his entire social class, ends up on his back in a high class brothel, sniffing cocaine with his father. The conclusion the reader comes to is that the most important skill these days is an ability to replace one’s mask at crucial moments, and to gracefully and quietly withdraw from combat. Naturally, one must have the means to afford this aesthetic of survival. Matías, by rejecting the possibility of true marginalization, accepts the law of the Father.

¹⁹⁶ especially in the latter case where the turnaround comes at the end of a long, drawn-out attempt to evade what turns into an inevitable fate

As was suggested at the beginning of this chapter, the search for a unified individual identity has become an impossible mission. Not necessarily because the concept per se no longer exists but, rather, because the protagonists appear unable to carry through and complete the process. The externally applied pressure is just too great no matter how sincere the attempt is. Often this finale becomes difficult for the reader to assimilate, due to the emotional tension which builds throughout the narratives and whose highly unsatisfying, even traitorous, non-conclusions leave one literally gasping with rage and disappointment¹⁹⁷.

Ironically, the only major character who seems capable of maintaining his independence and the closest thing to a whole identity is Alejo's brother, known alternately as Forma and El Aprendiz de brujo. While these monikers may give the impression that he too is a mere collection of masks and roles, they actually represent facets of a fairly integrated character (as integrated a one can find in these texts). Rather than being guided or overwhelmed by these characteristics, as Alejo appears to be, Forma somewhat successfully manages to assimilate them into his life and even derive a certain power from them. The question in his case is- can his success be traced to the character's having distanced himself physically from his native country and his familiar surroundings?

¹⁹⁷ Curiously, it is actually the quintessential Boom novel, Cortázar's *Rayuela* (*Hopscotch*), which comes to mind à-propos the mix of anger and desperation produced by the reading. More specifically the terrible death of the child Rocamadour, which could almost be seen as heralding what his (in fact this present) generation had to look forward to.

Just as Javier¹⁹⁸, Matías¹⁹⁹ and Pablo²⁰⁰ do, the Aprendiz (for lack of a proper name) leaves home, though unlike the last two he is sent away²⁰¹ initially rather than making the choice himself. Later however he abandons the lifestyle his parents have chosen for him (for the second time), and takes to the road in order to find both himself and others²⁰². I say for the second time because he is very open about the moment in his life which most powerfully defined him as a being :

A los ocho años me prohibieron ver la película *Fantasia*. Voy a ser más preciso: a los ocho años me prohibieron volver a ver la película *Fantasia*...En serio, el asunto es que la escena de las escobas embrujadas me convirtió en la persona que el resto del mundo no querría que fuera, y de algún modo hay un antes y un después del *El aprendiz de brujo* en mi vida. Porque sépanlo, yo era diferente antes de ver *Fantasia*. Al menos eso dice mi madre. Me volví loco por culpa de una película de Walt Disney, dice²⁰³ (15).

Conversely, the strongest indication that his brother Alejo's persona is *not* an identity which he can possess or take responsibility for, appears at the moment of what

¹⁹⁸ From "El Borde peligroso de las cosas" in *Nadar de noche*

¹⁹⁹ *Mala onda*

²⁰⁰ "La verdad o las consecuencias" in *McOndo*

²⁰¹ To work as a chef's apprentice in London. See "El aprendiz de brujo" in *Historia argentina*.

²⁰² He comes closer to comprehending his brother's personality than Alejo himself ever does.

²⁰³ "At the age of eight I was forbidden to see the movie *Fantasia*. I will be more specific; at the age of eight I was forbidden to go and see the movie *Fantasia* again...Really, the thing is that the scene with the bewitched brooms turned me into the person that the rest of the world did not want me to become, and in a way there is a before and after *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* in my

was meant to be a crucial transaction, and in a sense, the reverse of what the Disney movie-going experience was for his brother. In *Vidas de santos*, Alejo, along with his mixed-up girlfriend Nina, attempts to bargain with the devil himself for his soul. The deal at the crossroads does not work out because, as the reader quickly realizes, his soul, and indeed all the characteristics he associates with his supposed identity, are not truly his to control or assume.

Without wanting to generalize too much, it would not be wholly unfair to suggest that the brothers ultimately form a yin-yang of subjectivity, a sort of face and counter-face based on the Apprentice as the active one and Alejo taking the role of the acted-upon. The former is incapable of submitting without causing trouble²⁰⁴, and the latter is incapable of effectively resisting in any but an unconscious or even accidental manner.

Although one could argue that this is never convincingly resolved or completed in the texts, the issue, the consistent deferral of concretization, is also part of the process being textualized and problematized here. One interesting possibility in the development of all the abovementioned characters is the constant threat, or draw, of madness. As masters of fluid identity, some of them accept insanity as a sort of stability, while others reject it.

life. Because, you should know, I was different before seeing *Fantasia*. At least that is what my mother says. I went mad because of a Walt Disney movie, she says.”

Musical References: Reshaping Language and Identity

“Yo formé parte de un
ejercito loco/ tenía veinte
años y el pelo muy corto/
Pero mi amigo hubo una
confusión, porque para ellos
el loco era yo”- Sui Generis

“Y la radio nos confunde a
todos ”- Sui Generis

Throughout this chapter, an effort has been made to consider the contradiction between the “search for identity” and the tactical demolition of the notion. As a result we see some of the more common myths and popular images which have been disseminated in relation to youth culture and its varied and confused relation with identity, through both literary texts and other discourses. One very basic element of this search has been left unmentioned until now. It is perhaps the most common and therefore the most often overlooked in critical work due to what may appear at first to be its overly-obvious, non-academic, or shallow nature. I am referring to the idea of the “typical”, or the behaviour and language expected by an informed reader from a character. This idea and way of reading is linked to the stereotypical and to a construction which is the result of both externally imposed beliefs and an internal collaboration on the part of the writer and reader. It may be in reference to, or stem

²⁰⁴ See “El Aprendiz de brujo” where he is first unable to keep his head in the oven for long enough to pass the apprenticeship, and later indicates that he will not remain long in the job his father set up for him.

from, a regionalist belief (e.g. Latin American male characters described as *machista*), a generational stereotype (portraying Baby Boomers as ex-hippies who have abandoned their non-lucrative ideals, or young people as politically naive), or a simple literary model (i.e. a young man/hero who leaves home to seek his fortune). All of these factors that constitute doxa are valuable in evaluating a text and its place within space and time: not only for the recognizable hints which make the reader's job that much easier, but also, of course, for the possibility to re-question and to confront not the stereotypes themselves but rather the manner in which they are employed and played with within the texts.

One such tool for the construction of characters, which I looked at briefly earlier, used to simultaneously reinforce and question popular tactics of youthful self-expression, is the constant reference to contemporary music, cd's, rock groups, etc. as one channel of characters' identification with a particular politics, ideology, or indeed an utter lack thereof. Earlier in this thesis the repeated appearance and mention of these items was examined primarily as they pertain to the textualization of consumer culture, rampant globalization, and intertextuality as a strategy. It was however suggested briefly that the choices made vis-à-vis the specific groups and albums in the stories and novels ought to be considered with more attention, as the mention of particular bands (especially keeping in mind the relative obscurity of some of them) could not be lightly dismissed as having been wholly arbitrary or merely temporal (i.e. mentioning the most popular bands of the decade)²⁰⁵. It is in examining these highly charged cultural and

²⁰⁵ The power of naming in literature is inarguable and ought never be taken for granted, even when the name is only that of a rock band.

literary intertexts beyond their linguistic value that one more facet of identity becomes somewhat clarified or at least acknowledged as a player in the creation of an identificatory myth.

The genre referred to as the *Nueva narrativa* has demonstrated clear and inarguable ties to rock music (as both a cultural influence and a lexical-literary one), particularly as compared to the connection attributed to previous literary generations. In the case of the latter, the connection made was more by association, in that in the 1960s and 70s a certain renaissance was enjoyed in the two fields (literature and music) simultaneously, though there were few actual links between them on a more elemental level. The language employed in earlier texts (i.e. Boom), notwithstanding any specific mention of music, albums or bands which they may have contained, generally maintained a level of vocabulary which was considered better suited to literature and bore little relation to the language of daily life and of the street, which Fresán, Fuguet, Forn, Civalé, Gómez and particularly Mañas have seen fit to employ in their texts²⁰⁶. At the same time, in the case of English language texts like *Less Than Zero* or *American Psycho*, there is little if any radical innovation lexically speaking. Yes, there are specifically “yuppie-era” words employed in that novel, but the overall register and vocabulary of the novel does not break down any linguistic barriers or reject a traditional distance between the spoken and the written in the way that the recent Spanish- language texts do.

²⁰⁶ The most common examples of this change in vocabularies are related primarily to the use of highly regional, generational slang, or the use of the Argentine “vos” instead of the more standard “tú”, which is not used in Argentina but was previously employed as being more “correct”.

The choice of a more true to life, less poetic language has contributed to the construction of a certain image (or series thereof) for the characters and voices within the texts. The registers and levels of language are marked by a vocabulary which is acquired first in family and social settings, and is then refined through the selection and use of what could be called “chosen” elements, pointing to a highly personal decision by characters to align themselves with specific social and fashion trends (i.e. Matías’ not-so casual use of certain English expressions). In fact, in all the narratives, a virtual dismantling of more traditional language occurs; not only in relation to the wholesale rupture of the formal-informal dichotomy, but in the emphatic acquisition of alternate, external vocabularies which help denote the speaker’s posturings and attitudes. Some of the more obvious cases include the discrepancies among characters in Fresán’s “La Soberanía nacional”. These become apparent specifically through fairly straightforward lexical and linguistic hints. In the following two examples, both the register of the language and the vocabulary itself, not to mention the message, differ violently although the two speakers are not only in the same place and moment (the Malvinas war), but are also from not terribly dissimilar backgrounds.

Yo en la guerra. Y de voluntario, además. Algunos flacos me miran como si estuviera loco. Pero yo la tengo super clara. Lo que pasa es que no puedo decirles porqué me anoté en ésta. Tengo que jugarla tipo viva la patria, alta en el cielo, tras su manto de neblina²⁰⁷, se entiende, ¿no?...Porque éste es el plan: apenas salgamos a patrullar y la cosa se ponga densa, yo me voy para un

costado, me hago el herido, y me entrego. Así de corta, loco. Se los digo en inglés. Meic lov not uar²⁰⁸..(89).

And then:

“Estamos aquí reclamando lo que es nuestro por derecho legítimo y de aquí no nos van a sacar. Nuestra bandera jamás ha sido atada al carro del enemigo. Y nosotros somos los hijos de nuestros próceres. No debemos defraudarlos...”²⁰⁹,
(90)

There is a clear attempt here to demonstrate that the language chosen and used by characters goes beyond the merely class-oriented or economic, to expose a world view which may be either chosen, as in the first paragraph, or inculcated, as we see in the second. From what we have seen up to this point, it can be understood that in the texts of this genre it is precisely this choice which marks the boundaries of the individual (even as part of a group), beyond what is learned at home or school. Moreover, for the reader, the presence of the two levels of communication will likely spark an identificatory process as well, as they recognize their own tendencies in one or

²⁰⁷ Taken from the “Song of the Malvinas”.

²⁰⁸ “Me in the war. And as a volunteer no less. Some guys look at me as if I were nuts. But I’ve got it all worked out. The thing is I can’t tell them why I signed up for this. I have to be like long live the homeland, see?...Because this is the plan; as soon as we go out on patrol and things get rough, I go off to the side, pretend I’m hurt and give myself up. That simple, man. I’ll tell them in English. Make love, not war...”

the other character's speech and style. This particular strategy in the texts ought not be overlooked, as the ability of the reader to be drawn in by references, expressions and statements is endless, and serves to reinforce the split within the text.

The selection of and reference to music has led to both a liberation from certain conventions and a transparent delineation of groups of identification and desire (occasionally simultaneously). In order to comprehend or accept the specifically textual role which music plays in relation to the question of identity, the first step ought to be an exploration of just how or why it could be seen as linked to a possible literary "project". Music and literature make an intriguing pair in that while they undoubtedly exist in a parallel sense, each expressing ideas in their own, unique way, there are numerous occasions in which the two intertwine or at least converge. This is sometimes due to creative or artistic reasons but often it has more to do with a moment or a place, where they both appear, reflecting one another to the ultimate advantage of both.

The first signs in the texts that alert the reader to a trend present in both language and music are related to the issue which in its broader incarnation has occupied a great deal of this thesis; the forces of globalization and resulting manifestations within the enunciative practices of youth cultures, in their chosen form of self-expression. Simply put, particularly in the case of Latin American texts, a wave of English and English language music has inundated the novels and short stories. The use of a "foreign" language or "foreign" music ought to be regarded as a sign of social or class-based distinction and is by no means a new one in literature in general or even in

²⁰⁹ "We are here reclaiming what is ours by legal right and nobody will remove us from here. Our flag has never been tied to the enemy's wagon. And we are the sons of our forefathers. we

Latin American texts. One has only to look at a classic novel like the Chilean *Martín Rivas* in order to witness the somewhat overly casual use of French terms and phrases as a mark of breeding and wealth among the both the old and young characters.

In the selection of texts here a hierarchy emerges vis-à-vis the relationship of the non-Anglophone speaking character with the English language and English music. One could rank it ranging from “least assimilated” to “utterly swamped and obsessed”. Although *Mala onda* contains examples of the various registers, the protagonist Matías definitely qualifies in the latter category, as the reader witnesses in numerous situations in the novel. His constant use of English phrases combined with his utter contempt for those whose pronunciation is less than perfect create a character who personifies the 1980’s term “wanna-be”. This attitude culminates in a school scene:

Estoy al final de la clase. De mi silla-con mesita-incluida observo. Los observo. Estamos en clase de inglés. Sé más que la profesora, que nunca ha escuchado un disco, nunca ha leído la *Rolling Stone*...*Matías anda con anteojos oscuros. Se ve bien. Parece un rebelde, un solitario. Escribe algo en su cuaderno pero evidentemente no tiene mucho que ver con lo que está hablando la profesora de inglés, a la que le patina la ce-hache por lo que en vez de decir children, dice shildren*²¹⁰ (172-3).

must not disappoint them...”

²¹⁰ “I’m at the back of the classroom. From my desk I am observing the scene in English class. God, how annoying- I know more than the teacher does. She can barely turn on a stereo. Probably doesn’t even know what *Rolling Stone* is...*You’re wearing your sunglasses. You look good in them; you’re a real rebel, a loner. You write something in your notebook but it doesn’t have much to do with the lecture being given by the English teacher, who can’t even pronounce*

Matías, for all his linguistic abilities and fluency, remains very much a big fish in a small pond. Whether or not he is aware of this, the fact that his affinity for the U.S and the English language allows him to be distinct only within his own territory, is glimpsed by the reader when Matías finds himself face to face with a real American, Rusty, who threatens to usurp Matías' place as resident U.S expert, and leads him to make a very uncharacteristic comment, albeit somewhat cryptically:

Así que me puse mi polera de The Clash. Obviamente, le llamó la atención al Rusty.

-¿ Te gustan?

-Si- le dije- En especial ese tema *I'm so bored with the USA*.

El huevón no acusó el golpe²¹¹ (162).

Curiously, in the case of *Historias del Kronen* one does not encounter the same forced sense of “bilingualism” or the same type of love-affair with all things North American. On the contrary, the Spanish spelling of clearly English terms has a ironizing effect which plays with the widespread use of non-native terms and yet ridicules and deflates their power or their overall influence. If one compares the attention paid to

anything in English: she softens the “ch” sound, so that instead of saying children she says shildren”. (175)

²¹¹ “So I put on my Clash t-shirt. Obviously, it got Rusty’s attention.

-You like them?

Yes-I said-especially that song *I'm so Bored with the USA*.

The fool didn't catch the jibe.” (My translation; does not appear in *Bad Vibes*)

proper English spelling in *Mala onda* or any of Fresán's stories with the utter disdain for it in Mañas' novel, there can be no doubt as to the difference between the two cases, or the level of importance these "tags" possess within the respective cultures. Neither Matías, nor Forma, nor Alejo would ever casually or consciously hispanize or misspell brand names or proper names. Matías for example talks about his "yellow boots" and his "Wranglers" (116). Carlos on the other hand describes the sartorial situation in his own, less affected manner, with no qualms; "Miguel lleva pantalones cortados, botas *Naik* negras de *raper*, y gafas de sol *Reiban* de piloto de avión²¹²" (52 italics mine). It is equally unlikely that Matías and his crew would turn the tables on this phenomenon by joking about English pronunciation of Spanish words or names: "-¡ Va tocar Yulio, Yulio, yuju! ¡Te queremos!- exclama Miguel, pronunciando como un inglés y soplando besos con la mano. Se refiere a Julio Iglesias, que toca esta tarde en Las Ventas²¹³" (53)

When, on the other hand, Matías and friends are faced with Rusty's less than perfect Spanish, they can hardly comment on it disparagingly because they themselves sound twice as stiff and rehearsed in their attempts to sprinkle their conversation with key English expressions:

Como eso que decían sobre *Rasguña las piedras* de Sui Generis- dice el Nacho-
 . Eso de que Charly García dedicó el tema a una *babe* que sufría de catalepsia y
 que fue enterrada viva.

²¹² "Miguel is wearing shorts, black Nike rapper boots and Rayban pilot sunglasses."

²¹³ "Julio is going to play; Julio yoo hoo! We love you!-Miguel exclaims, pronouncing like an English speaker and blowing kisses with his hand. He is talking about Julio Iglesias who is playing this afternoon at Las Ventas."

-Eso es verdad: lo dijo el propio Charly García a una revista.

-*I doubt it*- responde el Nacho, con su mejor acento...

-*Who's Charly García?*- pregunta, algo urgido y bastante borracho el Chino.

-*He's this argentinean singer, dude*- le contesta el Nacho.

-*Is he any good?*

-*Latinamericans like him*- opina el Rusty²¹⁴ (198)

Matías, as narrator, comments sarcastically on Nacho's accent, but at another point in the book, talking to Alejandro Paz at the bar, he mentions his own "buen acento". The question is not really whether he speaks well, but the need to constantly measure himself against the others, just as he does with clothes and all other trends. He is defined even here only in relation to others around him.

This phenomenon extends to his peers as well. Looking at music and its place in this self-adulatory atmosphere, it is interesting to note the lack of mention of Argentine, or Chilean, rock groups and songs in comparison to the number of U.S references. This is unusual because in Argentina in particular, the *rock nacional* as it is known, does not take a back seat to American songs as it does in other non-English speaking countries among young people. There has not, traditionally, been any sort of inferiority complex

²¹⁴ "Like what they said about *Rasguña las piedras* by Sui Generis- says Nacho- That Charly García dedicated the song to a babe who had catalepsy and was buried alive.

-It's true, Charly García told it to a magazine himself.

-*I doubt it*-says Nacho with his best accent.

-*Who's Charly García?*- The Chinese guy asks, somewhat pushy and rather drunk.

-*He's this Argentinean singer, dude*- Nacho replies.

-*Is he any good?*

-*Latinamericans like him*- Rusty says.

and in fact, a certain pride is taken in the fact that Argentine groups have generally been trendsetters and best-sellers not only in Argentina but all over the Spanish speaking world.

The blame for the reigning attitude at Rusty's party can not even be linked the fact that it is Chile and not Argentina. In Chile as well during this period, there were home-grown groups like the Prisioneros who, through songs like "La Voz de los ochenta" and "El Baile de los que sobran" actually expressed many of the same fears and frustrations as those found in the conversation about Charly García, or indeed throughout the novel. The unwitting lack of self-awareness, and the emphasis on Nacho's "best" accent speaks volumes about the desperate desire of many of the characters to achieve a level of non-national identity and to distance themselves from what they perceive to be the typical and therefore less cutting-edge and less attractive.

In Pablo Alabarces' seminal text *Entre Gatos y Violadores: El rock nacional en la cultura argentina* (1993) this tension between the national and the foreign is addressed in some detail, via a discussion of how the national rock scene in Argentina was born and the significance it had for the last two generations of youth in that country (and by extension other countries where the music had an impact). After reading Alabarces' detailed, not wholly objective, yet utterly honest analysis of this cultural force, as well as considering the role of music in the novels and short stories, a series of images emerge which leaves no doubt as to the principle change in the role of music in the creation of textual identity.

Eso sí: había que pelearse. Estábamos llegando tarde a otras peleas (¿más importantes?: distintas, apenas nos rozaban, nos cerraron la puerta del ring cuando estábamos a punto de zambullimos, apenas llegamos a ostentar brazaletes negros para conmemorar la muerte del Che...). Nos dedicamos a los temas que hacían o deshacían el mundo: si el folk o el rock, si el sinfónico o el cuadrado, si los teclados o la pesada²¹⁵ (19-20).

This quotation, while speaking of a different genre and apparently a different time, is actually a comment on the beginning of the end vis-à-vis the role of youth in contributing to the society around them. It demonstrates that in the period leading up to the dictatorships in Latin America, music served as the core which at its peak united politics, literature, and society. What comes next however in the text pinpoints the cultural moment in which this music split off into two branches, which now manifest themselves in the literary texts; memory and evasion.

The times they're changing; claro que sí, pero pá peor, ya era la dictadura.

Pudimos entonces ejercitar la memoria en cosas útiles: abandonamos el Estudio de la Realidad Social Argentina (alias ERSA, Q.E.P.D) para submergimos en

²¹⁵ “Yes, one had to fight. We were arriving late for other fights (more important ones? different, that barely grazed us, they closed the door on us just as we were about to bust out, we barely managed to show off our black armbands commemorating the death of El Che...). We dedicated ourselves to topics which would make or break the world; folk or rock, symphonic or square, keyboards or the heavy stuff.”

las cambiantes formaciones de Yes o en los profundos abismos de King Crimson²¹⁶ (20).

What emerges in the end is the eternal struggle between the individual and the collective. Whereas the music of the period which precedes our texts acted as a meeting place, be it physically or emotionally, for a youth culture which professed the need for solidarity, the musical references in Fresán, Fuguet and Mañas (and to a lesser degree in Gómez and Civale) are alienating and alienated. They occur in moments of self-conscious separation from the group, moments of blind adolescent arrogance and worse, of a false, momentary sense of group dynamic (i.e Rusty's party, Javier at the party with Manú, Alejo at the disco with Nina) which is transparently dreadful even to the participants. Perhaps this helps to explain the lack of "Rock nacional" in the texts. As Alabarces' points out: "En el rock nacional esta tradición actúa casi como un imperativo: juntarse, para saberse parte de un colectivo, más homogéneo que el fútbol, tan eficaz como él. Y desde allí, hacerse fuertes. E imaginarse resistentes. Más: SERLO²¹⁷" (75).

As we have seen here, the concept of "being" (ser) anything in the permanent sense, much less part of a true collective rather than a club based on one-upsmanship, is almost completely foreign to the characters. The musical wires which at first gaze unite

²¹⁶ "The times they're changing, of course, but worse still, it was already the dictatorship. We could focus our memory on useful things. We abandoned the Study of Argentine Social Reality (alias ERSA, QEPD) to submerge ourselves in the changing formations of Yes or the deep abysses of King Crimson."

²¹⁷ In the national rock this tradition acts almost as an imperative: joining together in order to feel like part of a collective, more homogenous than football, and equally efficient. And from this, to strengthen oneself. And imagine oneself resistant. Moreover: TO BE SO."

the McOndo literature, readers and writers, are not a source of unity, as the self-isolating walkman, symbol of a generation, illustrates.

Chapter IV: Apathy and Activism

Identifying the Enemy: an Exercise in Frustration

“Yo adoro a mi ciudad/ aunque
me acusen de loco y de mersa/
aunque guadañen mi pelo a la
fuerza/ en un coiffeur de
seccional/Y sin embargo yo
quiero a este pueblo/porque me
incita a la rebelión/ y porque me
da infinitos deseos/ de
contestarle y de cantarle/mi
novedad”- “Yo vivo en una
ciudad” Pedro y Pablo

An important problem has emerged within the previous chapters, having to do with a sense of what can only be described as confusion, occasional duplicity and a distinct difficulty in ascertaining whether in fact the texts of this genre contain political messages or conscious sociological commentary. The question is not really whether an explicit, comprehensive political statement may be construed from the texts themselves but whether a general trend towards societal critiques can effectively be identified as being characteristic of this genre. Having established the socio-cultural context, in other

words the consumer-oriented, individualistic, globalized version with some certainty. the reaction of participants²¹⁸ and characters (and vicariously of the readers) to this world they both construct and inhabit is ambiguous and shifting. The reader, as a result of this instability, may be led first to one conclusion then to another, contradictory one, leading to a situation in which apparently conflicting concepts co-exist within the texts, much as they do within globalization itself.

In a similar vein, of all the criticisms leveled against the generation raised in the 1970's and 80's, one of the most common has been a consistent accusation of political and social apathy and an unwillingness to publicly define their position, nicely summed up by the name assigned to the so-called "Me Generation"²¹⁹. Once again, this can be read as both true and untrue in relation to the novels and stories. Nonetheless, before drawing any broad conclusions, how can apathy and activism be defined as motivators of characters' behaviour within a contemporary, relevant literary framework? Are we as readers to apply the same criteria which were used to measure the radicalism and the revolutionary fervour of texts²²⁰ in previous generations? Given that the references identifiable to the readers, the authors and the characters are for the most part either place or time-specific²²¹, it would only make sense to apply critical criteria which meet the same conditions. In other words, what qualified as "politicized" in the past may or

²¹⁸ I purposely include this category as a separate one because it can be applied equally to characters and those outside the novels, particularly insofar as their role in inhabiting a cultural context.

²¹⁹ Not to be confused with Generation X, born about 10 years later, and the inheritors of a rather different legacy. Whereas the "Me" generation was born at the tail end of the same generation who preached Make love not war", they were in the vanguard of rise of the the Yuppie. Generation X was raised from the start as members of a consumer culture.

²²⁰ Or, at the very least, social concern.

may not have any relevance within a more current context. The methods and the messages change necessarily according to the setting and the moment; stoning the U.S embassy may have worked in the 1970's but hacking into and deleting their files may be more in step with the capabilities and the interests of a protester today ²²².

Notwithstanding the differences between genres, the political messages have not diminished in their ability to demand change and occasionally affect it. One possible explanation for this is that the protests have assumed a tone which is more moral than purely class-based.

There are further elements to contend with in attempting to reach a conclusion. In numerous theoretical texts on the cultural repercussions of postmodernism, including Mouliau's, Sarlo's and Rosenau's, the suggestion of apathy is explained as being a fairly indisputable characteristic of our times (and in no way limited to youth culture) . Speaking of the "skeptical" post-modernists, Rosenau demonstrates how some critics have defended this lack of political participation by making the skeptics appear more conscientious or not getting involved in or advocating movements which they believe caused more harm than good in their efforts to create change:

In support of post-modern withdrawal, Edelman argues that high levels of political participation have lead to slaughter, repression, and genocide in the name of nationalism and patriotism. He concludes the world would be better off

²²¹ As was discussed in an earlier chapter, many of these references, be they musical, social or political may be traced to very specific moments in the lives of the characters and of their countries. Those which stand out distinguish them as members of a new generation, with their own codes.

without any of it (Edelman²²³ 1988: 8). In the extreme we have Baudrillard who tells us that political participation makes little sense because everything of interest has already happened...(141).

While this last sentiment is expressed in more than one of the literary texts (see, for example, Matías' indifference in *Mala onda*), there are, nonetheless, those who take the skeptics to task for their smug attitude; the same smirkiness which peppers a fair amount of the novels and short stories, manifesting itself in the words of the characters:

Critics argue there is something unhealthy about the political orientation of the skeptics- their turn inward and their concentration on the self. The skeptics are anti-determinist, pro-individualist, even narcissistic; they refuse all responsibility for what goes on in the society around them. Their retreat from the political may reflect their concern with self-development, self-expression, self-awareness, and self-affirmation, or it may simply be self-indulgent...The only forms of positive political action of interest to the skeptics are those that violate modern conception of the normal and those that display ironic contempt for the political. (Rosenau 141)²²⁴.

²²²To give a closer example, the roundabout storytelling tactics used in the film *Buenos Aires vice versa*, discussed earlier, are quite different from the more sermon-like tone employed in the classic documentary *La Hora de los hornos* twenty years earlier.

²²³ Taken from *Constructing the Public Spectacle*.

²²⁴ This argument is not new. Discussion of the role of the intellectual and his responsibilities to society are well known to readers of Sartre, Gramsci, Rousseau and numerous others. The question remains: does

Readers may accept that the texts passively support, or whole-heartedly reject, the system within which the characters live; a system which in many respects is homologous to that which the readers themselves inhabit²²⁵. There is, however, no doubt that the issues are at least raised and actively disputed within the genre. By “disputed” I do not mean to imply that all of the texts take a pro-active position or even defend themselves very effectively from the charges of indifference. It would however be a mistake and a grave misapprehension to call this genre apolitical²²⁶. A classic example arises when one recalls Carlos’ comment in *Historias del Kronen* which echoes the earlier quote by Baudrillard: “Ni siquiera nos han dejado la rebeldía: ya la agotaron toda los putos marxistas y los putos jipis de su época. Pienso en responderle que justamente lo que nos falta es algo contra lo que luchar. Pero paso de discutir con él²²⁷” (67). Even in a straightforward statement like this one, nothing is black and white. While the speaker leaves no doubts as to his utter contempt for both the previous generation of Marxists and hippies and for the emptiness which characterizes the supposed struggles of the more politically aware sector of his own peers, this text both defends and mocks the listless attitudes of a generation, but by its very hostility, refuses to ignore the issue. Carlos’ words do *not* in fact demonstrate the overwhelming

the intellectual have a responsibility to society as the voice of conscience or must he keep a safe distance in order to maintain perspective and focus only on his craft?

²²⁵ The main difference between the two being that the literature is capable of emphasizing certain characteristics and omitting others.

²²⁶ Beyond the fact that all writing is by nature a political expression.

²²⁷ “They haven’t even left us rebellion as an option. The fucking marxists and hippies wore it out in their day. I feel like telling him that what we are missing is something to fight for or against. .Still, I decide not to argue with him.”

narcissism²²⁸ or even the ironic detachment Rosenau attributes to skeptics. If anything, the reader could quite easily point to a sense of underlying (quite possible unconscious) disappointment, anger and a sense of futility which bends more towards the exasperated than the ironic. The rage is at being accused of a situation which Carlos believes is out of his hands and impossible, not for lack of potential interest but because it has been drained of possibilities by his predecessors. Carlos, for all his murdering negativity and self-interested, occasionally fatal pursuit of good times, is nonetheless aware of events being played out on the world stage, and expresses opinions about them. This in itself contradicts many stereotypes about the vacuousness of youth. For all his sarcasm the narrator nonetheless injects more than one chapter with news reports. “Parece ser que Mitterand se ha ido a Serbia, donde la ONU ha abierto un aeropuerto, y que los americanos van a intervenir. Para mí que deberían dejarles matarse entre ellos...Ahora sale Pujol haciendo unas declaraciones en catalán²²⁹” (Mañas 28). Later:

(c)omemos, como siempre, sin decir ni una palabra y viendo el telediario. Ya hablan menos de Yugoslavia. La verdad es que es una guerra de segunda. La del Golfo, con los moros, era más espectacular. Además, estaba mucho más claro quiénes eran los buenos y quiénes los malos²³⁰ (66).

²²⁸ This of course is in relation to his political consciousness. I have no wish to contradict the profoundly individualistic, egotistical, vaguely sociopathic image Carlos creates as a character.

²²⁹ “It looks like Mitterand has gone to Serbia, where the UN has opened an airport and the Americans are going to intervene...As far as I’m concerned they should let them kill each other...No Pujol is on making announcements in Catalan.”

Carlos' comments and actions lack coherency. While he at first refuses to take a stand or discuss politics with his father, because he does not see any point in responding, he later inadvertently reveals strong feelings. The choice of language, including the word "moro" which has both a historical and a political register, coupled with his suggestion to let all the participants of the Balkan wars slaughter themselves expresses a very specific opinion. The cool tone of delivery and the not-completely sarcastic commentary, for all the attitude which they may contain, are not actually too different from (more formally worded) commentaries made by reporters during of the Yugoslav civil war (and lately with Kosovo), complaining of the dilemma involved in labeling the participants. The occasional inability to judge who the good guys are on the world stage (not to mention in these texts) says more about the instability and confusion being disseminated earlier than about the spectators themselves. In some cases this quandary extends itself to national territory, as in the case of the Malvinas/ Falklands war where, although left unsaid by texts like Fresán's "La Soberanía nacional", the supposed defense of the nation's patrimony was in fact a ruse by the Galtieri dictatorship to both deflect attention from the atrocities committed by the military and a way to earn the public support of groups who had, shortly before, demonstrated violently against the government and its human rights abuses²³¹. The ridiculousness of the official discourse is exposed indirectly by the absurdity of the situations which Alejo finds himself caught up in while conscripted. Sacred concepts including heroism,

²³⁰ "As always, we eat without speaking, watching the news. They are talking less about Yugoslavia now. The truth is, it's a second rate war. The one in the Gulf, with the Arabs, was much better. Also, it was much clearer which ones were the good guys and which were the bad guys."

sacrifice for one's country and even the demonization of the enemy are all turned on their heads by this, the unlucky anti-soldier. It is this same sense of the absurd and the unbelievable, or the inability to clearly distinguish fact from fantasy, which acts as a mediating factor, both between history and the fictionalized account of it, and between the protagonist and the reader. The latter is based on an incredulousness which colours both Alejo's reading of his "real" situation, and the reader's acceptance of the somewhat surreal events of the text.

...le estaba escribiendo cuando vi a mi primer gorkha. Hablábamos sobre ellos todo el tiempo pero hasta ahora nadie se había cruzado con uno, y, esto va sonar idiota, lo primero que pensé fue en pedirle un autógrafo. Pero enseguida me subió el miedo. Los gorkhas cortaban orejas o al menos eso dicen...Se desplazó sin desperdiciar un solo movimiento y no pude evitar sorprenderme cuando abrió la boca y me habló en un correctísimo inglés.

-¿Qué hay de nuevo, viejo?- me dijo, con la voz de Bugs Bunny.

Largué un suspiro largo mientras pensaba que, claro, entonces todo esto era una pesadilla...; *porque la existencia de un gorkha que imite a Bugs Bunny era aún más imposible que toda esta guerra ridícula*²³² (Fresán *Historia* 86 italics mine).

²³¹ Popular belief also has it that this war was a way to finish off those members of the younger generation who had managed to escape incarceration, disappearance, death or exile.

²³² "...I was writing to him when I saw my first Gurkha. We used to talk about them all the time, but up until now no one had come across one and, this will sound idiotic, my first thought was to ask him for his autograph. Immediately though, the fear began to rise. The Gurkhas cut ears off, or so they say...He shifted without wasting a single movement and I couldn't help but be surprised when he opened his mouth and spoke to me in ultra-correct English.

-What's up Doc?- he said, in Bugs Bunny's voice.

Each character attempts to convince the other to take him prisoner and just as they reach the end of their wholly amiable discussion concerning which will have the privilege of being the captured and who the capturer, Alejo's gun accidentally goes off and kills the friendly "enemy". Another conscript describes the official version of what follows, addressing the very discourses mentioned earlier; heroism and the enemy:

Lo trajeron ayer al gurquita. Pobre flaco. Será el enemigo y todo lo que quieras pero morirse así, la verdad que te la regalo... Y quién iba decir que el mufa del Alejo tenía tanta puntería. O que era tan valiente. El asunto es que la guerra se acabó tanto para uno como para otro. El gurquita bajo tierra y Alejo en hospital y del hospital a casita²³³ (88).

Alejo not only tried to surrender, but also tried to dissuade a British enemy soldier from surrendering to him; both subversive acts as far as the official discourse of war goes. Can this be called resistance though, if Alejo originally intended to give himself up but ended up being fêted as a sharpshooting example of national pride²³⁴? Were his actions in fact a political statement, or were they just the desperate move of a

I let out a long sigh while I thought, of course, that ok, this was all just a nightmare...; because the existence of a Gurkha who imitates Bugs Bunny was even more impossible than this entire, ridiculous war."

²³³ "They brought the Gurkha in yesterday. Poor guy. He may be the enemy and all that but to die that way, you can keep it...And who thought that a loser like Alejo would have such good aim? Or that he was so brave? The thing is that the war has ended as much for one as for the other. The Gurkha underground and Alejo in hospital and from the hospital, home."

²³⁴ Albeit not by his fellow soldiers, who recognize the strangeness and the ambiguity of the situation they and Alejo are stuck in.

miserable soldier who did not understand why and how he had landed in a war in the windy South Atlantic? At which point do these moments in the texts deserve to earn the title “political statement”? At which moment does a character become politically “involved”? The fact remains that any given figure in a narrative is subservient to history, although this may manifest itself in a banal or unconscious manner. S/he is ultimately located within certain circumstances by forces which are often uncontrollable but are always political as they are read and filtered through the official discourse. The shell-shocked characters of “La soberanía nacional” personify this fate which is not so much arbitrary as it is invisible to the common man.

As was discussed and demonstrated in the previous chapter, Alejo generally has little say in how the events of his life unfold. Nonetheless, this inability to follow through on original intentions marks more than one of the narratives, including cases where the protagonists are not hindered by the metaphysical issues which plague Alejo. Before examining specific examples of how this inhibited desire emerges in the texts, one ought to consider the roots of the tendency and how they have become entrenched within the genre. In order to do so, the spectre of consumption must be raised once more.

Consumer society is a curiously unique phenomenon which manages to combine the socio-economic with the cultural in a way which leaves observers unsure as to which element carries more weight. While the former would seem the more powerful and more manipulative of the two, this is in fact misleading. Culture is influenced by the economic strategies of government and their chosen policy makers, but these same policies are difficult, almost impossible, to foist upon a society which is culturally

unready or more importantly, unwilling, to accept and disseminate them. The period which saw the emergence of this narrative genre was marked by an intertwining combination of harsh cultural and socio-economic events whose aftershocks are still reverberating from the United States and international finance institutions, through Argentina, Chile and Spain. The overall result has been the realization of a destiny that for the countries outside the United States is determined, to a great degree, in the north and not at home.

What did however happen at home, as far as the reaction of the populations is concerned, may be reduced to the coexistence of three opposing yet complementary concepts; ignorance, pleasure and guilt. Slavoj Žižek, in his book *For They Know Not What They Do* (1996), negates the Christian argument that ignorance is a legitimate defense, as in the title, and may therefore justify a pardon for the not-really-guilty party. Žižek insists that psychoanalysis, unlike the more tolerant and forgiving Christian attitude, can not accept that not knowing, or not wanting to know, absolves one of unacceptable or anti-social behaviour. This is because psychoanalysis recognizes that within the spaces of not knowing, whether they are real or feigned, there exists simultaneously an element of pleasure. In Fresán's "La soberanía nacional" this guilty pleasure is illustrated as Sargento Rendido irons and re-irons his uniform in preparation for the Final Battle, ignoring at the same time both the injustice of the war and the misery of the men he commands. In *Historias del Kronen*, the death of Fierro is caused by precisely this mix which privileges pleasure and makes excuses for a lack of compassion and responsibility.

() ¿Véis cómo se ríe? Venga, sujetadle y traed una silla. () Eso es. Continúa riéndote, Fierro que te vamos a atar...() Olvida a los médicos. Los médicos no saben nada. () Que no seas llorica joder. Aunque seas diabético un poco de alcohol no te va a hacer nada...() Venga Roberto. ¿Qué te pasa?() Bah. ¿Qué dices? Al Fierro le está encantando esto. () Venga, sujeta tú la botella. que yo voy a por la coca () ¿Cómo que pasas? Eres un débil Roberto. Pero si se lo está pasando muy bien, ¿no lo ves?²³⁵(221)

Ignoring his diabetic condition, although he had specifically mentioned the doctor's having prohibited alcohol, Carlos and his friends pour whiskey down Fierro's throat; supposedly for his pleasure, but actually for their own, at seeing him in the position of victim. Taking these texts as examples, the supposed passivity with which this generation has long been associated becomes even more strongly linked with the rewards of consumerism and with the tendency to express righteous shock at the violence the past which people "did not know about". As a result of the widespread dissemination and acceptance of this plea of innocence, the generation which followed, the readers and characters of the *Nueva narrativa*, have textualized the way in which Žižek's trinity has taken root within societies and become commonplace. The great

²³⁵ "See how he is laughing? Come on, tie him up and bring a chair. That's it. Keep laughing Fierro; we're going to tie you up...Forget the doctors. Doctors don't know anything. Shit, don't be a crybaby. Even if you're diabetic a little alcohol won't do you any harm...Come on Roberto. What's wrong with you? Bah. What's that? Fierro loves this. Come on, you grab the bottle, I'm going to get the coke. What do you mean you pass? You're weak Roberto. He's having a blast, can't you see?"

difference is that this generation inherently comprehends the link between guilt and pleasure, doing away with the previously perceived need to excuse one's behaviour. This is no longer considered necessary following the erosion of all sense of community. The first, underlying resistance which the reader could then point to in this genre is a resistance to what earlier generations would have defined as pangs of conscience.

A History of Non-Action

Y algunas chicas me van a
entender/ en esos momentos que
no aguanto más/me puedo
conformar
Viejas locas

Chilean theorist Tomás Moulian has suggested that what is commonly perceived to be the political indifference of youth is directly linked to neo-liberal government agendas. He further insists that in the case of Chile (and to a similar degree, Argentina) it must be considered a direct inheritance of the "economic miracle" which managed to silence a civilian population about the atrocities which they witnessed being committed in their own backyards²³⁶. In each country the phenomenon had a different name. In

²³⁶ This is by no means an exaggeration. Many clandestine torture centres in Argentina and Chile were located in residential neighborhoods, next door to family homes, churches, schools and stores. For a fictionalized account, based on an actual case in Santiago see Carlos Cerda's *Una casa vacía* (1996). Also, the recent film *Garage olímpo* (1999) directed by Argentine director Marcos Bechis, about a concentration camp in Buenos Aires where the director himself was held.

Argentina, for example, it has gone down in history as the era of “sweet money”²³⁷ and is fondly recalled by many as a time when it was cheaper to holiday and shop in Brazil or Miami than in Buenos Aires. In Chile it is remembered as the time of the “Chicago Boys”²³⁸. All of the above are relevant and moreover, crucial, to accessing the fiction from a relevant perspective other than that of the discontent bred of globalization. While the impact of globalization, technology and the role of the media have already been clearly established and assessed, to underestimate the power of national history in helping to shape both narrative and reading would be both fatal and idealistic²³⁹.

Plainly put, the sudden ability of a previously excluded sector of the population²⁴⁰ to purchase imported, socially prestigious goods, along with the introduction of new “easy payment” systems acted as a diversionary force which the governments of countries like Argentina²⁴¹ and Chile took full advantage of²⁴². The urge to confront a corrupt, murderous political system apparently diminishes at a scale relative to the new material benefits accrued by its citizens. The gratitude at being allowed to enter the more visible, superficial strata of modernity in many cases

²³⁷ In the U.S it was known as Reaganomics, although this label did not have the completely positive connotation that the Argentinian case did.

²³⁸ This period and its cultural and cultural ramifications was brilliantly fictionalized in the novel *Oír su voz* by Chilean writer Arturo Fontaine Talavera.

²³⁹ See for example Henry Giroux’s discussion of nationalism, cultural identity and the mass media in his book *Fugitive Cultures: Race, Violence and Youth* (1996).

²⁴⁰ This mainly affected the middle classes.

²⁴¹ In Argentina the dictatorship also took advantage of the fact that Argentina was the host of the 1978 World Cup in soccer to implement what could be called the second half of their “bread and circus” policies.

²⁴² One could just as easily have mentioned the case of the U.S where in the 1980’s Reagan administration, the economic boom (which again benefitted the middle classes) quieted down a lot of the clamour about the government’s intervention in places like Central America.

outweighed all other concerns²⁴³. The desire to attain modernity, after all, has been the driving force behind every major political project in Latin America. Given that suddenly the common citizen was able to reach a comfortable level of modernity without having to actively participate in a struggle to produce it, as advocated by movements like socialism, the silent and passive option must have seemed extremely attractive. Alfredo Jocelyn-Holt describes the process of seduction in the 1970's in Chile in *El Chile perplejo: Del avanzar sin transar al transar sin parar* (1999).

Donde reside buena parte de su atractivo, por tanto, no es en su veracidad real sino en la oferta que hace. El neo-liberalismo más que nada *marketea*. le trabaja a la ilusión. Vende panes. Nos dice que tarde o temprano *vamos a ser todas reinas, esta vez sí*. Viejo cuento que en nuestro país siempre arrasa, más aún si no se está pasando muy bien²⁴⁴...(188).

Nonetheless, while the people are being passively led towards the wonders of the shopping mall, even this lack of conscious political participation is perceived by other members of society as just the opposite, as an act of disturbance, or resistance to what has always been the status-quo. The author quotes a comment made in 1982 describing this contrary interpretation of the consumer process:

²⁴³ Before the 1970s modernization was conceived of as the ability to become industrialized and to produce technology. Today modernity is understood at the level of the consumer. One no longer needs to invest in factories at home if the goods can be bought more cheaply from somewhere else.

²⁴⁴ A great part of its attractiveness lies not in its veracity but in the offer it makes. Neoliberalism, more than anything else, markets, it works the illusion. It sells bread. It says to

Lo que pasa es que los ricos no valoran que la gente tenga televisor, radio a transistores, porque ellos siempre los han tenido. Y les molesta que la rotada ahora se les haya acercado porque se viste mejor y tiene radio y televisor y si seguimos así, en diez años más van a tener hasta auto, así que va ser tremendo para alguna gente porque imagínese que no habrá diferencias, los rotos se verán igual que la gente. Eso es lo que les duele a algunos (189)²⁴⁵.

It is not surprising that Moulian defines consumerism as a mechanism of domination and domestication in *Chile Actual: Anatomía de un mito* (1997). Nowhere is this power relationship more clearly outlined than in *Mala onda*, as Matías allows himself to finally be re-domesticated by his father's ability to purchase pleasure (cocaine, prostitutes) as well as his son's support. His father liberates Matías from the guilt of consuming prohibited, pleasurable goods.

Citizenship, understood as a voluntary commitment to participate in the politics of the public sphere, then becomes a concept with diminishing strength and consistently less attractiveness as far as the younger generation are concerned. Moulian pulls no punches and explains that this development is not in any way accidental; "la pasión

us that sooner or later we will all be queens this time. An old story in our country which always works, especially if things are not going too well.

²⁴⁵ What happens is that the rich do not appreciate the fact that people have a television, a transistor radio, because they have always had them. And it bothers them that the poor people have gotten closer to them because they dress better and have a television and a radio and if we keep going like this, in ten years they will even have a car, so its tremendous for some people, because imagine, there will not be any differences, the poor will look just like the others. This is what upsets some of them.

homicida contra las ideologías oculta un acto ideológico²⁴⁶ (60). In other words, the replacement of a tradition of participation, associated generally with the previous generation, with a strategy of non-involvement is not coincidental. Moulian explains, “se trata de comportamientos engullidores de las energías de los individuos, de una pasión que los deplaza hacia lo privado y los aleja de lo público²⁴⁷” (*Consumo* 66). The public stage becomes a space farther and farther removed from the individual’s consciousness.

This belief in a behind-the-scenes conspiracy is hardly a new concept. Baudrillard, in his article “The System of Objects” (1988), was equally blunt about both the politics and the manifestation of a new system of consumption, designed to manipulate and numb the critical nerve of the potential consumer. He referred to “...images of false transparency, of a false legibility of social relations... behind which the real structures remain illegible” (21). This is not to say that citizens are entirely passive; only that they are unaware of the true, completely selfish role they play within a false sociality. “This code is totalitarian...each day we participate in its collective elaboration...even actions that resist the code are carried out in relation to a society that conforms to it” (15).

The elaboration of this system, and its concretization through seemingly predetermined behaviour and demarcated rituals, are textualized over and over in the literature of this generation as choices made within the novels and stories reflect a not wholly convincing futility and inescapability. Juan Forn, whose characters often

²⁴⁶ “the homicidal passion against ideologies hides an ideological act.”

distinguish themselves both through their inability to escape the flowing social currents around them and their difficulty in prioritizing their lives²⁴⁸, tackles the problems inherent in taking a stand or making a life-changing decision in the short story “El karma de ciertas chicas” from *Nadar de noche*. In this story about a common sort of argument among a couple, the question arises; how far one can actually push the boundaries, or voice dissatisfaction before snapping back into one’s pre-assigned place. The opening lines of the text contain the dilemma in a nutshell:

Estaban discutiendo a gritos cuando se apagó la luz. Ellos creían que estaban discutiendo a gritos, o eso es lo que hubieran creído de tener que medir el grado de violencia de la discusión. En realidad no gritaban para nada, ni los oía ningún vecino, aunque esa preocupación no se les cruzara por la cabeza²⁴⁹ (11).

This scene describes a situation in which the battling characters, Miguel and his girlfriend, momentarily see-saw between an awareness of sorts (of the perceived noise level and the violence of the discussion) and a lack thereof (of the actual noise level and the possibility they may be heard outside). The degree of intensity present in the couple’s conversation is measured not by emotions or by gauging the actual importance of the subject they are battling over. It is not a coincidence then that the debate here,

²⁴⁷ “it is a matter of behaviours which channels the individual’s energies, a passion which shifts them towards the private and distances them from the public.”

²⁴⁸ i.e Javier in “El borde peligroso de las cosas”.

²⁴⁹ “They were having a screaming argument when the lights went out. They thought they were screaming, or at least that’s what they would have thought if they had had to measure the level of violence in the argument. Actually, they were not screaming at all, no neighbours heard them, even though this problem never even crossed their minds.”

beyond the actual topic of argument which is alluded to only in the vaguest of terms. concerns an anxiety related primarily to form and not to content; typical of a mindset capable of focusing only on the superficial and the immediate. The inability to measure the levels of their voices indicates something much more problematic, the incapacity of the male and female characters to comprehend their actual level of involvement in the events narrated. The violent intensity and the “heat” of the argument appear, according to the narrator, to be the cause of the participants’ distorted perception of their own voices and the reason that they ignore the possibility of annoying the neighbours. In fact, this opening shows the characters assuming roles which are no more than personas, and entering a contest in which the reader has only to wait and see which of the two drops their adopted mask of war first, to return to a pre-fight scenario. The descriptions resemble nothing so much as stage directions for an actor trying to get into his part: “Ella ya dejaba que el pelo le tapase la cara, fumaba como un vampiro y decía con voz increíblemente áspera cosas como: ‘Por supuesto que estoy harta...’” (11).

This character portrait is the beginning of a text which attempts to measure the distance between internal, personal concerns or apprehensions and the external which may not be able to stand this introspection; questioning the feasibility of building links between these two spaces.

The questions at the core of the narrative are “will the characters follow their concerns through to their logical conclusion” and consequently “will they be able to break out of their self involved mind-sets”. In the majority of the novels discussed here, these two issues have been the main obstacles to characters going beyond the merely

reflective stage of confronting the system which imposes a specific lifestyle²⁵⁰. The ability to act or not within a comfortable, personal situation is a reflection of the desire and capability of the same participants to react in the world outside. The title, which refers to a cycle of destiny and to the possibility of attaining a higher consciousness, implies there may be hope for the protagonists, or a way to resolve their seemingly irresolvable frustrations.

Unfortunately Miguel, the protagonist²⁵¹ of “El Karma”, emerges from his predicament with his issues only marginally more resolved and self-aware than does the unlucky Javier in “El borde peligroso de las cosas²⁵²”. Once the lights in the couple’s apartment go out unexpectedly, the characters are left in the dark, forced to cope in a space which is their own and familiar, yet suddenly feels different and requires a new way of navigating. As with the noise level, Miguel and his girlfriend remain unaware of the actual lack of lights for a long time; “eran las siete de la tarde y por eso no se dieron cuenta cuando se cortó la luz²⁵³” (11). Once they have gone to their separate corners, the darkness becomes just one more physical division between them, following first what they call screaming (noise), the curtain of cigarette smoke, and even the hair which she allowed to cover her face. These themes and accusations of not being able to hear or see, whether by choice or circumstance, criss-cross the text, and highlight the self-involvement mentioned earlier. For all effects and purposes the argument could be a double-soliloquy for all the communication it produces. This ability to interact only in

²⁵⁰ In other words, taking their opposition farther than just complaining.

²⁵¹ An ironic term considering his utter lack of initiative or action.

²⁵² Javier of course loses both his wife, one of the twins she was carrying and quite possibly his ability to tell the difference between real life and nightmares.

the most self-centred manner is a long-standing problem of Miguel's. according to his more self-righteous girlfriend: " Vivís en tu burbuja y todo lo que no te interesa lo ignoras olímpicamente...¿Y querés saber que es lo que *más* me revienta? Que siempre trates de pasarla lo mejor posible. Incluso cuando se supone que estás sufriendo. Eso es lo que más me revienta de vos²⁵⁴ (12).

While the reader has no proof that *she* is any more involved in her community or any less caught up in her own life²⁵⁵, the girlfriend blames Miguel for what she sees as not just selfishness but worse, dishonesty. She accuses him of not only ignoring the plight of the world (which she most likely sees as an accurate way of referring to herself) outside but also of pushing aside his own doubts and fears; of keeping his head determinedly above the waves no matter what. *Zafar*, as we said earlier. What's more. knowing of his inability to forcefully confront real difficulty, or to maintain an argument, she assumes after a short while that they are friends again, drops her previous hostility and the battle is forgotten. He, as expected, emits a few token grumbles, removes his own mask of bellicose discontent and acquiesces. He reacts rather than acting independently.

Miguel, does some perfunctory soul-searching and questions his relationship, his actions and what he sees as his ultimate domestication by his girlfriend. As he sees it, the blame for his lack of initiative and fighting spirit can be laid firmly at *her* feet:

²⁵³ "It was seven in the evening, that's why they did not notice when the lights went out."

²⁵⁴ "You live in your bubble and whatever doesn't interest you, you ignore olímpically...And you know what pisses me off the most? That you always try to get along as best you can. Even when you are supposedly suffering. That's what really pisses me off about you."

²⁵⁵ In fact, towards the end, Miguel accuses her of a similar tendency: "no le importa...porque ella no piensa, no se plantea nada, nunca va más allá de ella misma" (18).

O era él que se planteaba las cosas a la tremenda. Había algo que justificaba empezar de nuevo con todo el razonamiento, pero de sólo pensarlo volvía a sentir esa piedra de odio en el plexo, ya fría...Hasta de eso tenía la culpa ella, hasta el odio le había domesticado²⁵⁶ (17).

In other words, as he sees it, he possesses both the rage and the desire to act and to change things, but *she* has made this impossible. The narrator however gives the reader a glimpse into Miguel's thought process which bolsters the earlier "see no evil" allegation against him. He seems frustrated not merely because of the fight, or the harsh words exchanged, but rather because he is now forced by external circumstances to confront reality:

Siguió pensando: a oscuras de verdad, cuando hay apagón, cuando no existe la posibilidad de zafar...Entonces empezó a oír algo: un rumor. El rumor de pensamiento de todos los que estaban pensando lo mismo que él...Pensó también que cuando volviese la luz todos iban a olvidarse de lo que habían pensado...Él no iba olvidarse de todas esas cosas. Y no sólo de eso...empezaba a ver que haría de su vida a partir de ese momento...Algo épico, solitario, altruísta...²⁵⁷(14-15).

²⁵⁶ "Or maybe he was the one that overstated things. There was something here that justified starting all this reasoning all over again, but just thinking about it made him feel that stone of hatred in his plexus, now cold...Even this was her fault, she had even domesticated his hatred."

²⁵⁷ "He kept thinking: in the dark for real, when there's a blackout, when there is no chance to escape...Then he began to hear something: a rumour. The rumour of thought of all those who were thinking the same thing he was...He thought that when the lights go back on they would

It seems incredible that Miguel can show such insight and critical sense when it comes to analyzing the shortcomings of his fellow citizens and yet refuse to admit his own place among those who will keep living their lives, unmoved. In the above comment, which is highly reminiscent of Matías and his plans to prove himself different from those around him, even Miguel's supposed desire to be altruistic (albeit by way of an unorthodox project, defending the interests of women who are painfully beautiful) is enunciated in a way which separates him further from the public rather than creating solidarity. His inability to see real problems and troubles and yet to simultaneously invent and inflate the trivial lead him down the same path taken not only by those consciously aligned with a skeptical postmodernism, but also by those incapable of imagining an effective alternative. There is no happy medium here. Miguel alternates between a lack of judgment coupled with a desire to act, and an inability to act when the situation truly demands it. It is difficult to judge whether Miguel is fully aware of the long term implications of non-action (or ridiculous action in his case) or whether he is merely involved in a self-pity party as happens in Javier's case in the other Forn story. The lingering doubts about whether one has made the correct choice are most often washed away by chemicals, or in Miguel's case, by the bath water where his partner welcomes him back to the same state of complacency she criticized earlier. He is welcomed back into the "light" which was off for a while but now has returned to clarify his thinking and his (non)actions.

all forget what they had been thinking about...He would not forget these things. And not only that...he began to see what he could do with his life starting from this moment...Something epic,

Finally, a dynamic is created by those who inhabit this world of non-involvement and of transitory concerns which are never allowed to develop into a serious worry requiring action. The narrator of Fresán's "Señales captadas en el corazón de una fiesta"²⁵⁸ gives voice to this cautious persona with just the right degree of *ennui* and obviousness. What remains most telling about his comments and his character is his position, or more accurately, his positioning. Although claiming to be bored by a generic sort of party which no longer appeals to his exquisite and jaded tastes²⁵⁹, he remains there, "suffering" in public. The group as such does not actually exist, as the snatches of dialogue suggest; there are merely a series of individuals talking without listening.

Alguien susurra que "este sistema de presiones me trajo aquí esta noche" y alguien le responde "qué mensaje divino que me están obsequiando".

Alguien cuenta que "decidí regalar todos mi equipos de fotografía cuando descubrí que era demasiado bueno para eso"²⁶⁰, (43).

solitary, altruistic."

²⁵⁸ In *McOndo* (1996)

²⁵⁹ This would be the saturation effect mentioned earlier in this dissertation, caused by an overdose of goods consumed.

²⁶⁰ "Someone whispers that 'this pressure system dragged me here tonight, and someone responds 'what a wondrous message I am being given.'

Someone tells that they 'decided to give away all my photographic equipment when I discovered I was too good for that.'

With chilling accuracy, the man on the edge compares his decision to be an active non-participant in recognizable terms which would not be out of place in

Historias del Kronen or *Mala onda*:

Si, es posible que me hayan visto hace poco en los bordes de alguna fiesta para enseguida apartar la mirada- otro cuadro- y negar mi existencia del mismo modo en que se niega una noticia desagradable en el noticiero cambiando de canal.

Zapping. África o Europa Central [...] Yo soy un poco así. Despojo irrecuperable, anacronismo disfuncional²⁶¹ (Fresán 34).

The comparisons chosen here by the narrator, to newsworthy moments of human misery are not a coincidence; they represent much the same practice of looking at the world without seeing, and listening without hearing. Furthering the image, the narrator mentions a man at the party standing on the balcony, wondering whether he would not be better off jumping. The problem, as the narrator and reader both know, is that the man will never act and if he did, no one would care about “los títulos finales que nadie se queda a leer²⁶²” (43).

This ability to dismiss or ignore one’s environment and its unacceptable problems is of course a defense mechanism designed for self-protection and the protection of a comfortable way of life better left undisturbed. This, while upsetting,

²⁶¹ “Yes, it is possible that you may have seen me on the edges of some party, only to immediately look away- another frame- and deny my existence in the same way that one denies an unpleasant bit of news while changing channels. Zapping. Africa or Central Europe...I am a little like that. Irrecoverable goods, a disfunctional anachronism.”

may be explained away as a desire to maintain the status quo. The problem is that this attitude leads some characters to make light of the situation in highly problematic, unfunny, ways which cover their own lack of involvement by claiming there was really no reason to act anyway. One of the more flippant, terrible comments comes, not surprisingly, from the lips of the one protagonist who seems to learn the least during his trip through adolescent rebellion; Matías of course. When his bartender/mentor/dealer Alejandro Paz is arrested during the week of the plebiscite, the gravity of the event (not to mention the idea of possible torture and exile) seems to pass right over Matías' newly shorn head. "Me gustaría creer que, ahora que la cosa se apaciguó, lo que nos espera es la calma. El famoso Alejandro Paz de Chile salió libre y, más allá de unos golpes no fue torturado ni nada...El famoso Alejandro Paz de Chile se va²⁶³." (293)

The Road Less Traveled

La ciudad de los pibes sin calma
-Fito Páez

One would think, logically, that after discussing the reaction-impaired characters above, it would be exceedingly difficult to think of one capable of both initiating action in order to confront a real problem and consequently, of following it through to an

²⁶² "the titles at the end which no one stays to read."

²⁶³ "I would like to believe that now that things have quieted down, what we have ahead of us is calm. The famous Alejandro Paz of Chile was freed and apart from a few punches wasn't tortured or anything...The famous Alejandro Paz of Chile is leaving."

effective result, even at the cost of their own lifestyle. Fresán's protagonists in the trilogy of short story collections²⁶⁴, particularly Alejo and his brother, risk their jobs or situations more than once without undue hesitation, even knowing in Alejo's case that the intent may be futile. For them, the importance of the attempt (the re-arranging of Shastry's kitchen in "El aprendiz de brujo" or Alejo's being willing to put himself in enemy²⁶⁵ hands in more than one case) outweighs any foreseeable perils. They show not only interest in perceived injustices, to themselves and others, but also demonstrate initiative and creativity in confronting these wrongs.

Similarly, in Sergio Gómez's "De como el horoscopo chino...", Marce Santelices (who we hear of exclusively through the narrator's voice) first gives up her upper middle class lifestyle for an 'inappropriate' love and to a lesser degree revolutionary fervour, then sacrifices even more when she chooses to return to a former fiancé and a life she does not want in order to save her lover from prison. "Ella se mostraba segura y resuelta, yo otra vez la admiraba sin saber porque²⁶⁶" (21).

Perhaps the best counterpoint to this particular incidence is the plot of *Mala onda*. Matías attempts to distance himself from his family's politics (both internal and external) through raising his political and social consciousness and by trying to convince himself that given a chance, he would vote against General Pinochet in the upcoming plebiscite. The entire narrative documents these seemingly honest attempts, only to sink into an acceptance of the language of the Father (not to mention his money and cocaine) and a complete capitulation to the laws of consumption. It is *not* another case of self-

²⁶⁴ *Historia argentina, Vidas de santos and Trabajos manuales*

²⁶⁵ Be it the British or the devil.

and a complete capitulation to the laws of consumption. It is *not* another case of self-sacrifice for the greater good; it is a young man testing the waters of resistance and finding them too hot.

Some of the activism takes on unexpected forms, as with Daniela's videos in *Buenos Aires vice versa* which force the unwilling spectators, both within the movie and in the theatre, to acknowledge the violent and unpleasant face of the city. The emphasis on sight, and the need to acknowledge and engage with that which is before one's eyes is fiercely argued, though rarely in predictable ways. Blindness, for example, is not equated here with the dark or even with a lack of reflective action. Instead, the argument is made that one's apparent blindness is in fact no excuse for not defending oneself from the "unseen" or the hidden²⁶⁷. Do not claim ignorance because that is not a viable defense.

The other side of this is the power of hearing instead of just listening, which in many cases outweighs even that of speaking (generally given more importance because it appears to be a more active response). The hotel clerk who eavesdrops on the clients' illicit affairs, maintains a passive involvement in what they do. When he is forced to listen and *hear* what goes on, his mediating barrier is brought down, leaving him open to hear the cry at the end which ultimately contains the entire story, and to begin to act.

The texts underscore the thought that any change, no matter how small, is socially and politically significant, as long as one takes action. The protagonist of Fresán's "El aprendiz de brujo" moves things only a few millimeters out of their

designated spots and thus manages to cause complete chaos. Like the Mickey Mouse character in *Fantasia*, whom the narrator refers to, the protagonist, and the readers, find that the intended actions get out of control, but at least they are not just sitting around and sweeping floors at the behest of the Master.

The question was raised earlier in this chapter about the tactics of resistance employed in the texts, and how these may differ from the understanding of confrontation which is associated with the previous generation. The obstacle in the form of skeptic postmodernism and its melancholy sense of futility has made a deep impression upon the voices of the texts; particularly as concerns the characters' questioning both the honesty and the viability of great social projects which nowadays seem hopelessly utopic and ever farther from reach. "En los 90s, el ajuste y sus consecuencias plantean a la juventud la necesidad de aprender a descifrar y resignificar nuevos códigos de convivencia social²⁶⁸" (Szulik & Kuasñosky *Jóvenes* 229). The ways in which the characters have thus far chosen to respond to the world around them are based, to some degree, on appropriating and playing with the potential power of language. The combination of lessons learned from consumer culture and advertising gimmicks, along with a pressing need to recharge language with an acting, active significance has resulted in texts which, once again, find themselves crossing the discursive divide between literature and "real life" rejoinders. Those who grew up surrounded by what they perceived to be empty rhetoric concerning politics, society and

²⁶⁷ As in the horrifying scene where the ex-torturer torments the blind woman with a sick cat and mouse game in the motel room. She is overwhelmed at first and can not react. Her eventual reaction is one of rage and violence.

their duties as citizens, chose to go against the more symbolic, dense language of the previous literary generation, in order to call things by their name, to deflate them of extraneous meaning and to focus on what Gonzalo Contreras calls “transparencia” (Cortínez 16) .

One of the more fascinating cases is drawn from the highly creative activities of the group known as HIJOS in Argentina. This association run by the adult children of those who were killed, imprisoned, disappeared or exiled during the last dictatorship took upon itself the unfinished task of identifying those (former) torturers and killers who were still at large, unpunished, and living quietly as upstanding citizens all over Argentina. Their idea has not been to inflict upon them the same treatment which they had meted out to their victims. Instead, the power of language and the seductive techniques of the advertising industry have been harnessed in order to alert the neighbours to the presence of a murderer or child-kidnapper in their midst. For days before the main events, known as *escraches* and involving street theatre and small peaceful demonstrations in front of the target’s home, highly graphic, coloured posters and pamphlets are distributed throughout the area, complete with photographs, flashy logos and carefully worded “introductions to the neighbours” designed to promote awareness. The constant emphasis is on creating and disseminating a language which recuperates antiquated concepts including identity (of the victims and the victimizers), responsibility (of the oppressors and of those who remained silent), and sense of community (both local and national). Not all of the fictional endeavours meet these

²⁶⁸ “In the 90s, the change and its consequences required young people to learn how to decipher and resignify new codes of social coexistence.”

criteria and it is doubtful whether any address all three of the abovementioned goals. A positive understanding or sense of community seems to be the most difficult to find.

One interesting case is that of *Buenos Aires vice versa*, which in a sense takes the next step; allowing the subversion of language, as practiced by groups like HIJOS, to evolve into part of the narrative strategy of the film. Just as HIJOS try to lay bare the hidden faces of the community, Agresti's film itself becomes an *escrache*, revealing how the language and actions of criminals does not change with time. The words used by the man in the locked room, against the blind woman, belong to the same vocabulary he vaunted in torture rooms and cells. He has felt no need to re-evaluate his language in the past 20 years.

There are also cases of characters who use language for a different purpose; in order to withdraw further into an individual space, prolonging and propagating the solitude and anger of the victim rather than acting through language in order to expand consciousness and instigate a sense of community.

The standard bearer for this latter, exclusive group would be Nina, Alejo's girlfriend in Fresán's short stories. Nina, the daughter of a couple who disappeared during the dictatorship, withdraws into a self-destructive shell which expands only to allow her to negatively influence the lives of her boyfriend and later her daughter. Interestingly, her vehicle of choice for disseminating her particular opinions of life and society is an invented language whose main distinction is the substitution of certain letters for others; generally K's instead of QU's, and X's instead of S's and Z's. She leaves Alejo a note: "Te kiero haxta que el fin del mundo, haxta ke el kaos diga baxta.

Xox mi lux negra y te kiero haxta la xemana ke viene²⁶⁹” (*Historia* 156). Neither the form nor the contents of this message give the reader a sense of inclusion or of openness. The purposely pseudo-cryptic spelling and the elusive non-promises of affection resist the traditional declarations and images of stable and loving relationships. Love is eternal, or until next week. Nina confronts the world around her with violence and a stubborn refusal to create a link between herself and others, whether they be strangers, Alejo or even her daughter. “Como siempre, todo el mundo conoce a Nina y Nina no conoce a nadie...Nina avanza con la seguridad de Moisés dividiendo las aguas del Mar Rojo²⁷⁰” (164). One of the most striking elements of Nina’s character is her inability to understand why she acts as she does. Unlike Carlos from *Historias del Kronen*, Nina does not seem to derive pleasure from any of her unorthodox choices, or from her lifestyle. She acts as she is expected to act and ultimately fulfills her designated role as irresponsible, emotionally uninvolved young person. She is the embodiment of Cánovas’ orphan. Nina, having been affectively alienated since childhood, reacts by visually subverting and adapting the language of the Father to her own situation. The language of love she attempts to communicate to Alejo is one that has been emptied of meaning. The phrases promising eternal love belong to a time she does not inhabit and can not comprehend. As Eugenio Tironi explained in his analysis of post-dictatorial Chile, “toda sociedad que pierde el amor se desintegra²⁷¹” (19). Inverted, this comment also rings true; when society falls apart, so does love. Nina’s

²⁶⁹ “I love you until the end of the world, until the chaos says ‘enough’. You are my black light and I love you until next week.”

²⁷⁰ “As always, everyone knows Nina and Nina does not know anyone...Nina advances with the security of Moses dividing the Red Sea.”

note reflects this more contemporary understanding of what used to be an emotion and now belongs to advertisements, pushing products that the buyer will “love” and which will make the consumers “love themselves” for having purchased them. See for example an ad from the Argentinian women’s clothing store Via-Vai:

Hay acción. Hay color. Hay cosas que hacer. Hay reacción. Hay energía. Hay evolución. Hay gente. Hay ganas. Hay sueños. Hay historia. Hay horizonte. Hay cambio. Hay ideas. Hay amor. Hay música. Hay cosas que decir. Hay mística. Hay pasado. Hay mensaje. [...] Hay huevos. Hay libertad. Hay Via-Vai
(Margulis *Juventud* 40).

This repetition of what there “is” in the world, a repetition where action, love, evolution, liberty, history and other fundamental concepts are matched up on equal terms with the name of a boutique, give meaning to Nina’s actions. Rather than adapting the language for her own purposes, Nina assimilates both the vocabulary and the time frame of consumption, recognizing that love, in its present incarnation, lasts not much longer than an ad campaign.

Nina, as the narrator describes her, is a girl of her times, a doyenne of the all-night social scene and of all that is popular. Why or how she reached this position are questions she has never asked herself, if the narrator is to be believed.

²⁷¹ “Every society which loses its love disintegrates.”

En realidad, Nina no sabe muy bien por qué se droga. Tampoco sabe muy bien por qué se maquilla los ojos de negro, por qué se acuesta con cualquiera que le gusta, por qué se preocupa de fingir orgasmos cuando se acuesta con cualquiera que le gusta y por qué hay que llegar despierta a las diez de la mañana²⁷² (163).

This description of Nina's non-interest in her own motives or in what moves her to act as she does, is problematic. The reader may note that yes, Nina is a "teen-rebel" in the classic tradition. She paints her eyes with black make-up, takes drugs, lies, sleeps around and stays up all night partying. Nina appears, then, to have walked straight into a trap set by the official adult discourse which expects young people to follow a highly predictable pattern of rebellion; the same discourse which is the foundation for the state of constant suspicion described by Moulian (1997), and Szulik and Kuasñosky (1997). Yes, her actions appear conventional, and the text, at first glance, does not ascribe Nina any lofty ideals that could lead the reader to interpret her behaviour as a subversive cover for socially conscious beliefs. This reading however would overlook the obvious, the presence of a resistance contained in the text. Drugs are Nina's escape from a reality she does not know how to handle. Reality is, for her, a small, confining space that she finds unbearable and does not know how to navigate. "A Nina no le van bien los lugares chicos y silenciosos" (Fresán "Gente con walkman" 164). Drugs are a way of challenging the limits of the life she inhabits, just as the makeup around her eyes

²⁷² "Actually, Nina does not really know why she takes drugs. Nor does she know why she paints her eyes black. Or why she sleeps with whoever she likes, and makes sure to fake orgasms everytime she sleeps with whoever she likes, and why she has to stay awake until ten o'clock in the morning".

delimits what she chooses to see around her. Just as the instinct to *zafar*, to hang on and survive, can, as we have seen, imply a cultivated habit of lowering one's head, keeping one's voice down and staying out of trouble, it can mean the opposite as well. As seen in Nina's case, the only way to ride out a less than perfect destiny with a minimum of pain is, ironically, to get *into* trouble. She thus contributes to the official myth of disenchanted drug-addled youth while simultaneously refusing to live soberly and conscientiously in the society that disseminates this myth.

Places of Resistance

Esquina Libertad/ envido y truco
del tiempo/ a usted le toca jugar/
no haga parda y corte el
viento/.../nunca del todo se pueda
escapar/ aúh !/mientras la sombra
te siga detrás.
"Esquina Libertad", Los Piojos

Throughout this dissertation a mystification of sorts has emerged in relation to the loci mentioned in the narrative texts. One location, which figures prominently in several texts by Gómez, Fresán and Fuguet, as well as in the movie *Buenos Aires vice versa* is that of the shopping centre, which has become a symbol of the social age. A microcosm of consumer culture, the mall is fascinating primarily due to its ambiguity; it is both public and private by definition and by nature. How is this apparent contradiction possible?

It is easier to first explain the public character of the shopping centre, as it seems more straightforward. It is a construct built for the purpose of providing a multitude of services to the consumer under one roof. The mall is generally divided in two; first, areas of circulation, including hallways and courtyards, and second, areas of direct consumption, including the stores and the food court or cafes. Both of these sections could justifiably be described as public, as any member of the public can enter the mall, whether to actually shop or just to wander. There are no doormen or passes restricting access to a chosen clientele.

Socially speaking, one of the more definite illustrations of the public role of the shopping centre lies in its having replaced more traditional spaces like parks or *plazas* as a chosen locus of social and cultural interaction. Whereas prior to the advent and rapid spread of shopping malls it was customary for people to meet in public squares for a stroll and the chance to talk with family and neighbours, critics have noted how nowadays, a family outing often involves a trip to the mall.

Forma pasa frente a una familia tipo-padre, madre, hermana, hermano- que contempla abstraída una pirámide de videos vírgenes. El mismo paisaje al aire libre, en la calle, les sería indiferente. Aquí les resulta fascinante...²⁷³(Fresán “Shopping Center” 180-81).

²⁷³ “Forma passes a family- the father, mother, sister, brother type- contemplating a pyramid of blank videos. They would be indifferent to the same scene outdoors, in the street. Here they find it fascinating...”

Rob Shields, in “Spaces for the Subject of Consumption”, claims that the community (of consumers in this case) “appropriates the mall as a surrogate town square” (5). Those who have most strongly adopted the space as their own are teenagers, who according to Margulis, “sienten que en sus instalaciones, ‘nadie los controla’ y ‘nadie les dice lo que tienen que hacer’²⁷⁴” (*Juventud* 37). In the literature of the *Nueva narrativa*, particularly with Fresán and Fuguet, there is a tendency to place their characters in malls, exercising their supposed freedom or escaping from what the reader may interpret as the oppression of parents and school. In Gómez’ “De como matar ninjas” too the narrator and his friend feel the most free in what passes for a mall in their town. Taken at face value, the stories and novels support a reading privileging shopping centres as neutral locations within which youth is free to express itself, either by walking around or by purchasing the merchandise that may set them free from their unsatisfactory lives. It is a space within which the characters can act in an uninhibited manner. More importantly, taking *Forma* as a case in point, the shopping mall provides a place within which the characters can think about anything they choose:

Cosas en las que nunca piensa ahí afuera, en ese lugar que muchos inocentes que se han quedado fuera de la historia todavía insisten en llamar- con esa voz entre

²⁷⁴ “feel that in these places, ‘nobody controls them’ and ‘nobody tells them what they have to do’ ”

reverente y triste que sólo se usa para invocar lo irrecuperable- el mundo real²⁷⁵
(Fresán 186).

The parallels between behaviour in the square and in the shopping centre, right down to the discrete scrutiny shoppers endure from fellow patrons, demonstrate that there has been a physical move towards the indoors but no great change socially speaking. This is misleading, as people actually leave the strictly public zone upon entering a typical shopping centre.

Malls are privately built, privately owned spaces. They are not maintained by tax dollars or by the government. Furthermore, not only do the shoppers watch one another, but so do security cameras and guards, hired and paid by the owners of the shopping centre. These structures merely give the illusion of being public and of belonging to all who choose to enter. At any moment though, one may be evicted and forbidden re-entry. Herbert Schiller, in **Culture Inc.: The Corporate Takeover of Public Expressions** (1989), describes it in an even more disquieting, though nonetheless manner:

TV monitors discreetly observe your every move, their unblinking eyes rotating indefatigably in 120 degree arcs. And the ever present Pinkerton guards...can be seen to murmur secrets in their walkie-talkies, reporting to central control, ever watchful of the slightest irregularity in this environment, controlled to perfection, this fascist

²⁷⁵ “Things he never thinks about out there, in that place which many innocents who have been left out of history still insist on calling- with that voice somewhere between reverent and sad

Utopia. (99-100).

Seen in this way, the reincarnation of the figure of the torturer as a mall guard in *Buenos Aires vice versa* is not surprising. His murder of Bocha, the street urchin, is inevitable. The audience watches his tension grow. First, he insults his nephew, telling him he is “just like his parents”. Then, he mentally tortures the blind woman. Shooting a child is the final step.

Conclusion

La historia de mi vieja también tiene un final, en toda historia uno quiere hacer el final. Pero ¿qué final le doy yo a mi historia? ¿Qué final le da uno a una historia? Esa es mi pregunta.
Esteban, *Ni el flaco perdón de diós*

To speak of a conclusion in relation to this literature which is based in large part on instability and uncertainty is difficult. The *Nueva narrativa* is not a genre which offers up its beliefs or criticisms consistently or easily to the reader. The duality in the texts and their refusal to come straight out with an answer to the characters’ problems, points to a textualization of the same skepticism which has led this generation to dabble

that’s only used to invoke the irrecuperable- the real world”.

in many causes without dedicating itself whole-heartedly to any of them²⁷⁶. While, as was discussed at the outset in this dissertation, if the texts can not claim to faithfully represent society, they certainly select and develop some of its discourses. As the social psychologist George Mead underlined in *Mind, Self and Society* (1967), "...there is nothing odd about the product of a given process contributing to, or becoming an essential factor in, the further development of that process" (226). In the case of the narratives and their place within society, there is a constant exchange and advance which is fed not only by external discourses, but also by those which the process itself generates. In the course of this dissertation not only have these contributing discourses surfaced, but the fictionalized link between them has become more apparent. The *Nueva narrativa* has shown itself to be a genre able to fulfill the dual role of consequence and instigator.

Within the texts there is an appreciation of the fact that historical and political events, including the return to democracy, have not turned out the way society, and its youth, had expected. The post-dictatorship generation, in the cases of Chile, Spain and Argentina, were supposed to have benefited from the transition from smothering oppression to a promised economic, social and political openness. In Memba and Velázquez's *La generación de la democracia*, the reader is reminded of some of the hypocritical hopeful promises and enticements offered to first-time voters in Spain:

²⁷⁶ If one thinks of causes which were fashionable among youth in the 1980's, the list would include Live Aid and Band Aid for Africa, the Amnesty International Tour, Save the Rainforest, and more. All of these were accompanied by merchandising onslaughts including t-shirts, key chains, posters and specially recorded music to protest by.

La oposición, aún en la ilegalidad, carecía de medios para defender la abstención, mientras que la campaña periodística institucional aseguraba: “ ‘Tu voz es tu voto’; ‘si quieres la democracia, vota’; ‘El pueblo necesita tu voz’; ‘Ejercemos nuestra libertad a través del voto’; ‘La democracia la hacemos entre todos votando’²⁷⁷” (56).

Something, however, went awry. While the changeovers in Spain, Chile and Argentina inaugurated a new, more hopeful period in the respective national histories, policies and official discourses continued to be less than favourable to young people. If they were no longer being actively hunted for espousing political beliefs, the discourse of the hegemony had little trouble making minor changes to fit the new “democratic” rules of delinquency. As the popular Argentine singer León Gieco rationalized: “¿Qué nos diran por no pensar lo mismo, ahora que no existe el comunismo?/ Estarán pensando igual, ahora son todos enfermitos/ Estarán pensando igual, ahora son todos drogadictos²⁷⁸” (“Los Salieris de Charly”). This trinity of accusations, a lack of ideology, a sick attitude and a problem with consumption, actually serves as a fair evaluation of what represent the biggest challenges to this generation. More importantly, as this dissertation has argued, these three supposed crisis and their impact on the lives

²⁷⁷ “The opposition, who were still illegal, lacked the means to defend abstention, while the institutional newspaper campaign promised: ‘Your voice is your vote’, ‘If you want democracy, vote’, ‘The people need your voice’, ‘Let us exercise our freedom by our vote’, ‘Democracy is made by all of us voting’.”

²⁷⁸ “What will they say to us, for not thinking the same, now that Communism no longer exists?/ They will keep thinking the same, now they’re all sick/ They will keep thinking the same, now they are all drug addicts”.

of the fictional protagonists have formed a thematic foundation for many of the narratives of the *Nueva narrativa*.

The supposed disappearance of ideologies has remained an especially relevant topic. For the reader, one of the strongest images imparted by the *Nueva narrativa* is its refusal, to completely dismiss all aspects of an ideological heritage cut short. The genre, which espouses no particular politics except perhaps an uninvolved, passive neo-liberalism, textualizes the re-questioning occurring within recovering cultures. As I quoted earlier, characters like Mañas' Carlos complain that it has all been done before; the older generation managed to squeeze the last drops of rebellion out of any decent causes and there are no weapons left to fight with nor ideals to fight for. Simultaneously, titles like *Historia argentina* and *Adiós Carlos Marx, nos vemos en el cielo*²⁷⁹ express the desire for a massive re-evaluation and a re-writing of the official versions of historical events whether national or personal.

The leaders of the new democracies did not adequately address the social scars which remained, unhealed, from previous mandates. What is more, the distrust has spread to cause young people to question all of the history they have been taught, not only recent events. The authors of the *Nueva narrativa*, including those whose social background places them in privileged positions, have highlighted their degrees of moral dissatisfaction with the system and with this literary practice, almost without exception. The generation that came of age around the time of the transfers of power may have been deprived in a sense of their official memory, but they were able to recall the most

²⁷⁹ This title of Gómez's book also hints at the possibility of a conceivable utopia, a heaven where Karl Marx is also present.

important lessons of the period. There was no point in openly challenging the system; there appeared to be no movements or ideologies left that had not shown serious cracks in their utopic armour, and finally, they admitted to a sense of exhaustion. This generation was left with a legacy of dense language, both in literature and in real life, which tried to simultaneously represent this world and other possible worlds. A desire was expressed for a vocabulary that spoke clearly and called ideas and concepts by their proper name²⁸⁰, without wrapping them in flags or banners.

What sets this genre apart from others that have addressed society's injustices has been its utter refusal to actively engage in this discourse. The situation is described and the displeasure textualized. The characters are always pleased to discuss their own malaise and overpowering sense of alienation, and yet no suggestions are ever made overtly about how to solve these problems. This may be because there are no perceivable solutions; that any hopefully utopic components have disappeared. This literature testifies to the presence of serious obstacles being navigated by members of this generation, but it also addresses the utter absence of traditional cultural spaces in both the real world and the fictional ones within which transformation can occur. The "modern" alternatives to these spaces have fallen short of their mark. The most visible example would be the shopping center, the modern day replacement for the town square, which has proved a poor substitute as far as being a welcoming place for public contact and interaction.

²⁸⁰ This belief that names are simple and uncomplicated demonstrates a certain innocence, or even naivete, about the weight and power which words possess.

Just as a vacuum can not stay empty for long, the hollow left by the lack of ideological foundations was filled even before its significance was fully appreciated. There can be little argument in hindsight about the instigation of consumer culture by governments who had much invested in taking their public's minds off of politics. In this sense, the bad hand dealt the youth of the post-dictatorship generation was superficially balanced, as they were given easy access to a globalized modernity which was to set them apart culturally from their predecessors in a way which was unimaginable in the previous generation. As José Joaquín Brunner explains, "(d)e 1973 en adelante hubo que 'reconstruir' el país, rearticular la sociedad. No bastaba con una intervención militar que meramente impusiera orden (la represión)" ("Agentes" 74). The post- coup generation attained all the trappings of modernity with a minimum of discomfort. Consequently, by inducting the youth into the McDonald's and MTV generation, one more link with their local reality was severed, even if only cosmetically or virtually. The voice of this new citizen of the global village was diverted ideally to other, less confrontational forms of participation. The literature however, continues to remind the reader that there are two sides to every phenomenon.

Eugenio Tironi has suggested that young people today exist under a constant stain of suspicion. When they are politically active they are subversive, and when they withdraw from the public eye they are marked as narcissistic and spoiled. This same distrust and polarization of positions has emerged in the narratives written by the thirty-something generation. First the dangerous characters: Fresán's "Aprendiz de brujo", unable to live according to society's rules, is eventually forced to go underground and live as an invisible conscience, showing up in such controversial places as Waco, Texas.

The “Dinamitera loca” is given her violent nom-de-guerre not for having actually used any dynamite, but because her less confrontational brother Forma thinks that her disapproval of consumer culture might eventually turn violent. Fuguet’s Matías, on the other hand, personifies the selfishness which prevents him from properly committing to a cause. He never really expands his existential discontent, in fact the complaints of an overindulged adolescent, to include a critique of the oppressive political system he lives in. As he never strays too far from home, Matías is finally punished only with the dissolution of a nuclear family he was not overly keen on anyhow.

Whether any truth lies in portraying the experiences of youth in one radical way or the other, the fact remains that the roots of both tendencies, towards either rebelliousness or isolationism, lie in their reaction to the same culture which raised them. Similarly, the behaviour of the characters in the fictional narratives depend on their position within both the configured world of the text and the cultural codes inserted therein by the author. The official discourse of consumer culture, in both real life and within the world of the texts, may be described in general terms in the same way that Baudrillard spoke of the new cultural reliance on consumption. He did so in a positive sense, pointing out, much like the hegemonic discourses, the advantages and idealism inherent in this new, creative way of living:

The system of consumption constitutes an authentic language, a new culture, when pure and simple consumption is transformed into a means of individual and collective expression. Thus a ‘new humanism’ of consumption is opposed to the ‘nihilism’ of consumption (“System” 12).

What emerged in the writing of the McOndo generation is an addendum and a response to Baudrillard's statement. Consumer culture, as Baudrillard himself points out, expresses itself through a sociolect all its own. This lexis however, has fewer links to humanism than it does to advertising strategies and a cult of individualism and false collectivity. One example of this last creation is the famous advertisement for the "Pepsi Generation"; a generation united not through their common history or education or self-defined goals, but through the soft-drink they purchase. As such, consumption is a major factor in the creation of the contemporary social imaginary, a relationship which is further intensified in the case of young people, the acknowledged popular targets of the advertising industry. Codes of consumerism have consequently infiltrated correlated social discourses and relations, informing communication practices between individuals and between different sectors of society, including families. As Forma explains in "La Forma del shopping center": "El abuelo de Forma murió de un ataque cardíaco en un shopping center. Su madre le dijo a su padre que quería divorciarse en un shopping center" (182).

It is however important to re-emphasize the idea of fictitious worlds configured within the texts acting as both products and critics of this all-encompassing discourse. It has already been shown, particularly through the analysis of long lists of goods in the narratives, that the worlds of the novels and stories exist in a parallel, almost mirrored state to the outward image of "real" consumer society. Great weight is placed on the idea of material abundance and, furthermore, on the supposedly democratic access to nominally exclusive brand name items. The reader can not mistake the importance

attributed to these logos and names, as they replace what formerly were character descriptions based on human qualities. Judging from the equal presence of this tendency in texts from the United States, Chile, Argentina and Spain, the reader could be forgiven for thinking that these circumstances, if not global, are at least widespread. Nonetheless, the texts themselves avoid falling completely into the ideal model of the consumer citizen, and very definitely, though occasionally cryptically, reveal the true colours behind the lauded transparency and easy access of this new modernity.

To return for a moment to the second of the three negative characteristics thematized within the genre and the generation, the question of a sick attitude obviously requires and constitutes a moral judgment on the part of the reader. Keeping this in mind, the same reader may note a certain uneasiness on the part of characters who themselves express some surprise at their sometimes callous attitude toward the suffering of other around them. This anxiety generally manifests itself in the guise of confusion; they sense that something in their experience is not quite right. Matías gets the impression that popping amphetamines the morning before his nephew's baptism is somehow pathetic; Bateman bursts into anguished tears in the middle of eating his dead victim's organs. Neither of them has the emotional or cultural tools to analyze their sentiments though, or to make the moral judgment that the reader will inevitably make, because the characters' experiences of the individual-driven society and its codes have not included a lesson in profound self-criticism. One of the only cases in which the reader encounters a character being punished for his insistence on focusing only on himself and his present needs is in "El borde peligroso de las cosas". The protagonist Javier Messen is punished for concentrating exclusively and selfishly on his present. By

dedicating himself to recuperating in the present what he sees as lost opportunities, Javier gambles away his future. He is left without a wife, and without a complete legacy as his baby son dies at birth.

The alternate world configured within the texts is one whose critiques are of the sort nurtured within the belly of the beast, so to speak. The texts make no attempt to claim independence from, or deny their consumer roots. Nor do they hide the materialist desires of the characters. Instead, the pleasure accrued from an existence within the limits of the hegemony is accepted as a reward of sorts for the less pleasing aspects of the system. To paraphrase the title of Žižek's well-known book, the texts contain a definite sense of enjoyment of the symptoms the characters "suffer" from. And why should they not? The majority of the narrators, along with the characters, are in a position of privilege, class wise, and can well afford to complain about what they take for granted.

The texts feed off of a hegemonic system but in their elaboration they also return the favour and play a part in the reproduction and subversion of said structure. The weapon chosen to question the tenets of globalized consumer culture has been the vocabulary of the very same force that most powerfully influenced the narratives of this generation. The first chapter of this dissertation has addressed the propensity of the genre to highlight certain semantic or lexical tendencies intimately linked to consumer culture and more specifically to its media disseminators. Nonetheless, what constitutes the critical feature of the texts is not their discussion of the saturated presence of these references, but rather the study of the absences within the thematic and linguistic weave of the text. The practice of searching for clues to unmentioned issues like the true role of

the population at large during the dictatorships, beyond its purely intertextual interest, is also another example of the feeling that something is not quite right with the world. This same sense that leads some characters to sub-consciously critique their own behaviour is the one which spurs both the characters and the readers to re-examine the national, political and economic discourses which for them were formative.

One achievement of the narratives is the unmasking of social relations within consumer societies. A public restructuring of discourses, including the traditional approach to class, occurred with the introduction of deferred payment options into sectors of society who previously lacked the money to gain access to this new modernity. The official discourse would have one believe that thanks to easy payments, quotas and credit cards, anyone can attain the goods s/he desires, no matter their background or actual economic solvency. The texts, on the other hand, expose this false sense of inclusion for what it is; a simple restructuring of what constitutes cultural exclusivity. The characters in the novels and short stories recognize that some items for sale belong to the population at large, while others remain the exclusive birthright of the more privileged. Fuguet's Matías finds himself lost in a marginal neighborhood at night and immediately begins to worry about whether the inhabitants will try to steal his wallet and watch:

Escondó mi billetera en mis Levi's, lo mismo que el reloj. No sé qué hago aquí, pienso aterrado. [...] Por las ventanas, muchas de ellas cubiertas por plásticos

transparentes, alfora el ruido de la tele. Y las radios. Sólo canciones de protesta, en español. Ni un tema disco. Nada. Estoy perdido, pienso (246).

It never occurs to the narrator that according to the official version of economic access these people can go and buy themselves a watch with their multi-payment credit cards. They have televisions, but can not afford glass for the windows of their homes. The presence of the media (television) in the home means that all the characters know what Matías' Levis are, but not all of them can purchase them. In other words, there are many inconsistencies, surrounding the global culture of consumption and its supposed redistribution of access, whose impact on the consumers is revealed and magnified within the worlds of the texts.

Having addressed this discrepancy between the discourses and the practice, most characters of the Nueva narrativa still do not locate themselves within a revolutionary, confrontational space. Instead, after opening up the contested issues to a debate, and in some cases making a symbolic protest, many of the texts withdraw without pursuing matters any further. The decision to commit wholly to a struggle or a rebuilding is very rare within the texts, with Fresán's "Aprendiz de brujo" being one of the only characters to consciously take up arms against the hegemony. More often, the characters allow their frustrations to build to a breaking point, before settling back into their routine. In Buenos Aires vice versa this inclination to retreat is demonstrated in the scene following the security guard's torture of the blind lady, as his nephew who heard the whole thing weeps in a nearby park. The passivity displayed in this painful scene, as opposed to a

reaction in which the boy would have broken down the door and confronted his uncle, is the legacy of the ability to *zafar*.

The need to get through the diverse societal contretemps relatively unscathed is perhaps the most characteristic and the most deeply ingrained of all the generational tendencies that have been textualized and reconfigured within the world of the *Nueva narrativa*. Willing to do whatever it takes to get by without too much pain, the fictional characters have been endowed with the same survival instincts which are so well developed in non-fictional contemporary youth cultures²⁸¹. In Gómez's "De cómo matar ninjas" the author fictionalizes this characteristic as the protagonist cold-heartedly complains that a girl's shooting will ruin his chances to get ahead in life. The author amplifies the repercussions of what happens when one sacrifices one's sense of compassion and solidarity for the sake of progress. Just as the rapid entry of some societies into the western model of modernity was achieved at a harsh price in the past 30 years, so the characters in the textual universes respond to the combination of pleasure and pain with a sense of resigned understanding.

The reader must bear in mind that in adopting a foreign genre, as the *Nueva narrativa* did to a large degree with the literature of the Blank Generation, even the most universal themes or problems get filtered through local concerns. In the case of the texts which have been discussed throughout this dissertation, the timing of the writing

²⁸¹ Of course, in cases such as Pat Bateman of *American Psycho*, this suffering is generally caused by the narrator/ protagonist himself.

and the publication happened to occur at a moment when the local issues were ripe for textualization.

The literature of the Nueva narrativa may be said to have benefited from a timely combination of difficult transitions and a market which was not only ripe but carefully read by certain editors. The publishers, most strongly in Chile and Argentina, sparked off a movement which was already potentially there.

Seen then within the socio-political frame of its own period, what is the contribution of this literature? Has it earned a place within the discourses of consumer culture, or does it belong within a more argumentative, challenging category? First and foremost, the texts have captured a sense of the confusion and the fatigue which plague a generation nostalgic for something they can not even recall. The narratives speak in the everyday language of those who want their complaints aired, but who are unwilling to trust their potential resolution to anyone who promises a better way. This is not a critical literature, yet it contains a critical element which has shifted the political and the social towards matters which may ask questions but never quite becomes an anti-systemic genre.

Works Cited and Consulted

- Adler, Emanuel. *The Power of Ideology: The Quest for Technological Autonomy in Argentina and Brazil*. London: University of California Press Ltd., 1987.
- Adorno, Theodor W. and Max Horkheimer. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Trans. John Cumming. New York: Continuum, 1987.
- Alabarces, Pablo. *Entre gatos y violadores: El rock nacional en la cultura argentina*. Buenos Aires: Ediciones Colihue, 1994.
- Angenot, M. and R. Robin. "L'inscription du discours social dans le texte littéraire" in *Sociocriticism*, 1.1 (July 1985): pp.52-83.
- Avellaneda, Andrés. "Hablar y callar: Construyendo sentido en la democracia" in *Hispanamérica: Revista de Literatura*, vol.24 no. 72 December 1995.
- Balderston, D., D.W.Foster, T. Halperin Donghi, F. Masiello, M. Morello-Frosch and B. Sarlo. *Ficción y política. La narrativa argentina durante el proceso militar*. Buenos Aires and Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1987.
- Baudrillard, Jean. "Consumer Society" in *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings*, ed. Mark Poster. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988, pp.29-56.
- . "The System of Objects" in *Jean Beaudrillard: Selected Writings*, ed. Mark Poster. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988, pp.10-28.
- . *The Transparency of Evil: Essays on Extreme Phenomena*. London: Verso, 1993
- Becerra Grande, Eduardo. "Una hipótesis sobre narrativa hispanoamericana de los noventa basada en Historias argentinas y Viejos que leen novelas de amor" Unpublished paper, Autonomous University of Madrid.
- Bell, Daniel. *The End of Ideology*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988.
- Bertens, Hans. "Postmodern Characterization and the Intrusion of Language" in *Exploring Postmodernism* ed. M. Calinescu and D. Fokkema. Amsterdam/ Philadelphia: Benjamin's Publishing, 1990.
- Beverly, John. "The Ideology of Postmodern Music and Left Politics" *Critical Quarterly* 31:1 (1989).
- Bocock, Robert. *Consumption*. London: Routledge, 1993.

Bourdieu, Pierre. *The Field of Cultural Production*. London: Polity Press, 1993.

---. *La Distinction: critique sociale du jugement*. Paris: Éditions de minuit, 1979.

Braslavsky, Cecilia. *La juventud argentina: entre la herencia del pasado y la construcción del futuro*. Buenos Aires: Ministerio de Educación y de Justicia, 1986.

Britto García, Luis. *El imperio contracultural: Del rock a la postmodernidad*. Caracas: Nueva Sociedad, 1996.

Bruce, Donald. *De l'intertextualité à l'interdiscursivité: Histoire d'un double émergence*. Toronto: Paratexte, 1995.

Brunner, José Joaquín. *Bienvenidos a la modernidad*. Santiago: Planeta, 1994.

---. *América Latina: Cultura y Modernidad*. Mexico City: Grijalbo/Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 1992.

---. "Agentes y predicadores en la formación de la conciencia burguesa" in *Crisis y transformación de los regimenes autoritarios*. Cheresky, Isidoro and Jacques Chonchol eds. Buenos Aires: Eudeba, 1985, pp.63-81.

Calinescu, Matei. and Douwe Fokkema eds. *Exploring Postmodernism: Selected Papers Presented at a Workshop on Postmodernism at the XIth International Comparative Literature Congress*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1990.

Cánovas, Rodrigo. "De los espacios que restan en la novela chilena actual". Paper presented at the Revista Iberoamericana conference held July 1998 in Santiago de Chile.

---. *Novela Chilena nuevas generaciones: el abordaje de los huérfanos*. Santiago: Ediciones Universidad Católica de Chile, 1997.

Caparrós, Martín. Interview. *Página 12*. 22 Nov. 1998: 14-15.

Cassettari, Marcelo. *Los jóvenes durante la última dictadura en Argentina*. 16 February 2000 <<http://www.monografias.com/trabajos/jovenesdictadura.shtml>>

Cerda, Carlos. *Una casa vacía*. Santiago: Alfaguara, 1996

Cerruti, Gabriela. *Herederos del silencio*. Buenos Aires: Planeta, 1997.

- Civale, Cristina. *Hijos de mala madre: fragmentos de una generación dudosa*. Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1993.
- . *Perra virtual*. Buenos Aires: Seix Barral, 1998.
- Collyer, Jaime. *El infiltrado*. Madrid: Mondadori, 1989.
- Cortázar, Julio. "Algunos aspectos del cuento" in Barnett and Bendetti eds. *Literatura y arte nuevo en Cuba*. Barcelona: Laia, 1977, pp. 261-276.
- Cortínez, Verónica. *Entrevista colectiva*. Santiago, 1996.
- Costa Lima, Luis. "Social Representation and Mimesis" in *New Literary History: A Journal* 16:3 (1985): 447-466.
- Cubides, Humberto J., María Cristina Laverde Toscano, Carlos Eduardo Valderrama H. *Viviendo a toda: Jóvenes, territorios culturales y nuevas sensibilidades*. Santafé de Bogotá: Siglo de hombre, 1998.
- Delfino, Silvia. "We Haven't Had Time to be Guilty: Youth Culture in Argentina" In *Border/Lines: Canada's Magazine of Cultural Studies* 27 (1994): 41-46
- De Certeau, Michel. *L'invention du quotidien: arts de faire*. Paris: Gallimard, 1990.
- . *La culture au pluriel*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1993.
- Duchet, Claude. "Para una sociocrítica o variaciones sobre un incipit" *Littérature* 1 (1971): 5-14.
- Dussel, Enrique. *Haciendo memoria en el país del Nunca más*. Buenos Aires: eudeba, 1997.
- Eagleton, Terry. *Ideology: An Introduction*. London: Verso, 1991.
- Easton Ellis, Brett. *American Psycho*. New York: Random House, 1991.
- Eco, Umberto. *Travels in Hyper Reality*. Trans. William Weaver. San Diego, New York & London: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1983.
- Edgell, Stephen. *Class*. London: Routledge, 1993.
- Featherstone, Mike. *Consumer Culture & Postmodernism*. London, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1993.

Ferman, Claudia. *Política y posmodernidad: Hacia una lectura de la anti-modernidad latinoamericana*. Buenos Aires: Almagesto, 1994.

Fletcher, Lia. "Un silencio a gritos: Tortura, violación y literatura en la Argentina". In *Literatura y lingüística* 6 (1993): 133-43.

Fogwill, Rodolfo. *Los Pichiciegos*. Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1998.

---. *Muchacha punk*. Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1992.

Fontaine Talavera, Arturo. *Oír su voz*. Santiago: Planeta, 1992.

Forn, Juan. *Nadar de noche*. Buenos Aires: Planeta, 1993.

Foucault, Michel. "Des espaces autres" in *Architecture-Mouvement-Continuité*, October 1984.

Fowles, J. *Advertising and Popular Culture*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage, 1996.

Franz, Carlos. *Santiago cero*. Santiago: Seix Barral, 1997.

Fresán, Rodrigo. *Historia argentina*. Buenos Aires: Planeta, 1992.

---. *Trabajos manuales*. Buenos Aires: Planeta, 1994.

---. *Vidas de santos*. Buenos Aires, Planeta, 1993.

Frow, John. *Time and Commodity Culture: Essays in Cultural Theory and Postmodernity*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997.

Fuguet, Alberto, Sergio Gómez eds. *McOndo*. Barcelona: Mondadori, 1996.

Fuguet, Alberto *Por favor, rebobinar*. Santiago: Planeta, 1997.

---. *Bad Vibes*. Trans. Kristina Cordero. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997.

--- ed. *Santiago pena capital*. Santiago: Edición Documentas, 1991.

---. *Mala onda*. Santiago: Planeta, 1991.

---. *Sobredosis*. Santiago: Alfaguara, 1990.

García Canclini, Néstor. *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity*. Trans. C. Chiappari and S. López. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995.

—. *Consumidores y ciudadanos: conflictos multiculturales de la globalización*. Mexico: Grijalbo, 1995.

Gelman, Juan and Mara La Madrid. *Ni el flaco perdón de dios: Hijos de desaparecidos*. Buenos Aires: Planeta, 1997.

Giroux, Henry A. *Fugitive Cultures: Race, Violence and Youth*. New York: Routledge, 1996.

Goldman, R. and S. Papson. *Sign Wars; the Cluttered Landscape of Advertising*. New York: Guildford Press, 1996.

Gómez, Sergio. *Adiós, Carlos Marx, nos vemos en el cielo*. Santiago: Planeta, 1992.

—. *Vidas ejemplares*. Santiago: Planeta, 1994.

—. *Partes del cuerpo que no se tocan*. Santiago: Planeta, 1997.

Grossberg, Lawrence. *We Gotta Get Out of This Place: Popular Conservatism and Postmodern Culture*. London & New York, Routledge, 1992.

Hawthorn, Jeremy. *Cunning Passages: New Historicism, Cultural Materialism and Marxism in the Contemporary Literary Debate*. London: Arnold, 1996.

Hebdige, Dick. *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. London: Routledge, 1993.

Holquist, M. ed. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M Bakhtin*. Austin: University of Texas, 1981

Hopenhayn, Martín. "The Cultural Industry and the New Codes of Modernity." *CEPAL Review* 54 (1994): 167-179.

Hutcheon, Linda. *The Politics of Postmodernism*. London and New York: Routledge, 1993.

—. *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*. New York/ London: Routledge, 1988.

Jameson, Fredric. *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 1991.

—. *The Ideologies of Theory: Essays 1971-1986. Vol I Situations of Theory*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989.

Jofre, Manuel A. and Monica Blanco eds. *Para leer al lector: Un antología de teoría literaria post-estructuralista*. Santiago: Universidad Metropolitana de Ciencias de la Educación, 1986.

Joignant, Alfredo. *El gesto y la palabra: Ritos políticos y representaciones sociales de la construcción democrática en Chile*. Santiago: LOM, 1998.

Kon, Daniel. *Los chicos de la guerra: Hablan los soldados que estuvieron en Malvinas*. Buenos Aires: Galerna, 1982.

Kuasñosky, Silvia and Dalia Szulik. "Los extraños de pelo largo. Vida cotidiana y consumos culturales" in M.Margulis ed., *La cultura de la noche. La vida nocturna de los jóvenes en Buenos Aires*. Buenos Aires: Biblos, 1997. pp.263-91.

Langman, Lauren. "Neon Cages: Shopping for Subjectivity" in *Lifestyle Shopping: The Subject of Consumption*. London & New York: Routledge, 1992. pp.40-83

Lechner, Norberto. *El proyecto neo-conservador y la democracia*. Santiago: FLACSO, 1981.

Lefebvre, Henri. "The Bureaucratic Society of Controlled Consumption" *La Vie quotidienne dans le monde moderne*. Paris: Gallimard, 1972.

Letelier, Alfredo Jocelyn-Holt. *El Chile perplejo: Del avanzar sin transar al transar sin parar*. Santiago: Planeta, 1999.

Levi, Giovanni and Jean-Claude Schmitt eds. *A History of Young People: Stormy Evolution to Modern Times*. Cambridge Mass: Belknap Press, 1997.

Lipovetsky, Gilles. *L'empire de l'éphémère: La mode et son destin dans les sociétés modernes*. Paris: Gallimard, 1987

Magnusson, Warren. "Social Movements and the Global City." *Millenium: Journal of International Studies* 23:3 (1994): 621-645.

Mántaras, Mirta. "El manual de la represión" *Página12*. 24 March 1999: 11.

Mañas, José Ángel. *Historias del Kronen*. Barcelona: Ediciones Destino, 1994.

—. *Mensaka*. Barcelona: Ediciones Destino, 1995.

Margulis, Mario ed. *La Juventud es más que una palabra: ensayos sobre cultura y juventud*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Biblos, 1996.

---. *La cultura de la noche: la vida nocturna de los jóvenes en Buenos Aires*. Buenos Aires: Biblos, 1997.

Mariniello, Silvestra. "Le discours du recyclage" in Dionne, Claude, Silvestra Mariniello & Walter Moser eds. *Recyclages: Économies de l'appropriation culturelle*. Montreal: Editions Balzac, 1996. pp.7-20

McHale, Brian. *Postmodernist Fiction*. London: Routledge, 1987.

McInerney, Jay. *Bright Lights, Big City*. New York: Random House, 1984.

Memba, Javier and José Luis Velázquez. *La generación de la democracia: historia de un desencanto*. Madrid: Temas de hoy, 1995.

Mengham, Rod. *On Language: Descent from the Tower of Babel*. Boston/New York/Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1993.

Montaldo, Graciela. "Diez años en democracia: Los cambios en el canon" *Hispanamérica: revista de literatura*. 24:72 (1995): 39-48.

Moreno Ocampo, Luis. *Como explicar el proceso a nuestros hijos*. Buenos Aires: Planeta, 1996.

Morley, David and Kevin Robins. *Spaces of Identity: Global Media, Electronic Landscapes and Cultural Boundaries*. London and New York: Routledge, 1995.

Moser, Walter. "Le recyclage culturel" in Dionne, Claude, Silvestra Mariniello & Walter Moser eds. *Recyclages: Économies de l'appropriation culturelle*. Montreal: Editions Balzac, 1996.

Moulian, Tomás. *Chile actual: anatomía de un mito*. Santiago: LOM, 1997. (tercer capítulo)

---. *El consumo me consume*. Santiago: LOM (Libros del Ciudadano), 1998.

Niedzviecki, H. ed. *Concrete Forest: The New Fiction of Urban Canada*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1998.

Núñez, Carlos. "Lo que hemos perdido es la juventud, no las utopías" *Página 12*. Año 1, No.58, 5 August 1987.

- Olivárez, Carlos, ed. *Nueva narrativa chilena*. Santiago: LOM, 1997.
- Oses, Darío. *2010:Chile en llamas*. Santiago: Planeta, 1998.
- . *Machos tristes*. Santiago: Planeta, 1992.
- Pérez Alonso, Paula. *No sé si casarme o comprarme un perro*. Buenos Aires: Tusquets, 1996.
- Poó, Ximena. "Noche de controversias en 'Nueva narrativa'". *La Época*. July 31, 1997.
- Rajchman, John ed. *The Identity in Question*. London: Routledge, 1995.
- Riffaterre, M. *Fictional Truth*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1990.
- . "The Intertextual Unconscious" *Critical Inquiry* 13:2 (1987): 371-385.
- . "L'intertexte inconnu" *Littérature* February (1981): 4-7.
- . "La trace de l'intertexte" *La Pensée* 215 (1980): 4-18.
- . *Semiotics of Poetry*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1978.
- Rosenau, Pauline Marie. *Post-Modernism and the Social Sciences: Insights, Inroads and Intrusions*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992.
- Rosenzvaig, Eduardo. *Vidrios espejados: cultura de la posmodernidad colonial*. Buenos Aires: Letra Buena, 1998.
- . "Las Zonas: de Ottawa al sur". Unpublished article, Tucumán, 1998.
- Ruffinelli, Jorge. "Los 80: ¿ingreso a la postmodernidad?" *Nuevo Texto Crítico* 3:6 (1990): 31-42.
- Ruiz Núñez, Hector and María Seoane. *La Noche de los lápices*. Buenos Aires: Planeta, 1992.
- Sarlo, Beatriz. *Escenas de la vida posmoderna. Intelectuales, arte y videocultura en la Argentina*. Buenos Aires: Ariel, 1996.
- . *Instantáneas : medios, ciudad y costumbres en el fin de siglo*. Buenos Aires: Ariel, 1996.

Scarpaci, Joseph L. and Lessie Jo Frazier. "State terror: Ideology, Protest and the Gendering of Landscape" *Progress in Human Geography* 17.1(1993): 1-21.

Schiller, Herbert I. *Culture Inc.: The Corporate Takeover of Public Expression*. New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989.

Shields, Rob. "Spaces for the Subject of Consumption" in *Lifestyle Shopping: The Subject of Consumption*. London & New York: Routledge, 1992. pp.1-20

---. "The Individual, Consumption Cultures and the Fate of Community" in *Lifestyle Shopping: The Subject of Consumption*. London & New York: Routledge, 1992. pp.99-114

Silverstein, Michael and Greg Urban eds. *The Natural History of Discourse*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

Skelton, T. and Gill Valentine. *Cool Places: Geographies of Youth Cultures*. London & New York: Routledge, 1998.

Slater, Don. *Consumer Culture and Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997.

Tironi, Eugenio. *Los silencios de la revolución: Chile- la otra cara de la modernización*. Santiago de Chile: Editorial la Puerta Abierta, 1988.

Tompkins, Jane P. ed. *Reader Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism*. Baltimore/ London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983.

Tynianov, Iouri. *Le vers lui-même: Les problèmes du vers*. Trans. Durin, Grinbaum, Henry, Konopnicki, Ouvrier, Sabatier, Slodzian and Zaslavsky. Paris: UGE, 1977.

Valverde, Mariana. "Moral Capital" *Canadian Journal of Legal Studies* 9:1 (1994): 213-232.

Van Klei, Alice. "Pour une critique de la littérature hypertextuelle" *Ciberscrits*, 1:1, 1996.

Various authors. *Páginas amarillas*. Madrid: Ediciones Lengua de Trapo, 1997.

---. *Líneas aéreas*. Madrid: Ediciones Lengua de Trapo, 1999.

Vice, Sue. *Introducing Bakhtin*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1997.

Vila, Pablo. "Rock nacional, crónicas de la resistencia juvenil". In *Los nuevos movimientos sociales*. Elizabeth Jelin ed. Buenos Aires: Centro Editor, 1985, pp.83-148.

Wallerstein, Immanuel. "Semi-Peripheral Countries and the Contemporary World Crisis." *Theory and Society* 3.4 (1976): 461-83.

Žižek, Slavoj. *For They Know Not What They Do*. London: Verso, 1996.