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Title.

“Perverse fascinations and atrocious acts: An approach to *The Secret in Their Eyes* by Juan José Campanella.

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Abstract

By focusing on the intersection of recurring universes between Eduardo Sacheri's *La pregunta de sus ojos* [*The Question in Their Eyes*] and its adaption in Juan José Campanella's *The Secrets in Their Eyes* [*El secreto de sus ojos*], this paper explores the persistence of certain ideological effects of "perverse fascination" that the film, unlike the book on which it is based, tries to provoke in its audience. It analyses the discursive links with a language marked by a political tension that evidences the failure of a social system that seems to place its community beyond the civilizational boundaries of reason (Agamben). Briefly, this article argues that the thriller explored in Campanella's film serves the Argentine director to spread the idea of new social imaginaries that perpetuate, by a melodramatic imagination, the perception of a current chaotic community with no place for justice and where the rule of law has become unnecessary.

Biographical note:

Dr. Hugo Hortiguera is Senior Lecturer in Spanish at Griffith University (Australia). He specializes in contemporary Argentine literature and media. He is the author of *Argentinean Cultural Production During the Neoliberal Years (1989-2001)* (in coll. with Dr. Carolina Rocha) and *La literatura cambalachesca en la novelística de Osvaldo Soriano*. His articles have been published in *Ciberletras*, *Journal of Literary Criticism and Culture*, *Studies in Latin American Popular Culture*, *Estudios sobre el mensaje periodístico*, and in *Delaware Review of Latin American Studies*.

**Perverse fascinations and atrocious acts:
An approach to *The Secret in Their Eyes* by Juan José Campanella.**

Introduction

The adaptation of *The Question in Their Eyes* [*La pregunta de sus ojos*], the first novel by Argentine writer Eduardo Sacheri, originally published by *Editorial Galerna* in 2005 and made into a movie by Juan José Campanella in 2009, became the most talked about and successful event in the Argentine film industry in the last few years. Such success, both with audience and reviewers, made it the choice of the *Instituto del Cine de Argentina* to represent the country in the “Best Foreign Language Film” category, in the 82nd edition of the Oscar awards, organized by the *Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences of the United States*, in March 2010.¹

The original novel tells the exploits of Benjamín Chaparro, a clerk in a federal court who, having retired in the nineties, decides to write a novel as a way of dispelling his daily boredom. Chaparro’s narration alludes to a judicial investigation in which he had been involved in 1968 which dealt with the brutal rape and murder of a woman in the city of Buenos Aires. With the material kept in the character’s memory and some details he fished out of the main Court House archives, he started building –like Sacheri himself– his first novel. In it we find the unexpected consequences of the legal process, intersected with his own story as fictional narrator.² The text is structured on the basis of a series of interwoven chapters and a complex web of narrative voices. These voices fluctuate between the episodes of the novel being written by Chaparro about the criminal case (in first person); his moments of metatextual reflection, while in the nineties, about the matters of the novel at hand and the difficulties he has to overcome in order to put his story on paper (also in first person); as well as a meditation about his present (in third person, but noticeably from the character’s perspective).³

Soon after publication, Sacheri’s fiction attracted the interest of filmmaker Juan José Campanella, who decided to adapt it for his film version, in an Argentine-Spanish co-production. By 2007 both writer and director had prepared the screenplay and the next year they started filming in the city of Buenos Aires. Meanwhile, the publishing group *Aguilar-Altea-Taurus-Alfaguara* bought the rights to the original book published by *Galerna* and, with a few changes and a great sense of timing, reprinted it a few months before the film’s

debut, with a paper band which said: “The story which inspired Juan José Campanella’s film”.⁴

The film’s debut in Argentine movie houses with the title *El secreto de sus ojos* [*The Secret in Their Eyes*] was on August 13, 2009. The film immediately became an enormous box office success in Spain and Argentina, and made 8 and a half million dollars in the first months of exhibition, an absolute record in the Argentine market for a national film.⁵ On March 7, 2010, Campanella’s production won the Oscar for the Best Foreign Language Film of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences of the United States. The cast includes actors like Soledad Villamil and Pablo Rago, who had already worked with the director; Guillermo Francella, a comedian, humorist and TV actor in minor films; Ricardo Darín, Campanella’s actor of choice and star in two of his previous films; with the appearance of the Spanish actor Rafael Godino, in the role of Isidoro Gómez, the rapist and murderer.

In addition to the well known cast and good performances there were some special and unusual effects which won the admiration of both the public and the critics. Among these we may mention the technical marvel of a long air scene above a crowded Buenos Aires soccer stadium while a match was being played. The camera flies over the stadium and swoops down to the playing field, showing us the players and then focusing on the face of the protagonist on the stands, while he looked for the murderer among the crowd. This scene and the one depicting the persecution of the villain through the stands and nooks and crannies in the stadium, highly praised by the critics and the audience, required 200 extras, two years of pre-production, three days of filming and nine months of post-production.

However, it is not this movie-making grandiloquence, infrequent as it may be in Argentine movies, what I want to analyze here. In all this process of going from the book to the screenplay and from the screenplay to the visual language, some changes were made in the original story which added new layers of significance and perhaps giving –in my opinion- a rather different direction to the text that Sacheri had originally proposed.⁶

It has already been widely expressed by the critics that the focal theme in Campanella’s filmography can be an individual’s recurring failure intersected by a nostalgic past. Remember, for example, the protagonist’s frustration in *El hijo de la novia* [*Son of the Bride*], faced with the unavoidable loss of his business and his mother’s irrecoverable illness; the demise of a neighborhood social club in *Luna de Avellaneda* [*Avellaneda’s Moon*]; or the

misery and eternal exile condemning the immigrant characters in the TV series *Vientos de agua* [*Winds of Water*].

If in his first films (*El mismo amor, la misma lluvia* [*Same Love, Same Rain*]; *El hijo de la novia* and *Luna de Avellaneda*) you notice a trail describing the average Argentinean in three stages: individual, family and society, respectively, this new attempt does not detract from the trend and underlines, even more than any of his previous productions, “something about the deficit of the polis” (Fariña, electronic edition). It is this deficit that reveals a special form of memory where controversies and ideological pacts, different from those sustained in the first years of the democratic transition, are expressed. The theory of the two demons upheld by said transition, somehow cancelled the possibility of narrating the fluctuations in the social and political events of the early seventies (Sondereguer 3-4).

As we may remember, after decrees 157 and 158 by the government of Raúl Alfonsín (1983-1989) and after the report prepared by the *National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons* (CONADEP), which appeared under the title *Nunca más* [*Never Again*], a particular reading on the events that led to the 1976 coup was adopted. This explanation was based on three basic components. In first place, it posed the existence of a first demon (the left) that had disrupted Argentine society with its violence. This conduct was replied with the anger of a second demon (the right), which had opened the doors to an infinitely worse violence. Amidst this dispute, like an innocent witness, there was a society oblivious to this whole clash. Although this theory questioned the methods carried out by state terrorism, the presented diagnosis recognized the need to straighten out the excesses of the first demon. (For more details see Bietti and Sondereguer).

Unfortunately, due to space constraints, I can not dwell on this historical point. However, keeping in mind these many times discussed facts may allow us to understand the collapse the film portrays. In fact, the failure that the film talks about seems to have extended to a social system which places the community, which in the story is portrayed as being beyond the civilizing frontiers of reason, outside law, governed by an amnesic monstrous impulse and one from which it is no longer possible to escape. In this sense, a pessimistic political vision seems to take charge of the cinematographic discourse. The end chosen by Campanella—which partly modifies Sacheri’s ending, and we will soon see to what an extent—speaks of the ruin and moral and legal deterioration in which the broader community had entered.

Hence, the screenplay was constructed in this intersection of the director's and the writer's recurring universes. It also created a new resonance with very special echoes in the immediate social and political mesh of Argentina in the first decade of the third millennium. Based on this, it is not my intention here to make a list of the episodes that have been deleted or changed in the movie, or of the changes in characters' names or outcomes. My interest, after Sergio Wolf (22), lies in questioning the reasons for and the persistence of those changes and also the ideological effects of the "perverse fascination" that the film –unlike the book on which it's based- caused in its audience (Acosta Larroca). Also, I would like to study its relationship with a language characterized by a special torsion and tension with "the memory", which ends up representing the dark, unmentionable side of Argentine society. We could then wonder which are the material forms of Campanella's cinematographic discourse which evidence traces of this ideological formation. How can the film spread, establish and convey certain social imaginaries? Particularly, when they seem to contradict an imaginary about the memory which, starting with the two Kirchners' administrations, intends to become prevalent by the time the film is made and shown. This shall be the quest my study will try to address.

The serpent's egg

The context in which Sacheri's novel develops coincides with a series of critical moments in the last third of 20th century Argentina. The rape and the discovery of the woman's body occur during the military government of Onganía (late sixties). However, the murderer is caught during the dictatorship of General Lanusse, and he is released during the brief administration of President Cámpora, through the amnesty he ordered for the release of all political prisoners of the time (beginning of the turbulent seventies). On the other hand, it is during the regime of General Videla when Benjamín's exile takes place, in the province of Jujuy, where he took refuge faced with a possible murder attempt by a paramilitary group from the capital (mid seventies). Finally, the unexpected outcome about the fate of the victim's husband and the murderer occurs in the last days of Menem's government (late nineties).

Campanella's film, however, takes a significant temporal shift and concentrates all the action in two democratic periods, one between 1974-1975 (third Perón administration followed by that of his successor and widow, Estela Martínez de Perón) and the second in late 1990 (last days of Menem's government). That is, it takes our consideration away from the treatment

traditionally given to the dictatorship in the recent Argentine filmography, to be directed towards a period which, until now, has been less covered by the local cinema. This is the brief democratic interlude between 1973 and 1976, characterized by a radicalization of political thought, a strengthening of terrorist groups and the appearance of paramilitary squadrons organized from the *Ministerio de Bienestar Social* [*Department of Social Welfare*] by the then Minister José Lopez Rega, who, as you may remember, were meant to persecute all those who did not agree with an ultra orthodox *Peronism* (Mira Delli-Zotti 53). In brief, most of the film's timeline takes place in the protohistory of state terrorism.⁷

Regardless of the difficulty implied by having to set the story in five different periods and the technical simplification of reducing it to two, in some interviews (see Sendrós) the director himself has stated other reasons for this change. Among them he indicated his interest in analyzing the way in which a democratic government starts to transgress the legal limits, a crucial moment where configurations of certain social imaginaries are in conflict.⁸ The objective of these changes would then be, for Campanella, to stop at that paradoxical and exceptional instant in which the rule of law *gets rid* of the law and starts to breach it in order to secure its continuity and even its own existence. His idea, thus, was to revisit those cases which gave way to the creation of a space of lawlessness, a region of incongruity of regulations in which legal values were violated and relinquished (Agamben 99).

It is his need to recount “the serpent's egg” which caused the director to make some substantial changes in the temporal framework and in some significant events in the story, without leaving out very specific references to the immediate present at the time of filming. Thanks to these diversions, the film so made will have a very distinct way of looking not only at Sacheri's original work and the periods to which he refers as well as the political circumstances of the seventies, but also at very specific aspects of a contemporary Argentina affected by what seems to be an incorrigible Peronism which puts the state outside the law and plunges it into perpetual transgression.

In this sense, the fact that the story's timeline in the film, and the time of its filming and debut coincide precisely with three *Peronist* periods (the governments of Estela Martínez, Carlos Menem and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner) is not a minor fortuitous coincidence or the product of technical economy.⁹ Indeed, the ideological structure that sustains the film consolidates in the precise scene where the murderer –released from jail thanks to an

illegitimate act by paramilitary groups shielded by the *Ministerio de Bienestar Social* appears on television as a bodyguard for then president Estela Martínez. Such image marks the exact moment of “recognizance” of the beginning of terror in contemporary Argentine society. This is the instant when the community can be observed invaded by a dominant political structure which, from the highest levels of power and though in a democratic régime, envisages a state which is incompatible with the principles of nation.¹⁰

The evocation of that crucial moment when the movie character of Benjamín –and with him, the audience- registers that change, opens a space of terror which transforms the plot, apparently a police story, which so far had been told. It becomes a political thriller trying to tie up the loose ends for interpreting the recent national history in order to understand and unravel its present, in some sort of “exemplar memory” which can be used as “a model to understand new situations, with different agents” (Todorov 30).

Thus a complex enunciative focus and cinematographic viewpoint are established. The issue of social disintegration and dissolution of certain community values noticeable today by the audience is brought back 30 years and shown on the discursive horizon like a litany going through three utterly different *Peronist* governments. In this way the film’s narrative syntax gradually becomes more anomalous and pendular, in a continuous alternation. There are always at least two elements at stake: two timelines, two terms, two tones and textures, two scenes syntagmatically and paradigmatically opposed.

Therefore, alternation and the number two constitute the discourse in all its levels, in a two-way dialogue between connected voices which cannot find some form of synthesis or unity. On one hand, Campanella’s Benjamín admits to his misinterpretation of what happened and after the televised image, re-reads in a political light the events in which he is immersed, (an episode which is absent in Sacheri’s literary version). On the other hand, the viewers – identified with the character- perceive Campanella’s political view, that “other thing” of the present which the director is trying to add to Sacheri’s story, as an extra, in the *neo-Peronist* context of the Kirchners.

A new discourse on memory

But what is that extra? According to Montero (after Barros, in “Memorias discursivas”), at the beginning of the new millennium the conditions are right in Argentina to close off certain

discourses about memory and open some others. In fact, from the start of Néstor Kirchner's government in 2003, in the words of Altamirano (32), it can be observed an elementary vindication of the seventies' past, tempering any possible contradiction, "stylizing the political involvement [of those years] and erasing through said stylization, not only those political parties which were armed, but the internal war within the Peronist movement, the Triple A, etc., that is, all that which degraded national public life before the coup d'état", until it became the bloodiest repression in national history. From the moment when the Kirchners made explicit that political will of memory and established the so-called "memories of politics", a new polemic narration was built within the universe of the new national discourse, from which some past events were idealized and reformulated.¹¹

Therefore we could say that at the centre of the Kirchnerist discourse is the issue of memory and the reclamation of a vindicated tradition. This is done as a distinct way of carrying out the politics and of understanding a form of justice based on specific values and convictions inspired by those militant movements of the seventies, but with the aspiration of turning them into universal values. Campanella, in turn, takes up that attitude, but with an emotional twist that he uses to represent the concept's barbaric, deformed design. This view of the extratextual level saturates the narrative on several occasions in the film and causes some form of pragmatic reception. In it, the image mobilizes certain stereotypes of the imagination and the emotion, with the aim of transporting the audience to a more contemporary context, to build an *exemplum* and learn a lesson.¹² In the spectator's intentional conscience, the film's internal frame of reference is reflected in the audience's external and immediate frame of reference.

Consequently, traces of the ideological connections and affinities that both presidents (Néstor Kirchner and later his wife Cristina Fernández) have vindicated in their discourse, identifying themselves as "leftist militants" in the seventies and as heirs to that legacy, are always present. They are like an underlay where Campanella's images, in all their violence, appear and diverge. Unlike those political figures, for whom association with that idealized past is perfectly aligned, allowing us to establish positive discursive recurrences with the immediate present (both in words as in images), *The Secret* seems to clash with that representation. It questions and ponders about the ways in which the notions of justice and memory are tackled from the new prevalent political discourse. Hence a plot which genealogically re-interprets

the relations of power, remembrance and violence in Argentine society is reformulated, leaving marks in the body, but also in the language.¹³

Marks in the language and in the body

How, then, to narrate those circumstances? What words to use? Where to begin? Both the terrible story of the girl's rape and murder (observe the symbolic value implied in this) as the investigation reported in the novel become atrocious acts, impossible to be narrated. This is reflected in Sacheri's novel by the multiple attempts by Benjamín to start his narration, to try to find a narrative voice (what grammatical person to use). Also, whether to use a popular lexicon, full of nuances, with vulgar expressions and oral flexions, and to tell the "true facts" those he can "witness to" because he was there, but also those he infers or imagines may have happened ("Well, it will be best to say what I know and what I infer, *'cause otherwise, no one will understand shit.*" [21]). Undoubtedly, his inability to find a sole way to talk about the horror is reflected in the multiplicity of voices which populate the pages and emerge through the different chapters in the novel.

Faced with this dilemma for Sacheri's character, Campanella chose a similar opening while exposing the same frustration by means of multiple and ambiguous images.¹⁴ Thus, the beginning of the film is broken up amid an assortment of probable beginnings the character of Benjamín Chaparro –named as Benjamín Espósito in the film- reminisces about from a present, now in the late nineties.¹⁵ A first attempt flounders with the cliché of a typical romantic farewell –sentimental background music and all– in a train station, in the seventies. In a second try, a few paragraphs of the opening of the novel are shown and are immediately discarded by the author –who we can now see as Darín.¹⁶ A third attempt to a beginning is resolved by a voiceover –the voice of the same actor- who recounts in the third person Liliana Colotto's breakfast, following the image of a husband that we cannot see. But the version soon finishes as a paper ball thrown to the floor, with a scream, a mixture of deception and frustration. Image, written word and voice cannot reconcile with the story's horror. However, the fourth version, the most atrocious, the moment when the woman is raped as imagined by the fictional author (please observe this detail) seems to be the one he finally chose, although he later removed that page from the book where he kept his notes (so terrible is the memory), carefully folded it and left it aside on his desk, but never destroyed it.¹⁷

Although brief, the scene is, undoubtedly, horrific. Placed where it has been, just after a pair of sugary attempts (the melodramatic farewell on the platform, the romantic phrase, etc.), the image of the rape with the victim's screams barges into those nearly idyllic moments and unexpectedly and brutally crashes, exceeding any possible comment. There is no way in which we can accept violence in a close up like this, nor is there a way to forget it. Maybe the only possible reaction is folding up and keeping those words almost lovingly, perhaps until we find the right time to bring them to light. With that image in mind, the viewer will keep watching the film, compelled now, with Benjamín, to find the culprit and reconstitute order. This is done through the imposition of a justice system which, as we shall eventually confirm, not only did not exist in the seventies when the awful rape occurred, neither did it exist in the closer nineties, when the fate of the rapist and murderer is discovered.

In this way, what is fair and unfair and the notions of cruelty and compassion do not have a closing in the –excuse the redundancy– “closing” of the film and remain open until after the final credits. By contrast, the final scenes pose a disturbing vision of memory, of the notions of justice in Argentine society, and conflict with the concepts that the original book proposed. In fact, in the novel, Morales commits suicide due to a serious illness but, it is suggested, he previously poisoned the rapist whom he had imprisoned for 25 years at the back of his house, while in a letter to Benjamín, he asked him to keep his honor and hide any traces of his revenge. Benjamín accepted, buried the rapist's body, hid any traces of the made-up jail and reported only Morales's suicide to the police, without any mention of the other things he discovered. Therefore, forgetting seems to be the only valid option. Or even better: the memory of that tragic moment is only recognized in the fiction written by Benjamín, while forgetting the past seems to be the only viable option for official records.

However, the film diverges from this version and in view of the horror of the present time reinstates a sinister silence instead. Campanella's Benjamín discovers the made-up jail in a casual visit to Morales, he sees the rapist behind the bars and he chooses to keep quiet, like the jailer has done all those years. The whole scene circles around the silent looks exchanged by the three characters: the dismay in the eyes of Benjamín, the look of connivance in Morales and the confusion in Gómez, who can just utter the words: “Tell him to talk to me at least”. Immersed in that sinister relationship, Benjamín, who is now ‘accessory after the fact’ in this permanent horror, does not utter a word. But he is no longer an innocent “virtuous”

man between two demons, between two specters of the past but rather another creature in the small allegoric cosmos of the country into which that jail has now transmogrified.

This is where the film ends. The verbosity of the beginning has been cancelled by the presence of absolute silence and the foreboding in which Benjamín and, along with him, the viewer, is left immersed and trapped. The evil he discovered is something that goes far beyond the illegal punishment that Gómez has been subjected to. It is the discovery of the perverse fascination of the atrocious which goes through Argentine society and which he cannot escape. What he sees in the small space of the prison created by Morales is his own secret perversion: a vicious logic of permanent violence rooted in the basis of Argentina's own history.

Thus, while on one hand Sacheri's narration encapsulated the past, following a reading much more akin to the causal model of state-generated violence based on the theory of the two demons, almost whimsically in contrast with the stylized vision of the film's debut, Campanella's film discourse, on the other, recognizes, perhaps, a different interpretative mark. It is no longer the stylized image of an idealized *Kirchnerist* past, or the comfortable certainty of two demons lethally and perpetually trapped in a destructive relationship.¹⁸ It is, contrastingly, to recognize oneself with perverse fascination in those two aging shadows and decipher the secret in their eyes, the tremendous response of what we are, and we wouldn't like to even hear, because, paraphrasing García Márquez, "the races sentenced to two hundred years of solitude and disagreement do not have a second opportunity on earth".

NOTES

¹ Born in Buenos Aires in 1967, Sacheri is a teacher and a Bachelor in History. He works as a university lecturer and as a secondary teacher. His first short stories are from the mid nineties. Among his publications we find the texts of *Esperándolo a Tito y otros cuentos de fútbol* (2000, Galerna) —published in Spain under the title *Los traidores y otros cuentos*—, *Te conozco, Mendizábal y otros cuentos* (Galerna, 2001), *Lo raro empezó después, cuentos de fútbol y otros relatos* (Galerna, 2004), *Un viejo que se pone de pie y otros cuentos* (Galerna, 2007), and the novels *Aráoz y la verdad* (Aguilar-Taurus-Alfaguara, 2008) and *La pregunta de sus ojos* (originally published by Galerna, 2005 and rereleased by Aguilar-Taurus-Alfaguara in 2009). Some of his narrations have appeared in publications in Argentina, Colombia and Spain, and have also been included by the *Department of Education* of Argentina in its campaigns to foster reading.

² Sacheri himself has pointed out, in a note at the end of his novel, the trigger for his story. As he stated in there, in 1987 he had began to work in a federal criminal court in Buenos Aires. One day, some of his coworkers told him details about an old case that everybody remembered and in which a common convict, at the Devoto Jail, had been awarded the amnesty for political prisoners decreed by then president Héctor Cámpora in 1973. Some time later, while trying to write his first novel, he remembered the anecdote and added a series of fictitious events and situations that could serve as a possible explanation for the release of a criminal, and helped to give drive to his text.

³ "To a certain extent, those were my doubts. That way of writing the story, basically in the first person, as told by Chaparro, but every now and then coming out of the character and telling it to him, allowed me to put into

Chaparro part of what I felt. I had by then written three books of short stories, I could move in that genre with ease, but I felt that I owed it to myself to write a novel. This story had been going around in my head for years. In fact, there is a short story in *Te conozco, Mendizábal* called 'El hombre', that narrates a day in the life of the widower and the murderer. In the short story, Morales gets up in the morning and misses his wife, fixes his breakfast, goes out in the country in a rainy day, then goes to the shed, opens the door and suddenly, inside a cage there is a guy. And that is the end of the story. The story was already in my head, more or less complete, but in order to create it, I first wrote that short story. For the novel I needed to put into Chaparro my own doubts: verbal tenses, persons, how to narrate what he did not see, where to finish the story, how much to tell. It was very liberating for me to have the possibility that my problems could be Chaparro's problems" (Sacheri in Frieria. My translation. From now on, all quotes translated in footnotes are mine, unless otherwise indicated.).

⁴ It is worth noting here the direct relation that in the last few years has existed between *Editorial Aguilar* and the powerful media conglomerate of the *Clarín* group. For a view on the "association" mechanism of many of these companies, see Hortiguera, and especially the very interesting study by Ruiz.

⁵ Note that in Spain the publishers decided to print Sacheri's novel with the same title as Campanella's film.

⁶ By "transposition" here we shall understand, after Steimberg (16) the change of support or language in a genre or a textual product. The most evident example lies in the migration of a novel or a group of novels to the language of movies. As, on his part, added by Wolf (16), this concept implies "the idea of transfer but also that of a transplant, of putting something in a different place, of extirpating certain models, but thinking in a different register or system".

⁷ The list of groups responsible for acts of violence in those years is long and hard to understand, given the subtle ideological differences amongst them: the *Montoneros* (with considerable influence within the *Juventud Peronista* or Peronist Youth); the *Fuerzas Armadas Peronistas* (FAP or Peronist armed forces); the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias* (Revolutionary armed forces), originally a marxist-leninist organization that would later on lean towards peronism; the Liberation armed forces (*Fuerzas Armadas de Liberacion* or FAL), also marxist-leninist; the *Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo* (ERP or People's Revolutionary Army), originally a branching off a small trotskyist party, opposed to peronism. In the midst of all these groups, in the mid 70s the paramilitary group *Triple A* (*Alianza Anticomunista Argentina* or Argentine anticommunist alliance) appeared, secretly commanded by the then Minister for Welfare, José López Rega, intended to confront members of those guerrillas, their followers, as well as judges, chiefs of police and social activists and members of the culture that questioned the Peronist orthodoxy. For details, see Page.

⁸ By imaginary, I follow Castoriadis (10), when he defines it like an "incessant and essentially *indeterminate* creation (socio-historical and psychic) of figures/forms/images, from which it can only be *about* 'some thing': what we call 'reality' and 'rationality' are its works". In Wortman's words (61), in her exegesis of this author, "it is the magma of significations that makes things make sense for the subject and locate it within a social universe. Specifically, our task should be to elucidate those significant structures that "make up notions that organize the world of people, in intersubjective terms".

⁹ For Horowicz (who wrote his analysis in 1985), the Peronist movement may be divided in four stages. The first peronism borders are indicated by the events of October 17, 1945 and September 16, 1955. The second identified itself with the resistance struggles while Perón was in exile and ended with his return on November 17, 1972. The third is marked by the 1973 elections, when Mr. Héctor J. Cámpora was elected president and finished with the death of Perón himself on the first of July, 1974. The fourth relates to the administration led by his widow, Estela Martínez, and continued until the late eighties. Personally, I think that we could add two more stages: a fifth one, taking up the whole decade of the nineties and the administration of Mr. Carlos Menem, with a strong neoliberal undertone; and a sixth period, encompassing the administrations of Néstor and Cristina Kirchner (2003 onwards). While I was finishing this article, Dr. Néstor Kirchner died in 27 October 2010.

¹⁰ I use here the concept of "recognition" in its Aristotelian sense as "the change of ignorance into knowledge, for the benefit or for the damage of those who are destined for happiness or misfortune" (Aristotle 65).

¹¹ For the concept "memories of politics", I follow Rabotnikof (260) where she defines it as "the forms and the narrations through which, those who were contemporaries of a certain period, construct the memory of that political past, narrate their experiences and articulate in a controversial way, past, present and future".

¹² The examples are several and exceed the possibilities of analysis in this paper. To mention but a few, let's remember that the crime scene, as it appeared on the screen, seemed to evoke another one, not so far away removed. I am referring to the scenes that *América TV*, a Buenos Aires TV station, had shown against any respect or restraint at the time of the (real) death of a business woman, Nora Dalmasso, in November, 2006. It was then that this sensationalist station, obsessed with getting the elusive ratings and in collusion with police staff, decided to show images of the body as it had been found at the crime scene. Furthermore, under pressure to find the culprit and solve the case speedily, the police had arrested and charged, without any evidence, a worker who had been doing some repairs in Dalmasso's home. By then, he had been considered by all media to be a "*perejil*" –a term which in the local Spanish means "accidental character" and, by extension, a "dimwit"–.

However, immediately several popular demonstrations were organized in support of the worker, with strong criticisms against the authorities, as it was considered that this decision was made with the intention to blame an innocent person to cover up for someone close to the provincial government circles. Meanwhile, the press alluded to the people's reaction like a real-life vernacular *Fuenteovejuna*, as they rebelled against the political corruption which tried to protect one of their own. Although Sacheri's book told a similar story (two workers in a neighbor's house were charged with Colotto's murder), Campanella allowed himself to include a very significant wink. "His workers" were also labeled as "*perejiles*", in the film even when the expression did not appear in Sacheri's original novel. Thus, for the Argentine film's audience, Benjamín's reaction of indignation towards some of his corrupt colleagues stirred very specific memories of a recent past. It was impossible not to remember the popular demonstrations that the people who lived near Dalmaso had organized against the police accusation and in support of the unfairly detained worker. In the end, the events of the Dalmaso case were very fresh in the mental archive of the spectators as to miss that association.

¹³ Thus, it is impossible to avoid a symbolic reading of the woman's rape at the beginning of the movie. The rape transcends Liliana and becomes the rape of what she represents: an idyllic -and almost naive- period of Argentina (emphasized by the colors, the music, the tones of those domestic and trivial scenes of the newly married couple), interrupted by the brutal violation of the law. But what is more disturbing, as we'll soon discover, is the spirit of revenge that will transform the social sphere into a permanent lawless space where the torture of silence will forever prevail.

¹⁴ The symbolic value and the cultural evocation of many of its scenes cannot be underestimated. As an example, think about the famous stadium scene. The whole image seems to evoke the beginning of one of the most representative texts in the Argentine cultural tradition: "*El matadero*" ["The slaughterhouse"]. Compare the visual and aerial beginning of Echeverría's work with those images of the city seen from the air; the pursuit of the murderer through the stadium corridors and his capture, as it happened with the bull in the 19th century work; the obscene exhibition of the genitals of the murderer-animal; or the interrogation at the judge's office.

¹⁵ As it is known "*expósito*" in Spanish means "a newly born abandoned or exposed". The election of this for the character's surname stresses this idea of Benjamín's "innocence" while posing a paradox since, as we shall see throughout the movie, this character -who represents justice- not only violated the legal procedures on several occasions but also, as we can see in the last scene, ends up being an accomplice, with his silence, of an act of retribution.

¹⁶ The deleted paragraph says: "He also ran fast to the end of the train and saw how she, her whole figure which, until yesterday had been enormous, became smaller on the platform, until she was small to his eyes, but ever larger in his heart".

¹⁷ In the rape scene Fariña seems to hear the woman scream "*Mi amor... basta mi amor*" ["My love... stop my love"]. And he adds that this beginning, that surprises the spectator, could well be understood as Benjamín's fantasy about how the events actually took place. But he also maintains that it could be a false hint sent by Campanella "as an almost subliminal background to contribute to the police enigma". This could be interesting. However, when listening attentively, in the scene one can only hear the woman begging: "*Por favor... te lo pido por favor*" ("Please, I beg of you.").

¹⁸ This is an image that, indeed, Sacheri reiterates in his short story "*El hombre*" ["The man"], literary precedent of his novel. Remember the last lines (45): "[The man] drove on the gravel road up to the highway like every morning; troubled by the astounding evidence that, in the end, he was as much a prisoner as Gómez; torn by the feeling that both of them were rolling, holding each other, eating out each other's entrails, down the same inscrutable slope of their torn up lives (...)."

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