

**Based on true stories:
Representing the self and the other
in Latin American documentary narratives**

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ABSTRACT

This doctoral thesis studies the relationship between journalism and literature in contexts in which freedom of speech is at risk. It takes as primary sources a variety of nonfiction, crónicas, literary journalism and testimonial novels published by Latin American authors in Spanish, from the 1950s to the 2000s. I propose the concept ‘documentary narratives’ to refer to all literary modes of discourse which are related, in diverse degrees, to a journalistic representation of reality. The study focuses on authors who use journalistic investigation as part of their creative process in order to write about real-life stories. My corpus covers a wide range of topics such as social protests, dictatorships, civil wars, natural disaster, crime and migration.

While scholars have focused on the rhetoric and history of this kind of narratives, my reading considers the real, face-to-face encounter between the journalist and others. I argue that the representation of these encounters through novelistic techniques, such as dialogue, portrait, free indirect speech and direct speech, influences the pact with the reader and challenges the notion of truthfulness. I contend that documentary narratives can serve as a tool for the transmission of knowledge and the production of public debate in societies marked by political and social instability. In a world overwhelmed by data production and immersed in violent acts against those to be considered ‘others’, I argue that storytelling is still an essential form of communication among individuals, classes and cultures.

The Introduction critically reviews theoretical discussions and propose an approach to the topic that brings to the light stylistic and ethical differences in the work of the three generations of authors I study.

Chapter One introduces the two authors that I consider to be the ‘founding fathers’ of Latin American documentary narratives: Rodolfo Walsh and Gabriel García Márquez. Together, they constitute a historical and methodological point of departure for reflecting on the relationship between the journalist and his or her informants.

Chapter Two focuses on two Mexican chroniclers and public intellectuals, Elena Poniatowska and Carlos Monsiváis. I analyse how the physical position of the body in a given public space (e.g. squares, streets) affects the writers’ perception of reality, particularly in texts that seek to understand national culture.

Chapter Three explores questions of journalistic intentionality in the literary work of the Argentinean Tomás Eloy Martínez, particularly in his novels on Juan Domingo and Eva Perón. Based on my findings in his private archive, I demonstrate how the blend of journalism and literature can communicate a deeper truth in times of uncertainty and censorship.

Chapter Four examines the encounter with strangers in the travel accounts of the Mexican Juan Villoro after experiencing an earthquake in Chile, and the Argentinean Martín Caparrós talking with immigrants around the world. I study the cosmopolitan perspective of the writer in relations to remote localities, within a globalized context.

Chapter Five contrasts the documentary intentions of Latin American authors with their textual self-representation. It is based on textual analyses of life-stories published after 2000, and on interviews with Leila Guerriero, Cristian Alarcón, Arturo Fontaine and Santiago Roncagliolo. Contrary to the authors’s intentions of documenting others’ lives, I conclude that these stories offer an (interrupted) account of oneself, that is, the account of a contemporary storyteller pursuing a rarely fulfilled desire of getting to know the other truly.

The thesis has two appendices. Appendix 1 showcases selected illustrations from magazines, newspapers and diverse archival material that support some of my arguments. Appendix 2 includes the transcripts of the interviews that I conducted with eight Latin American authors: Elena Poniatowska, Leila Guerriero, Cristian Alarcón, Arturo Fontaine, Santiago Roncagliolo, Francisco Goldman, Martín Caparrós, and Juan Villoro.

*What can be said at all can be said clearly,
and what we cannot talk about we must pass over in silence*

Ludwig Wittgenstein

*Cosas he sabido que resulta difícil de callarlas,
pero que en este momento sería insoportable decirlas.
El exceso de verdad puede enloquecer y aniquilar
la conciencia moral de un pueblo*

Rodolfo Walsh

To my former colleague Alfredo Jiménez Mota, and
to all Mexican journalists who have disappeared while searching for true stories

To all my teachers

Contents

Preface.....	8
Acknowledgements.....	10
INTRODUCTION	12
A reading proposal	15
Journalism and reality in Latin America	21
Naming the real.....	24
<i>Crónica</i>	25
Literary Journalism	28
<i>Testimonio</i> -based narratives	30
In-between fields	34
Towards a theory of documentary narratives.....	38
Re-telling a truth	45
Chapter 1. Seminal works: two stories of survivors	49
1.1 Gabriel García Márquez's <i>Relato de un naufrago</i>	52
1.1.1 A signature	54
1.1.2 The journalist and the sailor.....	57
1.2 Rodolfo Walsh's <i>Operación Masacre</i>	59
1.2.1 The newspaper	64
1.2.2 The book.....	67
Chapter 2. Out of place: The chronicler meets <i>el pueblo</i>	72
2.1 Elena Poniatowska: hiding behind the notebook.....	79
2.1.1 The <i>cabritas</i> and other strange women	84
2.1.2 A guilty <i>catrina</i> goes out.....	86
2.2 Carlos Monsiváis: The protestant of 'La Portales'	90
2.2.1 The centre of all margins.....	93
2.2.2 Mexico 'camp'	95
2.3 The public space in <i>crónica</i> and <i>crónica</i> as public space	98
Chapter 3. A certain effect of truth: A Peronist Palimpsest.....	103
3.1 Tomás Eloy Martínez	104
3.2 Crafting the news	108
3.3 A parody of journalism	111
3.4 Eva Duarte/Eva Perón/Evita/ <i>Santa Evita</i>	114
3.4.1 Another Eva	116
3.4.2 In search of the (original) corpse.....	121
Chapter 4. Local conversations in globalized times	132
4.1 The journalist as protagonist.....	135
4.2 Approaching strangers: Martín Caparrós around the world	140
4.3 Surviving conventions: Juan Villoro's 'aftershock' narratives	145
4.4 Performing dialogues	152

CHAPTER 5. Being there: The reporter in the field(s)	159
5.1 Who are you?	165
5.2 Empathic listeners, unreliable writers	168
5.3 The potter's hand	170
5.4 Profane encounters: an erotics of testimony	178
CONCLUSIONS	185
APPENDIX 1. ILLUSTRATIONS.....	189
1. 'La odisea del náufrago sobreviviente del A.R.C. Caldas', <i>El espectador</i> , 28 April 1955.....	189
2. 'La verdad sobre mi aventura', <i>El espectador</i> , 28 April 1955	190
3. Cover of <i>Mayoría</i> , 27 May 1957	191
4. Rodolfo Walsh's 'La Operación Masacre', <i>Mayoría</i> , 27 May 1955, p. 8	192
5. Josefina Bórquez and Elena Poniatowska, photograph by Héctor García	193
6. Cover of Carlos Monsiváis's <i>Los rituales del caos</i> , illustrated by Rafael Barajas 'El Fisgón'	194
7. Cover of <i>Panorama</i> , 14–20 April 1970	195
8. 'Las memorias de Juan Perón', <i>Panorama</i> , 14–20 April 1970, p. 20	196
9. Juan Domingo Perón and Tomás Eloy Martínez at Puerta de hierro, 1970.....	197
10. Letter from Tomás Eloy Martínez to Norberto Firpo, 1970, pp. 1–3.....	198
11. Juan Villoro's 'El sabor de la muerte', <i>La nación</i> , 6 March 2010, p. 4	201
APPENDIX 2. INTERVIEWS	202
Interview 1. Cristian Alarcón	202
Interview 2. Martín Caparrós	209
Interview 3. Arturo Fontaine	215
Interview 4. Francisco Goldman	233
Interview 5. Leila Guerriero.....	251
Interview 6. Elena Poniatowska	271
Interview 7. Santiago Roncagliolo	286
Interview 8. Juan Villoro	305
Bibliography	316

PREFACE

This research started one rainy afternoon in 2013, in Chimalistac, the old upper-class neighbourhood of Mexico City, where the author Elena Poniatowska lives. While waiting for tea to be served by her maid, I asked her what it was like to be a reporter during the 1985 earthquake. She recalled: ‘Era hacer lo que usted está haciendo: hacer preguntas, nomás que en circunstancias mucho más difíciles, no sentadas en una sala iluminada, con flores y libros, esperando un té, sino en la calle, de pie, en circunstancias de tragedia’. Since the 1950s, Poniatowska has left her comfortable house in order to ask all kinds of people all kinds of questions. What she does, like several other authors I have interviewed since then, is often complex work, which can nevertheless be described in these simple terms: she goes out and asks strangers questions.

Poniatowska compared her writing to that of an author living in Paris or New York; where they might write about the state of their soul, this is not so of an author living in Mexico. There, she said, reality assails you at every moment, from every angle, ‘la realidad entra a tu casa y te avasalla’. It is not by chance that this phrase resonates with the words of the Argentinian Rodolfo Walsh, when he wrote ‘pudo ocurrir a cien kilómetros, pudo ocurrir cuando yo no estaba’ (1969: 20), explaining his reasons for embarking on the investigation that would result in his killing.

This thesis is about the world we live in, and about certain (narrative) ways of making sense of it. In particular, it is about the period 1955–2010 in Latin America, and the way in which some authors attempt to make sense of its reality: by encountering other people face-to-face and writing about it. All the true stories studied here expose a degree of vulnerability, which is the inevitable risk of telling the truth about the self and others.

I was compelled to respond to Edward Said’s invitation to move out of the western literary canon and search for otherness. The works I studied concern the other, but they are not seen through the ‘imperial eyes’ of the Spanish conquerors, nor through those of the European ethnographers or the American historians, whose works have characterised notions of otherness (Pratt 1992). Rather, the other is seen through the eyes of a self who is, from a western perspective, himself an other. I contend that this kind of other–self has to be re-discovered through the study of submarginal spaces within the peripheral spaces of cultural production.

I am conscious of my own in-between position as a female, Mexican scholar researching ‘Latin America’ — a vast generalisation regarding diverse countries and cultures — and writing about it in English, based at one of the oldest universities in the world. But it is that position, as liminal as the genres studied here, which made me even more aware of the fragility of concepts overloaded with meaning, like ‘the other’ and even the word ‘literature’.

Cambridge, United Kingdom, 24 April 2017

DECLARATION

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. I further state that no substantial part of my dissertation has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. It does not exceed the prescribed word limit for the relevant Degree Committee.

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This thesis is a response to the written word of many others who have initiated an academic dialogue in my field of interest. I am particularly in debt to the work of Walter Ong and Néstor García Canclini, whose pioneering ideas on literacy and hybrid cultures has inspired me since my BA. Nevertheless, my work was also shaped by my conversations with many people to whom I deeply grateful for their time and words. First of all, I would like to express my greatest gratitude to my supervisor and the best editor I have ever had, Prof. Steven Boldy. His intellectual and emotional support were simply essential.

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Thanks to the eight authors I studied, who opened the doors of their houses, or sat patiently in a café in order to share their stories with me. Thanks also to those authors with whom I informally discussed, and whose work is a great, but inevitable absence here. Special thanks to two Chileans: Diamela Eltit, whose literary workshop made me recall the reasons I write; and Pedro Lemebel, who took me by his arm for a walk around Santiago when he did not have much time left.

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INTRODUCTION

*Narrative becomes a problem
only when we wish to give to real events
the form of a story*
Hayden White

Dialogue is the most basic form of communication among us and yet it remains an enigmatic genre of speech. In daily contemporary life, the average citizen of the modern world is confronted with diverse modes of non-human mediated interactions, from electronic cashiers and internet-based shopping to virtual reality games and social media for smart-phones. The term ‘IRL’ (In Real Life) has been coined to describe human interactions outside virtual spaces. It might appear that the development of ‘intelligent’ and affordable technologies is bringing about the decline of face-to-face conversations. This thesis defends the importance of dialogue, both real and fictional, for our understanding of the contemporary world. Therefore, my approach inevitably departs from, and engages with a Bakhtinian worldview of language: if the word is shaped by its social environment, I believe it is in the encounter with one another that human beings make sense of their world.

While flesh-and-blood, face-to-face dialogues may be going out of fashion, there is simultaneously a growing fascination with true stories, and an evident increase in the technologies and formats that allow us to document reality in detail. These include digital photography and documentary films, reality television, talk shows, films inspired by real-life events, blogs and other electronic media, plus the more conventional biographical genres. Literary prizes, traditionally awarded to fiction writers, have begun to recognise non-fiction writing, the clearest example of which is the 2015 Nobel, awarded to Svetlana Alexievich, ‘for her polyphonic writings, a monument to suffering and courage in our time’ (*Nobelprize.org* 2014). Two years before, Mexican journalist and testimonial author Elena Poniatowska was awarded the Premio Miguel de Cervantes, the most prestigious literary award in the Spanish-speaking world.

In the context of the rise of social media and a growing distrust in facts, it is not by chance that ‘post-truth’ was selected by Oxford dictionaries as the 2016 international Word of the Year.¹ Every day people interact in a world overloaded with data of all kinds, which, perhaps ironically, has generated a crisis of trust and truth. Acts of extreme violence between groups and individuals worldwide continually demonstrate that this is not a world in which one can tell the truth — or certain truths, at least — without risks. It is not surprising then, to hear Walter Benjamin’s words updated against the backdrop of this renewed interest in storytelling:

Every morning brings us the news of the globe, and yet we are poor in noteworthy stories. This is because no event any longer comes to us without already being shot through with explanation. In other words, by now almost nothing that happens benefits storytelling; almost everything benefits information. Actually, it is half the art of storytelling to keep a story free from explanation as one reproduces it. [...] the narrative achieves an amplitude that information lacks. (1999 [1955]: 89)

For Benjamin, modern times privilege information as a form of communication. There is, thus, in his view, a certain scepticism towards the press and nostalgia for storytelling as a way through which knowledge and culture are transmitted.² Nevertheless, I believe that the storyteller has returned, ironically, through the dreaded press itself. He can be found particularly in those discourses that represent the ‘real’ story of a journalist–narrator, who in their search for a truth must encounter the other, face-to-face. In listening to this other and writing about him or her, the contemporary storyteller may act as Benjamin’s craftsman, fashioning — in a unique manner — the human life, ‘the raw material of experience’ (107). Roberto González Echevarría raised a similar point within the Latin American context:

Is a move beyond the Archive the end of narrative, or is it the beginning of another narrative? Could it be seen from within the Archive, or even from the subversions of the Archive? Most probably not, but if one form of discourse appears to be acquiring hegemonic power it is that of communication systems. Perhaps a new masterstory will

¹ The concept is used to relate or denote ‘circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief’ (‘post-truth’ *OED*). It implies that truth itself has become irrelevant; it was first used by a magazine in 1992, but its frequency of usage increased dramatically in the context of the EU referendum in the UK and the US presidential elections (‘Word of the year 2016 is...’, *OED*).

² Benjamin was aware of the documentary trend going on in Europe, as developed in the Soviet Union with the popularization of ‘factual literature’ or ‘factography’. Benjamin’s ‘The Author as Producer’ was a response to Sergei Tretyakov’s 1931 presentation on factography at the Society for Friends of the New Russia in Germany (Hartsock 2016).

be determined by them, but it is difficult to tell with any degree of certainty from the Archive (1990: 186).

This thesis revisits the trajectory, in Latin America, of some of those forms of communication identified by Benjamin and González Echevarría as narratives beyond the literary, and that I refer to as ‘documentary narratives’. These encompass all literary modes of discourse that are in conversation with journalism, to diverse degrees, in their aim to represent reality. Recent international approaches to the study of testimony demonstrate a wider interest in the ethics of self-representation, acknowledging the return of the storyteller (Dragas 2014) and the rise of the subjective turn (Arfuch 2002; Sarlo 2006). Giving account of oneself, however, always implies a certain degree of confession, because the account has to be given to another individual. Facing the listener, the confessor is exposed in his or her vulnerability (Butler 2005; Cavarero 2000). Even since the turn of the twenty-first century in Latin America it remains possible to find this storyteller disguised as a *flâneur*, a chronicler or *cronista*. He, and sometimes she, is able to get away from home in order to listen to the chosen other, to witness certain realities, to walk around, and finally to return and write about it, that is, to be able to generate experience. I agree with Beatriz Sarlo, who also follows Benjamin, that testimonial narratives are inherently linked with an embodied, collective experience of being in the world:

La narración de la experiencia está unida al cuerpo y a la voz, a una presencia real del sujeto en la escena del pasado. No hay testimonio sin experiencia, pero tampoco hay experiencia sin narración: el lenguaje libera lo mudo de la experiencia, la redime de su inmediatez o de su olvido y la convierte en lo comunicable, es decir, lo *común*. (2006: 29)

The very presence of this kind of storyteller in the media demonstrates their anachronistic nature. This is because the contemporary Latin American storyteller is in debt to a rather old journalistic narrative tradition, which is in itself a product of modernism that has surprisingly survived postmodern trends. No wonder there is a nostalgic sense of time in this kind of narrative, for their authors seem to write in order to register the moment they are witnessing, and to not let time move on.

A reading proposal

The purpose of this research is to explore the relationship between journalism and the crisis of truth in contemporary Latin America, based on how the encounter between the self and the other is represented in liminal, hybrid texts. These texts are a blend of many discourses, but journalism is the predominant influence. I focus mainly on textual representations of these encounters, as narrated by one of the participants. I then study how conversation functions as a research tool for the writer, and as a meaningful discourse technique produced in an intimate context, but represented and published as public dialogue. If, as Corona and Jørgensen (2002) have observed, there is a relationship between experiences of crisis and the documentary impulse, then it might not be surprising that there has been a return to storytelling in books and the media, particularly in contemporary Latin America. Dialogue in our global era, I intend to demonstrate, is still the essential and most effective form of human communication.

I analyse a variety of texts that have been classified as nonfiction, *crónicas*, *periodismo narrativo*, literary journalism or non-fiction novels, and which were published in the Spanish language between the 1950s and the 2000s. As a way of distinguishing these works from similar, *testimonio*-based literature, I refer to my corpus of study as ‘documentary narratives’.³ I am deeply aware of the exhaustive critical effort to classify and determine the specific nature of each nonfictional variant, and so I offer a summary of the main, relevant concepts later in this introduction.⁴ It is not my aim, however, to impose another classificatory mark upon them and, therefore, my term is not meant to be exclusive, nor a generic classification either, although it may overlap with traditional categories. I use ‘documentary narratives’ because it is the term which best defines the corpus I have identified, in order to illustrate my own research interests and arguments.

The selection of the corpus was based primarily on the authors’ use of journalism, either as a research technique during fieldwork or as a discourse in dialogue with others within their narrative. Secondly, these are works written in the first-person, by a self-

³ A similar term, although in its singular form, has been used by David Foster (1984) and by Julio Rodríguez-Luis (1997) with its Spanish translation *narrativa documental*. Although their works have been influential for mine, each term is based on different assumptions, theoretical perspectives and corpora, therefore they cannot be considered synonyms. I discuss these concepts in part III of this introduction. My concept does include some of Foster’s case-studies, but omits others.

⁴ For foundational theoretical works on the subject see, among many others, Johnson (1971), Zavarzadeh (1976), Hellman (1981), Foley (1986), and Hartsock (2016). For in-depth genre discussions in the Spanish American context, see Acosta Montoro (1973), Amar Sánchez (1992), González (1993), Rodríguez-Luis (1997), Chillón (1999; 2014), Herrscher (2012), and Carrión (2012). More recently, Roberts and Giles (2014) proposed a theoretical framework for nonfiction narrative which claims to identify and analyse ‘any given text in this genre’, based on a typology of ethnographic realism and cultural phenomenology.

reflective narrator, who is usually depicted as a journalist or, more broadly, an investigator. They are all metafictional narratives — or more accurately, *metanonfictional* — for they demonstrate an awareness of their discursive nature. Because of their hybrid stylistic nature and their time of publication, they generally oscillate between modern and postmodern trends.

Contemporary documentary narratives can be linked with what Linda Hutcheon (1980) has called ‘narcissistic narratives’, due to the predominant presence of a self-referential or autorepresentational narrator. This kind of self-mirroring, metafictional narrator has been studied widely, particularly as a characteristic of postmodern literature (McHale 1987; Hutcheon 1988). Nevertheless, I have found that there is no similar attention paid to the use of this kind of narrator within the specificities of nonfiction. This is, of course, part of the ‘critical marginalization’ that literary journalism and similar forms have received historically (Hartsock 2016). On the contrary, from the perspective of journalistic practice, the use of the first-person is still a cause of passionate debate in professional encounters, at least in the Latin American context.

Although there is currently a boom in print and online media specializing in literary journalism in the region, I will focus on works published in books, and specifically those presented as a full-length story, and not short *crónicas* collections. This is because I found that the book is still a much more adequate format for the transmission of this kind of story, for the authors feel at liberty to reveal their ideas, as well as to experiment with language in a way that would be difficult to do in newspapers or magazines for a variety of economic, logistic and political reasons. It is not by chance, I suspect, that there has been a return to the book as an alternative medium through which to tell a truth that, ironically, cannot be told through traditional journalistic formats.

I intend to explore these narratives as a particular cultural phenomenon of contemporary Latin America, rather than to present an in-depth, case-by-case study of each. However, I focus on the investigative and literary work of the authors Gabriel García Márquez (Colombia), Rodolfo Walsh (Argentina), Carlos Monsiváis (Mexico), Elena Poniatowska (Mexico), Juan Villoro (Mexico), Martín Caparrós (Argentina), Santiago Roncagliolo (Peru/Spain), Leila Guerriero (Argentina), Arturo Fontaine (Chile), Cristian Alarcón (Chile/Argentina), and Francisco Goldman (Guatemala/USA). Some of the authors are related to the Boom or Post-Boom literature, while some others are better known as journalistic chroniclers, as they are part of the group called ‘Nuevos Cronistas de Indias’. Except for García Márquez, Walsh, Martínez and Monsiváis, all authors are alive and at different stages of their writing careers.

I do not intend to take a historical approach, for almost all the authors are still alive and actively producing, but the structure of my chapters might allow us to trace an ‘evolution’ of the documentary mode in themes and style. I mark 1968 as a symbolic time of departure for my study, since it is the time of the Mexican student protests, and the Tlatelolco massacre, which motivated a rise in the already established genre of testimonial narratives. Along with the influence of New Journalism as a phenomenon simultaneously related to social movements in the USA, this testimonial mode continued to pervade the representations of other major conflicts and catastrophes throughout the ensuing decades in Latin America; through the 1985 Mexico City earthquake, the Sandinista war in Nicaragua, Videla’s dictatorship in Argentina, or Pinochet’s rule in Chile.

The first chapter gives an overview of two works published in the 1950s, that I consider to be the immediate antecedents of contemporary documentary narratives, for their authors created two important trends for future generations. These are Gabriel García Márquez’s *Relato de un naufrago*, which inspired a more ‘literary’ vein for the telling of true stories in the region, and Rodolfo Walsh’s *Operación masacre*, an exhaustive investigative piece, more in the tradition of the reportage, which still influences literary journalists today.⁵

This hybrid approach, both synchronic and diachronic, to borrow Saussure’s terms, aims to contribute to the recognition of at least two documentary traditions, or generations in the region. These generations of course overlap in a number of ways, and should be seen as a process, or continuum, of the same *fin de siècle* chronicle movement, rather than two opposing groups or periods. For my aims in this analysis, however, I group authors according to the period of time when they had their most representative production.

In one group, there are the documentary writers of the 1970s–1980s, who are considered to be the fathers of the contemporary Latin American chronicle. These texts are clearly influenced by modernist models, both in writing style and in the conception of the role of the author as public intellectual. Interested in popular culture and modernity, however, they go beyond the *modernistas* by innovating forms for representing oral speech, influenced by anthropological discourse and the techniques of the period. They have used the medium as a platform to express their political opinions, and they became popular as leaders of public opinion. Although they publish frequently in newspapers and

⁵ Although it is not common in everyday English, the word derives from the French *reporter* and refers to a journalistic presentation of an account (‘reportage’ OED). In this thesis, however, ‘reportage’ is used as a literal translation from the Spanish *reportaje*, which refers to a specific journalistic genre, usually lengthy and based on in-depth investigation; it is always signed (Bastienier 2009: 86). It can be equivalent to a news story or feature.

magazines, their texts are rarely ‘news’ or other journalistic genres. Their writing frequently crosses borders with the essay, in their intention to explain or criticize what they see. Like the *modernistas* at the beginning of the twentieth century, they were an intellectual elite, mediating between powerful and non-powerful groups within society. Documentary authors from this generation witnessed the transition from authoritarian regimes, such as the dictatorships in the Southern cone, civil wars in Central America and the ruling of the PRI Party in Mexico, to a democratic era in the region. It is possible to imagine that, within this context, documentary narratives flourished initially as a veiled, baroque, alternative way of expressing anti-regime opinions without the risk of being censored.

In another group, the writers from the 1990s–2000s are mostly journalists searching for new methods of research and narration. They were symbolically born with the Fundación para un Nuevo Periodismo Iberoamericano (FNPI), created in 1994 by Gabriel García Márquez and a group of writers linked with the former generation. Their writing is related more to reportage and to investigative journalism. They focus on the ethics of detailed research and verifiable information more than the innovations in form pursued by the earlier group. Some of them claim continuity with the original ‘cronistas de Indias’, and thus they have self-identified as ‘nuevos cronistas de Indias’. Although they usually deny any connection with the postmodern turn, they often display at least one characteristic of what Linda Egan (2001) calls *postmodern journalism*: a rethoric of antirethoric; the exposure of the deceptive transparency of traditional journalism's mythical objectivity — mostly through controversial use of the autobiographical and metahistoriographical ‘I’ — and the undocumented representation of the thoughts of others. In Latin America, this period coincides with huge economic crises, like those of 1994 in Mexico and 2001 in Argentina, and seismic political changes, such as the presidencies of Hugo Chávez in Venezuela, Lula da Silva in Brazil or Evo Morales in Bolivia. These events marked an era of uncertainty that indicates a major crisis of trust in institutions. At the same time, this period has seen the rise of internet-based media and other communication technologies that have created alternative spaces for collective and individual expression beyond the mainstream media.

Interested in the influence of testimonial narrative tradition in Latin American literary journalism, I initiated this research by questioning the implications of representing reality through fiction, and by asking what kind of otherness is represented in today’s literature. However, I found that even if it is true, that for a testimony to be published there should be someone able to share it, that testimony is nevertheless always

told to a specific listener. The account of oneself is, as Judith Butler (2005) states, always an account given *to* someone. It is then an account passing through the body of the storyteller, who cannot avoid leaving his or her own traces on the material (see Chapter 5). These ideas made me interested in issues of self-representation, particularly how the use of the first-person narrator impacts on the presentation of the other. My research question then shifted slightly, to: ‘what happens when someone approaches an other with the intention of writing his or her story?’.

The question of the other, thus, is addressed in this thesis, although not in the same terms as those in which it has been defined from subaltern studies and postcolonial theory. This view depicts the other mostly in terms of race, gender and geographic differences, for the other is the one who is not a European (or Western) white man (Said 2003, Todorov 1992). In cases as the ones analysed here, however, this definition is not enough. This is because the narrative self is now someone that could be seen as the other from the traditional perspective, therefore, additionally theorisation would be needed to define this ‘new’ other. For the purposes of my research, I use a rough working definition of the other, which oscillates between Todorov’s (1992), Kapuściński’s (2007) and Levinas’s (1984, 1972) views on the question. When I refer to the other, then, is to name the subject who does not write his or her own story but tells it to a (narrative) self, who is somehow different from him. I have found out that, generally, although not always, this difference is based on social class. The authors analysed in this thesis use the concept in rather ethnographical terms; the other for them is the source of their stories or the informant who eventually becomes their (fictional) character. In a similar line of thinking, I refer to the otherness, ‘la otredad’ in Paz’s terms, as the circumstances or context within which this subject acts and which differ from the authors’ comfort zones.

Some studies of, for example, the testimonial genre, have focused on the representation of the other and the ways in which an author — generally from a higher social class — acts as a mediator, to give the other a voice. Alternative perspectives prefer to focus on self-representation alone, in the study of genres such as autobiography. My research, however, focuses on dialogue; that is, the moment in which the encounter between the self and the other generates a clash of different worldviews. In the case of my corpus, this encounter borrows the methodology and stylistic form of the journalistic interview.⁶

⁶ I use ‘interview’ to refer to the actual conversation between the journalist and the informant, but also to name the journalistic genre *entrevista de perfil, semblanza*, portrait or profile. This is a written piece which is rarely a mere transcription of the real conversation with an informant, but a mixture of first-hand testimonies, citation of documents and the journalist’s observations and opinions.

Broadly speaking, the relationship between journalism and literature has been studied in diverse academic fields, such as literary, cultural, social and media studies. Against the general consensus regarding the hybrid nature of the subject, the academic approaches to it have been constrained by discipline in terms of their research methods and distribution of knowledge. This thesis, therefore, aims to fill a gap regarding the theorisation of the role of documentary and/or journalistic discourse in Latin American literature by using a hybrid methodology. I base my reflections primarily on a textual analysis of the selected texts, borrowing concepts from literary, cultural, and philosophical studies. Furthermore, I consider the journalistic practices that produce the raw material for the narrative. Thus, I also employ a sociological approach to address the authors' intentions and working processes. During fieldwork in Mexico, Argentina, Chile and Spain, I conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with selected writers, as well as participant observation. Additionally, archival research was particularly important for my development of a palimpsestic reading of some texts that were originally published in newspapers or magazines.

As I intend to go beyond traditional discussions of genre regarding the degree of fictionality of this kind of text, I will inevitably depart from some personal assumptions. Mainly, I assume that my selected texts are true stories about real people. I am concerned with the study of these texts as acts of speech, of truth-telling, particularly in circumstances in which freedom of communication is at risk. I assume, then, that these texts are products of a (journalistic) investigation and I believe in the individual ethical intention to tell the truth, as espoused by a self-conscious author. It is not my intention to validate their claims of truthfulness, but to understand why it is so important for these authors to claim truthfulness.

I depart from the premise that the problems to be addressed regarding semi-journalistic narratives are primarily ethical rather than textual, for I agree with Aníbal González (1993) that, stylistically, there is no way of differentiating journalistic narratives from fictional ones. However, I do also think, echoing Mikail Bakhtin (1981; 1987), that it is through stylistic analysis that it is possible to explore the implications of those discourses that proclaim themselves acts of truth-telling. My research, therefore, is primarily an interrogation of a particular narrative form, that of documentary narratives. The approach focuses on style, but only to the extent that this opens a dialogue with the diverse cultural fields in which this particular form interacts with other social phenomena. I argue that, because of their medial position in the literary and journalistic fields, Latin American documentary narratives question the possibility of either discourse giving a true

account of society and individuals in times of uncertainty. These texts can be read, then, as baroque cultural products that reveal the inadequacy of language for giving reality a complete meaning, sometimes in contradiction with their authors' intentions. Beyond their stated intentions, I intend to demonstrate that these narratives exhibit the limitations of fully knowing the other. I conclude that the Latin American other has not changed since postcolonial studies started to view it as an object of study. The other is still the poor, the indigenous, the woman, the victim, the homosexual, the marginalised citizen in general. What has changed, however, is the self who tells the stories of these Others. That is why I do believe that these narratives offer an alternative response to the problem of telling the truth in complex contexts. Ironically, in a world of instant, global communication, leaving one's comfort zone in order to listen the account of a stranger and then returning to write about it, is not such a common thing to do.

Journalism and reality in Latin America

La Habana, December 1960. Rodolfo Walsh and Gabriel García Márquez were working together in the news agency Prensa Latina, headed by the Argentinian journalist and guerrilla leader Jorge Masetti. The Cuban Revolution had just won against the dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista and Fidel Castro's new socialist government was dealing with the American embargo over the island. One day Walsh deciphered an encoded telegram sent from a CIA agent in Guatemala to Washington. The message was a detailed report of the US plans to invade Cuba, including the address in Guatemala where an army was being trained. Masetti decided to send Walsh to Guatemala as an undercover reporter, disguised as a protestant priest. The plan failed because Walsh's real identity was discovered in Panamá, but Masetti did not give up. Months later, Masetti and García Márquez were in Guatemala City's airport, drinking a beer while waiting for a connecting flight to Peru. Masetti wanted to go outside the airport and look for the training field. Nevertheless, García Márquez convinced him to have 'common sense' and proposed a consolatory task:

Escribimos a cuatro manos un relato pormenorizado con base en las tantas verdades que conocíamos por los mensajes cifrados, pero haciendo creer que era una información obtenida por nosotros sobre el terreno al cabo de un viaje clandestino por el país. Masetti escribía muerto de risa, enriqueciendo la realidad con detalles fantásticos que iba inventando al calor de la escritura. [...] firmamos con nuestros nombres reales y nuestros títulos de Prensa, y luego nos hicimos tomar unas fotos testimoniales [...] Al final metimos los papeles y la foto en un sobre dirigido al señor

general Miguel Ydígoras Fuentes, presidente de la República de Guatemala, y en una fracción de segundo en que el soldado de guardia se dejó vencer por la modorra de la siesta echamos la carta al buzón. (García Márquez 1981: par. 6)

Latin America might never have been a safe place to be a journalist, but what García Márquez's anecdote shows is that the limits between fiction and reality are not only a matter of rhetoric but of ethics. Against the impossibility of telling the truth without risking one's own life, García Márquez finds in fiction a moderate solution: 'a salvo ya de los riesgos de aquella travesura pueril, [Masetti] terminó por admitir que los liberalitos tranquilos teníamos a veces una vida más larga' (par. 7). On the contrary, Walsh, like Masetti, defends his own concept of journalism, even until its final, tragic consequences: 'sucede que creo, con toda ingenuidad y firmeza, en el derecho de cualquier ciudadano a divulgar la verdad que conoce, por peligrosa que sea'. (1957: 9)

These two extreme images of the self, the intrepid and serious investigative reporter and the cynical creative author, are present to diverse degrees in the construction of the narrators of Latin American documentary discourses. Regardless of the self-designated role of the narrator within the narrative, I argue that what the storyteller has become, at least in the Latin American setting, is an essential figure through which true stories reconstruct reality.

By the last two decades of the twentieth century there was clearly a new way of representing reality in Latin American fiction. In fact, those years were a time of censorship and mistrust in authority in Latin America, a time of dictatorships, exiles, and civil wars. It is this background that might have inspired Mario Vargas Llosa's theory on *sociedades cerradas*, that is, societies in which literature and history can no longer exist independently. In a society highly controlled by the state, Vargas Llosa proposes that literature and history are able to exchange identities like in a masquerade ball: 'En una sociedad cerrada la historia se impregna de ficción, pues se inventa y reinventa en función de la ortodoxia religiosa o política contemporánea' (1990: 17–18).

This was also the time in which the rise of the postmodern novel met the Boom, with its purpose of destroying the hierarchical difference between historical and fictional discourse. Regardless of the declared death of the author, in Latin America the role of the writer as an important public figure within its society has endured from the modern to the postmodern era. The social value of the *grandes firmas* led to the recognition of certain documentary narratives, written by established fiction authors (González 1993).

Latin American nonfiction was also influenced by avant-garde literature, whose writers questioned the prestige and power of journalistic discourse. Authors experimented

with language in order to represent a diversity of discourses, particularly those that were part of everyday life. The difference is in what Aníbal González calls ‘a return to ethics’, during the 1980s. The post-Boom writers, including the documentarists, used journalism either as a thematic resource or a motif within their works. The journalistic value system was thus employed as a way to question facts. This attitude towards social reality was understandable if one considers that most of these authors had a personal involvement with politics. For Aníbal González, journalism is no longer an emblem of truthfulness, as it was to Modernism, but a narrative strategy:

In today’s Spanish American narrative (from the ‘boom’ to the ‘postboom’) journalistic discourse is assimilated quite freely and openly as one of many elements in a textual repertoire that contributes to the narrative. This does not mean that journalism is no longer significant in fictional narrative; rather, whenever journalism is alluded to or otherwise ‘grafted’ onto the fictional text, its significance becomes more complex and varied (2006 [1993]: 108).

From a literary and historical perspective, journalism might be a link between modern and postmodern literary production in Latin America. As a modern product itself, journalism in documentary narratives can be seen as a value system, raising ethical considerations regarding writing. At the same time, it can be read as a parodic discourse used to question the relationship between the author and the other, the fictional and the ‘real’ world. Although journalism has been practised since medieval times, its definition, objectives and methods have been constantly changing across times and cultures (Davis 1983). If any characteristic has remained as an essential condition for journalism to exist it would be to tell stories that are new, relevant and (apparently) true. I, therefore, use the word here both as a social discourse and as a method of investigation which claims to seek the truth and one which is transmitted through a public platform, regardless the obviously subjective approach that each author, publisher and consumer of journalism could have towards such practice.

I argue, however, that journalism, as used by documentary narratives, exhibits the (im-)possibilities of truthful representation. If it is clear that by inserting journalistic discourse into a literary work, the author problematizes the notion of truth, then what I am interested in questioning here is not the nature of the discourse *per se*, nor the traces of journalism in a literary story, but the traces of those flesh-and-blood selves involved in the plot.

Naming the real

Deciding upon a name for narratives based on true stories has long been a source of debate among practitioners and researchers. According to my interviewees, it seems that the former are less worried than the latter about assigning a label to their work. For Santiago Roncagliolo, for example, there is no difference between *no ficción*, *reportaje*, *crónica* or *periodismo*, but they are all different from the novel in methodology: ‘uno implica salir a buscar y el otro implica encerrarte en tu cuarto e inventar’ (see appendix 2, interview 6). Leila Guerriero defines her work as that of a documentary film, ‘es un documental, pero escrito’, while Cristian Alarcón considers himself a ‘cronista’ and a ‘narrador de lo real’ (see interviews 5 and 1). Although considered the *cronista par excellence* in contemporary Latin America, Martín Caparrós confessed that he still cannot decide how to define his writing: ‘me gustaría dar con una palabra o con un concepto que lo englobara... Yo usaba esto de “un ensayo que cuenta, una crónica que piensa” o “la crónica-ensayo”’. (see interview 2)

Egan collected some names used for this type of discourse. In Spanish, these texts are called *periodismo de autor*, *ficción documental*, *sociología auxiliar*, *crononovela*, *socioliteratura*, *metaperiodismo*, *periosía*, *periodismo cultural*, *relato de no-ficción*, *periodismo interpretativo*, *neocostumbrismo*, *no (crónica)vela*. In English the related concepts include *transfiction*, *faction*, *transformation journalism*, *creative nonfiction*, *documentary narrative as art*, *apocalyptic documentary*, *paraliterary journalism*, *mid fiction*, *metareportage*, *liminal literature*, *radical news analysis*, *higher journalism*, *journalit*, *postmodern journalism*, *parajournalism*, *participatory journalism*, *the New Nonfiction*, *poetic chronicle*.

For John Bak (2011) the differences in the terms, across languages and eras, are the result of the intentions of the texts, and also of the cultures in which they are embedded. Latin American documentary-like narratives demand to be read in their specific context. In the first place, because they claim to be produced in a field that expands beyond the realm of the literary. Their writers usually claim not to have artistic intentions, but rather a commitment to truth-telling. At the same time, while they are published in journalistic spaces, these works employ more flexible ethical standards than American or British journalism, for instance. These authors are also well-known fiction writers and additionally, they are often socially and politically committed to issues in their countries, and most of them act as public intellectuals.

Beyond the specialised Latin American studies on specific, related genres — which I will discuss briefly in this section — critics have identified a trend towards the documentary effect that could have particular resonance for the region. Nevertheless, the names applied to similar narratives diverge. For example, David Foster's concept of 'documentary narrative' includes 'those texts in which a credibly real story is given an explicit narrative framework by an intervening narrator' (1984: 53). Foster's corpus focuses mostly on fiction, for he considers the best practitioners of this trend to be well-known novelists. On the contrary, Julio Rodríguez-Luis thinks that 'la narrativa documental relata ciertos hechos —que pueden organizarse de modo que conformen una biografía— que han tenido lugar y cuya autenticidad quiere el autor que resulte evidente' (1997: 84). His taxonomic study, therefore, focuses on the degree of intervention of the author, who he calls *mediador*. For Foster, this narrative is in opposition to the traditional concept of literature because it is not its intention to transform reality in any artistic manner.

As stated above, it is not my intention to become embroiled a discussion of genres and disciplines that has already been a significant part of the debate surrounding this field. Therefore, what follows is a brief critical description of three major concepts which I have identified as the most influential for the kind of writing I am focusing on.

Crónica

Crónica, as it was originally practised by the *modernistas*, can be defined as 'a short piece, published in a journalistic venue and produced in a polished literary style' (Reynolds 2012: 3). A broader and more contemporary concept of the genre, however, is given by Ignacio Corona and Beth Jörgensen: 'the genre is adaptable and elastic in form, an invitation to writers to mix an extratextual reality with artful fictional touches' (2002: 5).

Egan views the chronicle as a synonym of what in the US is called *literary journalism*, which for her would be a subgenre of nonfiction. Nevertheless, by using the Spanish word, *crónica*, critics such as Aníbal González and Susana Rotker (2005) highlight the difference between any type of *chronicle* and the kind of writing that refers to a particular Spanish-American literary tradition.⁷ Moreover, Viviane Mahieux (2011) expands awareness of the genre to the 1920s–1930s, to acknowledge that the phenomenon

⁷ From a wider perspective, the origins of this writing form can be found in Classic epic and in the work of the historical chroniclers of the Middle Ages in Europe (Benjamin 1999). However, I use the term 'chronicle' as a literal, albeit imprecise, translation from the Spanish *crónica*.

was shared with Brazilian authors writing in Portuguese, such as Mário de Andrade, Machado de Assis, and later Clarice Lispector.

The concept was first used in the American colonies to designate the conquerors' and missionaries' reports on new discoveries to the Spanish kings. Later, during the first decades of the independent nations, the chronicle appears again, this time as a tool for constructing national identities and educating citizens. The writer as an intellectual mediating between *la ciudad letrada* and *el pueblo* found in the chronicle a way to represent and even to create the nation.⁸ Nevertheless, scholars agree that the *modernista* writers were actually the inventors of the contemporary *crónica*. Susana Rotker considers the Latin American *crónica* to be a mixed genre: the result of the encounter between literary and journalistic discourses. Based on Jacobson's communication theory, Rotker states that in *crónicas*, the poetic and referential functions have the same level of importance.

Criticism usually associates this genre with newspapers, for journalistic discourse has legitimised fiction authors who practise *crónica*, as well as establishing the standards for its writing (Reynolds 2012). Whereas in the literary field its study has been traditionally neglected, in the journalistic one, it has a privileged place as representative of public opinion: 'the chronicle, along with the literary article, became the most aesthetically elaborated section of the newspaper, serving a function of enlightened entertainment amid the predominant documentary information' (Corona and Jörgensen 2002: 7).⁹

The chroniclers have also theorised on the genre, perhaps in their aim to legitimize their own position within such an unstable field, or in substitution for the lack of literary prestige. For most of them, the main element involved in the concept is time. For example, Carlos Monsiváis (1980) thinks that the chronicle reclaims literature in an anti-intellectual environment, that of the press, whereas Juan Villoro defines it as 'literatura bajo presión' (2012: 578). On the contrary, Peruvian editor Julio Villanueva Chang argues that 'una crónica ya no es tanto un modo literario y entretenido de "enterarse" de los

⁸ This is the age of works such as Juan Domingo Sarmiento's *Facundo: Civilización y Barbarie* (1845) in Argentina and Euclides da Cunha's *Os Sertões* (1902) in Brazil. These texts are not only literary but social proposals aiming to establish modernity on the continent (González 1983).

⁹ Carlos Monsiváis's introduction to his own 1980 anthology of Mexican chronicles is recognised as one of the first formal attempts to legitimise the genre. Three years later, Aníbal González published the ground-breaking academic study *La crónica modernista hispanoamericana* (1983). It was followed by Susana Rotker's *La invención de la crónica* (1992), which became very influential among practitioners, for it was reprinted in 2005 by the FNPI, as a handbook for journalists, with a prologue by Tomás Eloy Martínez. It is only in recent decades that the variety of academic books on the topic has increased. See, for example, Bencomo (2002), Jörgensen and Corona (2002), Bielsa (2006), Aguilar (2010), Mahieux (2011), Reynolds (2012), and Angulo (2014).

hechos sino que sobre todo es una forma de “conocer” el mundo’ (2012: 590). According to Villanueva, the *crónica* should avoid the use of the first-person, while Colombian editor Darío Jaramillo describes these texts as ‘una narración extensa de un hecho verídico, escrita en primera persona o con una visible participación del yo narrativo, sobre acontecimientos o personas o grupos insólitos, inesperados, marginales, disidentes, o sobre espectáculos y ritos sociales’ (17).

While *cronistas* coming from a more literary background emphasize how quickly these texts can be written, *cronistas* with a stronger background in journalism find the space and time in this genre that they cannot have in traditional news writing. These opposed perspectives are understandable, since the former may be comparing the *crónica* with the novel, while the latter compares it with the news. However, this further demonstrates the complex conception of the genre in terms of its production.

There are claims from some practitioners and academics that the Latin American chronicle remains a marginal genre. Nevertheless, by the end of the twentieth century, there was a renewal of interest in the *crónica* that had not been seen since *Modernismo*.¹⁰ International publishing houses like Penguin Random House Group, Alfaguara, Anagrama and Planeta have launched their own collections, some of them edited by renowned authors within the field; mass media and institutions related to the genre have also published selected *cronistas*.¹¹ The current editorial boom in chronicle collections is thus an example of the way in which this hybrid form aims for literary prestige. In fact, in these anthologies, those authors who are already established are featured repeatedly.

The FNPI has also played an important role in organizing workshops, prizes and professional encounters on the topic. The foundation has become the influential journalistic elite of the region. As a result of seminars and conferences organised by FNPI, for instance, a group called Nuevos Cronistas de Indias was created in 2008. Officially, the group has 26 members from Latin America and Spain, born between the 1950s and

¹⁰ Mass media publications interested in what is called ‘investigative journalism’ have been opening up more spaces for the genre. Some examples are print magazines as *Etiqueta Negra* in Peru, *Gatopardo*, *Emeequis*, *Letras Libres*, and *Proceso* in Mexico, *Soho* and *Lamujerdemivida* in Colombia; and online media as *Cosecha Roja* and *Anfibia* in Argentina, *Sinembargo.mx*, *Animal Político* and *El Barrio Antiguo* in Mexico, *The Clinic* in Chile or *El Faro* in El Salvador.

¹¹ The most relevant anthologies have been edited by Monsiváis (1980), Martínez (2006), Jaramillo (2012), Fonseca and El-Kadi (2012), Carrión (2012), and Alarcón (2015). Some academic publications also include a selection of chronicles or reflections of their writers, besides a variety of critics reflecting on the topic, such as Corona and Jörgensen (2002), Aguilar (2010) and Angulo (2014). Although all these texts have published chronicles in Spanish, some of them include Brazilian authors in translation. Brazil certainly shares this editorial boom — as an example, see Ferreira dos Santos (2005).

1980s, including some of the authors studied in this thesis: Guerriero, Caparrós, Villoro, Alarcón and Goldman.¹²

In terms of authorship, today's chroniclers are an elite, much as they were in the *modernista* era. If they do not all portray the glamorous life-style that their forerunners did, they still claim a connection with this heritage, as a means of distinguishing themselves from everyday news reporters. In Villanueva's words, *crónica* is still 'un género aristocrático con ilusiones de un público pop' (603). Nevertheless, the main difference with past generations might be that contemporary chroniclers consider their research method to be as important as the narrative style they use. The *reportería* or *reporteo*, and therefore the documents, images and voice recordings they obtain during it, seem to be the base on which to establish their credibility.

Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that the field of the *crónica* has been traditionally dominated by males. In one of the first anthologies on the topic, *A ustedes les consta* (Monsiváis 1980), there are only three women among the 37 selected writers: Elena Poniatowska, Carmen Lira and Magali Tercero. In the more recent anthologies (Jaramillo 2012; Carrión 2012; Angulo 2014) the situation has not changed: for every ten male chroniclers there are on average two women published.

Literary Journalism

If some defend the *crónica* as a uniquely Latin American genre, others have been trying to integrate it into a particular form of international journalism, that which has been broadly called *literary journalism*. As a field of study, literary journalism has been looking for a place within American academia, and is integrated most commonly into the fields of communication studies and comparative literature. An example of this is the foundation of the International Association for Literary Journalism Studies (IALJS) in 2006, after the first International Conference on Literary Journalism in Nancy, France. For this association, literary journalism is synonymous with reportage, and it is thought of as 'journalism that is literature'.¹³

¹² In an updated version of the Nuevos Cronistas' website, authors Elena Poniatowska and Santiago Roncagliolo are also included. See nuevoscronistasdeindias.fnpi.org for the full list of authors in this group.

¹³ Since 2009 the IALJS has sponsored the peer-reviewed journal *Literary Journalism Studies*. They mostly publish papers analysing American texts; there have been just three papers and one interview published on Latin American literary journalism. Nevertheless, their 2015 annual conference in Puerto Alegre, Brazil, was the first one to be held in a Latin American country and to offer space for presentations in Spanish and Portuguese. As a participant, I observed that there is still a need to legitimate, academically, the connections between *crónica* and literary journalism.

As a writing style, it is related to long-form journalistic genres, such as reportage, profiles, and the feature story. The IALJS considers the following terms to be synonymous with their definition of American literary journalism: literary reportage, narrative journalism, creative non-fiction, New Journalism, *Jornalismo Literário*, *periodismo literario*, *Bao Gao Wen Xue*, literary non-fiction, and narrative non-fiction (ialjs.org).

Some critics study this form as a kind of nonfiction, that could also derive from postmodern metafiction (Frus 1994; Zavarzadeh 1976; Hellmann 1981). Others consider it a completely new genre (Wolfe 1973), a subgenre of the novel (Hartsock 2016) or even an academic discipline in its own right (Bak 2011).

To avoid the traditional aesthetic values implied when using concepts in which the adjective *literary* precedes *nonfiction* or *journalism*, Phyllis Frus (1994) opts for the term *journalistic narrative*. While referring simply to writings about ‘newsworthy subjects’ (Frus 1994: ix), the term offers a wider space for the allocation of all kind of hybrid texts between literature and journalism, with emphasis on both content and form. From the Spanish speaking world, Roberto Herrscher (2012) uses the similar term *periodismo narrativo* to refer to true stories told with ‘las armas de la literatura’. This is also the term used by María Angulo as a synonym for *crónica*, to designate the texts included in the collective work *Crónica y mirada. Aproximaciones al periodismo narrativo* (2014).

All these concepts are generally used indiscriminately to refer to a type of journalism that can be valued as literature because of its narrative qualities. Literary journalists use dialogue, monologues, descriptions, allegories, metaphors, intertextuality, and other language constructions, in order to recreate the facts aesthetically.

In the US, literary journalism has been published widely in print and online journalism since the flourishing of the New Journalism movement in the 1960s, led by authors such as Tom Wolfe, Norman Mailer and Truman Capote.¹⁴ According to Johnson (1971), New Journalism was born as an alternative way of writing about reality, in opposition to the established mass media. Therefore, it implied a complete change in journalistic practice. One of the main characteristics of this form was the inclusion of sociological and political commentaries, which signposted a subjective perspective, for

¹⁴ Tom Wolfe is recognized as the one who coined the term ‘New Journalism’ in 1973, when he published the movement’s first anthology, along with Michael L. Johnson. However, by that time Johnson had already published a theoretical book analysing the works of Wolfe, Mailer and Herr, under a very similar title: *The New Journalism. The Underground Press, the Artists of Nonfiction, and Changes in the Established Media* (1971). For Hellmann (1981), New Journalism was symbolically born in 1965, when Tom Wolfe’s *Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby* and Truman Capote’s *In Cold Blood* were published. By then, however, Capote had already coined his own term: ‘nonfiction novel’.

‘it is the writing itself — its style and technique, its expression of the writer as a person, and its record of human events — that is central’ (xi–xii). Although innovations in journalistic writing style seem to be an inherent condition for this movement, there is also an ethical condition for its existence. For Johnson, at the root of this new way of telling facts, there is a renewed commitment to honesty and thoroughness as important values of journalistic practice. Hence, a free press is a basic condition for New Journalism to exist.

In the European context, this kind of text was called *literature reportage*. Both movements, however, have their origins in the literary realism, as well as in the journalism of the nineteenth century. The difference in the terms might be based on the intentions of the texts. On the one hand, American New Journalism has explored innovations in form, but remains rooted in detailed, objective research. European writers, on the other hand, have found, through reportage, a way to express themselves in a more interpretative style, and to write about censored topics, following an ideological, journalistic tradition (Bak 2011). It is possible that the contemporary Latin American *crónica* is a blend of both American and European traditions.¹⁵

***Testimonio*-based narratives**

Testimonio is a word charged with many meanings in the history of Latin American literature. As a particular, Latin American form of writing, it has been called *novela-testimonio*, *testimonial novel*, or simply *testimonio*. The genre is related to different modes of narrative, such as autobiography, biography, confessions, memoirs, letters and diaries. However, I refer to *testimonio* as it has been described by John Beverley: ‘The situation of narration in *testimonio* has to involve an urgency to communicate a problem of repression, poverty, subalternity, imprisonment, struggle for survival, and so on, implicated in the act of narration itself’ (1996 [1989]: 26). Due to the fact that the narrator is often illiterate, or is not a professional writer, the process of writing a *testimonio* involves recording, transcription and editing by an intellectual, generally a well-known novelist or experienced journalist.¹⁶

¹⁵ For more on contemporary literary journalism around the world, see Norman Sims (1990; 2007), Bak and Reynold (2011), and Keeble and Tulloch (2012).

¹⁶ For Beverley, all kinds of narratives where the *testimonio* is invented or reworked ‘with explicitly literary goals’ (38) are not *testimonio* but pseudo-*testimonio*. These kinds of works are more linked with postmodern literature, an aesthetic that testimonial theorists reject. This observation could be highly problematic and leads to confusion about the literary value that he paradoxically claims for *testimonio*. Under these non-*testimonio* texts he even includes Barnet’s testimonial novel and Capote’s nonfiction novel.

In 1966, Miguel Barnet published *Biografía de un cimarrón*, defining it as the first *novela-testimonio*. The genre was consolidated with the incorporation of the testimonial category into the prestigious Premio Casa de las Américas in 1970. By this time, the Cuban Revolution (1953–1959) had triumphed, and campaign diaries were popular, such as those by Ernesto ‘Che’ Guevara. It was a time in which freedom of speech was being negotiated, against the international backdrop of the Cold War (Franco 2002). In the intellectual field, theories about the West and the representation of otherness were emerging, particularly those developed by the cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz and the sociologist Edward Said.¹⁷

The *novela-testimonio* shares its documentary mode with other literary trends developed throughout the same period, such as New Journalism, the Latin American Boom and the postmodern novel.¹⁸ Regardless of the realistic mode that it can share with the ‘new historical novel’, which was also in fashion at the time, the evolution of the testimonial novel should be viewed as a different phenomenon. In a polemical piece, Seymour Menton (1993) describes it as a trend that had declined by the 1980s and that ‘never attained the high productivity, the great variety and the outstanding artistic quality of the New Historical Novel’ (190–191).

Although emerging from the tradition of social realism, *testimonio* is not defined as a novel, and therefore its fictional nature is overlooked. But, like the *archive novel* (González Echevarría 1990), *testimonio* also claims to have a pact of truth with its reader.¹⁹ It is not surprising, then, that legal terminology was incorporated into this form: ‘The position of the reader of *testimonio* is akin to that of a jury member in a courtroom. Unlike the novel, *testimonio* promises by definition to be primarily concerned with sincerity rather than literariness’ (26). In contrast to Lukács’s (1978) notion of the novel as a grand narrative seeking universal truth through the representation of a whole society, the theorists of *testimonio* make a claim for the importance of specific, localised stories. This is why Beverley defines *testimonio* as ‘a nonfictional, popular–democratic form of

¹⁷ In fact, one of the most important academic interpretations of *testimonio* came from the Latin American Subaltern Studies Group. Founded in America by John Beverley, Ileana Rodríguez and other scholars, it was based on the Subaltern Studies Group among whose associates was Said.

¹⁸ Williams (1997) considers postmodernism in Latin America to be related to the historical and political situation of the region, as shown in the novels of writers such as Guillermo Cabrera Infante, Manuel Puig, Ricardo Piglia, Salvador Elizondo, Carmen Boullosa, José Emilio Pacheco, Diamela Eltit, Sylvia Molloy, among others.

¹⁹ González Echevarría (1990) uses *archive novel* as a metaphor, coming from the language of the law to define a type of Latin American novel that creates a modern myth based on an old form, generally represented by an unfinished manuscript and an archivist/compiler. As an archive that accumulates and classifies information, these novels tend to go back to the origins of Latin American history, representing the relationship between legitimacy and power.

epic narrative' (Beverley: 27). The traditional role of the writer as he who speaks on behalf of the 'voiceless' has, therefore, vanished. The erasure of the function of the author, who is just a compiler, is one of the main characteristics of a testimonial style. George Yudice states that 'the *testimonialista* gives his or her personal testimony "directly", addressing a specific interlocutor' (1991:42). These debates concerning sincerity and literariness, nonetheless, came to a head with the controversy following *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia* (1983).²⁰

Against Yudice and Beverley's concept of the author as an objective mediator, some critics studied the aesthetic and ethical implications of the role of the writer, mainly during the processes of transcription and edition (Vera León 1992; Sklodowska 1993). For them, the testimonial pact is complex because there will always be a tension between the worldview of the writer and that of the informant: 'Es evidente que entre los códigos veredictivos de los testigos y de los editores hay un hiato que se debe a sus diferentes posturas cognitivas frente al mundo' (Sklodowska: 86).

Although *testimonio* has been written about and studied from different points of view, an inherent aspect agreed on by all relevant actors involved is that *testimonio* is not only a discourse but an act that implies solidarity. 'Testimonio is a means rather than an end in itself' (Beverley 1996: 279), and a way to understand experience and to preserve memory (Randall 1992).

In contrast with its definition in the 1960s–1980s as a new genre, current scholarship considers *testimonio* to be a subgenre of Latin American literature. Although some commentators remain attracted to traditional testimonial works and their influence on social justice and human rights, others have moved towards a less politically charged speech, proposing that *testimonio* should be analysed as any other hybrid discourse. They prefer to use concepts such as the *testimonio mood* or *storytelling* to refer to life narratives based on real experiences:

It is time for *testimonio de jure* of scholarship to move forward because *testimonio de facto* on the ground has undergone a profound metamorphosis and many migrations: from discipline to discipline and border to border; from text to textiles, radio, and graphic art; from transcribed and written to spoken, public, and performative; from fixed contexts to interactional ones; and from nonfiction to fiction and film. Included in these movements is the key figure of the *testigo*, or eyewitness. In the informant role, the eyewitness described in these pages may be invented, false, hidden, or

²⁰ The book was based on interviews with Rigoberta Menchú, conducted and edited by the Venezuelan anthropologist Elizabeth Burgos. After being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1992, Menchú declared that Burgos did not tell all of her story. In 1999, anthropologist David Stoll published *Rigoberta Menchú and the Story of All Poor Guatemalans*, in which he claimed that some facts had not happened exactly as Menchú narrated them.

disengaged while living in insile (internal exile), or even nonhuman. (Detwiller and Breckenridge 2012: 2)

On one hand, *testimonio* has been liberated from the written form, allowing for the exploration of a variety of media in which *testimonio* could have a new place. On the other hand, *testimonio* is no longer attached to a particular person or locality, but rather it can be found at the intersections of self, community and geopolitical borders.

The traditional concept of *testimonio* remains, in whatever way, useful as a form of expression for individuals in marginal communities, such as indigenous villages, urban peripheries or prisons. If it is true that there is still a high percentage of illiteracy and poverty in Latin America, technology and new media allow more possibilities for the self-expression of the other who, without any need of a mediator, can now become the author of his own story. For instance, projects such as *Tejiendo nuestras raíces* (2010), an audio book of testimonials in Spanish and Mayan, are recovering myths and worldviews of native cultures as well as details of their everyday lives. These new practices challenge the traditional definition of *testimonio* as mediated speech and lead us to question, again, the politics of representation.

From another perspective, Beatriz Sarlo (2006) analyses documentary texts and films in order to criticise the excess of testimony in contemporary representations of the past. Although it is true that testimonial accounts have been essential to the reconstruction and validation of cases of human rights violations, it is important to critically examine the ethical implications of the first-person narratives, when testimonies are the only source, or the most trustworthy one. She analyses, for instance, the artistic representation of disappearances during the Argentinian dictatorship, as described by the children of the victims, and which have been seen as part of a post-memory trend. For Sarlo, however, in the twenty-first century there is no *posmemoria*, just another form of memory in which an event has to be precariously reconstructed through disorganised pieces of information, because it is the only way to tell the stories of those who were silenced and murdered:

La primera persona es indispensable para restituir aquello que fue borrado por la violencia del terrorismo de estado; y al mismo tiempo, no pueden pasarse por alto los interrogantes que se abren cuando ofrece su testimonio de lo que nunca se sabría de otro modo y también de muchas cosas donde ella, la primera persona, no puede reclamar la misma autoridad. (162)

But testimonies respond to the needs or trends of the public sphere, and in the established ‘teatro de la memoria’ the other who speaks is no longer the poor; the illiterate; the exploited, but rather the female; the marginal; the subaltern; and the young. Nonetheless, it is only by the means of fiction, Sarlo concludes, that one can say what has not been said already, what the victim was not able to document: ‘La literatura, por supuesto, no disuelve todos los problemas planteados, ni puede explicarlos, pero en ella un narrador siempre piensa desde afuera de la experiencia, como si los humanos pudieran apoderarse de la pesadilla y no sólo padecerla.’ (166)²¹

In-between fields

Santiago Roncagliolo’s *La cuarta espada. La historia de Abimael Guzmán y Sendero Luminoso* (2007) begins with a self-reflective narrator responding to a rhetorical question. A shameless and ironic Santiago Roncagliolo-as-narrator explains his reasons for getting involved in the journalistic investigation that makes up the book:

¿Por qué un reportaje sobre Guzmán? Porque vende. O porque yo creo que vende. O porque es lo único que puedo vender. Siempre he sido un mercenario de las palabras. Escribir es lo único que sé hacer y trato de amortizarlo. Ahora vivo en España y trato de hacerme un lugar como periodista. Necesito algo novedoso, y el tema de actualidad en el último año, tras el 11-M, es el terrorismo. (23)

In an attitude that resembles that of a *modernista* chronicler, this narrator shows his awareness of the commercial value that words hold for newspapers. The journalistic field whence Roncagliolo is speaking, however, is no longer the romantic, Bohemian scenario that previously served as a platform for the Spanish-American *modernista* authors, lending them social popularity and literary prestige (Reynolds 2012). It is true that *crónica* is still, as a genre, mostly published in newspapers by intellectuals who ‘enjoy a recognized position in the field of restricted production’ and manage ‘to overcome the isolation of the written word’ (Bielsa 2006: xii).

The contemporary press, however, is not as well-disposed towards fiction authors as it used to be, or at least not universally. What Roncagliolo’s metafictional narrator demonstrates in this quoted passage, is that an ambitious author, who aims to make a living from journalism — and not an occasional *cronista* — must obey the rules of the

²¹ Sarlo refers to fiction and literature as synonyms, which is not uncommon but is the kind of practice that makes it difficult to conduct an analysis of nonfictional narratives as literature.

market and look for a story that sells. This cynical narrator, thus, represents what I perceive as a generational change in Latin American authors interested in ‘giving voice to the other’. If the documentarist goes out of his comfort zone and risks his security in order to encounter the other, it is less because of a social or ideological commitment to the topic — that testimonial authors past would have claimed to be driven by — and more because the topic is newsworthy.²²

Another difference is that today’s documentary authors have found that the traditional format of the book, rather than any mass media, is the best platform for telling true stories. Two years before publishing *La cuarta espada*, in October 2005, Roncagliolo published a journalistic article on Abimael Guzmán in the Spanish newspaper *El País*. Divided into two chapters, the story is told in the third-person, without any allusion to the author’s personal experience or opinions on the topic. Parts of the information, and of the text itself, were repurposed for the book version. The main stylistic difference was the first-person narrator. By inserting the self into the narrative, the new story became a dialogue between the protagonist and the journalist, even if the former never gave him an interview. Roncagliolo chooses the book to tell the complete, true story of Sendero Luminoso, rather than one of the more influential Spanish newspapers.

Metafiction as a self-reflective narrative technique has been used and debated in the postmodern era, largely by the social scientist, and particularly in fields such as anthropology, ethnography and history. However, traditional journalism has paid less attention to theoretical discussions on the role of narrative in the construction of its discourse, and thus in its construction of reality through language. In a field that assumes a transparent style of writing, what Barthes (1953) called ‘degree zero’, experiments with storytelling structures and general narrative techniques can be found less in everyday, breaking-news, and more in what in journalistic jargon is called ‘soft news’. This experimentalism is found particularly in interpretative genres such as the opinion piece, column, *reportage*, and *crónica*.

According to Pierre Bourdieu’s theory on ‘the field of cultural production’ (1993), cultural producers move between two poles in the field: the autonomous and the heteronomous. The first one is the space for those artists who are more concerned with autonomy, while the second one is the space of popular culture and bourgeois art, and its producers are more driven by economic interests than those on the autonomous pole. In

²² The idea of a ‘comfort zone’ is of course highly subjective. In the case of Roncagliolo’s narrator, journalism represents a sort of dignified salvation from his impoverished life as an illegal Peruvian immigrant in Spain.

the case of the literary sub-field, the struggle can be defined as a battle for the monopoly of literary legitimacy, or ‘the power to say with authority who are authorized to call themselves writers’ (41). This is not wholly different for the journalistic field, for in a later work, *On Television and Journalism* (1998), Bourdieu locates the journalistic field between the market and the intellectual pole. Journalists might have more or less freedom to say what they wish, depending of their specific role or position in the field. This position is determined by the level of control of both the particular media interests and the journalists’ sense of self-censorship.

If one considers that culture is a field in which its producers are in a constant struggle for power (Bourdieu 1993), the corpus I am analysing in this thesis, as documentary narratives, are inevitably situated in a liminal space. Its authors can be placed in diverse positions of the field of cultural production. Their positions, I suggest, depend more on their cultural affiliations and prestige, in both the literary and journalistic fields, than on the peculiarities of their writing. In the case of the Latin American cultural field, in which belonging to the literary sub-field has traditionally been much more prestigious than having a place as a journalist,²³ it is not surprising that the ‘literary’ element of documentary narratives makes their position ambiguous in terms of authority. Writers like Guerriero, Caparrós, and Villoro, recognized in our interviews that they usually do not have disagreements with editors, and that they normally publish their texts as they wish. They also have the freedom to choose or propose their own topics, and enough time to develop them, at least in comparison with writing up the daily news. This is not the case, however, for common reporters working to the pressures and interests of editors and media owners.²⁴

Despite Roncagliolo’s cynical self-representation as a *reportero en apuros*, the Latin American *cronistas* can be considered an elite in the journalistic field, and thus they act closer to the autonomous pole of the cultural field of production. As I stated before, since the creation of the FNPI, there has been an increase in workshops, conferences and even festivals in which recognized chroniclers from all over the region get together to

²³ According to Bielsa, the *crónica* as genre was not autonomous from the Latin American literary field until the 1960s.

²⁴ Based on interviews with selected *cronistas* from Mexico City and Guayaquil, Bielsa also concluded that they are usually not full-time journalists but writers with an ‘in-between position’ who have the freedom to work beyond the conventional press limitations of space and time: ‘Cronistas enjoy a degree of relative freedom in a medium in which their work is recognized as creative or literary journalism, and is not subject to the same kind of demand and limitations as predominantly informative reporting. It is thus possible to argue that most *cronistas* experience a privileged position when compared to the journalists who cover news’. (85)

share their experiences and teach ‘the craft’ to young journalists.²⁵ This new situation seems to be challenging the supposedly marginal status of the *crónica*, as Cristian Alarcón told me:

Vale la pena no estar solamente en las zonas de confort, no quedarse solamente en los lugares donde uno podría sentirse seguro, porque yo podría participar solo de la escena de la *crónica* latinoamericana y vincularme exclusivamente con escritores y editores y no salir del aire acondicionado de los hoteles cinco estrellas en los que se hacen los encuentros. (see interview 1)

Nevertheless, if in the journalistic field these Latin American authors are considered an elite, in the literary field they are still marginal. For instance, they have less likelihood of success when competing with fiction writers for prizes, peer recognition, social prestige, and even less in terms of publishing opportunities.

Documentary writers, therefore, have to play two games in order to legitimate themselves within both fields. On the one hand, for the journalistic field they emphasize the ethics of their work, conducting long and detailed investigations. Finding the balance between fidelity to the ‘voice’ of the informant and ‘good’ storytelling has been particularly challenging for journalists who also wish to experiment with form, for there is a risk of falling into stereotypes in the characterisation of the other. Based on her anthropological research on nonfiction narratives about violence in Colombia and Mexico, Gabriela Polit thinks that journalism becomes a trap, because even if not all documentary authors are pursuing originality in their writing, they struggle with representation and try to avoid portraying the cliché of the victim, for instance (2013: 174–176).

For the literary field, on the other hand, they consciously craft their authorial presence through the construction of a first-person narrator. For it is true that authors use the first-person narrator to create verisimilitude — they depict themselves as witnesses to the story they are telling — and they also use the ‘I’, to claim authority in a cultural field that still does not give them full acknowledgement.

²⁵ Other important venues for this kind of training are Mexico and Argentina. In Buenos Aires, for example, the Fundación Tomás Eloy Martínez regularly offers workshops led by recognised authors.

Towards a theory of documentary narratives

So far I have stated that the notion of the ‘field’ is a useful metaphor for the interpretation of all kinds of documentary narratives as a cultural phenomenon. Nonetheless, I find that narratives that fall between fields need to be studied with a consideration of the physical, concrete conditions of the real encounters between the author and his or her informants. These real encounters, which become part of the narrative, problematise a reading contract based on credibility: if the author declares ‘I was there’, the reader is invited to believe it. The author, then, acts less like an isolated, (post-)modernist novelist, and more like Benjamin’s storyteller: ‘The storyteller takes what he tells from experience — his own or that reported by others. And he in turn makes it the experience of those who are listening to his tale.’ (87)

Clearly, when reading these narratives after the experiments of the postmodern era, one cannot avoid a certain scepticism. Narrative strategies such as the configuration of a self-conscious, metafictional narrator, or diverse modes of intertextuality, for example, can be read as typical postmodern devices rather than a way of emphasising the act of witnessing. Nevertheless, I agree with Amar Sánchez (1992) and Frus (1994), that nonfiction raises political and historical issues that should be analysed along with discursive strategies. It is precisely because literary journalism was born as a subversive form in an age of uncertainty, that its content should read through this form, so as to question what we mean by literature, and by journalism.²⁶ For Frus, nonfiction is part of a complex public discourse, and therefore its literary strategies are more than stylistic attributes. This point of view coincides with the declared intentions of the authors I interviewed for this thesis, as they stated that they included, for instance, a first-person narrator mostly because of ethical concerns.

Latin American literary journalists have created a self-referenced character for themselves, who is usually a trustworthy, cultivated, intellectual, middle-class, progressive, open-minded man (or sometimes a woman), who is interested in marginal people and social problems. Within their own texts, they are intrepid reporters and sensitive detectives; they are, in short, the heroes of their stories. This ‘I’ in literary journalistic narratives is closer to an autobiographical voice and therefore there is a

²⁶ The nonfiction genre was born as a product of a time of crisis and value disorder (Zavarzadeh 1976). Hartsock (2016) traces the origins of the *literary reportage* — which would later inspire the American New Journalism — as a proletarian, literary genre used in the late 1920s by the workers’ movements in Germany and the Soviet Union. Another interesting account of the history of nonfiction in relation to the Latin American context is given by Amar Sánchez (1992).

tension between what Robert Burroughs calls the ‘eyewitness’ and the ‘I-witness’ (in Berger and Luckman 1967). Beyond the information the journalist gathers in the field, what becomes the unquestionable evidence in the text, is the self who witnessed something: the storyteller who comes back home to relate what he saw or heard.

If ‘real-life’ has always been a popular chronotope (Bakhtin 1981), it is in documentary narratives that the limits and consequences of using this setting are most evident. This is particularly clear in the Latin American cultural field, in which even before the Boom movement, writers used tools from the social sciences to approach a reality from within their countries that they could not relate directly. Writers have used anthropological research methods, specifically ethnographic techniques, such as the field interview, participant observation and life story (González 1993; Corona 2002). Framing facts through this kind of narrative, particularly in politically difficult times, has been a way through which writers make sense of reality, and preserve stories that otherwise would have disappeared, for, as Bruner notes, when analysing how people give meaning to their experiences: ‘if we were not able to do such framing, we would be lost in a murk of chaotic experience and probably would not have survived as species in any case’ (1990: 56).

Of all possible forms of framing reality, this thesis explores that of testimony. Testimony, however, is not isolated speech, but the result of a dialogue. While imparting their *testimonio*, the other is responding to a Self who is there, face-to-face, waiting to hear his or her story. In fact, the form and the content of this testimony are influenced by the others involved in the communication process: the listener-writer and the reader.

As all the selected texts depart from a journalistic, or semi-journalistic investigation, I have chosen to focus on a particular form of dialogue: the interview. In order to do so, I apply Mikhail Bakhtin’s reflections on speech genres and style as a social phenomenon, individualised by each author’s particular use of language.²⁷ Although I conduct a literary analysis, I do not intend to read the chosen corpus as novels.²⁸ I rather read each of these texts as what Bakhtin has defined as an ‘utterance’, that is, an individual, concrete use of language, here generated within a specific genre. These acts of speech, called ‘documentary narratives’ throughout my analysis, are, therefore, the result of various dialogues: first, between the informant and the writer, and second,

²⁷ Bakhtin defines speech genres as ‘relatively stable thematic, compositional, and stylistic types of utterances’, developed in a particular social sphere. (1987: 64)

²⁸ I refer here to the works not defined as novels. The only self-stated novels that I analyse are Arturo Fontaine’s *La vida doble*, Poniatowska’s *La “Flor de Lis”*, and Martínez’s *La novela de Perón* and *Santa Evita*.

between the writer and the reader; and, on another level, between the journalistic and the literary genres. All these diverse voices and genres clamour alongside one another in the text, for each speech represents a particular worldview.²⁹

Since I am focusing on the ‘dialogized style’ that Bakhtin proposes, to a certain degree I will be applying his approach to discourse analysis. For I agree with Bakhtin, that rather than considering the work to be a closed monologue, we should approach it as ‘a rejoinder in a given dialogue, whose style is determined by its interrelationship with other rejoinders in the same dialogue (in the totality of the conversation)’ (1981: 274).³⁰

By focusing on style, as conceived by Bakhtin, I have found that the ethical intentions of the documentary authors do shape their narratives and their pact with the reader. Their words cannot avoid being conditioned by the other’s words, even when they are appropriating them by means of writing. That these narratives are the product of real encounters between at least two people, the author and the informant, cannot be ignored. They are, then, the most literal example of Bakhtin’s idea of *dialogization* in speech:

Language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker’s intentions; it is populated — overpopulated — with the intentions of others. Expropriating it, forcing it to submit to one’s own intentions and accents, is a difficult and complicated process. (1981: 294).

What I propose, therefore, is that documentary narratives should be read as performative speech acts, in which multiple and highly diverse worldviews clash. A reading like this can show that questions of self-representation are inevitably linked to the participants’ real identities. Self-identity is always changing according to circumstance, but it can be observed in the way that individuals perform tasks, or in their behaviour in concrete situations (Goffman 1974). Therefore, an approach that focuses on the dialogical nature of these texts as a representation of the real can reveal, to a certain degree, the identities of the self and others, beyond the fiction. The traces of the relationship between the self and the other are, therefore, exposed in the representation of

²⁹ Critics who defend literary journalism as a literary subgenre, like Hartsock (2016), use Bakhtin’s theory of the novel as support for their arguments. For it is true that defining the novel as a hybrid form that mixes diverse speeches from real life (*heteroglossia*) can allow for a consideration of nonfiction forms as such, I do not think that Bakhtin included texts that claim to document real-life speech in his own definition of the novel. First, because for him the division between ‘artistic’ and ‘extra artistic prose’ is quite clear, and he includes journalism, as well as philosophy and other ‘moral’ speeches in the ‘living rhetorical genres’. Second, because to consider a reading of these texts as novels would imply, according to Bakhtin’s theory, a transformation of any element coming from the realm of the real-life into objects or characters, and this is precisely the opposite of what authors intend to do with documentary narratives.

³⁰ For Bakhtin ‘any research whose material is concrete language [...] inevitably deals with concrete utterances (written and oral) belonging to various spheres of human activity and communication.’ (1987: 62)

the narrative dialogues, for the story shared is never just of one self but the result of particular encounters between particular individuals.³¹

From another point of view, I suggest that the device that makes it possible for contemporary documentarists to connect both the social and textual spheres in which they act is the interview.³² The interview, as used in the selected texts, is in itself a hybrid speech genre. It incorporates an oral conversation, generated in a particular social sphere and later reorganised by only one of its participants. This speech is then incorporated into written speech, which is intended for another social sphere. The interview is also complex in its function, for it is a method of research, and also, when incorporated into the text, it becomes a stylistic, literary device.

Documentary narratives, particularly metafictional ones, are never unmediated testimonies. They are neither biographies, nor conventional journalistic profiles, but a collective product, a mix of several accounts of dialogues between at least two participants. These dialogues, I propose, can be read as a metaphor for contemporary attempts at communication between strangers. There is a rhetoric of alterity that highlights values such as empathy and altruism. Nevertheless, a close reading of the selected works, focusing on the representation of the dialogues as products of real encounters, shows that there is an unsolved tension between the self and the other. I believe this is due to the stylistic and ethical challenges that a text dealing with at least two fields — the journalistic and the literary — inevitably imposes on the author.

Through the interview, ‘*el género de la voz y la autenticidad*’, as Sarlo calls it (in Aurfuch 1995: 13), authors strengthen verisimilitude. Quoting — directly or indirectly — the other’s speech, becomes essential for the pact of credibility with the reader, because, ironically, it is only through the manipulation of the information gathered by the encounter with Others that the author is able to tell the truth:

³¹ This is proved by the different kinds of relationships that authors develop with their informants, some of which might continue after the story is published. These relationships seem to depend on the level of similarities found between the participants. For example, in the case of Leila Guerriero, those similarities depend on intellectual or artistic interests, although she said she usually does not follow up any relationship after the publication of her texts. Others might go so far as to develop a long-term friendship, like Elena Poniatowska, or to create family bonds, like Cristian Alarcón, who adopted the child of one of his informants (see appendix 2).

³² I refer to the genre of interview in its broadest sense as a conversation intended to be recorded somehow and later used by one of the speakers as a source for his or her book. This is because some of the authors I studied do not conduct formal, well-structured interviews but opt for a more flexible ethnographic-like method of gathering testimonies. For an in-depth analysis of the interview as speech genre in contemporary societies, also applying Bakhtin’s theory, see Aurfuch (1995). For the specific use of the interview in journalistic genres, see Halperin (1995).

Podría decirse que los hechos existen en la medida en que son contados, alguien ha registrado algo sobre ellos y entonces se puede proceder a su reconstrucción. La verdad es la que surge de esos testimonios, de su montaje, y no está en una realidad de la que se puede dar cuenta fielmente, sino que es el resultado de la construcción. (Amar Sánchez: 34)

The truth coming from the other's speech, however, is transformed through narrative into a *fictional truth* (Riffaterre 1990). This is because testimonies act in the text as symbolic stories, as any other literary text would. Transformed from real into symbolic stories, they tell a truth about certain aspect of reality in a way that is memorable and meaningful. This explains why there is an obsession among documentarist authors with finding the individual story that stands as an exemplar for the theme they aim to address, as Cristian Alarcón expresses regarding his own working process: 'yo creo que uno sabe que tiene entre manos una gran historia no porque la historia en sí sea buena sino porque hay un personaje que vale la pena y que va a ser memorable' (see interview 1).

Testimonial-like narratives tell the interviewee's story, but also show a trace of the encounter, as remembered by the interviewer. Riffaterre's fictional truth can, thus, relate to Adriana Cavarero's concept of a *narratable self*, for both interviewer and interviewee are exposing their equal desire for narration:

The narratable self's desire for narration manifests itself in autobiographical exercises in order to entrust one's own story to another's storytelling [...] what is at stake is not an assessment of qualities, or the frequency of a biographical response. Rather, the point is that I become for you a narratable identity, someone whose story you can tell, since my identity is by now in the care of this story that you know by heart. (114)

Stylistically, the presence of the other in the narrative is represented by quotation marks or dialogue markers. According to Riffaterre, quotations are symbols of the text's limits because they are used to signpost the intersection between the world and the word. They also show the limits between the authority of the writer's and the other's speech. To quote is to demonstrate awareness of otherness, but also to state the degree of authority that each speech has. That is why editing becomes the most creative element in documentary narratives, because it displaces the experience of the encounter and its recorded evidence to what the author wills. The author's decisions regarding the representation of the other are primarily stylistic, as Leila Guerriero explains:

Yo creo que cuando uno percibe que hay cosas que tienen que tener una tensión narrativa más fuerte no es muy buena idea darle la voz al protagonista de la cuestión, depende. No hay reglas con eso. Evalúo eso: a ver qué sentido tiene desde el punto de

vista de la tensión dramática que lo cuente yo o lo cuente el entrevistado, ¿conviene que comparta la voz con él? ¿que ponga su testimonio y que lo vaya partiendo con una narración mía? creo que la mirada mía está puesta más en cómo lo va a percibir un lector, cómo va a llegar mejor esta historia, cómo se va a percibir mejor el peso de la información (see interview 5)

It is through the process of editing, thus, that the other's story becomes the self's story too. During interviews, authors place great emphasis on the carefully crafted process of editing the words of others. I see this as less because they might need to defend themselves against a fact-checker — since this is not a common practice in Latin American media — and more because the transcription of the recorded voice of Others is a way of showing respect for their stories. To take care of the story entrusted to them is part of the ethics of the profession, according to Alarcón:

Creo que hay un respeto por la forma de hablar, o sea por las formas del lenguaje, que no son tampoco reproducciones mecánicas y que es un lenguaje seguramente más depurado, más accesible, pero donde el trabajo es el del oído, el de poder respetar las melodías que en el fondo de los discursos son sustanciales, que son clave para la existencia del otro. (see interview 1)

Nevertheless, Alarcón would recognise, along with others, that he does not transcribe the testimonies verbatim. Furthermore, novelist Arturo Fontaine felt that the victims generally did not possess the kind of language he thought was most effective for expressing their stories. Therefore, to let the other speak is an ethical problem that can be reflected through style. A simple decision about the way in which the testimonies are included in the text becomes essential for our interpretation of the work.

There is, then, an evident linguistic tension in the dialogues. They expose the unavoidable differences between the self and the other. After all, these encounters are not as smooth and idyllic as it might be imagined by testimonial theory:

As a living, socio-ideological concrete thing, as heteroglot opinion, language, for the individual consciousness, lies on the borderline between oneself and the other. The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes 'one's own' only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language (it is not, after all, out of a dictionary that the speaker gets his words!), but rather it exists in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions: it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one's own. (Bakhtin 1981: 293–94)

Although it might be true that the author's intention is to respect the other's story, and that during the real encounter the dialogue might appear equal, there is something lost and something else added in the process of translation from oral to written speech. If, during fieldwork, the author acts mostly as a listener, during the process of writing he or she transforms the journalistic interview into a literary dialogue, and it is in this that the differences between the self and the other emerge.

To summarise, analysed as a speech act, documentary narratives are a means to explore the difficulties of the encounter with otherness. In representing diverse individuals in dialogue, transmitting a 'living impulse' as Bakhtin would say, these texts show that each voice carries its own perspective on the world. These perspectives or worldviews do not interconnect smoothly with each other, as in a traditional fictional style. They clash, they collapse into each other, producing a new collective, heterogeneous, and complex speech form.

Furthermore, one must consider that, whereas in Europe the novel was born as a popular, mass form of entertainment, that aimed to reflect the everyday life of common people (Bakhtin 1981), in Latin America this form, like any other literary genre, was produced and consumed by the elites. In their emergence from popular culture, documentary narratives — while not as openly popular — might be seen as an alternative way of revealing the diversity of voices and identities within the masses, a way that allows these voices to speak from their own positions of diversity. Additionally, the journalistic genre, particularly the interview, can also set the tone for contemporary literature in the region.

It is important, however, to acknowledge the ethical pitfalls that this kind of practice is exposed to, for the dialogue represented here, the interview, is an irregular genre, between oral and written speech, and between the social and literary spheres. The interview, as a paradigm of the dialogical nature of speech, places its actors in an uneasy position, for their roles are constantly shifting. The listener, who is never passive, eventually becomes the speaker (Bakhtin 1987). Additionally, as the conversation moves from the private to the public sphere, the reader, 'el tercero incluido' (Arfuch 1995), joins the conversation.

As there is an unresolved tension between the self and the other, shown in their own communication process, there is also an unavoidable betrayal of the other by the author. If, following Bakhtin and Cavarero, one's story is always attended to, and shaped by the listener, there will be a discrepancy between a testimony confessed to the writer and the version of it that the reader finally receives. As I hope to demonstrate throughout

this thesis, the real encounter between the journalist and the informant cannot be separated from its narrative representation. This is because in contrast to other truth-telling situations in which there is a real story to tell (e.g. confession, therapy, legal process), in the case of documentary narratives, what generates the encounter is the desire for narration.

Re-telling a truth

Francisco Goldman's *The Art of Political Murder. Who Killed Bishop Gerardi?* (2007) uncovers the case of Bishop Juan Gerardi, murdered in 1998 in Guatemala. Although the text is written in the first person, it is hard to find an explicit representation of the journalist at work. References to the process of investigation are used in this case not to tell his own experience as reporter approaching others, but to provide information that confirms his involvement with the topic. It is only in a paratext, in the 'Afterword', that Goldman represents himself in relation to the case. He closes with a scene in which he meets Judge Yassmín Barrios, who had received several threats during politically-charged cases:

She didn't seem to register my name, though maybe she did, because turning back to Mario, she asked him, 'And when is that book on the case coming out in Spanish?' Mario told her that the person who'd written it was standing next to her. She was astonished, and thanked me, and I replied that I'd done nothing but narrate as faithfully as I could what she and many others had accomplished in the case. She spoke about her inability to 'understand people who live by denigrating the truth.' Then she gestured to her police bodyguards, and said that there was a *patrulla*, a police patrol car, waiting for her around the corner.
'As you can see,' Judge Yassmín Barrios said, 'I gave up my own freedom so that other people can have justice — so that other people can be free to say what they believe.' (381)

The scene depicts two characters who have been involved in telling the truth about others, but from different positions. In comparison with the Judge who has to live surrounded by bodyguards, the writer is much safer. By including the judge in his narrative, as well as other people who risked their lives for the case, Goldman becomes not only the listener for the truth in Gerardi's case, but for the tales of all those who cannot tell the full story.

Born in Boston to a Catholic, Guatemalan mother and an American, Jewish father of Ukrainian ancestry, Francisco Goldman is personally and professionally linked to Latin America. Goldman is aware that, in contrast with colleagues publishing from Latin America, he can be a more committed listener: 'Yo sentí que estos chavos necesitaban

que alguien contara la verdad. Yo era el único que estaba en posición de hacerlo y me sentí muy obligado a hacerlo' (see interview 4).

In unstable societies, in which journalism has become a dangerous profession and the media are censored, transmitting the other's truth is always a risk. Goldman is aware of the privileges of publishing his true stories abroad: 'Nunca he tenido mucha simpatía por el punto de vista gringo, ni entonces ni ahora. Pero sí es otra manera, estás más afuera' (idem). As opposed to the American New Journalism, which has a long tradition of first-person narrative, the Latin American writer cannot aim to tell the truth of Others without risking censorship, or even death. These writers therefore speak from the position of someone who, in order to tell the story of Others, must tell his own story too. In contrast with authors publishing abroad, such as Goldman, Latin American writers need to include themselves in the narrative, for being a witness can supplement the lack of official information, or the lack of a trustworthy legal process. This might explain why these authors are more concerned with modes of telling the truth that entail fewer risks, than with delivering 'objective' information.

Similar to the priest hearing confession, the journalist acts as a responsible listener. What documentary narratives show, however, is that there is a contradiction between the aim of the journalist-narrator to express himself, and his will to say what people trust him to say. This is why I consider that, in documentary narratives, the narrator is configured as both a storyteller and a professional listener. This phenomenon is specially seen in self-reflexive narratives which employ metafictional techniques, and which I would call 'metadocumentary narratives'.

Michel Foucault (2012) analyses the act of telling the truth under the name of *parrhesia*, which involves a couple: a speaker and a listener.³³ The risk in telling the truth is always on the side of the *parrhesiast*, the speaker who needs courage to tell the truth about himself even if that may involve angering the listener, breaking a connection, or experiencing hostility. The receiver of this truth is an expert in listening, like a technician or a teacher. In theory, this *teckne* passes the knowledge to society without putting himself at risk.

³³ Foucault defines *parrhesia* as 'the courage of truth in the person who speaks and who regardless of everything takes the risk of telling the whole truth that he thinks, but it is also the interlocutor's courage in agreeing to accept the hurtful truth that he hears' (13). The concept is opposed to the art of rhetoric, in which the way of saying things does not affect or determine the relations between individuals, and it does not involve any link between the speaker and what he states. For Foucault, the rhetorician is 'an effective liar' and a *parrhesiast* is 'the courageous teller of a truth'.

The activity of listening to someone else's truth used to involve several people in Ancient Greece, and in Christian culture was represented by the confessor or spiritual director. In modern societies, Foucault notices, the role is practised by the doctor, psychiatrist, psychologist, or psychoanalyst. Nowadays, I argue, the journalist can also act as this professional listener who transmits the true story entrusted to him.

While Foucault dedicates more space to the role of the speaker, the truth-teller, Butler focuses on the receiver of the confession. For Butler, giving an account of oneself is an embodied phenomenon that involves more than one person, since one must always tell the truth to another. In Latin America, the journalist–narrator is in a highly vulnerable position, for they vacillate between the idealised, professional listener to a parrhesiast, and being the parrhesiast himself. This is because telling the truth is a risk for them too but they feel a responsibility to tell it.³⁴ It is not out of mere fascination with literature, at least not in all cases, that Latin American authors opt for storytelling as a strategy to communicate certain information without the risks that other modes of truth–telling might imply. To publish in a book, rather than an article in a newspaper or magazine, can also be a way to avoid media censorship or heightened attention while writing about particularly sensitive topics.

If truth is a social construct, as Foucault considers it to be, in Latin America this truth will have a different mode in which it can be told. One must attend, then, to the particularities of the context in which documentary narratives are produced. The four modalities of the truth-teller as categorised by Foucault — prophet, sage, technician, parrhesiast — are combined differently in each culture or society. In the particular case of Latin America, I believe that writers who aim to tell true stories have to combine the role of the sage, 'the subject who tells the truth but has the right not to speak' (88), with that of the technician and the parrhesiast, as I will demonstrate in this thesis.³⁵

By representing themselves in other people's stories, nonetheless, writers are not only building up their authority within the text, but also claiming their right to belong to a certain cultural field. Certainly, the point of view of the author affects the representation of reality, but this is not only a matter of narrative strategy but also the result of the embodied, real and complex experience of encountering the other. In order to ask the

³⁴ The assassination of Rodolfo Walsh is perhaps the most iconic example of this situation (see Chapter 1), but there are more contemporary cases of journalists who have disappeared while reporting on drugs in Mexico, for instance. A comparative example is that of Roncagliolo's *Memorias de una dama* (2009). After the author was threatened by the protagonist's family, the novel was banned from the Dominican Republic and it has not been republished.

³⁵ The act of questioning, for example, is a way of combining the sage with the parrhesiast. Depicting themselves as interviewers, and thus letting the other speak through the responses, it might be a way of speaking without taking too much risk.

other 'who are you?', as Butler proposes, one must first give account of oneself, recognizing one's differences from the other. This might not be a conscious, creative process or a deliberate narrative strategy for writers who conceive of their task as a service to others' testimonies. It is, however, an irrefutably dialogic process. And this is why I believe that the texts and the authors analysed in the following pages offer both an aesthetic and ethical response to the problem of truthfulness and communication in uncertain times, as well as a challenge to continue the endless dialogue between the world and the word.

CHAPTER 1. SEMINAL WORKS: TWO STORIES OF SURVIVORS

‘¿Puedo volver al ajedrez?’, asks Rodolfo Walsh after witnessing a murder on the other side of his wall, through the front-facing window of his house in La Plata, Argentina. Earlier during that night of 1956, his chess game in a café was interrupted because of a shoot-out between military and civilian groups. Nonetheless, he tries to forget the violent events and continue his bourgeois lifestyle: that of a novelist making a living from journalism. Six months later, while drinking beer in a bar, he hears about the survivor of a military shooting. This time he decides to learn more, so he asks to meet the man.

The first face-to-face encounter between Rodolfo Walsh and the survivor Juan Carlos Livraga took place on the evening of 21 December 1956, in Livraga’s attorney’s office in La Plata. Evidently that moment, which would change Walsh’s life, left a vivid impression on the author. He narrated it in two different forms in paratexts of his *Operación Masacre*:

Lo primero que me llamó la atención de Livraga fué, naturalmente, las dos cicatrices de bala (orificio de entrada y salida) que tenía en el rostro. Esto también era un hecho. Podían discutirse las circunstancias en que recibió esas heridas, pero no podía discutirse la evidencia de que las había recibido. (1957: 9)

Miro esa cara, el agujero en la mejilla, el agujero más grande en la garganta, la boca quebrada y los ojos opacos donde se ha quedado flotando una sombra de muerte. Me siento insultado, como me sentí sin saberlo cuando oí aquel grito desgarrador detrás de la persiana. (2009a [1969]: 20)

Walsh realises that looking at the man covered in blood in the other side of his wall generated a similar feeling to that experienced when looking at Livraga’s mutilated face. It is significant, however, that the epiphany, the life-changing moment, is an encounter in which Walsh is able not only to acknowledge the physical presence of the other, but an encounter in which he addresses a man by name, asking for his story — and then listening to it.

Whether it can be found within the plot, or in a paratext of the work, the representation of the encounter between the self and the other is a recurring motif in the documentary narratives I analyse in this thesis. This encounter can take place on the road, in the streets of big cities, in the squares of small villages, in houses, prisons, airports, cafés or bars. All are meeting places of social and literary significance. This encounter would, generally, be between an educated middle- or upper-class author, and a marginalized other. This kind of encounter is recognisable from other disciplines, such as history and anthropology. Clearly, there is therefore much more going on beyond the face-to-face encounter with a stranger. Why does it matter for the author to state that his or her story is a true story? And, departing from the assumption that what he or she writes is ‘real’, what impact do documentary narratives, as a cultural phenomenon, have on the world they depict?

Although it is not my intention to judge whether or not documentary narratives should be considered literature, I pursue this study from the assumption that, ironically perhaps, the element that makes these stories true is precisely the most fictional one: the (representation of) the self (in search for truth). And that is the problem I wish to address. If it is true that there is nothing in the discourse of written/literary journalism that can distinguish it from fictional narrative (González 1993), then what, for me, is the distinctive element of documentary narratives (in comparison with other realistic discourses), is something beyond language: the self-declared intention of truthfulness.

Going beyond questions of representation of the other, I will focus on the representation of the self, but always in relation to the other, and to the specific space in which their encounter takes place; that is, broadly speaking, late twentieth– and early twenty–first-century Latin America. Within this context, I propose that documentary narratives are no longer — at least not to the same ideological degree — a medium to ‘let the other speak’, but the textual evidence of a dialogue between two selves exposed to a reader at a moment of vulnerability. For even if this dialogue is never equal and fails in its intention of getting to know the other — as I will conclude — it is still a valid response to the human search for truthfulness in uncertain times, and evidence of the enduring question of how we can approach each other, in both private and public spheres.

In the private space of that first encounter between two flesh-and-blood individuals, Livraga is the storyteller and Walsh is the listener. In the public space of the text, first a newspaper and later a book, Walsh is the storyteller, Livraga a character, and we, the readers, now listen to both Walsh’s and Livraga’s accounts of themselves.

Even before the New Journalists in the United States began questioning their society and the way mass media represented reality, in Latin America there had been two paradigmatic cases for the relationship between literature and journalism.³⁶ By the mid-twentieth century, Gabriel García Márquez (Aracataca 1927–Mexico City 2014) had published *Relato de un naufrago* (1955/1970), and Rodolfo Walsh (Lamarque 1927–Buenos Aires 1977), his *Operación Masacre* (1957/1972). Both are stories of survivors, but they present two different approaches to the task of journalists in censored times. Their use of literary strategies to reproduce real testimonies allows for an interesting comparison, especially regarding the complex relationship between the journalist-narrator and his or her informants, and the risks authors have to take in order to tell a true story.

Relato... and *Operación...* point to one aspect of the polemics involved in the ethics of *testimonio*: the legal question of authorship. In this sense, they can be seen as seminal works in the *testimonio* tradition, and in that of the documentary narratives that appeared in Latin America during the last decades of the twentieth century. Reading these works as palimpsests, that is as a product of multiple layers of texts printed in diverse formats, I intend to demonstrate how the practice of journalism, as an ethical procedure for telling a true story, and the authors' understanding of writing as a form of self-expression, are deeply interconnected in documentary narratives. These narratives, I believe, are able to transform the reality in which they are produced, if not at the societal level, then in the lives of their producers: the journalists and the informants.

On one hand, the initial publication of the stories in newspapers demonstrates the social and personal consequences that a story that aims to adhere faithfully to real facts in a particular political context can have. On the other hand, published as books, the stories highlight questions of the representation of reality. The relationship between the journalist and his or her informant is always problematic, and cannot be resolved; nor can it be ignored. The dialogue can be as friendly and close as the participants allow it to be. However, the question of who owns the story exists to remind us that the dialogue is never equal. By their interaction with the subject, the writer appropriates the other's words; the story no longer belongs to the one who lived it, but to the one who writes it.

³⁶ In *The New Journalism*, published in 1973, Tom Wolfe mentions Gabriel García Márquez as part of the Neo-Fabulists, along with authors such as John Barth, Jorge Luis Borges, John Gardner, James Purdy, James Reinbold, and Alan V. Hewat. For Wolfe, these writers proposed a return to storytelling as a form that was part of the origins of literature. Of course, by then García Márquez had already published *Cien años de soledad* and was internationally known. Wolfe may not be aware, certainly, that the father of the Boom, only four years older than him, had a similar interest in exploring new forms of journalistic writing.

What *Operación...* and *Relato...* ultimately rely on, I believe, is that a reader seeking an understanding of silenced or ignored facts in a repressed society will value the ethical intention to tell the truth.

1.1 Gabriel García Márquez's *Relato de un naufrago*

On Thursday 28 April 1955, *El Espectador* newspaper in Bogotá, Colombia, published a special supplement, in eight columns: 'La Odisea del Náufrago Sobreviviente del "A.R.C. Caldas"'. Under this title, there is a half-page, colour illustration of a man in the middle of the sea. He defends himself against the sharks surrounding his small boat with nothing but an oar (see appendix 1, illustration 1). The second half of this cover presents three black and white photographs of the survivor before and after his adventure, with small print announcing that the story will be published in fourteen parts over the following days: 'La Verdad sobre mi Aventura' (see illustration 2). The subtitle notifies: 'Por el marinero Luis Alejandro Velasco, exclusivo para El Espectador'. Despite the (perhaps conscious) editorial decision to let readers assume that the story was written by the survivor himself, the text was not signed at all, although it was actually written by a young journalist who would go on to win a Nobel Prize for Literature: Gabriel García Márquez. The initially obscured authorship is not the only element related to fiction in this publication (which links Velasco's adventure with that of the mythic Odysseus), but it would prove the most problematic for his author.

It was not until 1970, when García Márquez had become a well-known fiction writer, that Tusquets publishing house printed the story as a book, entitled *Relato de un naufrago que estuvo diez días a la deriva en una balsa sin comer ni beber, que fue proclamado héroe de la patria, besado por las reinas de belleza y hecho rico por la publicidad, y luego aborrecido por el gobierno y olvidado para siempre*.

Nevertheless, the story behind the initial publication of *Relato...* is the story of García Márquez's transition from full-time journalist to full-time author.³⁷ He began his literary and journalistic career almost at the same time: he published his first short-story 'La tercera resignación' in 1947 in *El Espectador*, and one year later he was working in *El Universal* newspaper in Cartagena de Indias. He had had to interrupt his undergraduate

³⁷ Like many others from his generation, García Márquez saw in journalism a way of earning a living while pursuing his literary career, although it is evident that journalism also influenced his fiction (Gilard 1987; Vargas Llosa 1971).

studies in Law at Universidad Nacional de Colombia in Bogotá, because the university was closed after the murder of Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, a presidential candidate from the Liberal party. On the Colombian coast, he became so engaged with journalism that he never returned to Law school. However, he did not always work as a reporter, but he also wrote anonymous and routine news stories; he was better known for his humorous columns, editorial pieces and film reviews (Gilard 1987). This was not at all coincidental, as after Gaitán's murder, violence became part of everyday life in the country. Within this context, the media preferred to publish frivolous news, and journalists got used to writing in a prudent, indirect manner (Méndez 1992).

García Márquez's story of the sailor appeared during the dictatorship of Gustavo Rojas Pinilla, whose rule was imposed by military coup in 1953. Returning to Colombia from the United States, the military destroyer *Caldas* was shipwrecked in the Caribbean and eight sailors disappeared in February 1955. The twenty-two-year-old Luis Alejandro Velasco was the only survivor. After ten days alone in the sea, Velasco appeared on a Colombian beach and became a celebrity. By the time he met the twenty-eight-year-old reporter, García Márquez, he had already told almost everything about his adventure to the media. What he had not related, however, was what he finally confessed to García Márquez following days of long interviews: the shipwreck was not caused by a storm, as the official version communicated by the government had said. It took just a strong wind to wreck the overloaded vessel; the military ship was illegally transporting televisions, refrigerators and washing machines, which the sailors bought in the United States for their families in Colombia.

After the story was published, the sailor lost his job and the newspaper responded to government censorship by sending García Márquez to Europe to work as a correspondent. A text he did not sign was the one that ended his journalistic career but that in a sense inaugurated his writing career. Also in 1955, García Márquez published his first novel, *La hojarasca*, but he would hardly ever return to journalism, barring two non-fiction works: *La aventura de Miguel Littín clandestino en Chile* (1986), a first-person testimony of Miguel Littín, a Chilean film director in exile during Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship, who clandestinely returns to Chile in order to film a documentary about everyday life under the dictatorship; and *Noticia de un secuestro* (1996), about kidnappings in Bogotá that had been organised by the drug trafficker Pablo Escobar. Although these real stories share a violent context with Velasco's, they are focused on the testimonies of the friends of the author, and they are cases in which the author was clearly politically invested.

1.1.1 A signature

The book version of the sailor's story, published by Tusquets in the 1970s, was identical to the original except for an added prologue by the author, entitled 'La historia de esta historia'. I argue that it is precisely this paratextual device that transformed — both literarily and legally — Velasco's story into García Márquez's one. The original text was published as if Velasco had written it, for there was no mention of García Márquez as author of the text. Later, in his own memoirs, García Márquez gave his explanation: he was not interested in writing the story, so he had no interest in receiving recognition as the author:

Le advertí deprimido pero con el mejor estilo posible que sólo haría el reportaje por obediencia laboral pero no le pondría mi firma. Sin haberlo pensado, aquella fue una determinación casual pero certera para el reportaje, pues me obligaba a contarlo en primera persona del protagonista, con su modo propio y sus ideas personales, y firmado con su nombre. (García Márquez 2002: 564)

Choosing not to sign their texts is a common practice among journalists who wish to convey their disagreement with an assignment. Although García Márquez seems to protest in this way, he goes further and makes the issue of authorship more complex: he actually gives the text an author, but a fictional one. After interviewing Velasco, García Márquez realized that it was a good idea to give the story a first-person narrator. He decided to use a fictional device for what was intended to be a journalistic discourse.

The function of the prologue to the book is therefore to assign names: to name the real (and legal) author of the story, as well as to name the nature of the narrative. By describing the creative process behind the story, García Márquez reveals himself as its creator. And by naming his creation as *reportaje*, García Márquez also establishes a new pact with the reader. According to some critics, markers of the book version's literariness (against the journalistic reading of the original text) are the change in the title, and the transformation of the fourteen *entregas* into chapters (Díez Huélamo in Rivas 2011). According to Ascención Rivas (2011), one of the major modifications of the reading pact is the change in printing format: from newspaper to book. Further to Rivas' observation, I argue that the inclusion of the prologue is the main literary device used by García Márquez in his claim to authorship of the anonymous press text. Although he avoids using the word 'literature' to describe *Relato...*, David Foster thinks that the work only functions as a documentary narrative in its book version, for the original publication is

only ‘a detailed description of the hardships faced by an individual’, a conventional newspaper’s ‘human-interest story’ (1984: 49).

At the beginning, the informant, the other, was not important — was he ever? ‘Cuando Luis Alejandro Velasco llegó por sus propios pies a preguntarnos cuánto le pagábamos por su cuento, lo recibimos como lo que era: una noticia refrita’ (García Márquez 2013: 12). There is a glimpse here of the journalistic environment. Whether to tell a story or not is a matter of money. The subject knows that his story could be economically valuable. At the same time, journalists must invest both money and time in the story.

The sailor’s story was, therefore, treated as a commercial product in which the newspaper might invest. Nonetheless, immediately after relating his first impressions of the informant, García Márquez recreates the Bohemian environment that connects journalists with fiction writers: ‘De pronto, al impulso de una corazonada, Guillermo Cano lo alcanzó en las escaleras, aceptó el trato, y me lo puso en las manos. Fue como si me hubiera dado una bomba de relojería.’ (13). Therefore, the origins of the story were not only based on a pragmatic decision regarding profit and the desire to sell the story. There was a feeling, ‘una corazonada’, that the story had an intrinsic value, like any fiction story.

After talking with Velasco, the writer’s image of him changed. From being a man capable of inventing anything in order to obtain money, he was now described as a hero and a good storyteller:

Mi primera sorpresa fue que aquel muchacho de veinte años, macizo, con más cara de trompetista que de héroe de la patria, tenía un instinto excepcional del arte de narrar, una capacidad de síntesis y una memoria asombrosas, y bastante dignidad silvestre como para sonreírse de su propio heroísmo (13).

The moral interpretation of the character, even the admiration of sorts, contrasts with the distant point of view used to present Velasco in their first encounter. However, there is still a sense of irony, for the informant is never the standardized character the journalist had created for him. García Márquez is surprised that a simple young boy that does not look like a hero but could be one, and could also be a good storyteller.

At the time he met the sailor and was forced by his editor to work on a story he did not like, García Márquez might have been less experienced than his colleagues were in reporting and dealing with informants, but he was certainly not naïve. He was a member of the Grupo de Barranquilla, a Bohemian group that García Márquez joined when living

in that city; it was comprised of journalists and fiction writers. They used to gather in bars and caf  s to discuss political and social problems, as well as literature. It was at the suggestion of members of this group that Garc  a M  rquez read foreign authors who would influence his future works, such as: Faulkner, Woolf, Dos Passos, Steinbeck, Caldwell, Huxley and Hemingway (Gilard 1987).³⁸ Garc  a M  rquez remembers his formative years as journalist in quite a romantic fashion, showing how the process of becoming a journalist did not differ much from that of becoming a fiction author:

Hace unos cincuenta a  os no estaban de moda escuelas de periodismo. Se aprend  a en las salas de redacci  n, en los talleres de imprenta, en el cafet  n de enfrente, en las parrandas de los viernes. [...] Los autodidactas suelen ser   vidos y r  pidos, y los de aquellos tiempos lo fuimos de sobra para seguir abri  ndole paso en la vida al mejor oficio del mundo –como nosotros mismos lo llam  bamos. (1996: par. 1–4)

In fact, the experience that Garc  a M  rquez had during this time could be compared with what Tom Wolfe describes for the American journalists in the same period:

By the 1950s The Novel had become a nationwide tournament. There was a magical assumption that the end of World War II in 1945 was the dawn of a new golden age of the American Novel, like the Hemingway-Dos Passos-Fitzgerald era after World War I. There was even a kind of Olympian club where the new golden boys met face-to-face every Sunday afternoon in New York, namely, the White Horse Tavern on Hudson Street.... Ah! There's Jones! There's Mailer! There's Styron! There's Baldwin! There's Willingham! In the flesh — right here in this room! The scene was strictly for novelists, people who were writing novels, and people who were paying court to The Novel. There was no room for a journalist unless he was there in the role of would-be novelist or simple courtier of the great. There was no such thing as a *literary* journalist working for popular magazines or newspapers. If a journalist aspired to literary status — then he had better have the sense and the courage to quit the popular press and try to get into the big league. (1973: 8)

It was not by chance that this cultural environment was shared in Colombia by the Barranquilla group. Considering this context and Garc  a M  rquez's awareness of the effects of the literary discourse upon the journalistic one, my views coincide with Foster's, in that *Relato...* is an example of the continuity between 'imaginative literature' and 'documentary' in Latin America.

³⁸ *Relato...* has been compared with Hemingway's *The Old Man and The Sea*, which was published beforehand (Foster 1984). In fact, Vargas Llosa (1971) compares the journalistic career of Garc  a M  rquez with that of Hemingway.

Although the book was published when *testimonio* was at its peak as a new Latin American genre, *Relato...* could hardly be considered a part of this specific tradition. Primarily, because the original story appeared before *Biografía de un cimarrón* (1963), which was considered the beginning of *testimonio* narrative. But also because García Márquez's intentions were journalistic rather than anthropological: 'Este libro es la reconstrucción periodística de lo que él me contó' (2013: 11). Nevertheless, it is interesting that, as with Rigoberta Menchú's case in 1983, *Relato...* highlights one of the ethical disputes that haunt *testimonio* as a genre: the legal question of authorship.

1.1.2 The journalist and the sailor

The prologue to *Relato...* claims textual authority for García Márquez, even when his declared aim is to present the story as a dialogical product: 'Hay libros que no son de quien los escribe sino de quien los sufre, y este es uno de ellos.' (12) Beyond his own sense of guilt, or social awareness, regarding his old informant, García Márquez's prologue was in actual fact claiming the copyright; merely by attaching his name to it. For it is true that he might have underestimated the text once, when he considered Velasco's story 'una noticia refrita' (12), but fifteen years later he had reconsidered, and thought it was 'bastante digno de ser publicado' (15). In the prologue, the author is aware that he is able to publish the story — this time with his signature and with no more risk of exile — precisely because of his own fame. 'Me deprime la idea que a los editores no les interese tanto el mérito del texto como el nombre con que está firmado, que muy a mi pesar es el mismo de un escritor de moda' (16), he wrote in 1970 from Barcelona.

The original prologue ends with a sentence that was erased from later editions: 'Los derechos de autor, en consecuencia, serán para quien los merece: el compatriota anónimo que debió padecer diez días sin comer ni beber en una balsa para que este libro fuera posible' (in Mudrovic 2005: 162). Velasco did receive money from the sales of *Relato...* during the thirteen years following the publication of the first edition (García Márquez 2002). Nevertheless, this agreement with the publishing house ended in 1983, when Velasco initiated a trial against García Márquez, claiming to be the co-author of the book and, therefore, claiming additional earnings from editing and distribution. The trial

ended eleven years later, when the court ruled that García Márquez was the sole author of the work (Mudrovic 2005).³⁹

Discussing the complex interviewer-interviewee relationship, and the ever-present possibility of a betrayal of the informant's trust, Janet Malcolm (1997) argues that there is no moral justification for the journalist's work because the relationship between the journalist and the informant is never naïve. In practice, when a journalist is interested in someone's story, the closeness to his informant is inevitable, but it cannot be confused with a faithful friendship. At the end of the day, the writer will select and even change the subjects' words in order to privilege the story that he wants to write. In his memoirs, García Márquez admitted that he looked for contradictions in Velasco's story:

La entrevista fue larga, minuciosa, en tres semanas completas y agotadoras, y la hice a sabiendas de que no era para publicar en bruto sino para ser cocinada en otra olla: un reportaje. La empecé con un poco de mala fe tratando de que el naufrago cayera en contradicciones para descubrirle sus verdades encubiertas, pero pronto estuve seguro de que no las tenía. (2002: 564–65)

There has always been tension between journalists and their informants, and it is known that a journalist is not a friend you can trust, but Malcolm asks: why, then, do people still want to be interviewed by journalists? And the answer seems to be simply: people want to tell their story; they want to be listened to by someone who seems really interested in it. 'The subject is Scheherazade. He lives in fear of being found uninteresting, and many of the strange things that subjects say to writers — things of almost suicidal rashness — they say out of their desperate need to keep the writer's attention riveted' (Malcolm: 20). The only ethical solution to this dilemma, according to Malcolm, would be to write only about subjects whose story is already interesting, so the nonfiction writer can limit himself to recounting what the subject tells. That was what García Márquez did with Velasco's testimony:

En veinte sesiones de seis horas diarias, durante las cuales yo tomaba notas y soltaba preguntas tramposas para detectar sus contradicciones, logramos reconstruir el relato compacto y verídico de sus diez días en el mar. Era tan minucioso y apasionante, que mi único problema literario sería conseguir que el lector lo creyera. (2013: 13)

³⁹ García Márquez did not use a voice-recorder — a recent invention at that time — because according to him they were heavy and difficult to use, and he preferred just to take notes, however, he stated that the trial included documentary evidence (2002: 552–73).

The Colombian author seemed to represent the informant's speech with such fidelity that the interviewee claimed authorship himself, as noted. The decision to write in the first-person was apparently a matter of narrative strategy — although given the possibility of censorship, it might also have also been an ethical decision — and thus was one of the arguments used against García Márquez in the legal conflict with Luis Alejandro Velasco. What is of interest for the purposes of this analysis, is that during the trial, the character in the story became, once more, a person. The other, thus, was able to obtain the power to speak without the mediation of the author, who had represented his words before. When the legal fight for authorship was over, Velasco declared to the media:

[E]n el escrito hay léxico mío en el 60 o 70 por ciento. Mi interés no ha sido pelearme con García Márquez, pues quedamos ligados como dos siameses por el ombligo. He querido encontrarme con él y entre los dos analizar la situación. No quiero ser un lunar negro en su gloria. (In Mudrovcic 2005: 163)

What Velasco was not aware of, maybe, is that the encounter that mattered had already happened, and it was not a face-to-face encounter like the first one, which itself had never been on equal terms. The encounter between the journalist and the informant was depicted in 'La historia de esta historia', and it was not an encounter between two persons, but the representation of two characters according to the memory of only one participant.

1.2 Rodolfo Walsh's *Operación Masacre*

Looking for the first time at his informant, Juan Carlos Livraga, Rodolfo Walsh enters into the story of Livraga and his fellow survivors as if he were entering into a novel. He listens, and he believes the storyteller: 'Livraga me cuenta su historia increíble; la creo en el acto. Así nace aquella investigación, este libro' (2009a: 20).⁴⁰

Operación... narrates the true story of the clandestine detention and execution of a group of twelve male civilians by the Provincia de Buenos Aires police, on the night of 9 June 1956. The events occurred under the dictatorship of Pedro Eugenio Aramburu, who became self-proclaimed, *de facto* president after the military coup that deposed

⁴⁰ Unless stated otherwise, all of Walsh's quotations are from *Operación Masacre. Seguido de La campaña periodística*, edited by Roberto Ferro (2009c), which reprints the 1972, 4th edition of the book. Ferro provides a detailed chronology of the process of Walsh's investigation.

President Juan Domingo Perón in 1955. During this period, citizens thought to be sympathetic towards Peronism were fired from their jobs, or even detained. Radical Peronist groups, led by General Juan José Valle, had been secretly organising a rebellion against the dictatorship, to begin on 9 June, after a revolutionary proclamation that would be broadcast over the radio, during the live coverage of a boxing match that started at 11:30 pm. One of the houses in which political meetings were held was that in which the victims were listening to the match that night, in a working-class neighbourhood in the municipality of Vicente Suárez. Some of these workers were actually involved in the Peronist rebellion, and therefore they were waiting for the radio's signal, while others were there just because of the match. By then, the conspiracy had been discovered by the government, and Aramburu had signed a martial law and a decree for the death penalty, so as to make the insurrection an exemplary case of repression. The law was expected to be executed as soon as it was announced over the radio. However, the detention of civilians accused of organising the rebellion, as Walsh demonstrated later, occurred before martial law was announced. The victims were first taken to police offices, and then to a landfill in the locality of José León Suárez, where they were shot in cold blood. The execution, however, was not completely successful, for seven of the men survived and escaped. Although the execution was reported by the media, there was no public knowledge about the survivors until Rodolfo Walsh managed to interview them and publish their testimonies.

In a testimonial style similar to that of Gabriel García Márquez's *Relato...*, Walsh's work is also the product of interviews with the victims, and it is more polyphonic, for it is narrated from the perspective of the seven survivors. In contrast with García Márquez's story, however, *Operación...* goes beyond the testimonial versions and includes textual evidence, in order to prove the irregularities of the judicial process. Because of its blend of materials obtained from Walsh's process of investigation, and the use of effective narrative strategies, the book has been considered 'the most authentic example of documentary narrative in Latin American fiction' (Foster 1984: 42).

Contrary to García Márquez, who wrote his sailor's story initially because it was his job as a journalist at a mainstream newspaper, Rodolfo Walsh used journalism as a way of denouncing a crime he could not discuss in any other format. I agree, therefore, with Roberto Ferro that in Walsh's work 'antes que una estética de cualquier orden, hay una ética que se impone en la investigación de un saber siempre obliterado, tachado de la memoria colectiva' (1994: 145). Walsh stated his writing intentions clearly:

Pretendía que, a esos hombres que murieron, cualquier gobierno de este país les reconociera que la justicia de este país los mató por error, por estupidez, por ceguera, por lo que sea. Yo sé que a ellos no les importa, a los muertos. Pero había una cuestión de decencia, no sé cómo decirlo. (2009b: 311)

Walsh was consciously aware of the powerful effect of narrative. An analysis of his work should therefore give appropriate space to his storytelling techniques, for style and ethics are thoroughly combined in Walsh's aim of bringing to light a story that needed to be believable. It was not by chance that Walsh was drawn to write about a 'true crime story', being already interested in writing crime fiction himself. He was already known in Argentinian literary circles by the time he began his *campana periodística*, as he used to call his series of publications on the executions. He started his career as a proof-reader and translator. In 1953 he published the short-story collection *Variaciones en rojo*, which won the Premio Municipal de Literatura. Editing the collections of short-stories by Argentinian authors *Diez cuentos policiales argentinos* (1954) and *Antología del cuento extraño* (1956) also showed his commitment to the promotion of crime fiction. His active role in the literary field might explain why Walsh's first intention was to publish the survivors' story in a book and not in the press. After his story was published in newspapers, he assumed his journalistic task with such an ethical commitment to the profession that he became an example to follow for later generations of journalists in Latin America.

Nevertheless, it is also interesting to note that he continued to write more crime fiction than journalism. He had important journalistic roles outside writing, for he was one of the founders of the Cuban news agency Prensa Latina in 1959, along with Gabriel García Márquez; and of the clandestine Argentine news agency Ancla; and he also worked as an editor of the popular Argentinian magazines *Primera Plana* and *Panorama*, where he was in charge of future names, such as Tomás Eloy Martínez and Martín Caparrós. Nevertheless, the story of the executions at José León Suárez was the main topic on which he wrote exhaustively as a journalist, with the exception of *Caso Satanowsky* (1958/1973) and *¿Quién mató a Rosendo?* (1968), both also published originally in the press and later in books. Amar Sánchez (1992) analyses these three works within the genre of nonfiction or *testimonials*.⁴¹ According to her, Walsh's whole narrative is the product of an intersection between the *novela policial* and journalism, that is, between two marginal textual genres, for they both emerged from mass culture.

⁴¹ Despite the interesting defence that Amar Sánchez gives of the use of the term 'discourse' instead of 'genre' when reading Walsh's journalistic writing, and on which I agree, she continually refers to nonfiction as a genre.

If Walsh is an antecedent of a very particular trend in today's Latin American journalism, that which gives evidence to the failures of the state and argues for justice for its victims, it is precisely because of his (literary) construction as a narrator-journalist-detective in search of the truth. Amar Sánchez counts the prologues of all book versions of *Operación...*, for instance, as evidence of the conscious construction of a textual subject, who is both Walsh-the-author and Walsh-the-narrator. A reading of Walsh's nonfiction, therefore, must consider the double nature of these texts, acting in two discursive spheres: the real and the literary.

In contrast with the American 'New Journalists', who, by similar narrative strategies, were able to become star reporters, Walsh was looking for an 'unbelievable' truth: the crime committed by the State (Amar Sánchez: 151). As opposed to crime fiction, in which justice can be obtained, Walsh's nonfiction demonstrates that, in contexts where the State is responsible for the crime, the only possible chance for justice comes through narrative. Whereas I agree with Amar Sánchez that Walsh's literary consciousness can be traced throughout his narrative, particularly in his self-representation, and regarding the genre differences between the fictional and the nonfictional nature of his production, it is also the case that this reading must not exclude his newspaper production. Along with Roberto Ferro (2009), therefore, I consider that an interpretation of Walsh's *Operación...* must take into account the whole process of investigation and writing as an open journalistic campaign. For it is true that the format — whether newspaper or book — changes the reading according to each genre's conventions. In the case of documentary narratives originally published as journalism, it is necessary to read each version as a part of the overall authorial process of investigation. Narrative, I believe, was used by Walsh as a tool to both disclose information about a fact not recognised as such by official accounts or mainstream media, and to offer protection to the victims through evidence.⁴²

In order to construct a reading of *Operación...* that considers the process of investigation and narration as a whole, I here follow Ferro's classification. He organises Walsh's journalistic campaign into three phases, which show the transformation of Walsh from journalist to militant.

The first phase of the publication process includes the initial, unsigned texts, based mainly on interviews with the survivors and their families, published as Walsh was

⁴² In order to narrate this event that did not have a place in the official records, Walsh had to himself create a name for it, and thus he called it 'Operación Masacre' (Ferro 2009).

gathering evidence to support the position of the victims.⁴³ They are five pieces published in *Revolución Nacional*, a weekly newspaper led by a Peronist syndicalist group outside the party: ‘Yo también fui fusilado. El caso Livraga –Los hechos’ (January 1957); ‘Habla la mujer del fusilado’ (29 January 1957); ‘La verdad sobre los fusilados’ (19 February 1957); ‘Nuevas informaciones sobre la masacre’ (26 February 1957); and ‘¿Fue una operación clandestina la masacre de José León Suárez?’ (26 March 1957).⁴⁴

The second phase consists of the eight parts of the reportage,⁴⁵ entitled ‘La “Operación Masacre”’, which was published from 27 May–15 July 1957 in *Mayoría*, an ideologically Peronist illustrated weekly magazine.⁴⁶ This phase also includes an – ‘Obligado Apéndice’ (31 July 1957); the first edition of the book *Operación Masacre – Un proceso que no ha sido clausurado*, published by Ediciones Sigla in December 1957, which was followed by another ‘Obligado Apéndice II’ the same month in *Mayoría*; and ‘La prueba decisiva de la Operación Masacre’ (February 1958), a transcript of a declaration made by those responsible for the executions, published in *Azul y Blanco*, a major political outlet with nationalist ideology.

Until this stage, according to Ferro, Walsh still believed that the state institutions were adequate channels through which to pursue justice. Proof of this was his journalistic strategy to not always reveal names or documents as he found them, if that evidence could have damaged the legal process. The publications covering the third phase, however, show how Walsh used journalism to collaborate with Montoneros, a leftist *guerrilla* group associated with Peronism — although Walsh always maintained a critical position towards them. The publications of this phase are ‘¡Aplausos, Teniente Coronel!’ (*Azul y Blanco*, March 1958); ‘¿Y ahora... Coronel?’ (*Azul y Blanco*, April 1958); and the

⁴³ The first publication made on the massacre was a transcription of the complaint made by the first known survivor, Juan Carlos Livraga, denouncing the authorities for committing the crime. It was entitled ‘Castigo a los culpables’ and published on 25 December 1956, in *Propósitos*, a prestigious leftist newspaper, directed by Leónidas Barletta. According to Ferro, it was Walsh who convinced Barletta to get involved in the case. Because the text was unsigned it has not been considered part of Walsh’s journalistic campaign, although according to Ferro the brief introduction to this publication must have been Walsh’s, as he admitted his initials were printed at the bottom. Walsh met Livraga the day after this publication and interviewed him for the first time. Although *Propósitos* continued to follow up the legal case, they did not want to publish Walsh’s interview due to personal and political reasons, since it was considered a communist outlet and it was under constant threat of censorship.

⁴⁴ Before publishing the article of 26 February, Walsh had already interviewed another survivor, Juan Carlos Torres, but instead of writing his testimony in the newspaper, he decided to write a report to the case’s judge, so that he could assist in the legal investigation. This was part of Walsh’s journalistic strategy, which consisted not of disclosing all the information he gathered, but of influencing the government’s actions (Ferro 2009).

⁴⁵ As I stated in the Introduction, I am using the term *reportage* to refer to the major journalistic genre that aims to disclose a truth, using several sources and showing evidence. However, the pieces were announced by *Mayoría* as ‘notas’. In Argentina, *reportaje* designates any kind of journalistic piece.

⁴⁶ Walsh was paid for his journalistic work, although it is not clear how much. He received \$1,000 Argentinian pesos as an advance payment for the series in *Mayoría* (Ferro 1994).

following editions of the book, also printed in Buenos Aires: *Operación Masacre y el expediente Livraga con la prueba judicial que conmovió al país* (Continental Service, 1964), *Operación Masacre* (Editorial J. Álvarez, 1969), and *Operación Masacre* (Ediciones de la Flor, 1972), which was the last one to be edited by the author.

Walsh's final text was 'Carta abierta de un escritor a la Junta Militar', sent via post to members of the press on 24 March 1977. By that time, following the military coup of 1976, that imposed the last Argentinian dictatorship (under the command of Jorge Rafael Videla) Walsh was living clandestinely, although he had been constantly in danger since his first publication on the executions:

Ahora, durante casi un año no pensaré en otra cosa, abandonaré mi casa y mi trabajo, me llamaré Francisco Freyre, tendré una cédula falsa con ese nombre, un amigo me prestará una casa en el tigre, durante dos meses viviré en un helado rancho del Merlo, llevaré conmigo un revólver, y a cada momento las figuras del drama volverán obsesivamente. (2009a: 20)

On 25 March 1977, while walking through Buenos Aires city centre, trying to distribute more copies of his letter, Rodolfo Walsh was shot and kidnapped by members of the army, despite attempts to defend himself. He returned fire with the revolver he had carried since beginning this journalistic investigation. His body was never found, and therefore he is considered one of the disappeared, although there are accounts that claim that his corpse was seen in a government building.

Taking all of the cited publications as one extended work, *Operación...* can be read as a complex and open palimpsest, for its content was constantly reworked and edited, and it was never to be finished. In the following sections, I will focus on two of the many layers of Walsh's palimpsest: the first series of texts signed by him in *Mayoría*, and the last self-edited version of his book.

1.2.1 The newspaper

In 1969, Walsh related his initial difficulties in finding a publisher, casting light upon the environment of censorship and fear felt throughout Argentina under the dictatorship:

Ésa es la historia que escribo en caliente y de un tirón, para que no me ganen de mano, pero que después se me va arrugando día a día en un bolsillo porque la paseo por todo Buenos Aires y nadie me la quiere publicar, y casi ni enterarse. Es que uno llega a creer en las novelas policiales que ha leído o escrito, y piensa que una historia así, con un muerto que habla, se la van a pelear en las redacciones, piensa que está corriendo

una carrera contra el tiempo, que en cualquier momento un diario grande va a mandar una docena de reporteros y fotógrafos como en las películas. En cambio se encuentra con un multitudinario esquivo de bulto [...] se pueden revisar las colecciones de los diarios, y esta historia no existió ni existe. (2009a: 21)

In his account of the story behind the story, Walsh comes to realise that journalism is only possible in the fictional sphere of the movies, far away from the reality of Argentinian media under the dictatorship. Within an environment of fear, he notices that fiction and news become inverted, for it is only in novels where there is space for a story like his. It is understandable, thus, that Walsh's book did not find a publisher, nor a space in a mainstream newspaper, but in the marginal *Revolución Nacional*:

Así que ambulo por suburbios cada vez más remotos del periodismo, hasta que al fin recalo en un sótano de Leandro Alem donde se hace una hojita gremial, y encuentro un hombre que se anima. Temblando y sudando, porque él tampoco es un héroe de película, sino simplemente un hombre que se anima, y eso es más que un héroe de película. (21)

Argentinian reality transforms him and his editor into fictional characters, heroes of a subversive movie. An anonymous writer then publishes, for an anonymous audience, details of an event that was erased from official media. Later that year, the story found a publisher and Walsh's signature was going to be included in the weekly newspaper *Mayoría*. The text is called for the first time: “‘La Operación Masacre’”, subtitled ‘Un libro que no encuentra editor’ (see illustration 4). Ironically, the format of the publication transforms the story originally conceived of as a book into a journalistic piece, at the same time that Walsh was acknowledged as its author.

It is interesting to note that in this first publication as a journalist, Walsh's authority is validated based on his prestige as a fiction writer. In the unsigned presentation that precedes Walsh's own introduction to his first ‘nota’, the editor comments:

El lector se preguntará: ¿Es serio lo que aquí se dice? Eso equivale a preguntar: ¿Es serio el autor? y ¿Son ciertos los hechos que se narran? En cuanto al autor, Rodolfo J. Walsh está considerado unánimemente uno de los dos o tres mejores escritores de relatos policiales de nuestra lengua [...] En cuanto a la segunda pregunta, ¿Son ciertos los hechos que se narran? Juzgue el lector mismo a través de la irrefutable prueba anexa al relato. Por nuestra parte tan pocas dudas nos caben (1957: 8)

The ‘seriousness’ of the writing task is here related in terms of fiction writing and not particularly associated with journalistic ethics, which are rather linked to the ability of the author to highlight the correct evidence.

Literature is thus blended with journalism in these publications, not merely because of the stylistic devices used by Walsh, but also through an overarching fictional worldview that impregnates the reportage. It is not insignificant that references to filmmaking were already present in his first text, as Walsh proposed the idea that reality is experienced like a movie in his prologue to the book version. The editor, for instance, declared in a style that emulates a narrator in film: ‘Y, ahora, a jugarse por la verdad y la justicia. Que hablen los hechos, con la autoridad de las pruebas y la magia irresistible de la pluma que, en cinematográfico ritmo, va presentando unos y otras’ (8). Walsh himself confessed in his introduction that ‘La historia me pareció cinematográfica, apta para todos los ejercicios de la incredulidad’ (8). He compares the story with the format of the *novela por entregas*, although he does it in relation with the official accounts of the crime. From the outset, his introduction defends his story as a proper, journalistic piece:

He hablado con testigos presenciales de cada una de las etapas del procedimiento que culminó en la masacre. Algunas de las pruebas materiales se encuentran en mis manos, antes de llegar a su destinatario natural. He obtenido la versión taquigráfica de las sesiones secretas de la Consultiva provincial, donde se debatió el asunto. He hablado con familiares de las víctimas, he trabado relación directa o indirecta con conspiradores, asilados y prófugos, delatores presuntos y héroes anónimos. Y estoy seguro de haber tomado siempre las máximas precauciones para proteger a mis informantes, dentro de lo compatible con la obligación periodística. (9)

Whereas the polyphony of testimonies makes the story trustworthy, it is the storytelling technique that transforms the fragmented oral and written evidence gathered by Walsh into a verifiable account. By the time Walsh started publishing the story in *Mayoría*, he had done most of the investigation. In contrast with the initial articles in *Revolución Nacional*, these show a literary coherence and a self-awareness of the role that the journalist plays as a compiler of the story. This is shown particularly in the first-person introduction and the *costumbrista* chronicle style⁴⁷ of the scenes in which he depicts, one-by-one, the everyday lives of the survivors that mark the formal beginning of his reportage and his book. Style, however, is always dependant on ethics, for it is by means of the narrative, and not solely by revealing evidentiary documents, that Walsh manage to

⁴⁷ These kind of *crónicas* were published in Spanish-American newspapers around the turn of the Nineteenth to Twentieth Century by literary authors who belonged to the *Modernismo* movement, such as José Martí, Rubén Darío and José Enrique Rodó. They were ‘brief articles on virtually any subject, written in a self-consciously literary style, that were meant to be entertaining as well as informative’ (González 2006: 84). Authors used a variety of rhetoric strategies to persuade their audience of their own political or cultural agenda; while American journalism was moving on to a condensed, ‘objective’ style, they preferred the rather interpretative, oratorical model from the French press. For more about the *modernista* chronicle style see González 1983, Mahieux 2011, and Rotker 1992.

convince the reader of the irregularities of the judicial case. For instance, the detailed chronological account of the night of the detentions is put there so as to explain the reasons why the executions were a crime and not a legal procedure.

Another example is the use of metaphors to name a reality that was officially denied. As García Márquez's story was announced in *El Espectador* newspaper as an 'Odyssey', so Walsh used the same literary reference to name the adventure of the Argentinian massacre's survivors, while editing Livraga's 'Castigo a los culpables': 'La dramática odisea que damos a conocer, debería merecer preferente atención de las autoridades y de los propios funcionarios indirectamente implicados' (2009c: 283). In a similarly sensationalist tone to that used for the sailor's story, and that was in fashion in the journalism of the time, the cover of *Mayoría* announces Walsh's reportage as an 'historia vívida y completa de las víctimas inocentes de la matanza de José León Suárez y de los que salvaron milagrosamente su vida' (see illustration 3).

1.2.2 The book

Operación..., along with all the texts included as part of Walsh's journalistic campaign, is written in the first-person, although the self-referenced narrator — Rodolfo Walsh himself — does not appear as an important figure in the plot. It is possible to imagine that this decision is a rhetorical strategy, used to demonstrate a political position, coming from an author who was clearly committed to writing from the position of the victims. One exception is the subtle use of the 'I' in the footnotes, where Walsh generally gave validation to, or discredited testimonies within the narrative. The other exceptions are the prologues, written for the various editions of the book, for as explained above, the author habitually included new information in each subsequent edition, as the investigation of the case advanced.

The 1972 edition of *Operación...*, the last one edited by Walsh before he disappeared, divides the story into 37 chapters and three sections: 'Las personas', 'Los hechos' and 'La evidencia'. Most of the content of the book was published as in the newspaper version, with the exception of the second part of the reportage, which he eventually substituted with Livraga's judicial file.

A literary approach to the prologues demonstrates that *Operación...* was Walsh's *bildungsroman*. It was his story of becoming a writer, from novelist to journalist, but also of becoming an active political agent.⁴⁸

Walsh obscures himself throughout the story, presenting it in the third-person apart from in footnotes. However, the reader cannot avoid the fact that the narrator is a real person; one who risked, and ultimately lost his life in order to tell the truth he had discovered. In this paratextual reading of his work, Rodolfo Walsh's story would then be part of the plot. Walsh can only tell the story by displacing his body to the places where the facts occurred; talking to people there; and introducing himself as the witness of the invisible reality. This is evident when he narrates his first trip to the place of the executions, a landfill, in the company of his research assistant, the journalist Enriqueta Muñiz:

Así que una tarde tomamos el tren a José León Suárez, llevamos una cámara y un planito a lápiz que nos ha hecho Livraga, un minucioso plano de colectivero con las rutas y los pasos a nivel, una arboleda marcada y una (x), que es donde fue la cosa. [...] Enriqueta dice 'Aquí fue' y se sienta en la tierra con naturalidad para que le saque una foto de picnic, porque en ese momento pasa por el camino un hombre alto y sombrío con un perro grande y sombrío. No sé por qué uno ve esas cosas. Pero aquí fue, y el relato de Livraga corre ahora con más fuerza (2009a: 22)

As in the chess scene, Walsh evokes a context where fiction and reality are constantly exchanged, contrasting the non-experienced memory of the executions with the vision of an empty space that could have been the site of a picnic, but was not. There may not be anything that can be used to prove the crime at that landfill; knowing what happened, however, transforms the experience of being there from a simple walk into a paranoid and fearful adventure. Walsh and his companion are not just walkers, after all — the picnic becomes a grim joke — and for them, as for the reader, every detail (such as the mysterious man with the dog) is a potential clue. This ironic depiction, or construction, of the story-space shows the constant merging of fiction and reality in such a repressed society.

⁴⁸ In his press publications, Walsh declared that he was not a Peronist, and called active members of the party 'esos temibles seres' (1957: 9), stating that his work was not looking for a political aim. Nonetheless, he would later be linked with Montoneros, and his work as an agent of this *guerrilla* group is now publicly known.

The reader, however, will not be reminded of the self-represented narrator from this point onwards. After the prologue, the narrator does not have a strong presence in the story. Nevertheless, the 'I' is still used in the footnotes as a strategy to assure credibility. Footnotes are used, as in a scientific discourse, to compare or add more precise information (generally in the form of documents) to the oral testimonies, which are part of the story. These notes function as contradictions or validations of the informants' testimonies. For instance, in the second part there is an emphasis on Walsh's aim to check and confirm data by displaying documentary proof. This kind of information alerts the reader to different versions of the facts; a series of fragments lost and found by the journalist. By showing his research method, stating that he could only sit and write after having heard all the versions of primary witnesses, the author reinforces the credibility pact with the reader. The last word, however, is the written one, for the legal document is the main evidence of truth, rather than oral testimony, as it is shown in one of the footnotes (2009c: 51).

I believe, however, that the vague presence of the 'I' in the book does not make the work less subjective in its point of view. One can identify the contrast between the representation of the self and the representation of Others, whose differences from the narrator is indirectly emphasized. Written in a *costumbrista* style, which also echoes the style of an anthropological report, the descriptions of the space of the narration highlight aspects of the environment to indicate the social class of the victims:

El barrio en que van a ocurrir tantas cosas imprevistas está a unas seis cuadras de la estación, yendo al oeste. Ofrece los violentos contrastes de las zonas en desarrollo, donde confluyen lo residencial y lo escuálido, el chalet recién terminado junto al baldío de yuyos y de latas.

El habitante medio es un hombre de treinta a cuarenta años que tiene su casa propia, con un jardín que cultiva en sus momentos de ocio, y que aún no ha terminado de pagar el crédito bancario que le permitió adquirirla. Vive con una familia no muy numerosa y trabaja en Buenos Aires como empleado de comercio o como obrero especializado. (32)

Although Walsh's intention is to narrate the particularities of each victim's life-story, he ends up creating his own ethnographic picture of Argentinian working-class culture. In order to understand the motives of the workers' actions he needs to re-create the stage on which they are going to act. Overall, the portraits of the victims of the massacre are the most explicit example of the journalistic trend towards presenting stereotyped characters. Walsh focuses on a physical and psychological description of victims but he emphasizes the notion of a 'common people' to draw connections between them. Therefore, Giunta

is described as ‘Un muchacho serio y trabajador, dicen los vecinos. Una vida común, sin relieves brillantes, sin deslumbres de aventura, reconstruimos nosotros.’ (42). Similarly, Pedro Livraga is: ‘Flaco, de estatura mediana, tiene rasgos regulares [...] Sus ideas son enteramente comunes, las ideas de la gente del pueblo, por lo general acertados con respecto a las cosas concretas y tangibles, nebulosas o arbitrarias en otros terrenos’ (43) The descriptions are presented from the point of view of an omnipresent narrator, one who already knows the characters’ destiny and therefore relates every element of their personality to their final actions. Perhaps influenced by scientific discourse, Walsh depicts characters whose destiny is evidently marked by social determinism:

Es una torre de hombre este Vicente Damián Rodríguez, que tiene 35 años, que carga bolsas en el puerto, que pesado y todo como es juega al fútbol, que guarda algo de infantil en su humanidad gritona, y descontenta, que aspira a más de lo que puede, que tiene mala suerte, que terminará mordiendo el pasto de un potrero y pidiendo desesperado que lo maten, que terminen de matarlo, sorbiendo a grandes tragos la muerte que no acaba de inundarlo por los ridículos agujeros que le hacen las balas de los máuseres [...] Nada es como él imaginaba. (45)

Walsh’s narrative exposes the problems inherent in representing reality through literary devices. As David Foster has noticed, there is an intrinsic risk in Walsh’s aim to convince the reader with a ‘highly fictionalized narrative’ about a massacre that was never covered by official news. He considers that the success of the book relies on a reader aware of the corruption of the state rather than on Walsh’s ‘narrative talents’ (43). In my view, what *Operación...* relies on is that Walsh’s ethical intention to tell the truth will hold more weight for a reader, particularly one looking for information on silenced or ignored facts within a repressed society. And that may be the reason why, even if the final version of the story can be read as an open defence of Peronist ideology, *Operación...* is also an emblem for Latin American journalism. While at the outset of his publishing adventure, Walsh criticised the mainstream media for remaining silent, ‘Durante varios meses he presenciado el silencio voluntario de toda la “prensa grande” en torno a esta execrable matanza, y he sentido vergüenza’ (1957: 9), but after the second edition, the story had changed the author. There is an interesting transformation in his notion of journalism, which is no longer the openly naïve one he expressed in his introduction to the *Mayoría* reportage, but one based on bitter experience:

Cuando escribí esta historia, yo tenía treinta años. Hacía diez que estaba en el periodismo. De golpe me pareció comprender que todo lo que había hecho antes no tenía nada que ver con una cierta idea del periodismo que me había ido forjando en todo ese tiempo, y que esto sí —esa búsqueda a todo riesgo, ese testimonio de lo más escondido y doloroso— tenía que ver, encajaba en esa idea. [...] Entonces me pregunté si valía la pena, si lo que yo perseguía no era una quimera, si la sociedad en que uno vive necesita realmente enterarse de cosas como éstas. Aún no tengo una respuesta. Se comprenderá, de todas maneras, que haya perdido algunas ilusiones, la ilusión en la justicia, en la reparación, en la democracia, en todas esas palabras, y finalmente en lo que una vez fue mi oficio, y ya no lo es. (2009b: 313–314)

In contrast with his disenchanted view of journalism, and his public renunciation of the craft — a renunciation which was ultimately erased from the 1972 edition — Walsh's literary consciousness regarding the craft of writing did not fluctuate so drastically. His metafictional reference to the reader shows that the fiction writer remains present: 'Releo la historia que ustedes han leído. Hay frases enteras que me molestan, pienso con fastidio que ahora la escribiría mejor. ¿*La escribiría?*' (314).

CHAPTER 2. OUT OF PLACE: THE CHRONICLER MEETS *EL PUEBLO*

In *Luz y luna, las lunitas* (Poniatowska 1994), a collection of true stories on Mexican women workers, there is a full-page monochrome photograph that captures, head to foot, two women holding arms (see appendix 1, illustration 5). Both women are standing still on bare soil, with a brick wall in the background on which birdcages are hanging. Despite their age, height and different skin colours, at first glance the women seem similar. They are smiling at the camera, both wearing floral summer dresses with pale coloured cardigans and upswept hair. If one looks in detail, however, the small, subtle differences in appearance become more evident. The woman on the left wears discoloured clothes, with the seams of her dress coming undone, and old, broken shoes, whereas the woman on the right wears better quality clothes, stylish black high heels, a watch and a bracelet on one of her wrists, and her hair professionally styled. Although both are facing straight into the camera, the woman on the left has a half smile, in a rather challenging attitude, whilst the other one has a more controlled open-mouthed smile, displaying the same charm as someone posing for the social section of a newspaper.

There is a caption at the bottom of the page quoting a phrase from the text that the image illustrates: ‘Usted es una catrina que no sirve para nada’. If one knows that the woman on the left is Josefina Bórquez, and the one on the right, Elena Poniatowska, it becomes clear which woman is referred to as the *catrina*, and who is the one naming her thus.⁴⁹ The image taken by the photojournalist Héctor García is in the book as evidence of what the text ‘Vida y muerte de Jesusa’ describes. In this chronicle, author Elena Poniatowska writes about the development of her friendship with Josefina Bórquez, who participated in the Mexican Revolution and later worked as a laundress in a marginal neighbourhood in Mexico City. Under the name of Jesusa Palancares, Josefina became the protagonist of Poniatowska’s most famous testimonial novel *Hasta no verte Jesús mío* (1969).

⁴⁹ In Mexico, *catrina* is used to refer to an elegantly dressed woman who belongs to the upper class or pretends to. It is also used in its masculine form, *catrín*.

Elena's encounter with Josefina/Jesusa responds to a longstanding wish to belong that can be traced back to her autobiographical novel *La "Flor de Lis"*: 'Güerita, güerita ¡cómo se ve que usted no es de los nuestros, no sabe nuestras costumbres!' (1988a: 74). Being *güerita* in Mexico, or 'a true blonde' as Carlos Fuentes once described Poniatowska, is a sign of foreignness. National identity, defined as a sense of belonging to the Mexican land and culture, would become a question for authors like Poniatowska to solve. The wish to belong is present throughout Poniatowska's work, and determines her self-representation:

—Pero tú no eres de México, ¿verdad?
 —Sí soy.
 —Es que no pareces mexicana.
 —Ah sí, entonces ¿qué parezco?
 —Gringa.
 —Pues no soy gringa, soy mexicana.
 —No se te ve.
 [...]
 —Soy de México porque quiero serlo, es mi país. (73–74)

The image of Poniatowska, the *catrina* against a half-constructed wall, getting her high heels dirty on the unpaved soil, provokes a sense of displacement. In Garcías's photograph, as in her own writing, there is a clear contrast between the author and her surroundings, including the representation of the Others to whom she holds on, trying desperately to belong.

This sense of displacement is also present in the documentary narratives of Carlos Monsiváis, although from a medial perspective, rather than as a complete outsider longing to belong. The cover of the first edition of Monsiváis's *Los rituales del caos* (1995) is illustrated by popular cartoonist Rafael Barajas 'El Fisgón'. In the black-and-white cartoon, the idea of chaos takes the form of a terrible traffic jam in Mexico City. Amongst the cars, trucks and buses, and their angry drivers, there are crowds of all sorts occupying the street in order to protest, to celebrate or to pray, and there is also Carlos Monsiváis. Depicted as a reporter, notebook and pencil in hand, Monsiváis can pass unnoticed, for he is not at the centre of the drawing, but discretely positioned in the right upper corner, his body lost among other characters and objects in the urban scene. He is observing from the same street where everything is happening, but at the same time he stands alone. From this strategic position, therefore, he sees the housewives, the peasants, the students, the workers, the young, the old, the children, the drunks, the priest, the vandals, the Virgin of

Guadalupe, the Mexican flags, the political banners, a ball, a trumpet, a candlestick, all passing by in front of him — and he writes. (see illustration 6)

From a liminal position, as an insider and outsider at the same time, a new, modern Mexican figure, Carlos Monsiváis chooses to look to his immediate past and reflect on its contradictions. He is aware of the construction of a certain Mexican identity through the use of language, but also through the senses and through appearances. Reality is then the result of the people's appropriation of the official discourse:

E) MEXICANOS FRUSTRADOS

—¡Qué *mexicano* te oyes!

—¡Ah, qué *mexicanos* vienen hoy!

—¡Qué *mexicano* te ves!

El término 'mexicano' como peyorativo y ya se transparenta la fuerza de otra etapa nacionalista, la autoperódica. ¡Qué orgullo vivir en el peor país del mundo!

(Monsiváis 1977: 340)

Monsiváis's way of incorporating *el pueblo*, its problems, assumptions and beliefs, can be seen as a postmodern version of Juan Rulfo's stylization of popular language. In '¡¡¡Gooool!!! Somos el desmadre', published in *Entrada libre. Crónicas de la sociedad que se organiza* (1987), a self-reflective first-person narrator describes football fans on their way to the stadium during the 1986 World Cup held in Mexico. Monsiváis depicts himself as the witness who only goes out of his home to quietly observe *el pueblo* and their festive noise, *el relajo*, passing by:

Contemplo largo rato a los grupos en la calzada de Tlalpan [...] Los chavos se acumulan sobre un punto, apresan y sueltan automóviles a su antojo, bailan sobre los toldos y zarandean a los atrapados, y antes de conceder el paso demandan porras, éxtasis vocales a los pies de la nueva institución del triunfalismo. (1994 [1987]: 216)

In the next paragraph, he positions himself as a solitary man unable to share *el desmadre* of the streets, whilst still being among it. When, in the middle of his chronicle, the narrator confesses to knowing nothing about football, the reader already knows that the story was less about the game than about the masses celebrating their own version of national identity: 'las porras avivan la casta de los nuestros, si uno ve a su alrededor sólo colores nacionales se le incrementa la fibra y el coraje' (231).

This portrait of the chronicler as a public figure who mediates between lower and upper classes resembles the romantic figure of the *flâneur*, the *paseante* or stroller, who used to walk the streets of Paris in the late nineteenth century. Particularly in the case of Monsiváis, the self-constructed image of the *cronista*, by the means of rhetoric, can be

also related — although only in attitude, life-style or point of view, rather than in fashion — to the figure of the dandy. That is, a self-made middle-class man interested in forms and appearances, able to move from one social class to another; Monsiváis as *cronista* can even be related to the dandy's most modern version, drawn from 'camp' aesthetics.

Elena Poniatowska and Carlos Monsiváis are part of the long list of chroniclers working in Mexico City. Since colonial times, the *cronistas de la ciudad* have documented the interactions between the urban public space and its inhabitants.⁵⁰ After independence from Spain, common practices, festivities and ceremonies gave a sense of 'lo nacional' to Mexican culture and transformed the city. As Monsiváis noted, based on writer Ignacio Manuel Altamirano's notion of national culture, Mexican literature would find a way of becoming 'national', by naming Mexican places, recognizing a new social space and creating *el pueblo* as a character.

The *cuadros de costumbres* were the texts in which the *modernista* chroniclers described Mexico City's everyday life in the newspapers. Through these texts, the intellectuals would thus create their own version of the Mexican individual, whilst simultaneously maintaining a distance from him: 'Nosotros, causa de sus males, nos avergonzamos de su presencia, creemos que su miseria nos acusa y degrada frente al extranjero; sus regocijos los vemos con horror, y su brutal embriaguez nos produce hastío' (Altamirano in Monsiváis 1978: 163). This is not so different from the reflections of Roger Bartra's *La jaula de la melancolía* (1987) on the invention of the modern Mexican after the Revolution. Unlike the indigenous myth, *el pelado* or *mestizo vulgar* is a hybrid stereotypical figure with a peasant past. The *pelado* is unable to adapt to contemporary urban life and therefore he becomes highly violent:

El *pelado* es la metáfora perfecta que hacía falta: es el campesino de la ciudad, que ha perdido su inocencia original pero no es todavía un ser fáustico. Ha perdido sus tierras pero todavía no gana la fábrica: entre dos aguas, vive la tragedia del fin del mundo agrario y del inicio de la civilización industrial. Esta imagen de una cultura anfibia, que no debe caer ni en el mimetismo autodenigratorio ni en el nacionalismo extremo, se ofrece como modelo a seguir desde mediados del siglo XX; tiene el atractivo adicional de permitirle al mexicano asomarse al abismo del drama existencial y sentir el vértigo de la modernidad. (112)

⁵⁰ In 1926, historian Manuel Romero de Terreros published *Bibliografía de cronistas de la ciudad de México*, in which he enlisted sixty-six urban chroniclers, including the friars Diego Durán, Bernal Díaz del Castillo, Bernardino de Sahagún, Gerónimo de Mendieta and the priest Francisco Javier Clavijero.

Monsiváis agrees with Bartra that the national culture is a construction of the Mexican elite, coming from the intellectuals as well as from the institutions in power. However, while Bartra thinks that *el pelado* as the new man, is part of the mythology created by the political system to blur social differences, Monsiváis argues for his authenticity. For him, this new man is not a fictional character but a flesh-and-blood figure who can be found in the popular classes. Monsiváis contrasts the concept of national culture with that of ‘popular culture’, the latter being the one created by the people (*el pueblo*) through a process involving the re-appropriation and transformation of the former: ‘Lo que entre nosotros ha habido con ese nombre “cultura popular” es fruto de la voluntad de las clases dominantes y de las adaptaciones gozosas y anárquicas hechas por las masas a tal plan de dominio’ (1978: 98).

Monsiváis and Poniatowska are conscious of their role as mediators between the dominant culture and the popular one. They use, therefore, mass media as a platform to give Mexican narrative a twist. In their texts, they deconstruct the stereotypes created by nationalism, and in that sense they act in opposition to those writers who (according to Bartra) are part of the hegemonic political system. As a response to what Bartra calls the upper classes’ ‘disdain’ for the rural and urban masses, Monsiváis and Poniatowska attempt to represent Mexico’s people and places from a dialogical and horizontal perspective rather than a vertical one. What surprises a contemporary reader is that in times where censorship was a common activity of the media, these authors managed to criticise the political system and still be part of the cultural elite.⁵¹ Rhetorical techniques might have helped, along with their own self-aware role-playing on the cultural field, but perhaps a more insightful sociohistorical approach could find other kinds of explanations.

In opposition to the institutional discourse of a romanticized mestizo culture, these chroniclers try to contrast worlds in tension. When Monsiváis writes about popular culture in the sense of resistance and civil empowerment, he is referring to a certain type of middle class, that of educated young people, professionals and activists. These ‘clases medias radicalizadas’ (98) are the idealised audience to whom Monsiváis and Poniatowska might address their books and newspaper texts.

⁵¹ Corona and Jörgensen explain how in Post-Revolutionary Mexico the political stability of the country was reflected in the ‘continued coexistence between the government and the press’ (2002: 7). Reporters could not write about certain topics, such as those listed by José Joaquín Blanco: ‘Our Lady of Guadalupe, the president, the army, and the newspaper’s major commercial sponsors’. The *cronistas*, on the contrary, were able to enjoy much more freedom of speech.

In *Fuerte es el silencio* (1980), for instance, Poniatowska observes poor Mexican neighbourhoods from the perspective of an outsider, but uses indirect speech as a form through which to approach otherness, and to understand their situation based on a narration of their everyday life:

Aunque a nosotros nos parezca mejor una choza campesina, por más humilde que sea, a un tugurio proletario, ellos, los que vienen del campo, siguen creyendo en la bondad de la gran ciudad que algún día les dará lo que no les ha dado la tierra (23).

That ‘us’ as opposed to ‘them’ represents two confrontational worldviews from which the city can be experienced. These confrontational worldviews are also exposed in Monsiváis’s chronicles, although in a more sarcastic and humoristic style than that of Poniatowska. In ‘La disidencia magisterial: los apóstoles se cansaron de serlo’, from *Entrada libre*, about a teachers’s strike in Mexico City centre, Monsiváis produces a detailed essay-like text that reflects on the problems of the educational system via the story of a driver who is not able to circulate through the streets because of a march:

El automovilista está desesperado. Desde hace una hora ha quedado varado en esa inmensa cuadra de ruidos y premuras vueltas histeria, y está harto de pagar con su retardo y su ira el avance democrático de la sociedad. ¿A él qué carajos le importan los maestros de Oaxaca, y qué ganan éstos con joder el tráfico? Váyanse a la chingada con sus lemas y sus pleitos locales. Y denle clases a su madre. (180–181)

From the 1920s to the 1940s, national culture was being constructed from above in order to legitimize each of its parts. Since the 1950s, however, the process of *desnacionalización* began to challenge tradition (Monsiváis 1978). As children of the second half of the twentieth century, it was possible for Poniatowska and Monsiváis to make a critique of chauvinism and, thus, to represent Mexico City’s public space in a different way from previous urban chroniclers. This might be due to their subjective approach to the public space. For Henri Lefebvre (1991) public space is defined as the product of the dialogue or interaction between subjects and the space — physical, mental and social — and the environment where they act. For example, in Poniatowska’s ‘Primeras impresiones de Chichén Itzá’, in *Todo empezó en domingo* (1997 [1963]), the reader can approach two different worlds and contrast what national culture means for different social groups. From a more ironic perspective, in *Días de guardar*, Monsiváis also shows a new kind of otherness while describing mass culture:

Hoy se estrena *Hair* en Acapulco. Afuera del teatro, una compacta ausencia de multitud evita la recepción popular, posterga la irrupción gloriosa de The Beautiful People, que va llegando envuelta en esa pausa metafísica que solicita la admiración ajena y que antes se conocía como tardanza [...] El reportero –o sea, quien esto escribe y que así se sueña– lamenta muchísimo su ignorancia de la Buena Sociedad Mexicana y del Jet Set, lo que provoca su indiferencia ante los Ilustres Apellidos congregados lo que le impulsa a revisar –en un vano intento por retener estilos– la variada falta de imaginación que organiza la vestimenta. (2010b [1970]: 20–21)

Unlike a conventional reviewer of the art, Monsiváis does not focus on the play but on its audience. He parodies high society news by ignoring the important names of the theatre-goers, for instance, and then he becomes a sort of anti-chronicler.

Monsiváis considers the chronicle and reportage to be of a different degree of importance than any other journalistic genre. In his opinion, contemporary mass media does not have enough time and space, or even money, or freedom, to allow authors to publish texts in which social problems can be discussed in depth. Yet they are the forms in which the other can be represented:

La crónica y el reportaje se acercan a las minorías y mayorías sin cabida o representatividad en los medios masivos, a los grupos indígenas, los indocumentados, los desempleados y subempleados, los organizadores de sindicatos independientes, los jornaleros agrícolas, los migrantes, los campesinos sin tierras, las feministas, los homosexuales y las lesbianas. Cronicarlos es reconocer sus modos expresivos, oponerse a la idea de la noticia como mercancía, exhibir la política inquisitorial de la derecha, cuestionar los prejuicios y las limitaciones sectarias y machistas de la izquierda militante, precisar los elementos recuperables de la cultura popular (2010a [2006]: 126)

The newspaper began to be a space for public opinion when literary journalism was introduced into its news pages (Habermas 1992). It is not surprising, then, that chroniclers in Latin America, and particularly in Mexico, became public intellectuals who represented public opinion. Using the means of literature, and the platform of the press, they act as mediators between social organizations and state institutions.

2.1 Elena Poniatowska: hiding behind the notebook

Throughout Poniatowska's work there is an ethical attitude towards the other. This attitude is marked through her identity (at least as it is represented in her writing): that of an educated and privileged woman, who in spite of her foreign background looks for a Mexican identity in those who are different from her. The desire to belong to a country to which her family does not belong defines her interest in Mexican popular culture.

Hélène Elizabeth Louise Amélie Paula Dolores Poniatowska was born in Paris in 1932 to a French father with Polish and American origins, Prince Jean E. Poniatowski Sperry, and to Paula Amor de Ferreira Iturbe, a French-Mexican woman of Russian ancestry, whose family had left Mexico after the end of the Maximilian Empire (Schuessler 2007). Because of the Second World War the family immigrated to Mexico with ten-year-old Elena. Poniatowska's first language was French, which she spoke at home, while she spoke English in the British-sponsored school she attended, the Windsor; she began to learn Spanish from the family maids. She was sent to the United States to study in a Catholic private school run by nuns at the Convent of the Sacred Heart in Philadelphia, after which she returned to Mexico City. She developed an openly leftist political ideology that emerged in her works, especially in *La noche de Tlatelolco* (1971) and *Fuerte es el silencio* (1980). She has also demonstrated her political commitments in her public life, as when she supported the campaign of Andrés Manuel López Obrador, candidate for the 2006 and 2012 presidential elections.⁵²

Poniatowska began her journalistic and literary careers simultaneously. In 1954, she started working at *Excelsior* newspaper, interviewing politicians and artists. The same year, she published *Lilus Kikus*, a collection of twelve short stories. In the 1950s, in a journalistic sphere dominated by male authors, the interviews offered Elena Poniatowska a way into the Mexican intellectual circuits of the time:

Yo no sentía ninguna resistencia mientras yo hiciera lo que los intelectuales pensaban que debía de hacer, es decir su propaganda. Me dediqué a entrevistarlos durante muchísimo tiempo, y eso les pareció siempre bien. Era muy dócil, y sigo siendo muy dócil. (Steele 1989: 90)

⁵² Her experiences as part of López Obrador's movement were published in *Amanecer en el Zócalo. Los 50 días que confrontaron a México* (2007).

Poniatowska is aware of the journalistic task of interviewing as a form of advertising. She felt she was just serving the powerful people of culture and the arts in Mexico, without leaving any time for her fiction. Nevertheless, her interviews with famous artists made her name visible in the national print media.

Poniatowska's individual form of journalistic practice was a novelty for the time in Mexico; however, her experiments with genres beyond traditional writing in the national press may be explained also by the cultural and socioeconomic system that supported her. According to Beth Jørgensen (1994), Poniatowska obtained her first job as a journalist at *Excélsior* through family connections. The newspaper was considered to be pro-American, and Poniatowska actually started there by obtaining an interview with the new U.S. Ambassador in Mexico, and continued by writing mostly about high society news.⁵³ Although it is true that men held the professional field, the Mexican mass media comprised a less competitive market than is the case today. There was no professional training for journalists, so the *oficio* needed to be learned from the outset. In a country with high levels of illiteracy it was hard to find either men or women whose cultivation and writing abilities were outstanding. In *Todo México*, a collection of interviews with celebrities made mostly in the 1970s, but published in seven volumes (1991–2002), she shows an awareness of her privileged status. For instance, while the rest of reporters had to chase after any and all statements by Jorge Luis Borges during his visit to Mexico City, she was able to see him for long and private conversations.

If her male colleagues were self-taught as journalists, then Poniatowska was an equal in that regard. One could say that she was advantaged over the average journalist, male or female, because of her privileged education, including her full command of at least three languages, and the intellectual environment in which she grew up.⁵⁴ It was this environment, in fact, which facilitated her approaches to people who would otherwise not have been so easy for a young woman who was just starting a journalistic career to gain access to. Her first interviews can then be analysed as representative of a process of (female) identity formation, for they had a direct referent in the real-life experience of the author, as she remembered in our interview:

⁵³ In the foreword to Schuessler's biography of Poniatowska, titled as her nickname 'La Poni', Carlos Fuentes remembers: 'I first met Elena at a ball held at Mexico City's Jockey Club. She was disguised as a charming kitty cat, all in white; a true blonde, she wore a mask that covered only the top part of her face, and very light-coloured jewels. She looked like some lovely and adorable creature dreamed up by Jean Cocteau.' (ix) Two of the most recognisable contemporary Mexican authors did not meet in a literary workshop or in any artistic event but in a society ball.

⁵⁴ Rather than admire journalists, she admires fiction writers, such as Marguerite Yourcenar, Virginia Woolf, Elvira Lindo and Catherine Mansfield (see interview 6).

cuando fui joven yo iba a lo loquito sin saber nada de nada, pero cuando eres joven yo creo que caes bien, aunque no sepas nada y hagas puras preguntas idiotas [...] en la época en que yo lo hacía había tres periodistas, entonces llegabas y caías en gracia [...] Yo le preguntaba a Diego Rivera que si sus dientes eran de leche porque nunca había visto una pintura de él, yo venía de un convento de monjas. Decía ‘está muy altote, muy grandote y los dientes muy chiquitos’ y él decía ‘sí, son de leche y con estos me como a las polaquitas preguntonas’ y de ahí salía la entrevista. Y me hice de un público que decía ‘a ver qué va a preguntar esta babosa’ (see interview 6)

Nevertheless, there are certain characteristics of a personal identity that prevailed as a stylistic mark of the author, particularly when she writes about intellectuals or artists. As in Rivera’s case, her foreignness — starting with her last name, an uncommon one in Mexico — is a mark of distinction which generates peculiar conversations, and she incorporated that into her worldview.

Poniatowska also employs humour and irony as a way to expose a rather mundane side of the intellectuals she interviews, as demonstrated in the last scene of her profile of Borges:

—Es que pensé que usted no había leído mis cuentos.
 —¿Por qué, maestro?
 —Por las preguntas que me hace.
 Me avergüenzo.
 —¿Por qué no soy erudita ni vengo preparada?
 —No —dice dulcemente—, prefiero su frescura. Usted tiene una *awareness*, puedo percibirla.
 Se me cae la libreta. Ay, Dios mío.
 —La señorita Emma Zunz es una Electra que no deja pistas, ¿verdad, maestro?
 —¿Así la ve usted? ¿No le parece que esta recámara es un poco fría, Elena?
 —Helada. ¿Quiere que lo tape a usted con una de las cobijas de la cama?
 —Creo que bastará con la sobrecama, por favor.
 [...]
 —Ahora mismo voy a ir a la recepción a pedir que calienten el cuarto. ¿Me espera tantito?
 —Tantito (y se ríe).
 —Bueno un poquitito.
 Corro, la salud de Borges en mis manos. Allá al fondo, con sus párpados cerrados me aguarda en un cuarto congelado el mayor escritor de América Latina.
 (1991: 149)

In this passage, the author depicts herself as a serious journalist, for she pretends to pose important questions to the important interviewee. The interview, however, turned out to be almost impossible: the interviewee is cold, and she ends up looking for a solution to a very practical matter instead of continuing the conversation on literature. She allows herself to be mocked in an hilarious situation that goes beyond the formal conventions of

a professional interview, but only after she has revealed an interesting conversation with the author. This conversation is in fact full of literary references and word play, which was indeed far beyond the level of conversation being held by the group of journalists who were following Borges continuously but did not know what to ask to him. By the end of the interview, it is clear that Poniatowska was just pretending to be one of those shy reporters who knew nothing about Borges' work.

As in this interview, Elena Poniatowska's documentary narratives are written in the first person, through a self-referencing narrator. By representing herself as a naïve woman and inexperienced young reporter, Poniatowska engages with her ideal reader: a middle class, modern, urban man or woman, who may be afraid of acting like her in a similar situation, but who recognizes in her a social equal. The 'I' in her texts, however, is rather elusive because the narrator becomes a hidden character. Poniatowska offers authority to the text by her mere silent presence. This is applicable even when she writes about her aunt, the poet Guadalupe 'Pita' Amor, or her husband, the astronomer Guillermo Haro. During my interview with her, she declared that she intentionally tried to erase herself from the chronicles:

El día que yo tenga tiempo o quiera yo escribir mi biografía utilizaré el 'yo', pero cuando estoy haciendo una crónica de algo que sucede fuera de mí, no veo la necesidad de meterme a mí misma, de hablar de mí misma: si me duelen los pies o si ya llevo 12 horas de pie esperando, por ejemplo, en un terremoto o en una tragedia, como en las muchas que he vivido. (see interview 6)

Based on this statement, it can be inferred that Poniatowska's conception of the chronicle excludes the author's own experience of approaching others. The ethics of her own writing lead her to criticize the abuse of the first-person by *cronistas* who represent themselves in the action and even as protagonists of their texts. It is also interesting how she defines the genre of *crónica* as opposed to autobiography. For Poniatowska, the chronicle is a well-defined genre, determined by its focus on otherness, 'algo que sucede fuera de mí', for it is a genre in which she is not allowed to express the self, as she is able to in fiction.

Regardless of her reluctance to make the first-person narrator the protagonist of her stories, Poniatowska is evidently aware of the subjectivity of her task. This awareness was exposed when she contradicted herself during my interview with her. When I asked her if she had thought of writing her memoirs she said no, because 'dentro de lo que yo escribo hay mucho de mí misma, dentro de las entrevistas y las crónicas hay mucho de

mi propia vida' (idem). Later during the conversation, she would recall my question on this topic, since she thinks that in her journalism the 'I' is not present at all:

Cuando usted me dice que si no he escrito mi autobiografía, pues dentro de los libros que uno escribe solo el hecho de escoger ciertos acontecimientos y dejar de lado ciertos otros ya es una forma de hablar de uno mismo. De todos modos uno habla de uno mismo, incluso haciendo un artículo, ¿no? (idem).

Poniatowska's writing style demonstrates that the act of editing can be a creative task. The creativity of editing is shown by the selection of the information she collects from her journalistic investigation. The more outstanding examples of this are *La noche de Tlatelolco* and *Hasta no verte Jesús mío*, for both experiment with the effect of transcribing the recorded voices of others into written discourse.

However, what she brings into discussion in her response to my question is the link between life and writing, for she is usually so involved in the process of investigation that it becomes not only a professional activity but also a real-life experience that shapes her writing. The 'I' therefore expresses itself only through the Others, as the rules of the genre supposedly work.

Despite her own statements on this matter, and based on a close reading of those texts with self-references, I argue that Poniatowska uses the first-person narrator as an aesthetic solution for the problem of verisimilitude. She then constructs a witness-narrator in texts in which the informant, usually a marginal other, could not be considered a legitimate source of information for traditional journalism. Therefore, as the interviewer legitimates the importance of the witness by the mere act of listening and recording his testimony, the reality she aims to show appears credible by the very presence of the author in the text. While explaining her own working process, the author demonstrates that the point of view of a surprised and rather naïve narrator is a conscious literary construction:

Liliana Chávez: Yo percibo que su mirada en las crónicas de este periodo [1960s–1970s] es una mirada muy sorprendida de la realidad, como si lo viera por primera vez, ¿qué experimentaba?

Elena Poniatowska: No creo que lo viera como la primera vez, pero para escribir pues tenía que yo darle la importancia a lo que estaba sucediendo. (idem)

On one hand, having positioned herself as a public intellectual, the topics she chooses become important because of her very decision to write about them. She is aware that she will be published and read. If Poniatowska's *crónicas* do not focus on the process, difficulties or adventures of the *cronista* in order to tell the story, as younger chroniclers

usually do, it is because her authority is not based upon the construction of a character. Her authority has already been established by her social origin and the prestige of her signature.

On the other hand, against her own desire to give voice to the voiceless, there is still a strong presence of the self in a search for identity. By writing about Others through a fresh — and always surprised — first-person narrator, she is not removing the differences of those who have been ‘voiceless’, but constructing a trustworthy witness with whom a bourgeois reader can relate. This reader will trust in her to be the Charon in their journey to another Mexico they could be discovering together, maybe for the first time.

2.1.1 The *cabritas* and other strange women

El universo o nada (2013) is the closest that Poniatowska’s output comes to autobiography, as it is the biography of her husband, the astronomer Guillermo Haro. In this book the narrator remembers herself as a devoted housewife, although quite absent-minded and unwilling to make strong decisions. In contrast with the scientist’s wife who wishes to please her husband’s political, and social circles, ‘¿Es este el sentido de la vida, acompañar hasta desaparecer?’ (293–94), Poniatowska also writes about other women with admiration for their independence, freedom, strength, courage and lack of care for social conventions. For example, in *Las siete cabritas* (2000), a collection of seven profiles of Mexican women intellectuals, Elena Poniatowska focuses on female identities that contrast variously with her own self-representation.⁵⁵

There is a clear difference between these women and the Elena who is represented in narratives with autobiographical tones. The author usually portrays herself as a childish or naïve woman who behaves ‘properly’; a good Catholic girl with a lack of self-esteem, who is insecure in her artistic capabilities. Besides, there is an interesting difference between the portrayal of the women in *Las siete cabritas* and other more socially and economically marginalised women. While she depicts marginalized, uneducated women in relation to their household tasks and their poverty, in the case of the artists she explores their inner life in a deeper sense, describing their intelligence, as well as their sensuality.

⁵⁵ The profiles are on Frida Kahlo, Pita Amor, Nahui Olin, María Izquierdo, Elena Garro, Rosario Castellanos and Nellie Campobello. Poniatowska declares in the introduction that it was her little daughter who suggested that title. In Mexico, the word *cabra* (goat) is used to refer to a person who acts in a crazy manner. The author, however, might be making a parodic reference to ‘Los siete sabios’. This was a cultural society founded in 1916 by male intellectuals who became powerful in Mexican politics (Krauze 1985).

Female sexuality is explored by a narrator who is shocked, but aware that she is writing about what she considers to be exceptional lives. This is shown especially in ‘Nahui Olin: la que hizo olas’, a profile of a model, painter and poet. Nahui’s background is actually quite similar to Poniatowska’s, for she also came from an upper class French family that incorporated intellectuals and writers. Nevertheless, the contrast between both female identities is evident, for the freedom and sensuality experienced by Nahui cannot be compared with the narrator’s life, at least as represented in Elena’s autobiographical texts: ‘Sus ojos son de un erotismo brutal, hasta violento. No hay hombre o mujer ahorita en México y a principios del siglo XXI que se atreva a escribir así, a sentir así, a enamorarse así, a pintar así’ (63). Poniatowska admires Nahui, and tries to explain her behaviour and identity, although she describes her as if she came from another world. Nahui’s early writings surprise Elena, for her fictional Lilus or Mariana would never be able to write or act like her.

Although all women are indeed portrayed as independent and strong in her writing, Elena only explores the erotic while writing about intellectual or aristocratic women. An outstanding example is *Tinísima* (1992), a biographical novel about the American–Italian photographer Tina Modotti which contains the most erotic prose of Poniatowska’s work. If, in fiction, Elena Poniatowska barely writes on eroticism, she challenges herself by choosing to profile women whose biographies render the topic inevitable.

By choosing to write about these women, however, the author inscribes herself in a generation of women who were in confrontation with a patriarchal and conservative society. Yet the narrator can only access this other world by means of irony and a self-constructed innocence. A child-like perspective becomes a signature feature of Poniatowska’s narrators. For instance, in *Lilus Kikus*, a coming-of-age story of a rich girl in Mexico City, the protagonist criticizes the society she lives in via heavy use of irony: ‘Lilus oyó decir por allí que las tontas son las mujeres más encantadoras del mundo. Sí, las que no saben nada, las que son infantiles y ausentes’ (1987 [1954]: 53).

Poniatowska’s construction of a childish point of view is more complex in *La “Flor de Lis”*. This novel can be read as a continuation of the Lilus Kikus adventures, for the life of Mariana, the narrator, is quite similar to Lilus’s, although she is already a teenager. Mariana’s character is crafted through a mixture of religious taboos and an awareness of the significance of sexuality. She shows a fascination for the mother’s body, and an obsessive but repressed desire to possess her. At the same time that she discovers

that the naked body must be hidden, for instance, her friendship with other women is rooted in her admiration for their physical beauty.

Faced with the impossibility of knowing the other completely, Poniatowska adopts the role of the silent observer. She embodies Virginia Woolf's description of the non-fiction writer as one who observes the lives of others through their windows (1929). Poniatowska's narrators, however, do not show in one place for long, as they are in a state of continuous displacement. If the little girl, Lilus Kikus, observes the world from her house window, the young woman Mariana observes it from the moving window of a bus. In Poniatowska's autobiographical fictions, therefore, self-identity is represented as a process in constant change, simultaneous to the ongoing process of discovering otherness:

Me gusta sentarme al sol en medio de la gente, esa gente, en mi ciudad, en el centro de mi país, en el ombligo del mundo [...] Mi país es esta banca de piedra desde la cual miro el mediodía [...] mi país es el tamal que ahora mismo voy a ir a traer a la calle de Huichapan número 17, a la FLOR DE LIS. 'De chile verde', diré: 'Uno de chile verde con pollo'. (1988a: 261)

The journalistic writing of Poniatowska cannot be analysed independently from her literature, for the value of her work rests in the intersection of two cultural fields in which she has learned to play. She has constructed a narrator with the ability to question a politician, engage in intellectual conversation, as well as the ability to ask for the street-food she likes in the most common language of the area.

2.1.2 A guilty *catrina* goes out

During the Mexico City earthquake of 1985, Elena Poniatowska and Carlos Monsiváis were working side by side. They were both interested in telling stories of the catastrophe, but their methods were quite different, as Poniatowska told Steele:

Él [Carlos Monsiváis] me decía mucho '¿para qué estableces relaciones personales? Tú escribe y se acabó'. No podía solo escribir, sino que iba por la silla de ruedas, por la cama, a la despensa por el arroz para que tuvieran qué comer. Este tipo de cosas te desgasta muchísimo emocionalmente. Para escribir es nefasto involucrarse (104–105).

Poniatowska's commitment to the lowest social classes is represented in her writing, showing awareness of her role as a public intellectual in a country with dramatic contrasts. She has written on topics she feels are important, sometimes regardless of her own personal interests. For example, she does not like her books *Gaby Brimmer* (1979), about

a girl with brain paralysis, and *Las mil y una... La herida de Paulina* (2000), about a girl who wanted to abort a child conceived by rape, and she wrote them just as favours to friends who are activists (see interview 6). Also, she frequently develops affective relationships with her informants, particularly with those whom she interviews for months or years. An outstanding case is her long friendship with Josefina Bórquez, known as Jesusa Palancares in *Hasta no verte Jesús mío*.

In *Luz y luna, las lunitas*, Poniatowska offers an image of the journalistic task as one where the journalist intrudes on the lives of other people. The informants are not usually part of the everyday life of the journalist. This situation is exemplified in the narration of the encounter between Poniatowska and Josefina Bórquez in 'Vida y muerte de Jesusa'. For Jesusa to tell and listen to stories is not such an important job compared to accomplishing the daily and hard household tasks that allow her to survive:

—Mire, usted tiene dos años de venir y estar chingue y chingue y no entiende nada. Así de que mejor aquí le paramos.

Me fui con mi libreta contra el pecho a modo de escudo. En el coche pensé: '¿Qué padre vieja, Dios mío! No tiene a nadie en la vida, la única persona que la visita soy yo, y es capaz de mandarme al carajo'.

Al miércoles siguiente se me hizo tarde (fue el renacido inconsciente) y la encontré afuera en la banqueta.

Refunfuñó:

—Pues ¿qué le pasa? ¿No entiende? A la hora que usted se va, salgo por mi leche al establo, voy por mi pan. A mí me friega usted si me tiene aquí esperando.

Entonces la acompañé al establo. (42)

As a self-reflective narrative, this chronicle includes the thoughts of the journalist after her experience of the encounter with the informant. By inserting this dialogue, Poniatowska questions the ethics of the profession, the apparent right of the journalist to intrude on other's life. Jesusa may not be an 'important' character in Mexican social or political life, but she is aware of her own right to tell or not to tell her story. From then on in the chronicle, Poniatowska tries another approach to Jesusa that implies her own openness to a more intimate interaction, beyond the conventions that would guide a formal journalistic interview, where the journalist has the power or right to shoot questions and the informant has to answer them. Jesusa then becomes Elena's Charon, guiding her journey into an unknown world:

De la mano de Jesusa entré en contacto con la pobreza, la de a de veras, la del agua que se recoge en cubetas y se lleva cuidando de no tirarla, la de la lavada sobre la tableta de lámina porque no hay lavadero, la de la luz que se roba por medio de ‘diablillos’, la de las gallinas que ponen huevos sin cascarón, ‘nomás la pura tocata’, porque la falta de sol no permite que se calcifiquen. (42)

Jesusa and Elena represent two faces of the same country. The bodies’ displacement from a poor neighbourhood in the outskirts of Mexico City to an aristocratic house in the same city depicts the dialogue that continues in opposed worlds. This is shown especially when Elena invites Jesusa to her house:

En las tardes de los miércoles iba yo a ver a la Jesusa y en la noche, al llegar a la casa, acompañaba a mi mamá a algún coctel en alguna embajada. Siempre pretendí mantener el equilibrio entre la extrema pobreza que compartía en la vecindad de la Jesu, con el lucerío, el fasto de las recepciones. Mi socialismo era de dientes para afuera. Al meterme a la tina de agua bien caliente, recordaba la palangana bajo la cama en la que Jesusa enjuagaba los overoles y se bañaba ella misma los sábados. No se me ocurría sino pensar avergonzada: ‘Ojalá y ella jamás conozca mi casa, que nunca sepa cómo vivo yo’. Cuando la conocí me dijo: ‘No voy a regresar, no vayan a pensar que soy una limosneta’. Y sin embargo la amistad subsistió, el lazo había enraizado. Jesusa y yo nos queríamos. Nunca, sin embargo, dejó de calificarme. ‘Yo ya sabía desde endosantes que usted era catrina’ (52).

By letting the reader know that Jesusa thought that she was a *catrina*, Poniatowska exhibits an important bias, for her encounters with informants are hardly ever equal. Also, her stories are not obtained through a purely scientific methodology, such as she considers anthropologists like Oscar Lewis used.⁵⁶ However, there is a strong sense of guilt in Poniatowska’s view of otherness, which might have its origins in her privileged background and her Catholic worldview. The awareness that her stories depend upon another’s suffering leads her to question her privileges:

Para mí Jesusa fue un personaje, el mejor de todos. Jesusa tenía razón. Yo a ella le saqué raja, como Lewis se las sacó a los Sánchez. [...] ni mi vida actual ni la pasada tienen que ver con la de Jesusa. Seguí siendo ante todo, una mujer frente a una máquina de escribir. (52)

⁵⁶ Poniatowska worked with the American anthropologist Oscar Lewis as a research assistant. She edited and corrected his interviews with Mexican peasants for the book *Pedro Martínez: A Mexican peasant and his family* (1964). After this job she began a new stage in her career, focusing on those Mexicans who were most different from her: the poor, marginalized urban and rural men and women.

Defining herself as a woman of letters, Poniatowska finds in language a way of respecting the other's identity, for she tries to transcribe popular phrases in her chronicles. Language, however, is the undeniable distinguishing mark of the difference between the narrator and the marginalized other. Therefore, the text becomes the space in which the two different worldviews collide. The author confesses, for instance, that she had to look up some of Jesusa's words in the dictionary. As opposed to the interviews with intellectuals and artists, the encounters with marginalized Others are not usually represented in Poniatowska's documentary narratives in the form of complete dialogue, but rather as carefully selected quotations. For if the dialogue is not between equals, the self should be almost erased in order to leave space for the complete experience of otherness, as if there were no mediation. While interviewing elites, Elena exposes a feeling of embarrassment for not being professional, due to her inexperience and her lack of formal education. On the other hand, while talking with people from lower social classes, she experiences a sense of guilt, generated by the acknowledgement of an unequal situation she is not able to change through her writing.

Even though differences of social class are an overarching obsession in Poniatowska's writing, they are not so evident in her documentary narratives. In these narratives, social differences are not explicitly questioned by the narrator, for she prefers to merely transcribe the voices of others. It is in fictional texts like *La "Flor de Lis"*, where the author's long-term concern is exposed in its great complexity:

Pero ¿quién es esa gente? ¿De dónde sale toda esa gente?, pregunta tía Francisca como si hubiera descubierto una nueva especie humana.
 —Tía, es gente común y corriente, gente del diario.
 —Lo has dicho bien, gente común. Antes no había tanta en el mundo. Nunca he visto tal multitud de gente fea a la vez. (80)

Poniatowska-as-narrator might be seen then, as acting as if she wanted to respond to a mystical call from the strange priest of *La "Flor de Lis"*; the one who motivates Mariana to go outside her comfort zone to confront the unknown reality of her country: 'atrévete a caminar en la multitud, entre los pelados como ustedes los llaman, avientate, rompe el orden establecido' (251). Poniatowska, thus, seeks not only a dialogue with Others but a complete fusion.

2.2 Carlos Monsiváis: The protestant of ‘La Portales’

Monsiváis was born when the post-revolutionary social agitation was over and the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) had consolidated a strong nationalistic culture. This was the period when President Lázaro Cárdenas started a programme of import substitution in order to accelerate the country’s own means of production. Monsiváis’s family experienced the consequences of an economic stability that allowed social mobility and the rise of mass media and consumer society. When Carlos was still a child, the family moved from La Merced — a poor neighbourhood in the city centre still known for its illegal activities — to Portales, a newer and quieter middle-class area, by then almost a suburb of the capital; Portales would be his residence until his death in 2010. In his first known book, an autobiography published at the age of twenty-eight, he narrates:

Desde el principio la pequeña burguesía me acogió en su seno. Fui creciendo extasiado ante un paisaje de ‘Últimas Cenas’; llama-al-técnico-porque-se-descompuso-la-lavadora; qué-le-vas-a-dar-a-tú-mamá-el-diez-de-mayo; cómo-se-parece-tu-abuelita-a-Sara-García; vámonos-el-domingo-a-Cuernavaca; y demás símbolos de la elegancia y el ascenso de una clase (1966: 11).⁵⁷

As if he was already announcing a topic that would be present in his future work, Monsiváis chooses to start his own life-story with a class-based definition of the self. In a few playful images, he exhibits the elements through which a new society was developing: kitsch aesthetics, technology, consumerism, popular culture, film, leisure and urban lifestyle. Later in the same text, which somehow echoes both the teenage confessional and the rebel perspective of J. D. Salinger’s *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951), Monsiváis depicts himself as ‘precoz, protestante y presuntuoso’ (11). He offers as evidence an account of the everyday activities of a young urban man exposed to drugs and late-night parties, but also to the ideological influences of Sunday School and literature. Although this text does not attempt to present itself as a *crónica*, it is an early example of the descriptive style that Monsiváis would go on to employ in later works and that would distinguish his texts from more traditional journalistic productions.

⁵⁷ Published in 1966 with a prologue by Emanuel Carballo, *Autobiografía* is the only autobiographical work by Monsiváis and it was never reprinted. In May 2008, *emeequis* magazine published a selection from the book under the title ‘La biografía que Monsiváis quisiera sepultar’, although it was illustrated with photographs donated by Monsiváis himself. In the introduction to the text, the editor states that Monsiváis tried to erase any trace of the book (Vega 2008).

Monsiváis was known as: a journalist; a fiction writer; a public intellectual; an historian; a radio presenter; an activist; a collector of material relating to popular culture; a bibliophile; a defender of animal and human rights; and also an actor.⁵⁸ During his prolific literary career he published essays, journalistic articles, film and music reviews, translations, short stories, prologues, and plays. It is not surprising that many of those genres can also be found in the five chronicle collections published while he was alive: *Días de guardar* (1970), *Amor perdido* (1977), *Entrada libre* (1987), *Escenas de pudor y liviandad* (1988), and *Los rituales del caos* (1995).

While Poniatowska's chronicles are rooted in the Latin American *testimonio* and adopt ethnographic techniques, Monsiváis looked more at American New Journalism as a stylistic model for his approach to Mexican reality.⁵⁹ He might also have been influenced by social theorists of his time. The style and theme of *Días de guardar*, for instance, resembles Roland Barthes's *Mythologies* (1957). If Poniatowska's pact of verisimilitude is based on a careful editing of her informant's voices, leading direct speech to the extreme, Monsiváis prefers the use of indirect speech and stream-of-consciousness writing to recreate otherness. This can only be attempted through the means of literary techniques: 'While he cannot fully overcome the unbridgeable gap between his own and the consciousness of those others, he carefully positions himself metajournalistically as "other" to all' (Egan 2001: 231).

The author initiated his career as a journalist by hosting a radio programme on cinema at Radio UNAM. During the 1970s–1980s, when he was the director of *La cultura en México*, the cultural supplement of *Siempre!* magazine, he started to obtain wider recognition. Throughout his writing career he continued to publish in counter culture, leftist and marginal publications as well as in mainstream media — even in those publications which were in competition with each other, or were ideologically opposed, such as the newspapers *Novedades*, *Excélsior*, *El Universal*, *La Jornada*, and the magazines *Proceso*, *Nexos*, and *Letras Libres*. His column, *Por mi madre bohemios*, used to be published in regional newspapers around the country, a fact that also brought him

⁵⁸ According to the website IMDb, he is known in the film industry for *Los caifanes* (1967), *Fonqui* (1985), and *The Life and Times of Frida Kahlo* (2005). He was an actor in nine films, the writer of four, and he appears as himself in at least 24 documentaries, television series and movies <<http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0598658>> [accessed 5 April 2017].

⁵⁹ Monsiváis's personal library, now open to the public as part of the Biblioteca de México, contains a wide collection of the major New Journalists: Truman Capote, Norman Mailer, and Tom Wolfe. He also owned first editions of the works of Pierre Bourdieu, Roland Barthes, Michel De Certeau, and Susan Sontag. One could infer then that Monsiváis was aware of the literary, sociological and anthropological trends of the 1960s–1980s, especially those studies centred on popular culture, film, photography, and everyday life.

national recognition as a leader of public opinion far beyond the cultural elite of the capital.

Regardless of his popularity in mass media, for he was himself a cultural referent in Mexico, Monsiváis did not reach the same levels in his native academic circles. In *Crónica de la literatura reciente* (1982), José Joaquín Blanco included Monsiváis among other, then young, authors, such as Carlos Fuentes, Sergio Pitol and Elena Poniatowska. The critic considered that ‘Monsiváis es el primer escritor libre del México moderno, el primero que empieza a tomarse las grandes libertades y a decir las grandes barbaridades’ (1982: 85). Monsiváis’s hybrid style and methodology allowed Octavio Paz to say, according to Blanco, that he was a symbol of the modern urban Mexican and a new literary genre in himself.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, even though Monsiváis wrote exhaustively on Mexican culture and nationalism, he was barely quoted by social scientists publishing in Mexico in the 1980s. In *La jaula de la melancolía, identidad y metamorphosis del mexicano* (1987), for instance, Roger Bartra refers to six essays by Monsiváis in his bibliography but only quotes him in two footnotes. Also, Néstor García Canclini’s *Culturas híbridas, estrategias para entrar y salir de la modernidad* (1989) strongly overlaps with Monsiváis’s intellectual interests, but mentions only two of his papers.

Monsiváis’s creative way of describing and interpreting contemporary Mexican society might have been uncomfortable not only for the political sphere but for both traditional academic and journalistic circles. This is because what might have been at stake was, in Bordieuan terms, the battle in the Mexican cultural field between high-brow culture and popular culture. This was demonstrated with the Paz-Monsiváis controversy of 1976–1977.⁶¹ Nevertheless, the question of whether Monsiváis was a symbol of the counter-culture, specifically that of the 1980s in Mexico City, is debatable. It is true that Monsiváis published on the topic of marginalities and popular culture, a topic that usually did not find space in academia or journalism. However, he wrote from the position of a public intellectual, working through the mainstream media. Socially, he was part of the underground circles of young artists, or at least he was known there and visited cafés and

⁶⁰ The quote, however, does not appear in the book by Paz that is referenced, although the last phrase has also been quoted by José Emilio Pacheco in *Las alusiones perdidas* (2007).

⁶¹ Regardless of the admiration that young Monsiváis had for Paz, and the positive comments Paz had already expressed regarding Monsiváis, they were involved in a public disagreement. They criticized each other’s intellectual and political attitudes through a series of articles published in *Proceso* magazine. The controversy was interpreted as a generational struggle for cultural power and legitimacy rather than as an ideological discussion (‘Polémica Carlos Monsiváis–Octavio Paz’ 2004). During the dispute, Paz wrote: ‘Monsiváis no es un hombre de ideas sino de ocurrencias. La acumulación de detalles no es un defecto cuando se escribe una crónica; sí lo es en la crítica intelectual y política. La ligereza se convierte en enredijo y aparecen las tres funestas fu: confuso, profuso y difuso’ (*Proceso* 1977).

bars frequented by gay and feminist activists, publishers of small magazines, and avant-garde artists (Osorno 2014). One of the striking characteristics of his public persona is actually that he was friends with both people with left- and right-wing ideologies, and he maintained a critical position regarding all parties in power.⁶² Being critical of those in power from the inside, as Egan observes, made him a polemical character, but also gave him an exceptional position as both witness and mediator. After all, he was aware of the influential role of the journalist in his society:

El periodista, ese inquilino de las vanidades de la Vida, un ser que mezcla el ánimo romántico y el cinismo, que se entusiasma con lo que no se publica y se aburre con lo que sí se imprime. ¿Qué se le va a hacer? Él no inventó el Sistema, no tiene la culpa de que los mexicanos sean tan dejados, y no puede vivir sin comer (Monsiváis 2010a: 110).

2.2.1 The centre of all margins

Monsiváis would hardly represent himself more openly than in his autobiographical ‘chronicle-esque’ book: ‘Me apasionan mis defectos: el exhibicionismo, la arbitrariedad, la incertidumbre, el snobismo, la condición azarosa’ (1966: 62). Although the self is not so evidently depicted in his most popular chronicles, the sense of being out of place permeates his narrative.

As Egan writes, he is ‘a self-fashioned outsider who invades the home territory of Mexico’s elite and popular sectors’ (2001: 231). In a Catholic and family-oriented country, he was raised by a divorced mother, Esther Monsiváis, who educated him in the Protestant faith. On the one hand, attending Protestant Sunday School influenced his worldview, as can be observed in the constant Biblical references found in his narratives. On the other hand, official schooling immersed him in the complex mixture of nationalistic discourse and Catholic culture, which he would criticise through most of his writing. A true representative of an urban, middle-class man, Monsiváis used his intermediary position to be a critical observer of social life in Mexico, of both the lower and upper classes.

Another important element in the formation of his identity as an outsider in a conservative society must have been his homosexuality. Although this was never explored, nor even referred to either in his writing or in his public life, it was common

⁶² This and other information regarding Monsiváis’s social and intellectual circles is based on my interview with his friend Consuelo Sáizar (2016).

knowledge among his closest social circles (Lamas 2010).⁶³ For while Monsiváis supported gay causes both in his writing and in his life as public intellectual — he used to attend the Mexico City gay pride parade as guest of honour, for instance — it remains true that there is no evidence of the disclosure of his identity in interviews or public events, and he was not seen as a gay author in the collective imagination.

It could be argued that if he had lived in a different society, the representation of the self in Carlos Monsiváis's writing could have taken another form than that of an elusive, baroque, or ironic narrator, who makes the reader feel his presence as witness, but at the same time says little about himself. In contrast with Salvador Novo, who was the protagonist of his own chronicles, Carlos Monsiváis was never at the centre of his narration (Villoro 2007). It is possible to infer, however, that Monsiváis's intention might have been to follow his intellectual father in his literary techniques to represent a similar worldview. Monsiváis begins his biographical work *Salvador Novo. Lo marginal en el centro* (2000b), with a reflection on Novo's homosexuality and the influence this identity had on his writing:

Novo desprende de su orientación sexual prácticas estéticas, estrategias para decir la verdad, desafíos de gesto y escritura [...] intenta desmedidamente la refinada y sagaz travesía: el intelectual que se propone ser figura popular, el hombre marginal que obtiene el acatamiento de la sociedad que, moralmente, lo desprecia. [...] con Novo empieza de modo ostensible la sensibilidad gay. [...] la sociedad que lo persigue termina reconociéndolo —y, por lo mismo, ocultado su significado— en vida. (11–12)

Even if there is not an evident homosexual identity represented in Monsiváis's literature, based on a close reading of his work I argue that it is still possible to find a queer sensibility in his approach to reality. Like Novo, Monsiváis challenges traditional conceptions of identity through language. He questions not only national identity, as critics have noted, but also sexual identity. But, unlike Novo, Monsiváis could not obtain the social recognition of this part of his identity in life, even when he gave readers some clues: 'La intimidad de un autor está siempre a la disposición de sus lectores' (12). Contrary to Poniatowska, Monsiváis did not always respect the speech of his Others. He did not quote them verbatim (he might not have recorded them at all). His style is, however, coherent with the standing point from which he used to document reality. I

⁶³ According to Lamas, weeks before he died, Carlos Monsiváis was planning to write a prologue for *Que se abra esa puerta* (2010c). What he would have written if he had the time one can never know, although the working title can be read as a request or a plea, and already suggests the image of 'getting out of the closet' associated with a public openness towards the homosexual self.

believe he did not need to distinguish the otherness through direct quotations of their voices because he was acting not as a mediator but as an another other.

Although in his autobiography the self is more obviously present than in his further *crónicas*, the position of the first-person narrator hardly changes in his documentary narratives: the narrator is always a middle-class public intellectual, able to declare without guilt that:

para mí, el subdesarrollo es la imposibilidad de ver El silencio de Bergman o de contemplar a Margot Fonteyn y Nureyev o de gozar una buena comedia musical o de estar al día en Últimos Gritos y lecturas y giros existenciales. Pero en general el subdesarrollo tiene significados menos culturales, más drásticos (56).

There are moments, however, when Monsiváis chooses stream-of-consciousness narration in order to appropriate the voice of a collective other. This collective other becomes a symbol of national identity, as represented through a ‘Monsiváian’ lens:

En la vida diaria yo valgo madre, pero además de valer madre, descubro que éste es un método de evaluación como cualquier otro, porque valer madre, carecer de la mayoría de los derechos elementales, entre ellos el de un porvenir visible para mí y mi familia, no me impide divertirme, saber que el llanto que mi muerte provoque se agravará por el costo del entierro, vivir en el seno de la rijosa y aquietable Raza de Bronce, crear la propia ciudad de mis deseos a la medida de mis sometimientos. (2010a: 126)

Carlos Monsiváis died in 2010 and his corpse was honoured in Palacio de Bellas Artes, Mexico’s most important theatre. It was a two-day public funeral, organized by the Mexican government, under the presidency of the right-wing party PAN. Few media outlets reported in real time that during the ceremony a group of LGBT activists covered the coffin with a rainbow flag, which was later hidden by a bigger Mexican flag.

2.2.2 Mexico ‘camp’

Published when journalistic writing was still solemn and rigid, as was the official *priista* discourse, Monsiváis’s chronicles are outstanding for their sense of humour, irreverence and irony⁶⁴. His style has been analysed from the concept of *neo-barroco*, and the Bakhtinian idea of ‘carnavalesque’ (Kraniauskas 1997; Egan 2001; Moraña and Sánchez

⁶⁴ This similitude between journalism and official, political discourse may not be surprising since media content was controlled by the government, and reporters could be corrupted by institutions. Giving money to journalists in exchange for a favourable image or news piece was common practice (Monsiváis 2010a).

2007). I propose, however, to explore the application of ‘camp’ as an overall influence on his narrative. I consider, therefore, that in Monsiváis’s *crónicas* there is a camp worldview from which he explores and (re)constructs the self and reality.

I agree with the observation that in Monsiváis’s *crónicas* one can discern the influence of the Latin American baroque tradition that was revitalised for the twentieth-century narrative by Alejo Carpentier, whom Monsiváis must have read. The presence of *heteroglossia* is also evident as a stylistic technique used by the author, for the collage of voices used to represent a collective, massive otherness is obviously reminiscent of Bakhtin’s findings in his theory of the novel. I argue, nevertheless, that a revision of Monsiváis’s writing from the perspective of camp aesthetics can offer a deeper and more complex understanding of his poetics. The concept of camp allows Monsiváis to uncover the elusive self in his writing, as well as to reflect on his own ethical and aesthetical positions towards the representation of otherness.

In her essay ‘Notes on “Camp”’, Susan Sontag refers to the concept as a modern sensibility whose essence is artifice and exaggeration, or in other words, the unnatural. ‘Camp’ is applicable to people and objects, but it is a taste rather than a theory, and therefore it is hard to explore it from a perspective based on reason. In Sontag’s definition, camp is an action upon the world, which aims to convince the audience of the benefits of an artificial, stylish world:

To camp is a mode of seduction — one which employs flamboyant mannerisms susceptible of a double interpretation: gestures full of duplicity, with a witty meaning for cognoscenti and another, more impersonal, for outsiders [...] Behind the ‘straight’ public sense in which something can be taken, one has found a private zany experience of the thing (2009 [1964]: 281).

Originally named only among ‘small urban cliques’, Sontag does not deny that camp has a strong connection with the androgynous and the epicene, in the sense that it responds to exaggeration and artifice. However, I propose a reading of Monsiváis’s chronicles from a camp perspective based on textual analysis rather than on biographical approaches.

There is no doubt that Monsiváis was interested in Sontag’s work on the topic, although his position towards the employment of the term was rather ambiguous. On one hand, in ‘De las variedades de la experiencia homoerótica’ (2010c [2007]), a late paper in his career, he criticises the use of the term to refer to questions of identity. On the other hand, in ‘El hastío es pavo real que se aburre de luz en la tarde (notas del camp en México)’, an earlier text published in *Días de guardar*, Monsiváis directly appropriated

Sontag's discourse, translating her 'notes' without doing the proper referencing. I believe, however, that these two opposed interpretations of Susan Sontag's essay can be read as an artifice, or the narrator's deliberate self-contradiction.

Just like Oscar Wilde — the camp writer *par excellence* and one of Monsiváis's favourite authors — the chronicler loved aphorisms. Monsiváis used to incorporate into his texts certain aphorisms from Mexican popular culture, as well as his own creations. The anti-solemn tone and the parody of the self and others, which are also characteristic of camp aesthetics, are part of Monsiváis's chronicle style. As in Sontag's essay, the use of jottings instead of the formal essay structure is usual in Monsiváis's texts.

Sontag makes a list of objects and people that can be considered camp, from Tiffany lamps and Swan Lake to Mozart and Wilde. After reading Sontag's essay, Monsiváis adds to this list an eccentric variety of Mexican figures and things, such as María Félix, Salvador Novo, Jorge Negrete, the Palacio de Bellas Artes, Amado Nervo's poems or Chapultepec Castle.⁶⁵ Indeed, if one considers Monsiváis's broad interest in popular culture, the list of Camp objects and people could be infinite. It is his own consciously camp perspective that makes a different view of Mexican reality possible through his texts: 'En un país que ha padecido vastamente a sus políticos, sus literatos oficiales [...] su espíritu de seriedad y su solemnidad absoluta, lo Camp es una perspectiva de justicia y venganza' (191).

Another example of Monsiváis's affinity with camp aesthetics is his activity as a collector. The author collected a huge number of paintings, toys, comics, postcards, print media, and other heterogeneous objects. Most of these objects were acquired in Mexico City flea markets and they show the collector's camp taste, particularly embodying camp's nostalgic approach to the past and its close relationship with *kitsch* aesthetics.⁶⁶

If camp is, thus, an 'epicene' looking into the world, Monsiváis used language to appropriate this style as a way of self-expression, but also to create his own version of Mexico through language. It is in this camp version of Mexico that Monsiváis's identity could be, perhaps, fully expressed. For life is not stylish, as Sontag says, 'to perceive Camp in objects and persons is to understand Being-as-Playing-a-Role. It is the farthest extension, in sensibility, of the metaphor of life as theater' (280). By the end of his autobiography, a young Monsiváis expresses his desire to dance and sing in the main square of Mexico City, the *Zócalo*, which is the symbolic centre of his country.

⁶⁵ Monsiváis wished to have a public funeral at Bellas Artes building, and he had it (Sáizar 2016).

⁶⁶ Monsiváis's collection of popular culture is at the Museo del Estanquillo, founded in 2006 by the Mexico City government after his donation.

2.3 The public space in *crónica* and *crónica* as public space

To walk the city is an act of speech that chroniclers make twice. Firstly, they experience the act physically, during their ethnographic-journalistic research, and then symbolically, by representing the experience in their writing. By the mere act of walking on the streets, the chroniclers are occupying the city. Therefore, space for these authors is a social place of performance, but also it becomes a place for knowledge through the art of writing it (Lefebvre: 33). Nevertheless, contrary to the *voyeur*, who according to De Certeau (1986) aims to pleasantly observe the crowds from a skyscraper, Monsiváis and Poniatowska belong to another kind of contemporary figure in the city: the walker. They are not contemplative strangers but citizens as any other, immersed in the crowds that they describe.

In works such as Monsiváis's *Los rituales del caos* or Poniatowska's *Todo empezó en domingo*, which still preserve a *costumbrista* style, there is an exhibition of the polyphonic and multisensory possibilities of representation, where the city is a space of interaction between social classes, memories, and experiences. For these authors, Mexico City can only be described by an endless accumulation of spatial references. The city is understood as an experience of the senses, that is by means of the body occupying and sharing a space with others. In the introduction to the 1997 reprint of *Todo empezó en domingo*, Poniatowska describes the city as follows:

Ciudad infinita, México es todas las ciudades; es París y Nueva York, Berlín y Madrid, Varsovia y Praga. Tiene todas las edades, es prehispánica y es moderna. Es horrible y es fascinante. Es cruel y es díscola, da puñaladas traperas y besos tronados. Sórdida y homicida es asquerosa y es niña de primera comunión. Ningún organismo humano debería soportarla y sin embargo aquí seguimos ofrendándole nuestros pulmones planchados para que ella los arrugue. [...] Merenguera y milagrosa, la ciudad ofrece tacos, elotes, camote de mieles, café con piquete, ¡colorada sandía!, mangos abiertos como descomunales flores de oro y en las esquinas el árbol de la vida de los algodones rosa estridente. (14)

Poniatowska uses personification as a technique to describe the city. Through language, the city is then transformed in an ageless, cruel and fascinating woman who can be loved and hated at once. She also proposes a close contact between the reader and the city by evoking the sounds of kisses, the feel of stab-wounds, the taste of tacos, corn, sweet potatoes and coffee, and the smell of carrion.

Emphasizing the visual over any other sensorial approach to the city, Monsiváis begins *Los rituales del caos* by asking the reader ‘¿Qué fotos tomaría usted en la ciudad interminable?’ From the perspective of an observer who tries both to experience and to find the appropriate distance to reflect upon that experience, he describes the space as if it could only be fully meaningful when it is crowded, occupied by its inhabitants:

En el terreno visual, la Ciudad de México es, sobre todo, la demasiada gente. Se puede hacer abstracción del asunto, ver o fotografiar amaneceres desolados, gozar el poderío estético de muros y plazuelas, redescubrir la perfección del aislamiento. Pero en el Distrito Federal la obsesión permanente (el tema insoslayable) es la multitud que rodea a la multitud (17).

Following Lefebvre in the idea of space as a social construction, Monsiváis focuses on the people’s use of space to approach the meaning of spacial practices. Squares and murals can be beautiful but if one looks at them alone they are not saying all they have to say. By insisting on the multitude as protagonist, Monsiváis is making evident the ‘illusion of transparency’ that Lefebvre considers to be part of what a public space conceals. According to these ideas, observing the empty city is not experiencing it at all, for it is the mass as character that shapes the city’s identity. The chronicler then chooses to create images that connect the mass with the public space in specific circumstances:

En la capital, éstas son algunas de las imágenes más frecuentes:

- las multitudes en el Metro (casi seis millones de usuarios al día) se comprimen para cederle espacio a la idea misma de espacio.
- las multitudes en el Estadio de Ciudad Universitaria hacen su examen de inscripción.
- la economía subterránea desborda las aceras, y hace del tianguis la subsistencia de la calle. (17)

City and citizens become, therefore, the same object of study, for they are that ‘identidad acumulativa’, the sum of all places and subjectivities. As Linda Egan notes, the Mexican contemporary chronicle ‘thrusts its opinions, emotions, criticisms and other personal stances upon the public, engaging the reader in a dialogue that may co-opt, conspire or challenge’ (93). This is shown particularly in the chronicles on the 1985 Mexico City earthquake. Rather than placing the attention of the narrative on specific individuals, Poniatowska and Monsiváis focus on the mass. For Poniatowska, the mass becomes a synonym for civil society. The mass is the protagonist: ‘Una multitud se echa a la calle, una turba espantada se detiene frente a los edificios. De esa multitud se desprenden muchos voluntarios. Entran a la cadena de manos, suben a los escombros, piden un pico,

una pala' (1988b: 21). What matters for Monsiváis, on the other hand, is the discovery of the mass as a collective force:

El reordenamiento social es inesperado. Los vecinos acordonan los sitios en ruinas y las amas de casa preparan comida, pero son los jóvenes quienes llevan el peso de la acción [...] No se consideran héroes, pero se sienten incorporados al heroísmo de la tribu, del barrio, de la banda, del grupo espontáneamente formado, de la ciudad distinta (2006: 78).

In these cases, chroniclers are taking to the streets and therefore appropriating and constructing public space, along with the citizens they are representing. Contemporary Mexican chronicles represent the consciousness of the other and a sensorial imagery in order to force the reader to participate in the construction of the discourse (Egan 2001). In *Luz y luna, las lunitas*, for instance, Poniatowska seems to take the reader by the hand, walking with him or her from her middle- and upper-middle-class neighbourhoods (Colonia Del Valle, Las Lomas, Coyoacán or Paseo de la Reforma), to the poor ones in which her informants live: 'Por estas calles del centro pulula el pueblo taquero, portero, pozolero, empinarrefrescos; en cada esquina hierve un perol, humea un bote de tamales, un anafre o un sartén grande colmado de aceite' ('El último guajolote': 26). The chronicler thus identifies with a reader who, like herself, might have never walked through the outskirts of the city. She describes the space as an outsider could experience it, always in comparison to a more comfortable side of the same city:

Allí donde México se va haciendo chaparrito, allí donde las calles se pierden y quedan desamparadas, allí vive la Jesusa. [...] Así como zumba el calor, zumban las moscas. Qué grasiento y qué chorreado es el aire de ese rumbo; la gente vive en las mismas sartenes donde fríe las garnachas y las quesadillas de papa y flor de calabaza. ('Vida y muerte de Jesusa': 37)

For Poniatowska and Monsiváis, memory plays an important role in relation to space. According to De Certeau, the sense of being in a space that has disappeared also contributes to the notion of space as a source for memory. In *Todo empezó en domingo*, Poniatowska uses the first person plural to include herself in a new urban society:

No éramos modernos, en la colonia Cuauhtémoc que es bien elegante se veían maizales (después los extrañaron: '¿Pues a dónde se los llevaron?'), en la Lagunilla, los inspectores recogían las revistas *Playboy* de los puestos de libros de viejo y para ver películas pornográficas era necesario viajar a Suecia (14).

The chronicler writes to preserve the memory of those spaces that have already changed. At the same time, she opens a dialogue with a reader who can also remember details of that recent past, proposing a collective reconstruction of the original space. Monsiváis also describes lost spaces in ‘Los días del terremoto’, published in *Entrada libre*. In this text, the narrator names a building that has been destroyed, while he recalls the experience of a group of dressmakers during the 1985 earthquake in Mexico City:

Ellas ignorarán siempre de dónde surgió la destreza que les permitió moverse con suprema agilidad entre los vaivenes, descender del tercer o cuarto piso del edificio usando telas amarradas, prefiriendo caerse y matarse antes que otro segundo en el infierno. Ellas recuerdan: el edificio estaba –digamos– hecho un arco, se derrumbaban los muros, las escaleras despedazadas, el polvo lo nublaba todo, las máquinas y los trozos de concreto parecían volar, y había que salir de allí como fuese. Al reportero, la joven llorosa le cuenta: ‘Yo estaba en el taller de costura y me iba a arrodillar junto a mis compañeras ante el altar de la Virgen de Guadalupe, cuando decidí meterme debajo de una máquina. Eso me salvó’. (1994 [1987]: 91–92)

Although Monsiváis uses a third-person narrator, referring to himself as *reportero*, he becomes the storyteller who appropriates the speech of others in order to preserve collective memory (Benjamin 1999). Monsiváis narrates the experience of the earthquake in indirect style, but he chooses direct speech to highlight the faith of the informant in God and the ‘Virgen de Guadalupe’, including in the story another element of cultural identity. In a style that resembles John Hersey’s *Hiroshima* (1946), this passage positions the transformation of the space at the centre of the narrative.⁶⁷ But it is the destroyed space in relation to its occupants that gives dramatic tension to the story. This is why the chronicle is not about the destruction of a building but the story of the people who died in it and of those who survived to tell their testimony.

The lost place represented in the texts could not have a real or immediate referent, for it is an abstraction of the memory, following Lefebvre. Nevertheless, the *crónica* becomes a representational space by relating to both objects and people. Chroniclers, thus, as anthropologists, ethnologists and psychoanalysts, consider representational spaces to be complex and dynamic entities. By depicting public spaces as meaningful products of their societies, and not as isolated landmarks of national culture, the urban chroniclers are also constructing an alternative space for social interaction. These *cronistas* demonstrate that Mexico City can only be experienced from multiple and diverse points of view.

⁶⁷ *Hiroshima* is a Pulitzer–Prize–winning work of non–fiction based on the testimonies of six survivors of the 1945 atomic bomb. It is considered an important antecedent of New Journalism and it is still a referent for literary journalists worldwide.

Although they adopt different positions regarding the self, both Poniatowska and Monsiváis explore their confrontations with all kind of Others in the public space. In their narratives, the masses are formed of all those Others: the poor, the female, the homosexual, the indigenous, the peasant, the student. These Others are not passive, but active citizens who move, talk and express themselves in the streets, squares, parks, schools, stadiums and public transport of the City. Chronicle, as conceived by these authors, is a discursive mode to represent public space, and *la sociedad que se organiza*, in Monsiváis's words. Beyond this conception, the chronicle is also a public space itself, one in which the *cronistas* position themselves as public intellectuals.

Considering the history of censorship that media has suffered in Latin American societies, it is understandable that the hybrid discourse of the *crónica* has been the place for public discussions that could not be presented in other journalistic discourses. Therefore, the chronicles of Poniatowska and Monsiváis can be considered a public space as defined by Habermas (1992), that is, as a space in which the democratic actions of citizenship are encouraged. By documenting and interpreting social interactions, both chroniclers are able to show the ways in which the Mexican society has produced its own public space. They, thus, offer to their readers an aesthetical experience and, at the same time, reveal new knowledge. Since Independence, art, at least in the form of high-brow culture, has been a privileged space for Mexican elites, a practice isolated from popular culture and the collective construction of national identity. Between literature and journalism, the *crónica* is a hybrid space in which intellectuals encounter other citizens, a space in which a public conversation becomes possible.

CHAPTER 3. A CERTAIN EFFECT OF TRUTH: A PERONIST PALIMPSEST

During the Peronist era, many newspapers and magazines were closed, and journalists disappeared (Páez de la Torre 2002; Gambini 1999).⁶⁸ It is not surprising then that for Argentinian intellectuals, fiction was the most popular form through which to write about reality. In the context of censorship and political instability, literature maintained a complex relationship with Peronism (Mayer 1994). To write about Peronism, fiction writers used metaphors and allegories rather than referring directly to facts and real names.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, it was difficult, if not impossible, to publish an objective account of the regime from inside the country. The study of Peronism was conducted by foreign historians, particularly in the United States, who were free from the regime's censorship.⁷⁰

After Perón's death, Robert Alexander published *Juan Domingo Perón: A History* (1979). In this work, the American historian mentions that after several attempts, he interviewed Perón in Madrid, on 1 September 1960. Alexander was disappointed by the falsehoods in Perón's speech. He did not use these impressions, nor his interview notes — seemingly, he did not record the conversation — as part of his historical narration at all, but left them as an appendix.

Another American historian, Joseph Page, published what remains one of the most relevant and complete biographies on Perón in 1983. Although Page states that his intention is to tell the truth, he admits in the introduction to his work that:

⁶⁸ My examples here concern only events from Perón's lifetime. He was president of Argentina in two periods: 1946–1955, and 1973–1974. Peronist ideology, represented by the Partido Justicialista, had a contemporary revival during the presidencies of 1989 (Menem), 1995 (Menem), 2003 (Kirchner), 2007 (Fernández de Kirchner) and 2011 (Fernández de Kirchner).

⁶⁹ From this period, one can find short stories like Julio Cortázar's 'Casa tomada' (1946), Jorge Luis Borges's and Adolfo Bioy Casares's 'La fiesta del monstruo' (1955), David Viñas's 'La señora muerta' (*Las malas costumbres* 1963), Ricardo Piglia's 'Mata-Hari 55' (*La invasión* 1967); poems like Leónidas Lamborghini's 'El letrista proscripto' (*Las patas en las fuentes* 1965) and 'Eva Perón en la hoguera' (*Partitas* 1972), Néstor Perlongher's 'El cadáver' (*Austria-Hungría* 1980); and novels such as Ernesto Sábato's *Sobre héroes y tumbas* (1961), Beatriz Guido's *El incendio y las visperas* (1964), and Leopoldo Marechal's *Megafón o la guerra* (1970). See Davies (2007) for more information.

⁷⁰ Argentinian historians like Hugo Gambini and Horacio Verbitsky wrote some articles during the regime, but only started to publish books after Perón's death, and after democracy were restored in 1983. Martínez himself waited until 1985 to publish *La novela de Perón*, and even longer to publish the complete transcriptions of his interview in *Las memorias del General* (1996). Exceptional cases are the authors with explicit sympathy for the regime, like Enrique Pavón Pereyra, who claimed to be Perón's official biographer.

Juan Perón presents formidable obstacles to the biographer. He left behind relatively few reliable records of his long public career, perhaps under the conviction that he would fare better in the eyes of posterity if judgments about him did not rest upon hard fact. His many books, pamphlets, articles, speeches, letters and taped conversations are so permeated with contradiction, exaggeration and misstatement that they must be used with extreme caution. (1983: ix)

Page continues his introduction by narrating his surprise while he found out that the personal archives of both Perón's first and his second presidencies were being eaten by rats in an abandoned government storage facility. He also mentions the difficulties associated with obtaining other reliable material for his research: the correspondence was locked in Madrid, either saved by his secretary or lost. Publications of the time were hard to find, and people who know Perón closely refused to give their testimony.

Contrary to the motivations of these researchers, Tomás Eloy Martínez's initial decision to approach Perón originated within the commercial environment of a popular magazine. The author, however, was to agree with the academics regarding the difficulties of distinguishing fact from fiction in Perón's own accounts of his life. What was left in the margins or appendices of the history books form the centre of Martínez's narratives:

Cuando compaginé las grabaciones, advertí que Perón había omitido hechos importantes y que en algunos casos los había tergiversado, ordenándolos bajo una luz más favorable. Al enviarle la versión final para que la aprobase, adjunté una serie de notas al pie de página en la que dejaba constancia de las omisiones e inexactitudes observadas. Perón me devolvió el texto final de las memorias sin corrección alguna. Quería las memorias que él había dictado, y punto. (2009b: 152)

3.1 Tomás Eloy Martínez

Tomás Eloy Martínez was born in San Miguel de Tucumán, Argentina, on 16 July 1934, and he died in Buenos Aires at the age of seventy-five.⁷¹ He lived in Venezuela, France and the USA. He married three times, and had seven children. Better known for his novel *Santa Evita* (1995), one of the most translated Argentinian novels of all times, Martínez is also recognized within the Latin American journalistic elite for being a founder of newspapers, a media consultant, editor, and workshop instructor. He had a master's

⁷¹ Unless other sources are quoted, the biographical information on Martínez is based on a copy of his 'Curriculum Vitae', obtained in the archive of *La Gaceta* newspaper, the author's official website at <fundaciontem.org>, as well as on Martínez-Richter (1997), Roffé (2003), and Fickelscherer (2003).

degree in literature from Université Paris Diderot, and three honoris causa degrees from Universidad Argentina John F. Kennedy, Universidad Nacional de Tucumán, and Universidad de Guadalajara. He was Professor Emeritus at Rutgers University.

His journalistic career started at *La Gaceta de Tucumán* newspaper. During this time, Martínez also studied for a Bachelor of Arts degree in Spanish and Latin American Literature at Universidad Nacional de Tucumán. He moved to Buenos Aires in 1957 to work as a film critic for *La Nación* newspaper. In 1961, he was fired for his reluctance to publish exclusively positive reviews of American movies (this was expected because their distributors were clients of the newspaper). He wrote at least twelve screenplays, and his first ever publication was actually an essay on Argentinian film: *La obra de Ayala y Torre Nilsson en las estructuras del cine argentino* (1961).⁷² That year, he also started teaching theory of film at Universidad Nacional de la Plata.

In 1962, journalist Jacobo Timerman founded *Primera Plana*, where Martínez started to work firstly as a film and literary critic and later as chief editor. This weekly publication represented the modernization of Argentinian media after Perón's dictatorship, passing from intellectual, elitist magazines such as *Sur* to publications directed at a broader audience, based on the democratic ideals of the Cuban Revolution and mass culture (Quattrocchi–Woisson 2003). Evoking *Time* magazine, and inspired by the style of American New Journalism, it is not surprising that the magazine's products, aimed at a middle-class reader, circulated in the international market. In fact, the first text the magazine sold to *The New Yorker* was a report on the space race, co-written by the magazine's Russian and American correspondents: Tomás Eloy Martínez and Ramiro de Casasbellas (Mudrovcic 1999). *L'Express* also bought Martínez's text on the atomic bombing of Hiroshima.

Martínez published book reviews and interviews with authors who in several cases were also his friends, such as Carlos Fuentes, Augusto Roa Bastos, Mario Vargas Llosa and Adolfo Bioy Casares. Furthermore, Martínez was one of the first editors to publish reviews of Gabriel García Márquez's *Cien años de soledad*, and he welcomed the Colombian author when he visited Buenos Aires for the first time (Martínez 1998).

⁷² Martínez wrote the screenplay for the short film *Bazán* (dir. Ramiro Tamayo 1960), based on a short story he had originally published in *La Gaceta de Tucumán*. It was re-published in 2009 by the independent publishing collective Eloísa Cartonera. He also wrote *El amor elige* (dir. Adolfo Kuhn 1960), *Vida y muerte de un bosque* (1976), *El círculo de Bellas Artes* (1976), *La casa de agua* (1984) and *Le tango de la fin du monde* (1990). In addition, Martínez co-authored *El último piso* (dir. Daniel Cherniasky 1962), *El terrorista* (dir. Daniel Cherniasky, 1962), *El demonio en la sangre* (dir. René Mugica, 1964) and *La Madre María* (dir. Lucas Demare 1974) with Bioy Casares. I found in his archive two more screenplays about Eva Perón, which must have been written around 1989 and would be a point of departure for his later novelistic project on the topic (Buenos Aires, Archivo TEM, SE-D-1).

Although Martínez was younger than the Boom writers, he shared the literary and publishing environment of their time. His idea to write about Perón might have been influenced by the day he first met Carlos Fuentes and heard about his project on the novels of dictatorships (Martínez 1994: 12–13). During this time, he met Francisco Porrúa, editor of *Sudamericana*, the publishing house behind Martínez's first novel, *Sagrado* (1969). By then, Martínez was also working in television, conducting the news program *Telenoche* at Canal 13, and his journalistic work was beginning to earn him recognition and prizes.

In 1970, Martínez moved to Paris in order to study for a master's. Under the supervision of the Russian theorist Tzvetan Todorov, he wrote a dissertation on Jorge Luis Borges and fantastic literature. During his stay in Europe, Martínez was also a correspondent for the Argentinian publishing house *Abril*, which owned the magazines *Siete Días*, *Siete Días Internacional*, *Semana Gráfica* and *Panorama*. It was in this period, and as a job assignment for *Panorama*, that Martínez interviewed Juan Domingo Perón, who was by then an exile in Madrid.

Martínez returned to Buenos Aires in 1971 as editor in chief of the *Abril* magazines. In *Panorama*, he published the news of the execution of sixteen people, members of Peronist and leftist organizations, in the city of Trelew. Four days after this, Martínez was fired from the magazine. The author, however, travelled to Trelew as a freelancer in order to interview witnesses of the event. As a result of his investigation, Martínez published *La pasión según Trelew* in August 1973 when he was already working at *La Opinión* newspaper. As director of its literary supplement, *La Opinión Cultural*, Martínez was in contact with authors such as Osvaldo Soriano, Ricardo Piglia, Juan Gelman and Rodolfo Walsh.

According to Martínez's prologue to the 1997 edition of *La pasión...*, the Trelew story changed his life. The fifth edition, produced just three months after the first one, was prohibited by the local government at the beginning of Perón's last term as President. Perón died in 1974 and was succeeded by his widow, Isabel Martínez de Perón, who had been his vice president. During this time, Martínez received threats from the Triple A, a terrorist group led by José López Rega, who had formerly been Juan Domingo Perón's personal secretary. As a consequence, the author decided to go into exile in Venezuela in 1975, where he worked as a media consultant. In 1978, he founded *El diario de Caracas* and published the short story collection, *Lugar común la muerte*. He also taught at Centro de Estudios Latinoamericanos Rómulo Gallegos, and at the Universidad Católica Andrés

Bello. It was during this time that he met the film critic, writer and academic, Susana Rotker, who would become his wife.

In 1983, he obtained a scholarship from The Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, D.C. to write *La novela de Perón* (1985). After the project was over, he became a lecturer at the University of Maryland. He stayed in the USA until 1987, when he decided to return to his country, that had recently emerged from dictatorship. In Buenos Aires, he was a visiting scholar at Centro de Estudios de Estado y Sociedad, and also worked at Canal 13, directing the shows 'Los argentinos' and 'Los siete locos (libros y lecturas de los argentinos)'.

In 1990, he moved for a short time to Guadalajara, Mexico, in order to fund the newspaper *Siglo 21*, in tandem with the Mexican journalist Jorge Zepeda Patterson. The next year, he published *La mano del amo*, and created the literary supplement *Primer Plano* for the *Página/12* newspaper in Buenos Aires, which he was director of until 1996. He also participated as an assessor in the creation of the FNPI in Colombia. Until his death, Martínez taught workshops on narrative techniques and editing for this foundation, and was one of its most active promoters.

From 1995 to 2009 he again lived in the USA, as he was named Distinguished Professor of Spanish Literature and director of the Latin American Studies Program at Rutgers University, New Jersey. From there, he published for *La Nación*, *El País* and *The New York Times Syndicate*. Despite having to endure the dramatic death of his wife in a car accident in 2000, this period was Martínez's most prolific. He published *Santa Evita* (1995), followed by the non-fiction work, *Las memorias del General* (1996), the collections of chronicles and articles, *El sueño argentino* (1999) and *Ficciones verdaderas* (2000), and the novels *El vuelo de la reina* (Premio Alfaguara 2000), *El cantor de tango* (Premio Konex 2004). In 2008, he published his final novel, *Purgatorio*, and he was awarded the Premio Cóndor de Plata for his career as film critic.

In 2009, he won the Premio Ortega y Gasset de Periodismo, the most prestigious prize for a journalistic career in the Spanish-speaking world. The same year, he became a member of the Academia Nacional de Periodismo, and he was declared 'Ciudadano Ilustre' of Buenos Aires. By then suffering from brain cancer, he returned to Buenos Aires, where he died on 31 January 2010.

3.2 Crafting the news

According to Gerard Genette (1997), paratexts, or the texts that accompany the literary work within or outside the book itself, influence the reception and consumption of that literary work. Within this theoretical framework, I focus on the displacement of authorship of the Peróns' story, from Perón himself to Martínez's multiple versions of it. Therefore I propose a reading of 'Las memorias de Juan Perón' (*Panorama* 1970) and 'Las memorias de Puerta de Hierro' (*Las memorias del General* 1996/*Las vidas del General* 2004) as paratextual discourses accompanying the novels *La novela de Perón* and *Santa Evita*.⁷³ I suggest that Martínez is able to change the meaning of Perón's discourse through a game of palimpsests: he reworks the same piece of information (his interview with Perón) into diverse literary and journalistic genres.

Following Genette's taxonomy,⁷⁴ the epitext of all these works concerning Perón is the conversation between Tomás Eloy Martínez and Juan Domingo Perón.⁷⁵ On one hand, 'Las memorias de Juan Perón' is the result of real encounters between Juan Domingo Perón and Tomás Eloy Martínez that took place at Perón's house in Madrid, Puerta de Hierro. From 26 – 29 March 1970, Martínez recorded Perón reading his memoirs, which had previously been dictated to Perón's secretary, López Rega. The recordings were transcribed and edited by Martínez and, after the approval of Perón, they were published over the next month in three parts in *Panorama*, a weekly magazine based in Buenos Aires.

The first part of Perón's authorised memoirs featured on the cover of issue 155, which appeared in the week beginning 14 April 1970 (see illustration 7). The headline announces, in big white letters, 'Las memorias de Juan Perón' as an exclusive document. It shows a full-colour photograph of an old aged Juan Domingo Perón outside his Spanish country house. He is wearing a brown suit, blue and red striped tie, and golden ring and watch. Unlike the iconic images of Perón from his presidential terms, in this one he is

⁷³ *Las vidas del General* was the author's last edition of *Las memorias del General*. Both editions have the same content, including 'Las memorias de Puerta de Hierro', except for the exclusion of a text originally published in *Panorama* magazine, and the addition of two more texts in *Las vidas del General*. In 2009, Alfaguara publishing house reprinted the book as part of their collection, Biblioteca Tomás Eloy Martínez. Quotes given from 'Las memorias de Puerta de Hierro' follow this latest edition.

⁷⁴ Genette defines epitext as 'any paratextual element not materially appended to the text within the same volume but circulating, as it were, freely, in a virtually limitless physical and social space' (1997: 344). He mentions newspapers and all kinds of media production, including interviews, as examples of epitexts.

⁷⁵ The recording was edited posthumously by Fundación Tomás Eloy Martínez under the title of *Tomás Eloy Martínez: Juan Domingo Perón: Encuentro en Puerta de Hierro* (2014). Designed as an art-object, the work contains heavily edited fragments of the conversations in a CD-ROM format. It also includes a booklet with quotes from Martínez and Perón, along with photographs.

holding one of his dogs in his arms while looking at it, smiling. The text covers pages twenty to twenty-five, under a section called 'Documentos', which highlights its historical rather than journalistic nature (see illustration 8). Nevertheless, the presence of a stand-first, written in the third-person, calls attention to the journalistic procedures used to obtain the information. A stand-first is used in editorial design to set the tone, contextualize and sell the story. It tells the reader of the story's intention, and acts as the bridge or link, both textually and visually, between the headline and the body copy (Zapaterra 2007). In this case, however, it was also used to mention that Perón was in dialogue with the journalist Tomás Eloy Martínez: 'Estas memorias –una aproximación al tema que quizá el ex presidente no escriba nunca– fueron elaboradas, a pedido de Tomás Eloy Martínez, corresponsal de Panorama en París' (*Panorama* 20). The stand-first thus legitimates the truthfulness of the story, for it tells the readers that there was a reliable witness at the same time it gives prestige to the magazine by showing that their journalists are able to organize an encounter with such an important figure.

The body copy is written in the first person, and published in three columns. Its subheadings clearly mark the topics of each section and indicate the text structure: 'El padre y la madre', 'Llegada a Buenos Aires', 'El hermano', 'La vocación', 'La milicia', 'Teoría de los valores', 'Años de preparación' and 'Años de realización'. Additionally, the document is illustrated with eight black and white pictures showing Perón in different periods of his private and public life. Whether he is giving a speech, riding a horse, or practising sports, Perón is represented as a strong, active and self-confident man. Of course, this could reflect Perón's narcissistic aims, since he supervised the publication. It is also possible that it was due to the editor's quest for profit, since it is known that a cover with a celebrity sells more magazines (Zapaterra 2007).

It is important to note that the text is not signed at all, although an editor usually writes the stand-first. Following a common practice of the time, *Panorama* was not particularly keen to give authorship to all its texts. A signature, however, would have been expected for a text based on an interview. One can only guess that it was Tomás Eloy Martínez himself who wrote the introduction in the third-person, or his editor Norberto Firpo. The restricted conditions under which this publication appeared — with Perón acting as editor — and the general censorship of the press during that time in Argentina, does not allow one to think of the question of authorship as a mere issue of the conventions of journalistic genres. On the other hand, in *Las memorias del General*, Martínez stated that he disagreed with the final version of the magazine's text. This might be another reason why he did not sign it. Nevertheless, if declining to print his name after

this text was a subtle way of protesting its unreliability, his most successful way of highlighting the untruthful nature of Perón's account would be by endlessly reworking the content of this original text.

There is no doubt that this is a text of deliberately blurred authorship and, therefore, the question of its genre becomes unclear. If one considers a reading taking into account the practice of journalism, it is clear that the text, as any other mass media product, was collectively constructed by the informant, the reporter, editors and even designers. Although each of the participants would have had their own purposes in communicating a message through this text, one cannot forget that it is ultimately a commercial product. The magazine, then, is selling a supposedly true story of Perón.

Yet it is surprising that in later texts Martínez would refer to the encounter as 'entrevista', and the text that came out of it as 'autobiografía', 'historia de vida' and 'memorias'. From a journalistic point of view, Martínez/Perón's text could easily fit into the category of news, as defined by Teun van Dijk (1988). For van Dijk, news is a kind of discourse that gives new information about recent events. The interview is a 'newsgathering encounter' (97), in which the source, text and conversation are transformed into news discourse. In this sense, the encounter between Perón and Martínez can be considered a newsworthy interview.

There is no doubt that news is constructed through dialogue, particularly in interviews. Nevertheless, the nature of the journalistic dialogue, as opposed to an everyday one, is rather complex. Genette considers, following Philippe Lejeune, that the interview is a false dialogue. Contrary to a conversation, an interview is a dialogue mediated by someone 'whose job it is to ask him (the interviewee) questions and record and transmit his answers' (356). It is 'a dialogue generally short and conducted by a professional journalist' (358). From this more critical perspective, 'Las memorias de Juan Perón' can be read as the product of a dialogue, a journalistic one maybe, but with no other purpose than to record information given by the interviewee. Reading interviews as carefully constructed, (false) dialogues can allow us to question, therefore, the ethics of some journalistic practices and their expressed aspiration to truth.

By declaring that he decided to make a *verbatim* transcription of Perón's speech during their conversations, Martínez demonstrates one of the major ethical concerns of the journalistic practice: that of finding the balance between the voices of the self and the other. Although he tries to confront Perón's version with others, as any good journalist would do, young Martínez cannot escape his position as a powerless reporter; 'yo era solo el compilador, el mediador de la autobiografía' (2009b: 154). When he met Perón,

Martínez was at one end of a complex news system that aimed to legitimate the politician's discourse as trustworthy by publishing it as a journalistic discourse. (see illustration 9)

3.3 A parody of journalism

By re-writing his conversations with Perón, Tomás Eloy Martínez shows the shortcomings of the interview as genre. This might be because the interview represents two worldviews, which are constantly colliding with each other. In this section I focus on the role that some literary devices, such as intertextuality and parody, play in *La novela de Perón* (1985) in order to expose the fictional nature of journalistic discourse.

Martínez's novel was published within the context of postmodernism, and it can be aligned particularly with post-structuralist thinking. It can be read as a rather late representative of what Hutcheon called 'historiographical metafiction' (1984),⁷⁶ and this has even been the point of departure for critics of Martínez's novels. Besides, the author's awareness of the complex relationship between literary and historical discourses was certainly influenced by Hayden White's reflections on historiography (1978). It is possible that the Argentinian author had these critical references in mind while writing *La novela de Perón* during his residence at the Wilson Center.

The novel develops three stories with protagonists whose lives overlap on a single day: 20 June 1973. This is the date of Perón's return to Argentina after eighteen years of exile, when he sought to become President for a third time. Two of Martínez's stories are about writers. In the first one, Perón is writing his memoirs for a book, with the help of his secretary López (José López Rega). In the other one, Zamora the reporter is writing Perón's counter-memoirs for a magazine. The third story is about readers, for it is about a couple of radical Peronist leaders who are reading Zamora's reportage while preparing a march to welcome Perón at Ezeiza airport.

Metafiction in the novel is generally used in the representation of Perón writing his memoirs. Perón, and not the autodiegetic narrator, is the most self-conscious character in the novel. He is the one capable of manipulating the story.

⁷⁶ With this term, Hutcheon refers to a particular literary form of novel that appeared in the 1970s.

In *Las vidas del General*, Martínez confesses that the encounter with the ex-President was not a properly journalistic interview. His assignment was to record a text read by Perón, previously written by his secretary José López Rega. However, this recorded story was constantly changing before his eyes: ‘A veces, Perón incorporaba digresiones al relato e iba llenando los vacíos de lo que López leía. Otras veces, el mayordomo corregía los recuerdos de Perón o los aderezaba con comentarios insólitos.’ (17). Perón’s manipulation of the material during their actual encounter must have inspired Martínez, for he was not an innocent listener. As the quotation demonstrates, Martínez experiences the encounter from the perspective of a fiction writer. By describing his personal experience during the encounter, Martínez shows how reality and fiction are mixed:

López Rega, que llevaba ya más de media hora leyendo las memorias, decidió irrumpir en el pasado del General. Se describió a sí mismo acompañándolo al velorio de Bartolomé Mitre, en 1906, lo que era virtualmente imposible porque el mayordomo había nacido en 1916. Tanto Fernández Moreno como yo lo interrumpimos para advertir a Perón sobre el anacronismo. López Rega insistió en que el hecho ilógico era también verdadero, y el General no lo desaprobó. (17–18)

This anecdote would later be transformed into an interesting scene in *La novela de Perón*, using metafiction to question the consequences of the construction of history from a position of power. While writing the memoirs, López Rega says to Perón:

No sólo sembraba las Memorias de pensamientos propios; también les incorporaba historias que el General había omitido y que él, en cambio, recordaba al dedillo: ‘Lea esta página: ¿por qué hemos suprimido aquel verano?’, solía exaltarse. ‘Piense, mi General: remóntese. Enero de 1906. Nos vistieron de negro, y por si fuera poco, nos ensartaron en el brazo un moño de luto [...] ‘Y usted, ¿qué hacía usted allí, López? ¿Cuántos años tenía?’. El secretario nunca contestaba. (2004a [1985]: 69)

La novela de Perón is therefore Martínez’s creative response to a reality that could not be represented through the conventions of a mimetic discourse. Because of Perón’s censorship, the author could not publish the text as he wished to in the magazine. Nevertheless, he would re-write the information and find — in the form of the novel — the freedom to tell the truth. The reference to Perón’s authorised memoirs in the novel thus questions the validity of journalistic discourse, particularly that based on testimonials. This is shown when Martínez appears as a character in the novel on two occasions. Initially, it happens in a conversation between Perón and López: ‘Oiga esto, mi General: el cuento que dio usted a publicar hace apenas tres años. [...] Recuérdelo,

Martínez, aquel de la revista *Panorama*. Déjeme que le pase la grabación completa' (245). Intertextuality is used here to show the fictional meaning given by López and Perón to the supposedly autobiographical text given to Martínez. This also highlights the degree of malleability that information can have, for the existence of a recording is not a proof that the story being told is totally true.

Later, in chapter 14 (entitled 'Primera persona'), Martínez appears in conversation with Zamora, discussing the use of the first-person in journalism. Choosing a first-person narrator is a way of questioning the apparent objectivity of journalism, which usually employs the third person and does not refer to the journalist's personal experience:

El periodismo es una profesión maldita. Se vive a través de, se siente con, se escribe para. Como los actores: representado ayer a un guapo del novecientos y anteayer a Perón. Punto y aparte. Por una vez voy a ser el personaje principal de mi vida. No sé cómo. Quiero contar lo no escrito, limpiarme de lo no contado, desarmarme de la historia para poder armarme al fin con la verdad. Y ya lo ve, Zamora: ni siquiera sé por dónde empezar (346).

If Martínez-as-a-character is a well-known journalist, who once interviewed Perón and has much more information on the topic than any other source, then Zamora is represented as a mediocre reporter. There is a parodical representation of journalism throughout the story of Zamora writing the counter-memoirs of Perón, as ordered to by his boss. This is particularly evident when the editor of the magazine decides to organize a welcoming party for Perón and his old friends and family:

Horizonte montará una ópera en Ezeiza, *il risorgimento*, la resurrección del pasado. Llevaremos a los testigos que todavía puedan moverse, Zamora: que sean el cortejo de la bienvenida. Hay que prepararse rápido. ¿Si dos semanas antes los proclamáramos 'héroes del ayer' o algo por el estilo, en una edición especial: ah? Imagínese: los compañeros de colegio, los primos, los cuñados, todos ya irrefutablemente unidos al logotipo de la revista, besando con Perón el suelo patrio. (47–48)

This passage portrays journalism as an activity motivated by sensationalist and economic concerns rather than by an ethical commitment to uncovering truth. Although Zamora does not agree with his editor's idea, he follows his instructions and writes a new profile of Perón based on the memories of a group of old people who are somehow related to Perón's hidden life. Therefore, rather than a metafictional discourse, one might say that there is a metajournalism in this part of the novel. By reflecting the process of the journalistic investigation, this narrative technique solves practical matters concerning the use of the information gathered and the ways of telling it in a truthful manner.

By employing parody, the author demonstrates how reality can be constructed through media. The seven people who shared their memories and personal documents with Zamora in order to tell the truth about Perón's formative years, are used primarily as informants for the cover story of the magazine, then treated as decoration for the welcoming event that has been prepared in Ezeiza, and they are eventually abandoned:

—¿Qué hacen aquí estos viejos? –grita la mujer–. ¡Sáquenlos!
 —Soy Julio Perón –se alza, en un arrebato de dignidad, el primo. No ha dicho: Soy el primo.
 —Soy prima hermana del General –dice María Amelia.
 En el tumulto, en la fiebre de la histeria, la mujer no los oye:
 —¿Quién mierda los ha traído? Llévenselos de aquí. Tírenlos en el campo. (432)

After Perón has decided what to do with his past and present, there is no room for these other memories, even though they have also been published. The discourses of history (Perón's memoirs) as well as journalism (Zamora's counter-memoirs), are no longer enough to tell the truth. Therefore, it makes sense that the novel makes a parody of these discourses, for the technique shows the 'literary inadequacies of a certain convention' (Hutcheon 1988: 50). It is not through journalism, but through the novel that Martínez finds a creative response, free of others' control, for the telling of his true story.

3.4 Eva Duarte/Eva Perón/Evita/ *Santa Evita*

A year before her death, Eva Perón published *La razón de mi vida* (1951), in which she defines herself in relation to her husband, the President of Argentina, Juan Domingo Perón:

yo no era ni soy nada más que una humilde mujer... un gorrión en una inmensa bandada de gorriones... Y él era y es el cóndor gigante que vuela alto y seguro entre las cumbres y cerca de Dios. Si no fuese por él que descendió hasta mí y me enseñó a volar de otra manera. (13)

Eva Perón's awareness of her identity as a public figure who people talk and write about continues throughout the text. The following year, in the USA, historian Robert Alexander published *The Peron Era*, based on his research and impressions following his travels to Argentina. He describes Eva's appearance and personality as the result of careful construction:

‘Evita’ Perón, as she is familiarly called in Argentina, is about five feet five, but appears taller because she wears her hair artfully arranged in an ‘upsweep’. She has dark brown eyes, blonde hair with reddish tints, and a startlingly white skin (partly natural and partly the result of the skilful use of make-up). Milton Bracker has commented that she ‘can be equally impressive in a strapless evening gown, a two-piece light print or floppy slacks’. Friends and enemies are in agreement that Eva Perón is a woman of great personal fascination. (1951: 102)

This description can hardly be compared with Eva’s self-portrait. Rather than focusing on her participation in the social discourse or her political power, the historian highlights the fake elements of the look upon which she based her public image: the hairstyle, the make-up and the clothes. Appearance was important in the construction of Eva’s identity.

By analysing several images of Eva’s short career as an actress in relation to contemporary women’s fashion, Beatriz Sarlo (2003) shows the process by which she constructed the public appearance of her body. Sarlo confirms the impression that Juan Domingo Perón’s biographer Joseph Page had of Eva: ‘Though she was not beautiful, sexy or particularly talented, Eva Duarte (Evita to her friends) was blazed with a tenacity that had lifted her from an obscure, small provincial town to a career in theatre, radio and film’ (Page 1983: 4). For Sarlo, the uniqueness of Eva — what she calls her *excepcionabilidad* — is indeed her capability to shift from one place to another, and, in consequence, to be out of place. The exceptional nature of Eva, however, was not rooted in her social background, as Page suggests, but in her performative ability. Although her acting qualities were not enough for the artistic scene, she managed to use them in a place where they were not the norm: the political scene. With a kind of beauty that was out of fashion for the actresses of the time, Sarlo demonstrates that Eva was recognized as a beautiful woman only after she became the President’s wife. It is perhaps not surprising that Eva insisted that her life actually started with Perón. The idea of Eva as an artistic construction, and as a malleable body, became a central axis in Martínez’s fictional works on Peronism, but particularly in *Santa Evita*. After all, Perón had already confessed to Martínez in their interview: ‘Eva Perón es un producto mío. Yo la preparé para que hiciera lo que hizo’ (2009c: 57).

3.4.1 Another Eva

Evita died in 1952 and her corpse was embalmed and put on public display. Three years later, the rule of Juan Domingo Perón was overthrown by a military coup and he went into exile in Spain. Eva Perón's corpse was kept hidden by the new government, and it was only returned to her widower in 1971. *Santa Evita* narrates the story of this corpse.

In other texts from his Peronist cycle, such as *La novela de Perón* and *Las memorias del General*, Martínez relies exhaustively on his personal account of the real life encounter with Perón as a primary source. Nonetheless, in *Santa Evita* the author cannot rely on his own memory as witness to a particular moment, since he did not personally meet Eva Perón. In consequence, the use of other sources of information is essential to his representation of her in the novel.

While Page and other writers succeeding him would go on to use Martínez's journalistic texts to approach a more vivid, first-hand view of Juan Domingo Perón, Martínez himself looked for different kinds of audio-visual material such as films, photographs and radio recordings to create his portrait of Eva. This is not only relevant for the construction of Eva as literary character but it also suffuses the novel with a sense of what Martínez described as 'un cierto efecto de verdad' (1988: 49).

Martínez looks for alternative sources of information to de-construct Eva, and in doing so he creates his own documentary material. During the research for his novel, he conducted interviews with marginal informants, whose testimonies may not have been considered by historians. It is particularly interesting to note that the two main testimonies through which the documentary effect of the novel is sustained are the men responsible for Eva's public identity at certain points: the hairdresser Julio Alcaraz, who was the guardian of her body in life, for he was in charge of her daily physical appearance; and the soldier Héctor Eduardo Cabanillas (renamed Tulio Ricardo Corominas in the novel), who was the guardian of Eva's dead body, since he directed the strategy to hide the corpse and get it out of Argentina.

I believe that Martínez's *Santa Evita* is defined by an original documentary intention. The evidence for this can be traced through some earlier letters of Martínez's, and through interviews that I found in the author's private archives during my fieldwork at the Fundación Tomás Eloy Martínez in Buenos Aires. To analyse the chosen texts in relation to the novel, I use Gérard Genette's metaphor of the palimpsest (1997).⁷⁷

⁷⁷ Genette proposes the existence of a dialogical condition in certain texts that he calls 'hypertextuality'. Thus, if a given text can present a direct or indirect interaction with other texts, this hypertextuality

Until now, *Santa Evita* has been read as an intersection of multiple discourses inspired by other authors, and thus it is considered to be written in a style evocative of citation (López Badano 2010; Davies 2010). What I propose, however, is to emphasize the investigative process at the core of Martínez's narrative. By doing so, I wish to demonstrate that through the use of the research techniques and discursive genres of journalism, particularly that of the interview, the author finds a way to erase the opposition between information and narration.

The author creates a metafictional narrator, also named Tomás Eloy Martínez, who is represented as a journalist obsessed with the truth, conducting exhaustive research on broadly differing sources of information; no matter how difficult it might be to talk to people or to find certain documents. Therefore, one could say that the author is speaking through his narrator, using strategies of self-representation to reinforce his narrative authority.

As the plot becomes more incredible, details of the narrator's process of investigation help to construct the pact of credibility with the reader. Throughout the novel, the narrator constantly notifies the reader that he has the documents that verify the story he is narrating. However, since the reader cannot actually access those documents, the story's credibility is based on the word of the narrator. The game of doubt and trust thus includes the reader, for just as the author-narrator needs to believe in his informants, so the reader needs to take a position on how to read a story that never seeks to define itself.

Reality is represented through documents, recordings and photographs, the content of which is not reliable: 'Las fuentes sobre las que se basa esta novela son de confianza dudosa, pero solo en el sentido en que también lo son la realidad y el lenguaje: se han infiltrado en ellas deslices de la memoria y verdades impuras' (Martínez 2002: 153). If the narrator can assure the reader that there is plenty of documentation, he cannot, on the other hand, admit his trust in the information provided by those documents.

Strange as it may seem, some of the magical-realistic elements of the novel are in fact real, in the sense that they did not come out of the author's imagination, but were included as a result of witness testimonies. For example, the interview transcripts show that all the informants actually told Martínez that they saw flowers and candles every time the corpse was moved to a new secret place; they also insisted upon the truth of the curse that surrounded everyone involved with the care of the corpse.

functions as a palimpsest in which other texts can also be discovered. Once these texts are discovered, however, the interpretation of the given work is modified.

Ironically, the most strongly fictional element in *Santa Evita* is the representation of the self-referential narrator, who at the same time is, and is not, Tomás Eloy Martínez. In his aim to give voice to all the marginal protagonists of Eva's story, the author ends up re-creating himself in such a way that he becomes the protagonist of the novel.

It is only at the close of the novel that the narrator gathers together his three main informants for the story he has undertaken to tell: the men Tulio Ricardo Corominas, Jorge Rojas Silveyra and Carlo Maggi. This is certainly a nod to the author's interviewees. More importantly, the representation of this interview is an ambiguity because it functions as a literary device that paradoxically reinforces and destabilizes the credibility pact with the reader. There is no doubt that the author is questioning the borders between reality and fiction:

—Vine porque había una historia —les recordé—. Cuéntenmela y me voy.
 —Leímos la novela suya sobre Perón —aclaró Corominas—. No es verdad que el cuerpo de esa persona estuvo en Bonn. [...]
 —Como usted dijo, es una novela —expliqué—. En las novelas, lo que es verdad es también mentira. Los autores construyen a la noche los mismos mitos que han destruido por la mañana.
 —Ésas son palabras —insistió Corominas—. A mí no me convencen. Lo único que vale son los hechos y una novela es, después de todo, un hecho. (421)

There is evidence that Martínez really interviewed the men these characters are based on more than once and in different years, although in the novel they are depicted as having a single, long night of conversation in a café in Buenos Aires. Metafiction is a useful strategy for the demonstration of a documentary effect in the representation of Martínez and the others. This leaves it down to the reader to decide whether or not they believe that the story is real. Even if one does not check this episode against the real interviews, it is still hard to believe that these men would have initiated a conversation on poetics, discussing Martínez's *La novela de Perón*. What the reader is 'listening' to in this secret conversation is the voice of the author, and what he chooses to represent of others.

As a journalistic palimpsest, *Santa Evita* disobeys Virginia Woolf's advice on biography, since for her, when writing about real people, the author can never mix 'the truth of real life and the truth of fiction [...] let them meet and they destroy each other.' (1967: 234)

Martínez's original intention was not to mix both kinds of truth, but rather to focus on the 'real life' truth, if one attends to the evidence of his working process. In a 1989 script called 'Evita rest in peace' (which was never filmed), Martínez advised the potential filmmakers: 'Todos los datos de esta historia están respaldados por documentos

originales y grabaciones que pertenecen al autor. Debido al secreto que aún protege a estos materiales, se ruega a los editores mantener la mayor reserva posible sobre el contenido.’ (1) The author refers to the plot as ‘relato de no ficción’, although he introduces his characters as a novelist would do. By making this statement, however, the author is trying to sell his idea. It is based on the value that a story with some documentary evidence would have to the filmmakers, and eventually to the audience. Also, he is giving himself credibility through his possession of documents. Nevertheless, he affirms that he owns that material, whilst simultaneously asking readers to be careful with the content. Martínez owns the documents, but what is important is to maintain the privacy of the confidences written there. He knows he is only the keeper of the confidences entrusted to him in an interview, or found in an archive during his research. In a certain way, he is not the creator of the story but the custodian of its evidence. This awareness of the potential legal conflicts when relying on others’ discourses is also shown in a similar film project from 1989, ‘La historia de Evita’, in which Martínez advises that all the characters are historical, and thus it is convenient to change their names so as to avoid legal problems (1989c).

For Genette, plagiarism can be seen as a form of intertextuality, although it is not so explicit as other types of palimpsests; it is an ‘undeclared, but still literal borrowing’ (2). But what may be a stylistic decision for writers of fiction becomes an ethical question for those who work with the material of real lives. Although a novelist himself, Martínez makes his position clear regarding the undeclared use of others’ words in a non-fictional work.

The biographer, says Woolf, is not an artist but a craftsman, ‘his work is not a work of art, but something betwixt and between’ (227). Walter Benjamin uses the same analogy for the work of the storyteller, as a figure also opposed to the writer of fiction. However, there are differences in their approach to this craftsman. For Woolf, this type of writer requires direct contact with facts and so he worries about obtaining the most accurate and varied amount of information regarding real people. For Benjamin, the craftsman, or storyteller, is precisely the opposite of those who seek information. Thus, storytelling is the resistance of narrative against information, which is considered by the critic to be a new way of communicating reality that defines our era. When using journalistic material for his documentary projects, Martínez could be represented both as Woolf’s ‘biographer’ or Benjamin’s ‘storyteller’, for he is carefully selecting and editing the words of others to fit into the form he wishes to create for his/their stories.

Santa Evita has been characterised variously as a product of the Latin American Post-Boom, as that of postmodern aesthetics, or as a product of the New Historicism of the turn-of-the-century discourses that suffused the Western world (Davies 2010; López Badano 2010). Nevertheless, one could argue that the decision to shift from a pure documentary or journalistic discourse to a fictional one could have had an ethical or legal basis rather than simply an aesthetic one.

Santa Evita does preserve a documentary effect due to the journalistic nature of the sources that exist in playful interconnection with each other within the text. This effect, however, is also indebted to its context of production, within the development of postmodernism, as it is to the author's intentions of telling some unknown facts about Eva Perón's life. In any case, this information — obtained by the author through an investigative process — is at the same time represented through literary devices and therefore is open to being invested with more complex meanings.

If, in his other works on Peronism, Tomás Eloy Martínez was, like Woolf's ideal biographer, interested in exposing the facts of real life with obsessive detail, it is only in *Santa Evita* that he seems to find the most effective format to portray his own version of Eva, and through her, his interpretation of Peronist Argentina:

¿Santa Evita iba a ser una novela? No lo sabía y tampoco me importaba. Se me escurrían las tramas, las fijeza de los puntos de vista, las leyes del espacio y de los tiempos. Los personajes conversaban con su voz propia a veces y otras con voz ajena, sólo para explicarme que lo histórico no es siempre histórico, que la verdad nunca es como parece. Tardé meses y meses en amansar el caos. Algunos personajes se resistieron. Entraban en escena durante pocas páginas y luego se retiraban del libro para siempre: sucedía en el texto lo mismo que en la vida. Pero cuando se iban, Evita no era ya la misma: le había llovido el polen de los deseos y recuerdos ajenos. Transfigurada en mito, Evita era millones (68).

In her research on life-writing and the forms in which fictional and non-fictional biography try to obtain knowledge of 'the real, other person', Ina Schabert (1990: 13) argues that, in order to avoid molds and draw a complete profile of another human being, the writer should study not only the historical setting of the person but also this uniqueness, assuming his free will and analysing his singularity through psychoanalytic methods.⁷⁸ In reference to Sartre's biography of Flaubert, *L'Idiot de la famille*, Schabert describes comprehension as a method for getting to know the other completely that implies emotional distance, as opposed to

⁷⁸ Although in Sarlo's *La pasión y la excepción* (mentioned above), there are no signals for an exhaustive biographical work on Eva Perón, it is interesting to note that her aim to find the 'exceptionality' of Eva as a public figure reflects Sartre's methods of acquiring knowledge of others' lives, as described by Schabert.

sympathy. Therefore, rather than an achievement, comprehension is defined as praxis or ‘a way of living’. Based on the analysis of intertextual and paratextual material written by Tomás Eloy Martínez before *Santa Evita* was published, there is no doubt that for the author, Juan Domingo and Eva Perón were part of his experience, for his interest in every detail of their lives became an obsession. Nevertheless, after an exhaustive process of research and production of texts on the topic that lasted for decades, Martínez, through the self-described narrator, confesses his helpless confusion at the end of *Santa Evita*: ‘No sé en qué punto del relato estoy. Creo que en el medio. Sigo, desde hace mucho, en el medio. Ahora tengo que escribir otra vez.’ (423)

3.4.2 In search of the (original) corpse

Around four months after the publication of ‘Las memorias de Juan Perón’ in *Panorama* magazine, Tomás Eloy Martínez initiated an interesting epistolary exchange with Norberto Firpo, his editor at *Siete Días* in Buenos Aires.⁷⁹ It was 1970, and Martínez was living in Paris. These three letters, two written by Martínez and one by Firpo, can be read as an intriguing pre-text for *Santa Evita* as well, as they shed new light on the interpretation of this novel based on historical characters.

Besides an attempt to pursue the truth of an important national matter — the disappearance of the embalmed corpse of Eva Perón — Martínez writes these letters to convince a magazine to buy into his promising, but as yet non-existent product. Although he starts the first letter by describing himself as a journalist with more luck than talent (1970b: par. 1) through the actions he narrates, Martínez is represented as an enthusiastic, proactive and self-confident reporter. Confident of the privileged status that he has as a talented reporter, and of the friendship that the letters demonstrate between him and his editor, he even asks his boss to do some complementary research for him in Buenos Aires (see illustration 10). At the same time, his editor appears to perceive him as a clever, trustful and experienced journalist.

Firpo’s letter also emphasises the commercial intentions inherent in dealing with the subject of Peronism, particularly when he asks Martínez to look for an interview with Juan Domingo Perón to talk about what is going to happen after he dies.⁸⁰ The editor is

⁷⁹ These letters are not published, but are part of the author’s archive held by the Fundación Tomás Eloy Martínez in Buenos Aires, where I have been able to consult the originals.

⁸⁰ The response from Martínez to Firpo’s letter is not in the archives, and there is no evidence that this interview actually happened. This would have been the second conversation between Martínez and Perón in Madrid, after the one that was published that year in *Panorama*.

aware of the sensitive task he is asking Martínez to undertake, but he is also aware of Martínez's ability to succeed:

Es posible que a Perón no le haga mucha gracia hablar de este tema, pero tal vez sí: tendría oportunidad de declamar sobre la sobrevivencia del peronismo, un tópico encantador. Por otra parte, no habría que enfrentarlo a este interrogante, de entrada, sino –y para ello contamos con tu astucia– ir metiéndolo de a poco ('Tomás': par. 2).

The three letters thus offer an insight into the journalistic environment of the time, that is, how reality was being constructed by mainstream media in Argentina. Another example of this is demonstrated in Firpo's letter when he asks Martínez to convince Perón to become a political columnist for *Siete Días*:

Se trata de comprometerlo a que nos escriba 5 ó 10 columnas a la manera de un columnista político, sin caer en la arenga o en la historia vieja. Sería un golazo para nosotros. SD está en ganadora: vendemos alrededor de 70.000 ejemplares por semana en la Capital y todo hace suponer que el aumento de precio no incidió para nada, que a fin de año llegaremos a los benditos 200.000 ejemplares que quiere don César (par. 2).

It is obvious that what matters here is magazine sales. Firpo must persuade Martínez and Martínez in turn must persuade Perón, in order for a certain story to be told, and for it to become available to the magazine's readers as news. There is no evidence that before his first conversation with Perón, Martínez was interested in the topic, either in his journalistic or fictional writing. Therefore, it can be inferred that this interest in Peronism, particularly in Eva Perón, was also an economic one. Martínez was working as a foreign correspondent and in order to earn his salary he needed to write interesting stories. By the end of his second letter, Martínez confesses to Firpo that Eva's story may be his last work for the magazine because he is tired of not knowing if he will continue working in Paris or if he might return to Buenos Aires (apparently, he was waiting for the director's decision).

Nevertheless, a reading of these letters as a private epitext also allows a different approach to Martínez's literary work.⁸¹ The letters demonstrate the documentary intentions of the author at the outset of his writing on Eva Perón. At the same time, they offer insights into the contemporary journalistic field, and in doing so, show how media contribute to the construction of reality. Although it cannot be denied that the adventures

⁸¹ Genette distinguishes between private and public epitext based on the nature of the addressee. The correspondence analysed here fits into the first category since Martínez addresses a particular person.

of Eva Perón's hidden corpse could easily be the plot of a fictional story, these letters from the 1970s show the intentions of a journalist who was following some hints of a story he believed in, trying to discover a truth that would be revealed just one year later, when Eva's corpse was finally returned to the widower, Juan Domingo Perón.

Regarding the documentary intentions of the author in writing *Santa Evita*, the letters demonstrate that the novel cannot be read as a historical one. This is because the author was himself a part of an unfinished chapter of Argentina's history: he was actually an actor in his own still unfinished plot. For a twenty-first-century reader, who is engaging with the novel years after the deaths of Juan Domingo and Eva Perón, the work may be viewed as predominantly about historical figures within a particular period of Argentina's history. But what the letters bring to our attention is that, from the beginning of his research, Tomás Eloy Martínez did not approach the topic as an historian or even as a fiction writer, but as an investigative journalist. This can also be demonstrated by the way in which he represents himself in his writing. Primarily, he is concerned about discovering the 'real' story of a highly relevant topic, which was a newsworthy one for the Argentinian media, and secondarily, he is aware of the importance of the format, and how best to deliver the story in an interesting way to his readers. Martínez found that a journalistic investigation was the only possible method of finding the truth about the corpse — at least for him, as he was at that time better known as a reporter. The only way of publishing the story, however, would be as fiction and not as a report or journalistic text in a popular magazine.

Of course, the preference of a literary genre over a journalistic one was not only an artistic decision but a reaction to the censored and dangerous environment for writers in Argentina. The topic itself was being treated as fiction even in the letters that dealt with a potential journalistic story: Martínez was very careful not to mention the name of Eva Perón and he referred to her as 'Yoko Lennon', and to the city where her corpse may have been concealed, as 'Ono', humorously comparing Eva influence over Argentina to that of Yoko Ono in the separation of the popular British band The Beatles. He was so aware of the power of fiction to communicate truth in a censored environment that he reinforced his theory of Eva's corpse being buried somewhere in Europe by reminding Firpo of Rodolfo Walsh's 'Esa mujer', a short story that first appeared in press in 1965, which is interpreted by Martínez as reportage full of clues:

Como sabés, Rodolfo Walsh fue el único tipo que trabajó seriamente en el asunto del cuerpo. Él tuvo una larga entrevista con un coronel cuyo nombre se me escapa ahora (pero que es el protagonista del cuento 'Esa mujer'), en cuya oficina de la SIDE, sobre un armario, estuvo el cajoncito de Yoko un par de años. En plena borrachera, este coronel le confió a Rodolfo (él me narró minuciosamente esa historia) que él mismo había enterrado a Yoko 'parada, en un lugar donde llueve mucho'. (1970b: par. 4)

By stating that Walsh worked seriously on the topic because Martínez heard directly from him that the anecdote was true, Martínez offers his own vision of fiction as a valid and reliable format through which to transmit information. This applied particularly during a period when it was not possible to do so through journalism.

In *Santa Evita*, Martínez mentions Walsh's short story again. Initially, this is while he recreates a scene that he might have experienced, for it is based on his own 1991 interview with Moori Koenig's widow and daughter in Buenos Aires:

Les hablé de un cuento de Rodolfo Walsh, 'Esa mujer', mientras ellas asentían. El cuento alude a una muerta que jamás se nombra, a un hombre que busca el cadáver – Walsh– y a un coronel que lo ha escondido. En algún momento entra en escena la esposa de ese coronel [...] Un cierto brillo asomó a los ojos de la viuda, pero ningún signo que indicara si me ayudaría en la investigación. (59)

Relating and contrasting reality with fiction became an obsession in Martínez's novelistic work, as well as in his own journalistic career. As the author does in real life, the narrator in *Santa Evita* needs to know, to verify, that there were real people behind the characters. When the narrator of *Santa Evita* tells the women about Walsh's story, the reader — even if they are not familiar with 'Esa mujer' — is made aware of the contrast between the intertext and the environment and characters described in the passage. Besides, whether or not the interview between Walsh and Koenig really happened is never clear in the novel. It is possible then, that Martínez-the-author no longer believed that the encounter actually occurred. According to the transcripts in the author's private archives, by the time he approached the widow, his other main informant, Héctor Cabaillas, had already told the author that Koenig did not know what happened with the corpse in the end, nor did he know the place where it was resting.

Martínez's obsession with discovering what really happened to the corpse might have motivated him to keep trying to verify the truthfulness of Walsh's fictional story. At some point it became a game in which Martínez, if he had to publish a journalistic text, would have to decide who was he going to believe, for all had told him their version: Walsh, Cabaillas and Koenig's widow. What is important to highlight here is that by inserting the reference to Walsh's 'Esa mujer' in his novel, Martínez is showing us that

his intentions are more literary than journalistic. In the same passage, Martínez also refers to Borges's 'La muerte y la brújula' as another example of fiction representing reality during the Perón era. Intertextuality, therefore, plays a significant role in the novel; it is the form in which Martínez gives reality a transcendental meaning, that which, according to his own poetics, can only be displayed when facts are represented through fiction.

Instead of questioning the truthfulness of Walsh's story — which he refers to as a 'reportaje' in his letters to Firpo — Martínez leaves the decision of whether or not to believe it to the reader. Nevertheless, by the end of the chapter the widow declares that Walsh's story was not a story, a 'cuento,' but something that really happened:

Yo estuve oyéndolos mientras hablaban. Mi marido registró la conversación en un grabador Geloso y me dejó los carretes. Es lo único que me ha dejado.

La hija mayor abrió un aparador y mostró las cintas: eran dos, y estaban dentro de sobres transparentes, de plástico. (60)

Although Martínez did interview the widow as part of his research for the novel, at least according to the transcripts that are conserved in his archive, there is no evidence in those transcripts of any question or reference to Walsh's story. Describing a narrator observing the evidence — the recordings of that interview — does not make the story more or less real, but it does add the patina of reality to his novel. It is interesting then that what the author chooses to invent in this half-real scene in the novel is precisely the mention of Walsh, as if he still wanted to defend his colleague's short story as reportage.

Reality becomes fiction again when Rodolfo Walsh is introduced as a character in dialogue with the narrator. The narrator — who is a self-insert, also named Tomás Eloy Martínez — remembers an encounter with Walsh in a café in Paris. The encounter is a literary recreation of an apparently real meeting, since the conversation was mentioned in Martínez's letter to Firpo. In the novel, the narrator tells Walsh about a recent conversation he had with a secretary, who told him about the expensive and unnecessary construction of a coal bunker replacing the garden at the Argentinian Embassy in Bonn. This is said to have occurred ten years before the scene as it is described. After listening to the secretary's story, Walsh — who by then had already published 'Esa mujer' — confesses that although he always supposed that Bonn was the city where the corpse was buried, he was never sure about it until now:

–En ese jardín está Evita. Entonces, es ahí donde la tienen.
 –¿Eva Perón? –repetí, creyendo que había entendido mal.
 –El cadáver –asintió–. Se lo llevaron a Bonn, entonces. Siempre lo supuse, ahora lo sé. (328)

At the same time, the narrator can confirm — to himself and his readers — that the short story actually represents a real dialogue, since the colonel in the short story really existed. And so the narrator of *Santa Evita* insists:

Todo lo que el cuento decía era verdadero, pero había sido publicado como ficción, y los lectores queríamos creer también que era ficción. Pensábamos que ningún desvarío de la realidad podía tener cabida en la Argentina, que se vanagloriaba de ser cartesiana y europea. (329)

Following Martínez's investigation, one is able to see Walsh's documentary intentions; although he, too, wrote his narrative as fiction. The interview with Moori Koenig could have been real, but Martínez finally discovers that — despite his own desire to believe Walsh's story — the facts, the information that the interviewee gave to Walsh were not. The problem of credibility, however, was not that of Rodolfo Walsh himself, but affected the informant, Carlos Eugenio de Moori Koenig, in whom he trusted. Eventually, Martínez discovered that Moori Koenig had his own reasons to lie, although they were more complex than they seemed to Walsh.

Both Walsh and Martínez wanted to write the 'truth' about the case of the disappeared corpse, and they both found their own ways of doing so through fiction. They employ different methods in their approaches to this 'real story'. Walsh acts more like a storyteller: he listens to the story of another person, someone who he apparently trusts, and he rewrites the story in a way that allows him to safeguard the identity of his informant. On the other hand, Martínez conducts a long, journalistic investigation, cross-checking different sources and double-checking information.⁸²

Evidently, although both of them were respected journalists by the time they were writing their narratives, the two authors found different solutions to the problems of representing this real story. Their opposing worldviews are shown in *Santa Evita* in the same encounter in the Parisian café:

⁸² According to Ezequiel Martínez — the author's son, and director of Fundación TEM — Tomás Eloy Martínez had an obsession with what he used to call 'las zanjas de la historia': that part of the story where there was a lack of information or particular uncertainty regarding the facts. 'Era siempre ir al lugar y entrevistar a los testigos que quedaban' (2014).

–Vayamos a buscar el cuerpo –me oí decir–. Salgamos para Bonn esta noche.
 –Yo no –dijo Walsh–. Cuando escribí ‘Esa mujer’ me puse fuera de la historia. Ya escribí el cuento. Con eso he terminado.
 [...]
 –Tal vez lo cargue en el baúl del auto y lo traiga –dije–. Tal vez lo lleve a Madrid y se lo entregue a Perón. No sé si él lo quiere. No sé si él quiso ese cuerpo alguna vez.
 Walsh me contempló con curiosidad desde la lejanía de sus anteojos opacos. Sentí que mi obstinación lo tomaba por sorpresa. (331)

The clearest contrast that Martínez’s writing draws between them is evident in the way they conceive of writing about facts. Both authors have chosen to use fiction in order to represent reality, but Walsh limits his task to the production of a short story, where real names are not mentioned and the composition can be read as a work of fiction regardless of its reference points in Argentina’s history. For Walsh, his task as writer ended when he finished writing what he wanted, for what he wanted was merely to write a story. In contrast, Martínez cannot conceive of telling a story crafted out of a single anecdote from a single informant: he needs to be a part of the story in order to write about it. However, the fictional devices in Martínez’s writing are used to represent the self. The metanarrative allows the author to construct a self-referenced narrator in the first person, who is even more impulsive and enthusiastic than the author himself. Unlike the journalist that Martínez is shown to be in his exchange with Firpo, who prepared the trip to search for the corpse based on rational arguments; who waits for, or at least looks for, the approval of his editor; the narrator of *Santa Evita* decides to engage in the adventure as soon as possible.

Martínez’s journalistic interpretation of a story that could be sold, as against the rather romantic perspective of Walsh — which expresses the impossibility of finding or telling the truth — is made evident by the end of the scene in the Parisian café. Walsh shows Martínez a photograph of Eva’s corpse taken by Moori Koenig, who gave it to him. Aware of the value of the object, the narrator says:

–Podrías haberla publicado –le dije–. Te habrían pagado lo que hubieras querido.
 –No –replicó. Vi que una rápida sonrisa lo atravesaba, como una nube–. Esa mujer no es mía. (332)

The author consciously raises the topic of Eva’s corpse as a symbol of the social and political situation in Argentina. For fifteen years, no one in Argentina admitted to knowing where it was. However, the question of the appropriation of a corpse — and not just any corpse, but that of Eva Perón — is more than a national metaphor here. Beyond

the metaphorical appropriation, the narrator actually expresses to Walsh his desire to search for the corpse and to exhume it himself. The episode in the novel in which both authors meet also brings into question Walsh and Martínez's opposing conceptions of the representation of reality within fiction. Walsh refuses to make commercial use of his treasure, while the narrator simultaneously considers selling the first-hand testimony he is listening to. The relationship between the aesthetic solutions posed by Martínez's work, and the ethical questions those solutions pose in turn can be analysed in contrast with the author's archive. There is evidence that Martínez actually intended to find the corpse in order to tell his, ultimately journalistic, story. In the 1970 letters, Martínez tries to convince Norberto Firpo to go beyond journalism and act as protagonist of the news he aims to construct:

Cualquiera fuere el lugar donde esté Yoko, el affaire es de tal gravedad que la única manera de salir adelante con él no es tomando fotos ni contando la historia, sino trasladando el cuerpo. Imaginate, si Siete Días sale diciendo que el cuerpo está —por ejemplo— en Torres, Brasil, la FAP, la SIDE, la CIA y todas las siglas del mundo se encargarán de saberlo en el trayecto L. N. Alem—taller. El día de la salida de la revista, el cuerpo ya no estará donde decíamos que estaba. Hay demasiados intereses en juego. (1970b: par. 8)

That same aim of searching for some breaking news — a story that could be sold successfully, and not just form part of a collection of short stories — had led Martínez to propose to his editor to look for the corpse, as if they were part of a detective novel. Despite the fantastic tone of the proposal, Martínez lays out his plan in rational language (see illustration 10, par. 12–14). Once again, the question of Eva's corpse as an object that can be — albeit not easily — manipulated and appropriated is in the air. Martínez knows that finding Eva's corpse will lead the magazine, and himself of course, to journalistic success. History is malleable and can be changed — and sold.

Martínez's suggestion to his editor may seem naïve. Nonetheless, in considering that looking for the body was actually a possibility, he demonstrates an awareness of the media processes through which news is constructed. The author knows that news cannot be fiction, for he is not suggesting invention or lies, but still he is able to make an impact on reality so it can be made newsworthy. Full of excitement and ambition, Martínez's letters to Firpo can be read as *crónicas* in their own right, particularly the one dated 28 August 1970, in which Martínez narrates in detail his research trip to Bonn and failure to prove that Eva's corpse was buried in the Argentinian Embassy there. Faithful to the ethics of the journalistic craft — since the idea of writing the story without verifying it

was never entertained — Martínez never published the reportage he proposed to his editor in any other medium, but continued to conduct research, until his findings were later transformed into the novel *Santa Evita*.

The documentary intention of *Santa Evita* is, nevertheless, evident through a closer look at the process of the novel's production, as has been demonstrated. This is precisely because Martínez was careful to protect his informants when it was still dangerous to talk about the topics he was researching. One can infer that, in order to maintain the realism of the story as far as possible, Martínez acted primarily as a journalist rather than as a fiction writer, but he found in the novel the most ethical and aesthetically appropriate solution for the representational problems he faced. For instance, Tomás Eloy Martínez wanted *Santa Evita* to be labelled as a novel on the cover precisely so that he would not face problems from people who would read it as non-fiction. (Ezequiel Martínez 2014)

In addition, it is important to highlight the detail that during Martínez's research into the background of the story, he interviewed three military men who were responsible for the operation to move Eva's corpse from Argentina to a cemetery in Italy. They gave Martínez original documents as evidence that their testimony was true, as the transcripts of those interviews demonstrate. However, Martínez did not represent these men in the novel in direct relationship with those particular documents; nor did he even mention their real names. That also proves that Martínez acted as a professional journalist would in his investigation, and it is reinforced by the transcripts of the interview held with Cabanillas and Rojas Silveyra:

TEM: Igual tiene esa especie de maldición detrás, hay que tener mucho cuidado con la información, porque nunca se sabe lo que pueden hacer los fanáticos Peronistas, nunca se sabe.

CAB: Por supuesto. Yo le digo, Martínez que yo me he prestado a esto con toda confianza, con toda honradez diciéndole la verdad, aunque hay cosas que evidentemente no pueden publicarse.

TEM: Usted me las ha dicho, claramente: 'Esto no lo diga, esto tampoco, el nombre de Sorolla hay que mantenerlo...'

CAB: No, por supuesto, es peligroso. Aparte yo tengo hijos, nietos.
[...]

TEM: Sabe lo que hay que hacer, brigadier, ponerse a pensar muy seriamente en ver qué se publicó, qué se sabe, qué no se sabe, y con toda esa información en la mano.

CAB: Yo le voy a dejar a usted todo este material, yo tengo copia de todo. Se lo dejo todo completo, con toda confianza. ('Cabanillas2': 11–12)

Empathy and trust were the basis upon which the sources gave Martínez their information. A similar situation arose when, in his letters to Firpo, he states that he managed to get into the Argentinian Embassy. Martínez reports that he had met people who were willing to give him information. Besides, regarding the author's relationship with his informants, his son Ezequiel Martínez has pointed out (as he was witness to some of his father's interviews), that 'Era muy entrador, hacía que la gente se sintiera enseguida muy cómoda, podía hablar con cualquier persona y hacerla sentir como que estaba hablando con un igual, se interesaba mucho por la otra persona' (2014). The author's aim of developing empathy with others in order to obtain information is clearly evident in the way he led Cabanillas, Sorolla and Koenig's widow to talk about a possible case of necrophilia. Martínez raises the topic in different ways depending on each informant and the relationship they had with the man accused of the act, Moori Koenig. When he talked with Cabanillas, for example, he asked directly on the topic:

TEM: Pero, discúlpeme. Ahí quedan los tres meses o cuatro que Moori Koenig está a cargo del cadáver. Lo importante es –porque ahí hay mucha leyenda– ver exactamente qué es lo que pasó. De lo que yo he oído y he leído en todo este asunto es que hubo episodios necrófilos con el cadáver, para decírselo en lenguaje vulgar, que se lo cogieron al cadáver. Disculpe que use este lenguaje crudo, pero estamos entre hombres (1989a: 2).

By pointing out that they are among men only, the interviewer tries to position himself as an equal in an intimate conversation, preparing an appropriate environment for the confession. The conversation continues without any direct response — apparently due to Cabanillas's struggle to find the words to describe the episode in question — but Martínez maintains a gentler tone in his interview, until he obtains the evidence he sought:

TEM: Discúlpeme, coronel. Perdóneme que vuelva sobre una historia que le es ajena a usted. ¿Se había bebido arriba del cadáver, se había hecho mesa...?

CAB: Personalmente no me consta, a mí me llegaron comentarios de que sí. Evidentemente una de las causas justamente del relevo de Moori Koenig, es que le habrían llegado a Osorio Arana versiones de que estaba evidentemente cometiendo un sacrilegio con ese cadáver, que se estaban haciendo ceremonias al lado del cadáver, festejos, y gritaban y tiraban vino encima y todo lo demás (3).

On the contrary, when the author interviews Moori Koenig's widow he does not seem to have asked direct questions about the rumours of necrophilia. He listened to her side of the story, even if in his notes on the conversation he shows himself to be aware of a different version. In the transcript of the interview, Martínez quite literally underlines the

fact that the widow gives him another version of the story: ‘Aramburu metió preso a Moori cuando él abortó una revolución antes de la de Valle, y se opuso a que mataran a los conspiradores (versión opuesta a la de Cabanillas: que lo metieron preso para alejarlo del cadáver).’ (1991: 2)⁸³ There is an obsession with the truth that can be perceived throughout the transcripts. Questions to verify dates, details of how the corpse was hidden, descriptions of places and people are constantly repeated to each informant, as if Martínez was looking for contradictions and also for the part of story that had not been discovered yet. As the characters are moved by an obsession to possess Eva through the manipulation of her dead body, Martínez is also obsessed with possessing her through information, as his fictional self remembers in *Santa Evita*:

Recordé el tiempo en que anduve tras las sobras de su sombra, yo también en busca de su cuerpo perdido [...] hablé con la madre, el mayordomo de la casa presidencial, el peluquero, su director de cine, la manicure, las modistas, dos actrices de su compañía de teatro, el músico bufo que le consiguió trabajo en Buenos Aires. Hablé con las figuras marginales y no con los ministros ni aduladores de su corte porque no eran como Ella: no podían verle el filo ni los bordes por los que Evita siempre había caminado. (66)⁸⁴

As opposed to a historian’s utilisation of his research, Martínez will not give any conclusive or complete story about what happened to the corpse. By playing with the borders of literary genres and their conventions, Martínez is actually questioning the nature of a real story. Therefore, his novels offer not only a critique of social and political issues in Argentina, but also a critique of the ways in which reality is narrated.

In conclusion, a paratextual reading of Martínez’s Peronist novels complements and definitely challenges the traditional interpretation of these texts as fiction. It is evident that Martínez deliberately experimented with diverse modes of documentary narration to represent his encounters with Juan Domingo Perón. It can be presumed that this was because of the author’s aim to show that the discursive mode, even in journalism, can actually change the way in which reality is perceived. As an experienced journalist, Martínez was aware of the power of media in the construction of reality, ‘el medio sustituía a la realidad; el medio *era* la realidad’ (2009b: 150).

⁸³ Underlining is Martínez’s own emphasis.

⁸⁴ Among the documents I discovered in Tomás Eloy Martínez’s private archive there were transcripts of interviews with different sorts of informants who witnessed a part of Perón’s or Eva’s life, for example Elvira Barilatti, a school teacher who was a friend of Perón’s aunt, and Luis Ratto, a lawyer who was Perón’s college classmate. These transcripts also contain notes or brief physical descriptions of the interviewees and the location of the encounter. The questions focus on descriptive details about places where Perón used to live or visit. The archives also contain copies of documents such as CIA reports on Perón and Perón’s letters (Buenos Aires, Archivo TEM).

CHAPTER 4. LOCAL CONVERSATIONS IN GLOBALIZED TIMES

Martín Caparrós and Juan Villoro are considered two of the best chroniclers in Latin America. Apart from their careers as novelists, they are both part of the group *Nuevos Cronistas de Indias* and teachers at the *Fundación para un Nuevo Periodismo Iberoamericano*. They also share a passion for football, as is exposed in their famous football *crónicas* and their co-authored book *Ida y vuelta: una correspondencia sobre fútbol* (2012). In this chapter, however, I focus on two texts that are not actually acknowledged by their creators as proper *crónicas*, for they were not planned as such and, according to the authors, were rather written by chance: Caparrós's *Una luna. Diario de hiperviaje* (2009) and Villoro's *8.8 El miedo en el espejo. Una crónica del terremoto en Chile* (2010). In these works, discourse hybridity goes beyond the traditional and quite prescriptive definition of the genre of *crónica*. As Caparrós advises the reader: 'Esto no es una crónica: es sólo un diario de hiperviaje' (2009: 62). Contrary to their other travel writing, the self-reflective narrators are travellers exposed here to otherness in a foreign country.⁸⁵ On neither occasion was the reason for the journey a happy one, and the narrator is confronted by existential and moral questions.

By depicting themselves as explorers in unexpected lands or situations, Villoro and Caparrós follow the tradition of the *crónicas de conquista* initiated by the first chroniclers travelling in Latin America. They are, however, aware of the anachronistic task of a traditional chronicler in today's world. Based on their physical and intellectual experience of approaching others in globalised times, they create not only a particular style and point of view — closer to postmodern aesthetics than to conventional journalism — but they also raise questions of ethics and communication. Therefore, both authors deal with what Thea Pitman (2008) has identified as a trend towards a type of postcolonial travel writing in Latin American literature, particularly in Mexico, since the late 1990s.

⁸⁵ There are other travel books that receive wider acknowledgement from the critics, for instance: Caparrós's *El interior* (2006), which is a travelogue of the author's adventures while driving through the northern provinces of Argentina, and Villoro's *Palmeras de la brisa rápida: un viaje a Yucatán* (1989), an account of Villoro's own experience while travelling to his grandmother's land as part of a commission for a collection of travel books.

These chroniclers embrace a postmodern worldview and innovative narrative style in contrast with their Latin American predecessors, particularly in their configuration of a self-aware metafictional narrator. However, I believe that the main difference from the tradition of travel writing in the region is Villoro's and Caparrós's mediatory role, for they travel through their countries, or other regions of the developing world, as insiders in respect to culture but as outsiders in social class. This duality makes their self-representation highly problematic, particularly in the encounters with their informants.

Juan Villoro Ruiz was born in Mexico City in 1958, where he still lives.⁸⁶ He has published novels, short-stories, children's literature, plays, screenplays, essays, chronicles and newspaper articles, and he is also a translator of German and English. He holds a BA in Sociology from Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana and has been lecturer at Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, as well as a visiting scholar at Yale, Princeton, Universidad Autónoma de Madrid and Universidad Pompeu Fabra. The writer is the son of Estela Ruiz, a psychoanalyst from Yucatán, and Luis Villoro, a philosopher, diplomat and professor, whose family emigrated from Catalonia to Mexico. Juan Villoro grew up reading newspapers, particularly *Excélsior*, while it was under Julio Scherer's direction. Although reading José Agustín's novel *De Perfil* (1966) encouraged him to write fiction, he found a model for his later journalistic work in cultural magazines such as Vicente Leñero's *La Revista de revistas* and Octavio Paz's *Plural*. He attended a writing workshop at Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes conducted by Augusto Monterroso, who recommended Villoro's first book, the collection of short-stories *La noche navegable* (1980), to the publisher Joaquín Díez Canedo. By then, Villoro was a script writer and presenter of the music program *El lado oscuro de la luna*, on Radio Educación. From 1981 to 1984 he was the cultural attaché of the Mexican Embassy in East Berlin, in the German Democratic Republic. Back in Mexico, he published his first novel, *El disparo de argón*, in 1991, and from 1995 to 1998 he directed *La Jornada Semanal*, the cultural supplement of *La Jornada* newspaper. He has published in Mexican magazines *Nexos*, *Vuelta*, *Siempre!* and *Proceso*. He is a regular contributor to the newspapers *La Jornada* and *El País*, and he also publishes in South American media, including *El Mercurio* in Chile and *El Malpensante* in Colombia. Villoro's prolific and multifaceted career as an author is demonstrated by the variety of his prestigious prizes. Among others, he has been awarded the Premio Xavier Villaurrutia 1999 for the short-story collection *La casa pierde* (1999), Premio Mazatlán 2001 for the essay collection

⁸⁶ Villoro's biographical information is taken from personal interview (see interview 7) and from Esquembre (Biblioteca Virtual Miguel de Cervantes).

Efectos personales, Premio Herralde 2004 for the novel *El testigo*, Premio Internacional de Periodismo Manuel Vázquez Montalbán 2006 for the chronicle collection *Dios es redondo*, Premio Ciudad de Barcelona 2009 for an article about the discovery of Robert Capa's photographs of the Spanish Civil War, and Premio Internacional de Periodismo Rey de España 2010 for an article on Mexican drug cartels. He has been awarded prizes for his literary career, such as Premio Iberoamericano de Letras José Donoso 2012, and Homenaje Nacional de Periodismo Cultural Fernando Benítez 2013 for his journalistic work. Among his numerous journalistic publications, there are only two full-length stories: *Palmeras de la brisa rápida: Un viaje a Yucatán* (1989) and *8.8 El miedo en el espejo* (2010). A selection of his most representative work as *cronista* can be found in *Espejo retrovisor* (2013).

Martín Caparrós was born in Buenos Aires in 1957 and he is a journalist, novelist and essayist.⁸⁷ At the age of sixteen he wanted to be a photographer so he asked for an internship in the Argentinian newspaper *Noticias*.⁸⁸ Later he started writing news pieces on crime under the guidance of Rodolfo Walsh. In 1976 he went into exile to Paris and then to Madrid, following the military coup that deposed Isabel Perón and began the dictatorship of Jorge Videla. During his exile, he took a BA in History at La Sorbonne and wrote novels. He returned to Argentina after the dictatorship was over and published his first novels, *Ansay o los infortunios de la gloria* (1984), and *No velas a tus muertos* (1986). During this time, he worked in the cultural section of the *Tiempo argentino* newspaper and ran the radio programme 'Sueños de una noche de Belgrano', and the television programme 'El monitor argentino'. He was editor of the magazines *El Porteño*, *Babel* and *Cuisine&Vins*, and was one of the founders of Jorge Lanata's *Página/12* newspaper in 1987. In 1990, in the cultural supplement *Página/30*, Caparrós started to write a series of long stories about life in the provinces under the name of 'Crónicas de fin de siglo', for which he was awarded the Premio Internacional de Periodismo Rey de España.

According to Caparrós's reflections, the word *crónica* was hardly used by journalists in Argentina, for it referred to the most marginal position on the journalistic scale: the young apprentice who went out into the streets in order to gather the information that a more experienced journalist required to write the news. Like Villoro, Caparrós was

⁸⁷ Caparrós's biographical information is taken from personal interview (see interview 2), Angulo (2014) and his profile at <<http://nuevoscronistasdeindias.fnpi.org>> [accessed 11 April 2017].

⁸⁸ Although, in our interview, Caparrós denied the importance of photography to his work, he usually takes photographs during his travels and some of them have been published to illustrate his texts, as in the case of *Una luna*. He also published a photographic book, *Palipalí. Impresiones Coreanas* (2012).

never this kind of journalist, or at least not for long. After a period in the newsrooms, he has worked mostly as a freelance writer. He has been an advisor to the United Nations, and a literary translator of French and English. In 2004 he was awarded the Premio Planeta Latinoamérica for his novel *Valferno*, and the Premio Herralde de Novela in 2011 for *Los Living*. From 2011 to 2014 he published the blog *Pamplinas*, in the digital version of *El País*. His body of nonfiction writing is even more extensive than that of his fiction. Among his most representative books are the history book *La voluntad. Una historia de la militancia revolucionaria en la Argentina* (2007–2008), co-authored with Eduardo Anguita; the *crónica* collections based on his travels, *Larga distancia* (1992), *La guerra moderna* (1999), and *El interior* (2006); the novel based on a true story, *Amor y anarquía. La vida urgente de Soledad Rosas* (2003); and the journalistic books *Contra el cambio* (2010) and *El hambre* (2014). *Lacrónica* (2016) is his own anthology of *crónicas*.

4.1 The journalist as protagonist

Una luna and *El miedo...* cannot be read as traditional chronicles, but as a broader type of documentary narrative. In their aim to give meaning to a personal and collective experience, they use a variety of testimonial-based genres (for example: diaries, letters, electronic messages, notes, press articles, interviews/conversations), intersected by fictional modes (such as poems, novels). Traditional methods of documenting reality, these books seem to propose, are no longer adequate to narrate the experiences of a globalised citizen moving through chaotic times and spaces.

Neither book was originally conceived as a literary-journalistic project. The life-stories or journalistic profiles of young migrants included in *Una luna* were published one year before in a shorter, edited version as part of a United Nations report, *Jóvenes en movimiento* (2007). ‘El sabor de la muerte’, a section of 8.8 *El miedo en el espejo*, was originally published in *La Nación* Newspaper, a week after the 2010 earthquake in Chile, which was experienced by Villoro while he was attending a conference on children’s literature.

Although *Una luna* actually contains chronicles, for Caparrós the book is rather a travel diary, which was never supposed to be a book:

Hasta hoy –hasta ahora, sentado en este bar de Amsterdam, con tanto frío afuera y adentro leve soledad– no había pensado que esto pudiera disfrazarse de libro. Yo sólo tenía que armar mis historias sobre inmigrantes jóvenes. Pero desde que salí que estoy

tomando notas –porque todavía no aprendí a viajar de otra manera. Lo intento, lo intento, pero no. Y ahora –un cigarrillo fuerte, una cerveza belga, tres amigos que gritan en la mesa de al lado–, cuando miro las notas que se han ido acumulando imagino que quizá tengan algún sentido –y pienso en publicarlas porque todavía no aprendí a escribir para el silencio. Lo intento –fuertemente lo intento– pero no todavía. (2009: 62)

The narrator thus emphasizes the originally private nature of his writing. For him, *Una luna* is the product of his travel notes, which were written on the road to freely express his thoughts and feelings while he was working for the UN project. Unlike his travel notes, the UN texts had to be precise and impersonal, as he observes in *Una luna*:

En principio tienen que estar en tercera persona y tener menos de dos mil palabras. En mis crónicas, dos mil palabras es lo que suelo usar para aclararme la garganta. Y, peor, el problema de contar sin incluirme: la tarea de desaparecer. Un buen ejercicio, me digo: un desafío –y otra manera de viajar. (15)

Written originally as a personal side project, *Una luna* then becomes the subversive response of an author who cannot conceal his voice within that of a third-person narrator. It is important, however, to consider Caparrós's decision to configure a self-insert narrator as a business traveller. As opposed to those who travel for pleasure or in search of adventure, as the old *cronistas de Indias* did, or who travel out of necessity, like his own informants for the UN report, this narrator travels in order to work. He depicts himself as a modern globalized traveller, flying from one side of the world to another in hours.

On the contrary, in *El miedo...*, Villoro approaches a narrative drawn from personal memory as a self-conscious decision to make public a private and unexpected experience of the fear of death. The narrator here is also a writer travelling because of work, for he is to be a speaker in a conference.

Both books are born of private writing, of personal experiences that were not supposed to become public. Writing their testimony freely, without the limitations of any institutional report or a newspaper assignment, becomes for Caparrós and Villoro a way to escape from reality and at the same time to make sense of it in a deeper manner. According to his own account, Caparrós did not conceive of *Una luna* as a publishable book, since it was intended to be a present for the guests of his birthday party, and was based on personal notes made during his travels (see interview 2). Similarly, Villoro configures a narrator who decides to write a book about the earthquake he lived through in Chile only after his hands stopped trembling, as he narrates in *El miedo...*:

—¿Vas a escribir del terremoto? —me preguntó un colega periodista apenas aterricé en el aeropuerto del D.F.

—Cuando me dejen de temblar las manos —contesté.

Pasaron unos días antes de que eso fuera posible. En Santiago había tomado algunos apuntes, ajenos a todo sentido de la concentración. (2010a: 21)

Villoro's attempt to make sense of his traumatic experience is represented textually by independent paragraphs. This unconventional fragmentation of the text symbolizes the flow of thoughts that can be registered in a notebook, jumping from one idea to another without a logical transition.

Both narrators show a consciousness of the chaotic and non-linear process of writing through a journey in which dramatic experiences are encountered. Registering their accounts is not a way of preserving facts anymore, but a way of trying to understand what is going on. However, the notes based on feelings and thoughts as they apparently appear on the author's mind — a sort of real stream-of-consciousness — are not transcribed word by word to conform with the format of the book, but are mixed with remembrances. The narrators are, furthermore, aware of the lack of reliability in this approach to reality, as Caparrós demonstrates when he narrates his observations on men in a bar in Lusaka:

Once de la mañana: en el Stanley Bar, los hombres toman leche. Hay una forma rara de mi felicidad en viaje: caminar, caminar, más o menos entretenido, más o menos no, y dar de pronto con un lugar que me ilumina la cara: ese lugar que sí valía la pena. (2009: 161)

On the next page, he describes the joy of the experienced and bored traveller who finally finds an authentic local experience. The anecdote of the men drinking milk in a bar is demystified by the encounter with other people:

El viajero no sabe una mierda. Supone, busca, piensa, afirma —y muchas veces sigue suponiendo. Los muchachos del Stanley Bar no tomaban leche: en esos tetras blancos tan lechosos, con letras que decían shake shake, de donde salía un líquido tan leche, había una chicha, una bebida alcohólica de maíz fermentado que aquí llaman chibuku. Me lo dicen ahora, camino al aeropuerto, y puedo corregirlo. Pero fue un azar: lo más lógico habría sido no enterarme nunca. ¿Hasta qué punto hay que seguir averiguando o, dicho de otro modo, desde qué punto desconfiar? ¿Si veo una bebida con nombre de leche que sale de un recipiente de leche y es igual a la lecha, debo decir que es leche? ¿O debería, mejor, dejar claro lo que podría ser evidente: que un señor mirando es un señor mirando, no el garante de la verdad divina? (162)

These reflections on the limits of the observer to interpret other cultures leads the reader to question the unreliable nature of the text itself and therefore of the documentary genres as a way of representing reality. By choosing to present the experience as it supposedly happened, Caparrós risks his credibility as a narrator of real stories. Nevertheless, this procedure allows him to demonstrate the impossibility of observation and interpretation as reliable methods of research. In a similar tone, Villoro echoes Giorgio Agamben's idea of the 'integral witness' — those who could relate the complete experience — in order to reflect on the function of the chronicle as a way of approaching what cannot be uttered (2010a: 24).

Within the fragmented textual structure, digressions and flashbacks are used to relate current experiences to past experiences. These techniques allow the authors to develop their literary motives, beyond their particular documentary intention. Experiencing by chance the 2010 earthquake in Santiago de Chile, Villoro remembers the 1985 Mexico City earthquake, and thus the fear of death becomes a motif in his writing. In the case of Caparrós, interviewing young migrants in places where he has lived before reminds him of his own youth, and a tone of nostalgia spreads over the book.

These narrators observe and interpret reality through the lens of their own past experiences, their literary and cultural references, and through national and individual identities. Caparrós-as-narrator is a white Western man travelling to poor areas of the world countries, as Villoro is a Mexican writer stuck in Chile unexpectedly. Their expectations, observations and feelings during the travel are influenced by their represented identity. They are aware of their own perspectives and are willing to show their position to the readers. By doing so, both authors become critical of the social order they represent too. For instance, Caparrós questions not only the globalized nature of contemporary travel, but also the role of the humanitarian institutions claiming to save the world while travelling first class:

El desierto allá abajo es bellísimo y marrueco, plagado de colores. El chardonnay es chileno, el sauvignon neozelandés, francés el foie, el salmón canadiense; el señor de mi izquierda es norteamericano, el de mi derecha senegalés, pero los tres somos oenegeros leyendo reportes sobre miseria y emergencias sociales en el oeste de África. Es clase Hombres, por supuesto: la solidaridad bien entendida empieza por sí mismo. (35)

The authors, however, construct their narration from the perspective of someone for whom the travel was imposed by others. Having positioned themselves as men of letters,

writing becomes their way of making sense of the forced travelling experience, so whatever happens outside home can only be interpreted by the means of language.

Villoro's and Caparrós's documentary narratives might not be reliable as pieces of traditional journalism, but they claim to be honest with their own human experiences in encountering otherness. The narrators are aware of the limits of the journalistic genre in the representation of reality:

la historia del señor bajo el árbol con traje justificado porque es el uniforme de hacer business parece mandada a hacer para refrendar lo que escribía anteayer sobre los trajes y los negros. ¿Qué hago entonces? ¿Empiezo por contarla, como mandan los cánones del buen viejo nuevo periodismo, y después sigo con mi reflexión? ¿La ignoro porque parece demasiado a propósito, casi inventada? ¿Trato de darle verosimilitud con algún dato o detalle que la singularice y complemente? ¿O me armo una pequeña discusión sobre qué hacer y así ya nadie duda de que la historia era real y mis intenciones las mejores? (Caparrós 2009: 159)

Metafiction or, more accurately, metajournalism, is used by Caparrós to control, to an extent, the interpretation of the facts. This is a stylistic device frequently used by (meta)documentary narratives, particularly in the depiction of scenes in which the journalist–narrator is writing in real time about his surroundings. From a table in a Parisian café, for instance, Caparrós tries to remember an interview that he conducted in El Salvador a month before:

Trato de pensar cómo era todo hace unos días, cuando estaba sentado en el coche de un pandillero salvadoreño, estacionado en la puerta de su casa de un barrio duro, nueve, diez de la noche, y él me hablaba y pasaban las sombras a los lados (88).

There is thus a sense of dislocation, for the place of writing is hardly ever the same as the one of the experience. Similarly, Villoro's account of the earthquake can only be interpreted when he is back home. The narrator in *El miedo...* informs the reader that he has made notes while he was waiting for a flight to return to his own country. It is improbable, however, that during the moment of the earthquake he was taking notes. This is why the most sensitive narrative episode in his book, the narration of his own experience while dealing with the possibility of his own death, could only have been written based on memories:

Cuando el movimiento cesó por fin, sobrevino una sensación de irrealidad. [...] Al cabo de unos segundos, los gritos que el edificio había sofocado con sus crujidos se volvieron audibles. Abrí la puerta y vi una nube espesa. Pensé que se trataba de humo y que el edificio se incendiaba. Era polvo. Sentí un ardor en la garganta.

Volví al cuarto, abrí la caja fuerte donde estaban mis documentos, tomé mi computadora y perdí un tiempo precioso atándome los zapatos con doble nudo. Los obsesivos morimos así. (61–62)

Villoro's account of the earthquake is influenced by his own aesthetic aspirations. If the text were purely a journalistic one, he would not care, or have the space in the newspaper, for comments of a philosophical nature. In this scene, however, Villoro is not only narrating the event as it happened, but also depicting himself as an obsessive man who was willing to risk his life rather than exit the building without his valuable possessions or his shoes well tied.

In their documentary narratives, Caparrós and Villoro confront themselves with natural and social phenomena which they cannot control, such as earthquakes, poverty, globalization, and death. Their metadocumentary narratives go beyond the journalistic aim of registering an event, and even beyond the parodic intentions of showing the construction of reality by the media, like authors such as Tomás Eloy Martínez do. Citizens of a globalised society, Caparrós and Villoro abandoned any attempt at control, and their writings show the impossibility of shaping reality into a unified, coherent narrative.

4.2 Approaching strangers: Martín Caparrós around the world

When researching his stories on migration for the UN, Caparrós worked under specific circumstances. He had to act as an anthropologist and journalist, yet he had very little time to get to know the place he visited, to learn its customs or languages, or to understand what it was to live as a local. The result was an informative institutional report which, besides the collected life-stories, included quantitative data, such as statistics, maps, photographs and historical and sociological information. The life-stories that Caparrós and other authors recorded were considered by the editors to be 'emotivos y evocadores' (Lanski and Schellekens 2007: ii).

As I have already mentioned, however, Caparrós's travel notes were later turned into the book *Una luna*. The book incorporates the migrants' testimonies from the report, and even more. The great difference is the change in the narrator's voice. In the report,

the stories are presented in the form of journalistic profiles or in a biographical style, that is using a third-person narrator to describe facts, with direct quotations from the interviewees. On the contrary, the stories in *Una luna* are narrated in the first-person, by a self-reflective narrator who takes time to give detailed descriptions of the context of the encounter with the interviewees, and even of the problems he had in reaching them.

Another outstanding difference is the question of authorship. The UN stories are anonymous, for Caparrós's name appears in the credits of the booklet as part of the editorial team, as editor in chief and under 'Periodistas/Autores de las Historias de Vida', but not as author of any specific story. On the contrary, in Caparrós's *Una luna*, there is a strong presence of a self-represented narrator.

Whereas in the report, credibility is given to the testimonies by the supporting data and by institutional reliability, in *Una luna* this credibility is sustained through the authority of the narrator as witness. The narrator in the book is depicted as a participant-observer in whose experience and knowledge the reader should trust. And if this rather subjective story that frames the multiple life-stories of others can offer a sense of reality it is also because of its form. *Una luna* is not presented as an individual memory but as a diary written on the road, a type of text that might resemble an anthropologist's field journal. In the book, subjective information, such as perceptions, feelings, thoughts and interpretations of the stories told, is as reliable as the statistics are for the report. This is due to the narrative effect of the discourse chosen to frame the testimonies.

Although the facts of the stories of the young migrants in a globalized world are barely modified in the report version, Caparrós nevertheless eliminates the dialogue. The speech that in *Una luna* is represented as a conversation, a fragment of a real, recorded, interview, in the report is limited to the single declarations of the informants. Stylistically, the disappearance of the narrator-interviewer from the text can be interpreted as a way of giving voice to the other, as has been the case regarding testimonial literature. This disappearance of the authorial voice, however, restricts the plurality of meaning that the text can offer as well, as it makes a debate on the ethical implications of the encounter between the journalist and his interviewees more difficult. An example is the story of Natalia, a young woman from Moldova who was sold by her husband to a human trafficker. The story in the report begins with Natalia's impoverished childhood, while in the book, Caparrós first narrates his own journey to meet her:

Anoche cené foie gras y fue en París; esta noche, polenta con queso en Kishinau, capital de Moldavia. Hay algo en esos saltos que me atrae más que nada.

Kishinau es mi imagen de una ciudad rusa de provincias después de la caída.

Mucho monoblock, negocios de aquellos tristes todavía, el hotel con lámparas tan tenues, unas cuadras del centro con sofisticación barata y algún coche alemán. [...] ¿Quién va a emprender, alguna vez, aquel estudio comparativo: el malgusto capitalista frente al malgusto socialista, una lectura del Siglo de las Luces de Colores? (17)

Another modification of the testimony lies in its descriptions of places and people, as can be seen from the passage. In the report, the testimony appears out of context, and the circumstances leading to it are not problematized. In *Una luna*, Caparrós lets the reader know who is the writer of that testimony: someone able to enjoy a Parisian delicatessen before travelling to an impoverished ex-Soviet Union country, and who is aware of the historical, political and aesthetic differences between the world he has travelled from and the one he is travelling to. The narrator does not conceal his perceptions of the place, nor his own ideology or preferences.

By representing himself in the interview situation, Caparrós shows the conversation to the reader from behind the scenes and, therefore, transforms the testimony into a dialogical space for both real and literary encounters. The report ends Natalia's story as follows:

¿Por qué hablas con nosotros?

Bueno, yo primero quería ocultar mi historia, porque acá cuando se enteran no te tratan como víctima sino como culpable. Pero ahora sé que tengo que contarlo: si no, me voy a pasar toda la vida pensando en esos meses. Contarlo es la manera de dejarlo atrás y de ayudar a que no le pase a otras chicas como yo.

¿Qué esperas del futuro?

Natalia se calla, piensa, intenta una sonrisa.

Qué pregunta difícil.

Dice.

(‘Natalia. Moldova, víctima del tráfico de personas’: 28)

In *Una luna*, the same part of the story is narrated as follows (words in bold highlight the parts that are not in the report):

–¿Por qué **hablás** con nosotros y no con tu familia?

–**Porque ellos nunca me entenderían.** Yo primero quería ocultar mi historia, porque acá **en mi país** cuando se enteran **te discriminan**, no te tratan como víctima sino como culpable. Pero ahora sé que tengo que contarlo: si no, me voy a pasar toda la vida pensando en esos meses. Contarlo es la manera de dejarlo atrás y de ayudar a que no les pase a otras chicas como yo.

Dice Natalia, pero no quiere que su cara se vea clara en las fotos. Todos los expertos coinciden en que el tráfico es sólo la punta del iceberg de la migración – y que seguirá mientras sigan la pobreza y la falta de perspectivas que la causan: mientras el noventa por ciento de los jóvenes moldavos siga pensando en emigrar,

mientras haya mujeres que prefieren arriesgarse a lo desconocido antes que seguir en un lugar que no les ofrece ninguna posibilidad.

–¿Qué esperás del futuro?

Natalia se calla, piensa, intenta una sonrisa, **se restriega con un dedo el ojo falso. Afuera nieva. Lo bueno de la nieve es que vaga en el aire: allí donde la lluvia cae, la nieve flota, hace como si no tuviera un fin, como si no quisiera nada.**

–Qué pregunta difícil.

Dice, **tras haber contestado tantas preguntas imposibles.** (27–28)

Although some of the stories in the report do include questions, these are presented in bold, separated from the rest of the text — without the use of hyphens, as in a script or a novelistic dialogue — and there is no indication of their speaker, as if the interviewer were hidden or did not exist at all. In the book, on the contrary, the reader can recognise the Argentinian identity of the interviewer by noticing the accent mark on ‘hablás’ and ‘esperás’. Additionally, the description and perception of Natalia’s reactions to the questions, which do not appear in the report, offer a subjective dimension to the story, one told from the point of view of a concrete narrator. The representation of Natalia in the book reveals someone shy, frightened and embarrassed by the interview. The report does not include either Caparrós’s reflections on Moldova, or his final comment interpreting Natalia’s attitude during the conversation, which shows his awareness and recognition that she has answered many difficult questions.

In the book, details of the environment, such as the note on the snow and the narrator’s effort to relate the weather to the story, are also important, for they provide the stage on which the encounter between the self and the other occurs. In contrast with the report, Natalia continues to act as a character in *Una luna*, but only as seen through the eyes of the one who registers her movements and attitudes:

Natalia y yo estábamos sentados uno al lado del otro pero los dos mirábamos a Alexandrina, que traducía del moldavo al inglés, del inglés al moldavo. Acabo de pasarme cinco horas escuchando a una chica con un ojo de vidrio y una vida tan dura que su marido la entregó, embarazada de él, a un traficante –y todo el resto. Hay cosas que no se pueden escuchar impunemente. (28)

As one can recognise from the fragment above, the conditions of the dialogue are problematic not only because of the social and cultural differences between the interviewer and the interviewee, but also because of the language barrier. As opposed to the transparent testimony offered in the report, in *Una luna* the reader is invited to look behind the stage and see what happens when the public dialogue is over. Furthermore, Natalia will continue to be present in the book through the narrator’s own assimilation of

her testimony. Some pages later, she re-appears in Caparrós's memories when he is looking at the prostitutes in the windows of the red light district in Amsterdam:

Las chicas semidesnudas en las ventanas de farolitos rojos ya no me calientan. Creo que antes sí –y no es que sea, ahora, menos pajero. [...] No hay mito, no hay misterio: el capitalismo, a veces, no sabe cómo hacerlo. Y, para peor, me acuerdo de Natalia. Pese a lo que quiera creer –el periodista–, hay charlas que nunca se terminan.

Pero ahora, cuando ya pasó, me doy cuenta de que lo que más recuerdo de Moldavia son mis pies mojados en la nieve hecha barro del mercado central, el frío apretujado y ese ojo, sobre todo ese ojo: ojo grande vivo bello azul oscuro con ese golpe verde violáceo negro alrededor y ese golpe rojo por la sangre adentro –y la chica de veinte años y tres hijos y su pasado de monja trucha traficaba y su presente de ese ojo y los veinte euros que me pidió por contarme su historia: ese ojo tan azul desnudo. (64–65)

As shown in the passage, the narrator's travelling experience was influenced by Natalia's story, to the extent that he is no longer able to look for sexual services as he used to. It is also surprising that a physical feature that shocks the narrator, the fact that Natalia only has one eye, is not something important in the report but becomes a symbolic element used to depict Natalia as character in the book. The narrator confesses another fact that goes untold in the report: Natalia asked him for money in order to relate her life-story to him. If Natalia's life has been part of a business in which she has been the victim, then by exposing this fact, the narrator gives narrative (and some economic) power to the marginal other. Natalia is the owner of her own story, able to negotiate the value of her words with the interviewer. In choosing to write about his own interactions with the informants, Caparrós generates another reading of their testimonies, one with a strong emotional impact.

The stories heard, recorded and transcribed first as isolated testimonies in an institutional and conventional report, become the raw material for the author's travel palimpsest. This new product goes beyond the mere aim to be informative, in order to show the story that unites all the other stories: the story of the researcher doing his fieldwork.

As in the case of Tomás Eloy Martínez (see Chapter 3), editing becomes the main narrative strategy employed by Caparrós to re-appropriate the voices of his informants. Caparrós re-signifies the testimonies by describing the circumstances of the production of his research. Through the format of the book, the author is then able to offer an additional aesthetic dimension to what would otherwise have remained a handful of dramatic stories published in a conventional report.

4.3 Surviving conventions: Juan Villoro's 'aftershock' narratives

Similar to Martín Caparrós's *Una luna*, some parts of Juan Villoro's *El miedo...* are written in the style of a field journal. The self-referential narrator is also a writer, and not even during the catastrophic days recounted was he able to put down his pen and paper. Nor was this book originally thought of as a text to be published.

On 6 March 2010, Villoro published 'El sabor de la muerte' in the Argentinian newspaper *La Nación*, which he would later incorporate in a longer form to *El miedo...* The newspaper version was the first of Villoro's attempts to represent his life-changing experience through writing.

As in the case of Caparrós's works, Villoro's first published version of this text does not differ too much from the book's in content and style, but the differences are still highly significant in terms of genre, authorial intentions and reader expectations. Analysing the process of editing allows us to better comprehend the author's conception of the journalistic and literary genres, since by making minimal changes—for example, adding or reducing phrases in paragraphs, changing elements of the structure, and choosing what to highlight—Villoro demonstrates his awareness of the conventions of each field of production, even if it is only so that he may challenge them.

Of course, there is a political contrast in the two spaces of discourse. Whereas 'El sabor de la muerte' is published in an old, traditional, conservative newspaper in Argentina, it was a small, independent publishing house in Mexico, Almadía, that published *El miedo...* However, a different type of analysis will be necessary to compare the texts in terms of the ideology of their respective media and the influence that this might have had in editing the content. In general terms, there are no obvious marks of political censorship in the newspaper version. Nevertheless, I do consider that the contrast between the two different print media demonstrates the author's preferences for the book format over the mass media. It seems that for contemporary chroniclers, the book is becoming a preferable alternative medium to express their own relationship to facts, and even to inform their audiences in a wider and more complex way of the realities around them.

Moreover, the conventions and the intentions of the publishing spaces and the genres of discourse they display, are what modify the production of meaning regarding the events and their factual representation. Villoro's first published narrative on the earthquake can be read thus as a journalistic text, formally a *crónica*, although defined by the newspaper as *opinión*. On the contrary, the extended or less-edited version of the text

included in *El miedo...* cannot be considered a conventional *crónica*. By being incorporated into the book, this second version has become another layer of Villoro's literary account of the earthquake. In order to narrate a collective experience of the event, *El miedo...* therefore blends the first journalistic text with other registers, like the essay, *testimonio*, and electronic text messages.

The newspaper text appeared on page 4 of *La Nación*, in the section for international news called 'Exterior', and as part of the special reporting that the media was doing under the label of *Tragedia en Chile*. The dramatic tone employed to present the news is evident in this title, which alludes to suffering and pain by using the word 'tragedy'. This tone is also obvious in the topic of all the texts on the page. Two focus on the feelings of people affected by the earthquake: Villoro's 'opinion' piece and a reporter's interviews with Chilean marines whose families were in Chile. The other two international news items on the page cover the popular protests on the economic crisis in Greece — including a full-colour photograph of the police attacking citizens — and China's attempts to decrease social inequality. (see illustration 11)

The main section of the page, however, is formed by the two texts on the earthquake. The text of reporter Diana Salinas Plaza is the *nota principal*, since it is placed at the top of the page, illustrated with two big colour photographs. Nevertheless, Villoro's text has more words. Both texts focus on personal experiences, illustrated by photographs that also show people being affected by the accompanying stories. The testimonies of witnesses, therefore, are of interest to the newspaper's covering of the catastrophe.

The great difference between these texts is the mode of representation, which demonstrates the hierarchy of authorship. The newspaper reporter, Salinas Plaza, reproduces other people's testimonies as obtained through interviews. The veracity, or sense of truthfulness, which defines the journalistic value of her text, is based on the experiences recounted by others and not on her own opinions. This sense of truthfulness is also reinforced by style, because the text is published in a conventional documentary genre, that of news writing. Veracity is also strengthened by the photographs that illustrate the piece, which show the interviewed subjects and therefore reinforce the nature of the referent. Textual testimonies are real because the subjects were recorded and photographed.

Conversely, Villoro's text is considered to be a journalistic narrative mainly because of his signature. The veracity — or verisimilitude, if we consider this a hybrid discourse between literature and journalism — depends on the author's own words, and his prestige as a *cronista*. He does not need to quote anyone else in order to validate his

account, nor did the section editor have to add any photographic evidence. By publishing Villoro, *La Nación* demonstrates itself to be a space for the ‘real’, but also for high quality writing.

There are other signs of the editors’ intentions to highlight the value of the author, as distinct from how a reporter is usually presented. For example, under Villoro’s signature, the phrase ‘para La Nación’ is followed by the indication of place: ‘SANTIAGO, Chile’. This makes it clear that the author has written the text specially for the newspaper, even if he is not on its regular payroll. It also shows that Villoro is acting as a correspondent. Sending the text from the place of the catastrophe adds more value and truthfulness to the work. Besides, while Salinas Plaza’s text does not give any information about her, Villoro is advertised as an important witness.

Despite Villoro’s prestige as a literary author and intellectual, his chronicle is a conventional, journalistic one. It responds to the reader’s expectations of the genre since it is an individual account of the earthquake. Of course, in terms of style, his text is remarkably different from that of traditional news reporting and writing, but still, I argue, he follows the conventions of the journalistic discourse, the overall aim of which is to offer news. I consider that beginning the text with a numerical account of the facts — provided in just ten lines — is not solely a stylistic decision. This is a question of genre conventions, for in journalistic writing, the first paragraph is expected to be an abstract of the text and it must include the main facts. This famously described ‘inverted-pyramid’ structure serves to justify the newsworthy nature of the story. If by any chance Villoro were not aware of this, his editors certainly would have been. Villoro was, therefore, expected to narrate his own experience, although of course with a minimal reference to the, by then well-known, objective facts.

For the newspaper, Villoro’s testimony is important because of the cultural value the author’s name adds to its pages: the text deserves a wider space because he is a public intellectual who also happens to be at the site of the event at the ‘right’ moment. This is particularly relevant if one contrasts the longer version in the book, in which anecdotes of other people and interpretations or opinions of the earthquake are an important part of the text. The newspaper version, on the contrary, only focuses on his testimony. The journalistic text does not include references to the other people in the hotel, with whom Villoro experienced the earthquake, or their conversations. Yet these other testimonies are a central part of the author’s narrative in *El miedo...* The testimonies represent the catastrophe as an apocalyptic experience — and not only for one individual. The newspaper version also ignores details of Villoro’s anecdotes about the airlines, which

are told in the book in a tone that is critical of the Mexican government and the globalized economy. Additionally, in the book, Villoro remembers the 1985 earthquake in Mexico and offers many references drawn from his national culture.

The text in *La Nación* focuses on Villoro's detailed, sensory description of the first minutes following the catastrophe, as well as on his broad brush-strokes depicting the devastated city. For example, the headline 'El sabor de la muerte', and the sub-headline 'Pillaje y rating', provide a more impressionistic depiction of the facts, unlike the reflective tone of the book.

The extracts from the text highlighted in the page design, marked with a change in typography, also show the intention of the media to expose the most dramatic side of the text: 'Cuando el movimiento cesó, sobrevino una sensación de irrealidad. Me puse de pie. No era normal estar vivo' / 'Nuestra vida se había detenido y no sabíamos cuándo comenzaría nuestra sobrevida. Estábamos en el limbo' (idem). The emphasis on the self and his direct experience with death is evident here as a discursive technique to catch the attention of the reader, and also to make the narrative a newsworthy one. Within the limited space and genre constraints of the newspaper, Villoro nevertheless manages to hold a critical position regarding the representation of the catastrophe in the media:

El discurso de los noticieros se caracterizó por el tremendismo y la dispersión: desgracias aisladas, sin articulación de conjunto. Las imágenes de derrumbes eran relevadas por escenas de pillaje. No había evaluaciones ni sentido de la consecuencia. Unos tipos fueron sorprendidos robando un televisor de pantalla plana extragrande. Obviamente no se trataba de un objeto de primera necesidad. ¿Era un caso solitario? ¿El crimen organizado se apoderaba de electrodomésticos? Los rumores sustituyeron a las noticias. Se mencionó a un pueblo que temía ser invadido por otro. El relato fragmentario de los medios mostraba rencillas de tribus y repetía las declaraciones de una gobernadora que pedía que el ejército usara sus armas. (idem)

Although this passage can be found in the book almost verbatim, the meaning cannot be the same, since it is presented within another discursive context, framed by a more complex representation of the facts. It is surprising to find this critical statement published in an outlet of the mass media that simultaneously acts just as Villoro describes. However, the critique here may be considered light, if one compares the book version, which has a few additional, and more critical comments (highlighted in bold by myself):

El discurso de los noticieros se caracterizó por el tremendismo y la dispersión: desgracias aisladas, sin articulación de conjunto. Las imágenes de derrumbes eran relevadas por escenas de pillaje. No había evaluaciones ni sentido de la consecuencia. Unos tipos fueron sorprendidos robando un televisor de pantalla plana extra grande.

Obviamente no se trataba de un objeto de primera necesidad, **y menos en un sitio sin luz eléctrica**. ¿Era un caso solitario? ¿El crimen organizado se apoderaba de electrodomésticos?, **¿se abrían viejas heridas sociales, comunitarias, generacionales?** Los rumores sustituyeron a las noticias. **Se habló de un pueblo que temía ser invadido por otro, con el que tenía rivalidad ancestral. Se cuestionó la vigilancia de la ONEMI, la organización de la armada que debe dar alerta en casos de tsunami y que confundió la señal de maremoto con la más leve de marejada. Se refirieron abusos del ejército y se puso en tela de juicio la severidad del toque de queda, que sólo permitía que la gente saliera a la calle durante seis horas en el sur del país (esto, dicho sea de paso, era más de lo que salíamos los náufragos del lobby).**

El relato fragmentario de los medios mostraba rencillas de tribus (2010a: 73).

In a style reminiscent of the *modernista* chronicle for its use of intertextuality, Villoro ends his newspaper text with a reference to Neruda's poetry. Of course, in the book version the dialogue with the poet is more significant, for three of Neruda's poems are quoted as epigraphs: 'Oda a la tormenta', 'Oda al edificio' and 'Entrada a la madera'.

One of the main differences between the newspaper text and the book is that in the latter format the author uses intertextuality to mediate the representation of his personal experience. Multiple voices are present in the book, through direct and indirect references to poems, novels, mobile text messages, blog entries, emails, mass media narratives, the author's own writing, and his recollections of conversations. Villoro's references to others' texts demonstrate the highly intellectualized testimony of the narrator, but also allows the author to reconstruct reality from multiple perspectives, demonstrating that reality is more complex than the version constructed by the media.

On another level, in the chapters titled "'Aquí hay temblores, ¿no?" Premoniciones', and "'Estoy acá." "¿Acá dónde?" Réplicas' the book recalls John Hersey's *Hiroshima*.⁸⁹ Like Hersey, Villoro narrates the catastrophe as experienced by some of its victims, focusing on their memories, both before and after the event. Villoro also focuses on the victims' experiences, but a narrative of a catastrophe lived under different conditions inevitably has to be aware of changes in modes of representation. Unlike Hersey, who focused on the pain of the victims, with detailed descriptions of the experienced horror, Villoro constructs a narrative in which the narrator and his characters are conscious of their privileges, so that the joy of being alive emerges somehow:

El mismo 27 de febrero, Antonio Skármeta y Esteban Cabezas se presentaron en el hotel para cerciorarse de que no nos faltara nada. Otros colegas mandaron mensajes de texto ofreciendo platillos, mariscos y vinos. Nos sentimos en una versión revisada del *Titanic*: estábamos a la deriva, pero la atención era espléndida.

⁸⁹ Hersey's book also influenced texts by Monsiváis (see Chapter 2) and Martínez (see Chapter 3).

Chilenos que acabábamos de conocer ofrecieron sus casas para quienes tenían dormir en las alturas y una extraña comunidad se estableció entre quienes se instalaron en el lobby. Pensé que se fraguarían rivalidades de un sofá a otro, como en una obra de Harold Pinter, pero no hubo mayores tensiones. (2010a: 72)

This rather humoristic and ironic tone marks a distance from the experience itself but also from the traditional chronicle. The narrator compares his experience with other famous catastrophes, but also with fictional scenarios. He shows that an earthquake in the twenty-first century cannot be perceived, or narrated, as if it were the same as other catastrophes in the past. This earthquake true story, although dramatic in its own way, was experienced from a hotel, and the narrator was using technology that connected him to the rest of the world.

In contrast with the experience of the 1985 earthquake in Mexico, in which thousands of people died, the 2010 earthquake in Chile is, for the author, if not a happier memory, at least a less painful one. While chroniclers of the 1985 earthquake, such as Elena Poniatowska and Carlos Monsiváis, centred their narratives on their observations of devastated streets and buildings, and on interviews with the victims, Juan Villoro concentrates on isolated non-places, such as the hotel or airport. He also relies on the testimonies of others, particularly those from his own community of artists and intellectuals:

En el lobby se compartían ansiolíticos e impresiones. Por primera vez sentí en carne propia una etimología inglesa: *lobbying*. En los sofás del vestíbulo, el tiempo era una oportunidad para la conspiración y el cabildeo. La inmovilidad provocaba una vertiginosa especulación sobre las posibles maneras de salir de ahí. (71)

The impossibility of getting out of this nightmarish, post-apocalyptic scenario is also compared with being a character in *Lost*, a popular American television series which narrates how the survivors of an airplane accident must wait on an island to be rescued (68). Besides the references to contemporary popular culture, references to canonical literature are mixed with other not so well-known titles, such as a novel by German author Heinrich von Kleist, translated as *El terremoto en Chile* (1808). This intertext is explored by Villoro in a rather academic style, as if by analysing others' writing on earthquakes, he could illuminate his own insights on the matter. Nevertheless, for Villoro's purposes, the only possible comparison to his task of narrating the experience of the Chilean earthquake is the experience of being in a reality show:

La suspensión de vuelos y la ocasional falta de teléfonos, Internet, suministro de electricidad y agua fueron las señas visibles de la catástrofe en Santiago. Era como estar en un *reality show*: nuestra vida se asemejaba a la realidad controlada de un estudio de televisión; en cambio, lo que estaba afuera resultaba temible y casi ficticio: las cámaras retrataban una realidad salvaje al sur de Chile. (74–75)

From the narrator's perspective, the real earthquake cannot be found in his account, nor in those of his friends, but it is also not to be found in the testimonies shown by the news. The Others' experiences, as represented by the media, are fictional because they present an extreme reality, 'una realidad salvaje' (75). In comparison to that one, the privileged experience of Villoro and his friends in the hotel seems as unreal as a reality show can be: an inbetween space in which reality and fiction meet.

In the book, Villoro acts as a reporter, offering information from all kinds of sources and representing a collective experience from multiple perspectives. Ironically, in the newspaper version, Villoro is introduced as a literary author. Yet clearly, the book format offers him a richer space to tell his story.

The literariness of *El miedo...* thus is not based on its fictional elements, but on the interpretation of real-life experiences through the use of stylistic devices and the incorporation of different genres. Following Hutcheon's differentiation between *event* (an historically situated phenomenon), and *facts* (those events that have been chosen to be included in a narrative), Villoro's narratives on the 2010 earthquake in Chile can be read as two facts concerning the same event. This is because 'neither form of representation can separate "facts" from the acts of interpretation and narration that constitute them, for facts (though not events) are created in and by those acts' (Hutcheon 1989: 72). Villoro's texts are, indeed, two diverse forms that each give meaning to individual and collective experience.

As a palimpsest, *El miedo...* includes the newspaper chronicle as one of the diverse discourses through which Villoro expresses his real-life experience. Whereas for media purposes — that is, for an immediate account of the catastrophe — Villoro-as-journalist published a testimonial and informative text as soon as possible, Villoro-as-literary-writer needed more time, and space, to translate the experience into multiple layers of meaning. Only through a hybrid discourse, a meta-documentary narrative, is the author able to assimilate experience, understand events, and transform this into knowledge.

4.4 Performing dialogues

As I have demonstrated so far, Caparrós's *Una luna* and Villoro's *El miedo...* both display the problem of genre hybridity, as well as the authorial struggle with reader expectations. It seems, also, that the representation of reality becomes a more complex question when the narrator is depicted in a foreign environment or unexpected situation. These selected works, therefore, are exemplary of the responses of contemporary Latin American authors to both questions of storytelling and documentation.

In order to complement the textual analysis with the authors' own conceptualization of their working process and documentary intentionality, I interviewed Caparrós and Villoro. What follows is an interpretation of my conversation with them, through which, I compare their responses and connect them with my own research objectives.⁹⁰

Responding to similar questions on their research methods and writing processes, both authors showed an awareness of the differences in the production of non-fictional work in comparison with fiction writing, although they focused on different aspects of the process. Villoro's responses focused more on the post-research process, particularly on selecting and editing the raw material and on matters of self-representation. Caparrós commented more on fieldwork, especially in response to questions regarding the social and political relevance of the topic chosen and the ethics of the representation of otherness.

Both agree on the idea that *crónica* is quite a well-defined genre, one whose value resides mainly in its ethics more than its aesthetics: there is an awareness of a certain responsibility or commitment to telling the truth to their readers, or at least what they witness or empirically interpret from their own investigation. There is, nevertheless, a clear contrast in the conceptualization of their individual work as chroniclers. For Villoro, the creative element of the process of writing seems to be more relevant, whereas Caparrós is primarily moved by ideological motivations. Whereas Villoro is located towards the more moderate left wing of politics, Caparrós constantly refers to his writing as political and has made clear his commitment to left-wing thought: 'una crónica para que a mí me importe tiene que ser política, de distintas maneras: por su forma y eventualmente también por los temas que trata'. On the contrary, Villoro's chronicles are

⁹⁰ For full transcripts see appendix 2. All following quotes referring to my interview with Caparrós are from interview 2, and those referring to Villoro's are from interview 7.

usually based on his own reflections rather than on exhaustive, ethnographically-inspired research.

I also realized that the authors shared important concerns relating to the problem of finding a balance between telling a story and imparting information. During the interviews, they both constantly highlighted these concerns through descriptions of their own process of research or writing, through personal anecdotes, or with examples from their literary and journalistic references.

What I found most striking, however, were their responses on the use of the first-person, because they show a rather prescriptive concept of *crónica*. According to them, this genre denies or devalues the role of the journalist as protagonist of the chronicle. Ironically, this idea clearly contrasts with their own writing, as I have demonstrated, because they do create a metafictional narrator with a strong authoritative voice. Furthermore, most of the time this narrator has a determinant presence in the story, beyond a mere role as a witness or observer.

The intention to document facts enters into conflict with questions of self-representation, as they constantly observe, since the mere definition of *crónica* depends on a pact of credibility with the reader. Therefore, whether to include or exclude the 'I' does matter ethically, and it seems to be an unsolved problem in their writing, especially for Villoro. It is interesting that while Villoro directly disagrees with the use of the chronicler as protagonist, he usually employs the first person in his own *crónicas*, as we have seen in this chapter. During our interview, Villoro expressed on two different occasions his dislike for the personal, narcissistic type of chronicle, in which the protagonist is the chronicler himself:

Hay cronistas de alto narcisismo que consideran que son más importantes que la noticia, y en ocasiones se trata de gentes con una personalidad tan colorida que agradeces que ellos están en primer plano, pero en general yo desconfío de este procedimiento y creo que es mejor que uno acompañe los hechos. Desde luego que yo estoy muy presente sobre todo pues en las metáforas, en las comparaciones, en las citas, o sea en la manera de contar las cosas, creo que sí tengo un estilo muy personal, pero no tanto en que yo interpreto, yo hago las cosas, yo abro una puerta, yo encuentro un tesoro.

In contrast, Caparrós does recognize his active role in the stories, although it has to be thoroughly justified: 'Es raro que no esté, no me acuerdo, probablemente cuando mi participación no agrega nada. Si alguien está contando su historia, la va contando por sí mismo; en cambio, a veces un relato no avanza si no está la interpelación'.

Additionally, there is an unstable treatment of the *testimonio* as an inevitable part of a documentary discourse, for credibility is also based on the ability of the chronicler to display a multiplicity of discourses. However, displaying a variety of voices in the text is a great challenge for the writer, because the misuse of the technique can pose a risk to the narrative. The words of others are in constant negotiation with the author's. Beyond the theoretical implications that testimony as a genre presents, this is also a practical matter, embedded in the materiality of the information, as Caparrós demonstrates when discussing editing:

cuando estoy en una situación voy componiendo, voy editando; cuando estoy escuchando a alguien veo qué frase sirve, qué frase no. En general, me permite entender qué cosas necesito, qué cosas me faltan, qué de lo que tengo puede venir justo antes o después de lo que estoy consiguiendo en ese momento. Por supuesto, después, cuando me siento finalmente, aparecen cosas nuevas, aparecen relaciones que no había visto antes y demás.

The chronicler-as-editor is then as essential to the plot as his informants are. Against the idea of imagining the chronicler as an insatiable explorer, explains Caparrós, he likes to acknowledge that sometimes the chronicler is bored, desperate, or mad. There is thus an intention to create a narrator who can be closer in experience to any other contemporary traveller and to whom otherness will not be a preconceived, sometimes idealistic, reality but a subjectively perceived one.

As in other first-person genres, there is a narcissistic dimension that must be acknowledged in documentary narratives, as derived from a conscious, creative writing process. The use of the first-person in documentary narratives, is nevertheless particularly problematic in terms of ethics, as the concerns of the authors interviewed demonstrate. Both Villoro and Caparrós consider self-representation in *crónica* to be valid only when the story somehow justifies the strong presence of the chronicler as witness. This justification, however, is ultimately an authorial decision that can only be legitimised by means of language. If the chronicler wants to be part of the plot, he has to convince, to impose his view on the reader, by deploying all his literary ability.

The 'being there' strategy, which depicts the chronicler as a traveller doing fieldwork and then reporting faithfully on his findings, actually influences not only the interpretation of facts but also the plot. Similar to the conscious process of framing or setting the scene, there is also a clear self-consciousness regarding the creative process involved in representing the self and others. Indeed, Caparrós uses the concept of character to refer to his informants: 'en su vida serán lo que sea, pero en mi libro son

personajes'. Similarly, Villoro expresses his process of selection of informants as an artistic task:

La crónica debe parecer algo concreto, no debe parecer un trozo de vida interrumpido, sino que debe de tener una unidad simbólica y muchas veces es complejo encontrar esta unidad simbólica. Entonces tienes que buscar un personaje secundario que aparezca al inicio de la crónica y contribuya al desenlace. Tienes que buscar algún gesto emocional que te dé una sensación de clausura.

It is interesting to note that both authors refer to their informants as literary characters, and to the chronicler's task of interviewing them as a performative act. For they are aware of the important role that empathy plays in their interaction with the interviewees; artifice becomes inevitable in order to obtain information. The chronicler, according to Villoro, is like an actor and 'muchas veces la preparación del cronista es mucho más interesante que sus propios personajes'. Similarly, Caparrós reflects on his investigative techniques, showing his awareness of the task of a professional listener:

en general creo que puedo adaptarme y sé escuchar. Una de las cosas raras que siempre me pasan y me alegran, y no sé por qué suceden, es que la gente tiene ganas de contarme cosas; es un privilegio. Quizá porque sé mostrarles que los estoy escuchando, quizás aprendí a mostrar que escucho, a hacer el comentario preciso en determinado momento que hace que el otro se sienta de algún modo comprendido y entonces tenga ganas de seguir.

Listening is actually a highly valued skill in chroniclers, although the dialogue is still difficult for a self that is almost never similar to the other, and when there are mutual prejudices interfering with communication. Caparrós's self-referenced narrator usually depicts these uneasy dialogic situations:

—¿Qué es lo que más te gusta hacer, lo que te da más placer?
 —No entiendo la pregunta.
 —¿Sí, cuáles son los momentos en que estás más contenta?
 —Ah, ya. Cuando charlo con las otras mujeres, o con mi marido y con mis hijos. Es eso, ahora entendí. (2010: 108)

In his responses, Caparrós displayed the assumption that he had mastered this ability, and his references to the importance of his role as listener emerged several times in our conversation. However, when he relates the act of listening to that of editing, he frames his experience of encountering the other, choosing the informant and his words only for what they can offer his authorial interests.

Another aspect of performativity is then also shown in the dialogue, which is an essential source of information. Caparrós's empirical reflections on fieldwork demonstrate the collective dimension of the chronicle as a product constructed by the self and the other in dialogue. This dialogue is never an equal one, and even the memory of it cannot be preserved from unintentional bias. In this regard, it is particularly interesting that Caparrós decided to explain the complexity of interpreting others' reality with an anecdote:

pensando algo que tenía que estar en el libro de *El hambre*, una señora en Níger me contaba cómo hacía una bola de mijo, que es lo que comen todos los días. Era la primera que me contaba cómo hacía esa bola y yo le dije '¿y comen eso todos los días?', desde este mito de la diversidad alimenticia de occidente y ella me dice 'sí, siempre que podemos', desde ese otro lado.

This encounter might have been particularly meaningful for the author, since the scene is first referred to in *Contra el cambio* (2010) but represented in detail as the starting point of *El hambre* (2014):

Creo que este libro empezó acá, en un pueblo muy cerca de acá, fondo de Níger, hace unos años, sentado con Aisha sobre un tapiz de mimbre frente a la puerta de su choza, sudor del mediodía, tierra seca, sombra de un árbol ralo, los gritos de los chicos desbandados, cuando ella me contaba sobre la bola de harina de mijo que comía todos los días de su vida y yo le pregunté si realmente comía esa bola de mijo todos los días de su vida y tuvimos un choque cultural:

–Bueno, todos los días que puedo.

Me dijo y bajó los ojos con vergüenza y yo me sentí como un felpudo, y seguimos hablando de sus alimentos y la falta de ellos y yo, tilingo de mí, me enfrentaba por primera vez a la forma más extrema del hambre. (9)

This recurrent scene, in the texts and during interview, opens a debate on the limits of the dialogue as a tool for approaching otherness. Although Caparrós tries to be empathetic and to adapt himself to any situation, this is not possible all the time. However, the author perceives himself as a mediator, someone who comes from an inbetween region. This position, a consequence of coming from a 'cultura mestiza', he said, allows him to approach many problems more intimately. Nevertheless, the encounter is not always equal: because of his appearance he is sometimes considered as a typical European or American white man and that affects the first impression of the other towards him.

In these narratives, the other enters the text not as a protagonist but as a secondary character. This is, I suspect, because in contemporary metadocumentary narratives, the centre of the story is the theme. The voices of Others are no longer the element that leads

the story, as in *testimonio* literature. These voices have become a malleable piece of information that can be cut, edited, and modified in order to serve the authors' purposes. This shift from the individual testimony focus to an almost scientific aim to analyse reality configures, if not a new other, at least a new representation of otherness. This might explain why the authors prefer to call their informants characters rather than *personas*. Asked about what he considers a successful or useful interview, Caparrós declared that it has to do with finding words that are worth enough to be quoted. For Caparrós, today's *crónica* must have a sharper focus on problems that transcend the context of individual life-stories, which has traditionally been the focus of *testimonio* narratives. This new focus offers the possibility of moving beyond what he pejoratively calls *crónica caniche*. Caparrós then criticises the recent boom in a sensationalist and frivolous type of chronicle.

If the contemporary chronicler is moved by 'problemas' and not by 'situaciones o historias', then he would be proposing an alternative kind of literary journalism which is not based on news, and that could be researched with the methods of a social scientist, resembling something like an academic project. These narratives would also be different from testimonial literature, since individual life-stories are no longer at the centre. The selection of the informants, who will be transformed into characters, is no longer based on an individual's heroic or distinguished features, but on their capability to represent certain social groups affected by specific global or local problems. This explains why, for example, Caparrós is able to say that his motivation for travelling to a remote and small town is because that is the most common environment to find out more about the problem of hunger in the world. The physical displacement of contemporary chroniclers in search of encounters with otherness, therefore, is much more conditioned by their identification of evidence that supports their own thesis, and much less by adventure or fantastic discoveries, which motivated the old *cronistas de Indias*.

Travelling nevertheless remains necessary for Caparrós and Villoro to consolidate the credibility pact with the reader, and to bring a certain sense of legitimacy to their work as documentarists. 'Being there' becomes another rhetorical strategy, and so does the representation of the self as an observer. This might explain why there is a contradiction between the authors' intentions to write from the perspective of mere observers of Others' lives, and their active role as narrators of their narratives. Villoro, for instance, considers the role of the chronicler to be one which offers an interpretation of the testimonies, and therefore the author must be aware of the risks of reproducing too many testimonies: 'la sobreabundancia de testimonios puede llevar a que se carezca de lo más importante, que

son las interpretaciones sobre los testimonios, porque la literatura te aporta no solamente datos sobre la realidad sino el significado emocional de la realidad'. According to Villoro, the difference between a testimonial-like text and a discourse which seeks to be appreciated because of its 'literary' quality and its knowledge, is based on the interpretative task of the author, rather than on the stories of Others. In times where readers are overwhelmed by data; with testimonies and news published every minute by mass media everywhere; chroniclers are still looking for narratives that can help make sense of the contemporary world.

CHAPTER 5. BEING THERE: THE REPORTER IN THE FIELD(S)

In one of the final scenes of Cristian Alarcón's *Cuando me muera quiero que me toquen cumbia. Vidas de pibes chorros* (2003), the journalist is visiting Sabina, one of his sources, in a poor neighbourhood of Buenos Aires, when a shooting occurs. The male neighbours take their guns and run out to the streets, encouraged by the women to defend their *villa*. Crouching down behind the curtains, spying from the window, the journalist notices that, except for a child, he is the only one who remains in the house, 'amariconadamente escondido' (112).

There is a double notion of 'field' in this image of the journalist at work. Alarcón's self-representation in this scene illustrates the medial position of the documentary author in two fields in which the other is encountered. First, there is the physical space of the encounter with the informant, whose background differs from that of the narrator. Alarcón marks this difference, and thus his outsider position, by representing a surprised narrator, hiding, cowardly, while his source experiences the shooting as an almost natural event. Second, there is the imaginary space of writing, in which the encounter with the reader takes place. The author is writing for an ideal reader. This ideal reader, it can be assumed, is from a social background closer to his than that of his informant. The exhibition of the journalist's feeling of fear or insecurity in such environments is a narrative technique used to connect to the reader on an emotional level. As neither the author nor the reader belong to the informant's context, the reader would hardly be in a position to experience for himself a scenario like the one he reads about. Therefore, the narrator acts as a mediator between both Others, the informant and the reader.

According to the authors analysed in this chapter, one of the most exciting things about journalistic investigation is the possibility of getting out of their comfort zone in order to meet people and to be in places where they would not usually be, as Cristian Alarcón expressed in our interview: 'Me encanta la idea de entrar y salir de ese mundo, me encanta la idea de no permanecer condenado a mi propio mundo.'⁹¹

⁹¹ Unless another source is quoted, all citations of authors' opinions in this chapter are from my personal interviews with them (see interviews 1, 3, 5 and 7).

Towards the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first, there has been a trend among Latin American testimonial authors to narrate the stories of Others, emphasizing the subjective perspective of the journalist as a first-person narrator. This trend might be seen as anachronistic in comparison with other, similar narrative practices around the world, particularly in the USA. For example, while American New Journalism has its base in the subjective perspective and representation of the journalist as a character (Wolfe 1973), the use of the first-person still causes polemical debates in Latin American literary journalism.⁹²

In this chapter, I explore the conditions that make the use of metafiction possible, or even necessary, as a recurrent narrative technique by the latest generation of Latin American authors working with testimonial-based stories. In order to do so, I analyse four books published in the 2000s that are based on true stories of violence and mourning from Latin America. Two of them are set in the context of civil and state violence during oppressive regimes in Chile and Perú in the 1970s–1980s, whereas the others refer to young, marginalised people in the context of the Argentinian crisis of the 1990s. I also conducted interviews with the selected authors in order to be able to compare their declared documentary intentions with their investigative and creative production. Except for Arturo Fontaine's *La vida doble*, which has been explicitly described as a novel, all texts considered for this analysis are difficult to define under a fixed category, and thus I will refer to them as metadocumentary narratives.

Cristian Alarcón Casanova was born in La Unión, Chile in 1970, but his family emigrated to Argentina when he was five years old. He holds a BA in Communications from Universidad de La Plata and a Master's in Journalism from Universitat de Barcelona. He was a student of the Polish journalist Ryszard Kapuscinski at FNPI, where he later became a teacher. He started out as a reporter for *Página/12* newspaper in 1996, writing particularly on social exclusion and urban violence. He later worked for *Crítica* and the magazines *TXT* and *Debate*. He also founded the website *Cosecha Roja. Red de periodismo policial de América Latina*, and directed the news agency INFOJUS. He has been a visiting professor at the University of Texas and he is currently a lecturer and director of the graduate programme on cultural journalism at Universidad Nacional de la Plata. He lives in Buenos Aires, where he is currently director of the online magazine

⁹² A reading of the reflections on *crónica* by the most popular authors of the genre today can give us an idea of the importance that the discussion of whether or not to use the first-person narrator holds in the Latin American journalistic field. See Jaramillo (2011) and Angulo (2014).

Anfibia. He has published *Si me querés, quereme transa* (2010) and *Un mar de castillos peronistas. Primeras crónicas desorganizadas* (2013).

Cuando me muera... tells the story of Víctor Manuel “El Frente Vital”, a thief who became an urban legend after being killed by the police in 1999, at the age of seventeen. It is set in a marginal neighbourhood on the outskirts of Buenos Aires, in which the narrator — a journalist also living in the Argentinian capital — becomes immersed, in order to interview friends and family of the victim. The book, therefore, also depicts the violent everyday life in a *villa miseria*, and offers an insight into the social problems that these communities experience. This book is the result of three years of journalistic research, and for it Alarcón won the Samuel Chavkin Prize for Integrity in Latin American Journalism, awarded by the North American Congress. The book is considered by the Latin American journalistic scene to be an example of *crónica* or nonfiction narrative, but it has barely been studied by literary critics. Carmen Perilli (2010) considers *Cuando me muera...* to be a novel, and relates its style to the format of traditional realism and melodrama, as well as to what Jean Franco (2012) has called ‘globalised *costumbrismo*’. For Perilli, one of the major merits of the book is the *puesta en escena* of the lives of the young gangsters, which she considers to be aligned with Paolo Lins’s novel *Cidade de Deus* (Brazil 1997) and Víctor Gaviria’s film *Rodrigo D: no futuro* (Colombia 1990).

Leila Guerriero was born in Junín, a province of Buenos Aires, in 1967. She is a self-taught journalist currently living in Buenos Aires. Her career began in 1991 at *Página/30* and five years later she became a full-time reporter at *La Nación* newspaper. She is editor in chief of *Gatopardo* magazine, but she works mostly as a freelance journalist. Her work is regularly published in Latin American media, such as *La Nación*, *Rolling Stone*, *El Malpensante*, *Soho*, *Letras Libres*, *El Universal*, *Paula*, and *El Mercurio*, as well as in *El País* and *Vanity Fair* in Spain. She has won prestigious prizes, such as Premio Nuevo Periodismo CEMEX+FNPI (2010) for her report ‘El rastro de los huesos’; Premio González Ruano (2012), awarded by Fundación MAPFRE for her press article ‘El bovarismo, dos mujeres y un pueblo de La Pampa’; and Diploma al mérito (2014) awarded by Fundación Kónex to distinguished Argentinians. A collection of her texts are published in *Frutos extraños* (2009), *Plano Americano* (2013), and *Zona de obras* (2015). So far, *Los suicidas del fin del mundo. Crónica de un pueblo patagónico* (2005) and *Una historia sencilla* (2013) are the only full-length nonfiction stories.⁹³

⁹³ This is Guerriero’s only work to have been translated into English so far, under the title: *A simple story. Dancing for his life* (2015). It is a full-length profile of an Argentinian folk dancer, Rodolfo González Alcántara.

Some of her texts have been translated into English, German, Portuguese, Polish and Italian.

Los suicidas... narrates the stories of young people who committed suicide between 1997 and 1999 in Las Heras, a small town in Patagonia. The first-person narrator, Leila Guerriero herself, tries to uncover reasons for the wave of suicides by staying in the town for a while and talking with its inhabitants. Although the narrator is not able to solve the case, the book shows the complex and depressing environment of a province so distant from the capital city, and in which young people have no hope for the future. Guerriero was originally working on this story to publish it as a report in the Argentinian edition of *Rolling Stone*. When the magazine ran out of money to support her investigation, she decided to continue it as a personal project, which eventually became her first book (see interview 5).

Santiago Roncagliolo was born in Lima in 1975. Two years later, his father, the journalist and politician Rafael Roncagliolo, had to go into exile because of the military government of Francisco Morales Bermúdez, so Santiago spent part of his childhood in Mexico. Back in Lima, he studied a BA in Linguistics and Literature at the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú and began his literary career as a playwright and children's author. He emigrated to Spain in 2000, first to Madrid and then to Barcelona, where he currently lives. Since 2005, he has published regularly in the newspaper *El País*. Although he is better known as a novelist and journalist, he is also a film and television scriptwriter, a translator, and an active user of online media. He writes online as a blogger and from his Twitter account @twitroncagliolo. In 2004 he published his first novel, *Pudor*, which was adapted into a film. His second novel, *Abril rojo* (2006) deals with a period of extreme violence in Peru, leading up to the presidency of Alberto Fujimori. With this novel, he became the youngest author to win the prestigious Premio Alfaguara, and he was considered for the Independent Foreign Fiction Prize in the UK. His works have sold more than 150,000 copies and have been translated into more than twenty languages (Instituto Cervantes 2015). Although most of Roncagliolo's novels are based on real stories, he has only published two books classed as nonfiction: *La cuarta espada. La historia de Abimael Guzmán y Sendero Luminoso* (2007) and *El amante uruguayo. Una historia real* (2012).

La cuarta espada is a lengthy profile of Abimael Guzmán, a former Philosophy lecturer at Universidad de Huamanga, in Ayacucho, who became the leader of the subversive terrorist organization, Partido Comunista del Perú, also known as Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path). The group, which started its actions in rural areas of the

country, claimed to be inspired by Marxist-Leninist-Maoist ideology, and was one of the players in the armed struggle conducted in Peru between 1980 and 2000.⁹⁴ According to the Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación, 69,280 people died during this period, which is thought to be the longest and most violent one in the history of Perú (*Informe final* 2003). *La cuarta espada* can be read as a continuation of Roncagliolo's interest in this period, that began with the writing of *Abril rojo*. The first-person narrator, Santiago Roncagliolo himself, interviews family, friends and enemies of Guzmán, especially Elena Ipanaguirre, aka 'Camarada Miriam', Guzmán's long-term partner, and an important member of the movement. Roncagliolo reconstructs the life of Guzmán, giving details of his childhood, relationships, and education. As he narrates the process of the investigation, coming back to his country as a correspondent for a foreign newspaper, Roncagliolo also remembers his personal experience, growing up in the middle of a civil war he could not understand. The author's research for this book started while he was working on the journalistic piece 'La cuarta espada del comunismo' (2005). This text gives a general overview of the personal and political life of Guzmán, and it was published in *El País* newspaper on 11 October 2005, just after Guzmán's third trial had begun. Abimael Guzmán, imprisoned since 1992, could not talk to the press, but Roncagliolo managed to interview other people from the organization when he was invited to Peruvian prisons in order to talk with the inmates about his novel *Abril rojo* (see interview 6).

La cuarta espada has been read as a biography, *crónica* and novel. Although it has not drawn too much academic attention, the book was a best-seller and caused polemical reactions in the media. In Perú, the book received critical reviews regarding the 'factual inconsistencies' and 'sloppy research' of a 'non-expert outsider' (Lozada 2008). It was better received in other Spanish-speaking countries. Reviewers from *Letras Libres* in Mexico and *Siglo XXI* in Spain, for example, pointed out the clarity, precision and outstanding storytelling techniques demonstrated in the book (Galarza 2007; Ruiz-Ortega 2008).

Arturo Fontaine Talavera is a novelist, poet and essayist, born in Santiago de Chile in 1952. He is the son of poet Valentina Talavera Balmaceda, and journalist and lawyer, Arturo Fontaine Aldunate, who was Chilean ambassador in Argentina, and director of *El*

⁹⁴ During this period, the State also committed massive violations of human rights, as documented in the final report by the Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación. The conflict between Sendero Luminoso and the Peruvian government led to a coup in 1992, the authoritarian presidency of Alberto Fujimori and the scandalous case of the corruption of his intelligence agent Vladimiro Montesinos.

Mercurio newspaper during the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet. Arturo Fontaine holds a BA in Philosophy from Universidad de Chile and two Master's, in Arts and Philosophy, both from Columbia University. While living in New York, he was a student of the art critic Arthur Danto and the writer Manuel Puig, and on his return to Chile, he took part in José Donoso's writing workshops and taught seminars on Aesthetics at Universidad de Chile. From 1983 to 2013 he was director of Centro de Estudios Públicos (CEP), a right-wing think-tank that had a significant role in conducting public opinion surveys during the Chilean transition to democracy. He was also part of the board of directors of the Museo de la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos, opened in Santiago in 2010. He is currently a lecturer on Philosophy at Universidad de Chile. He has published the poetry collections *Nueva York* (1976), *Poemas hablados* (1989), *Tu nombre en vano* (1995), and *Mis ojos x por tus ojos* (2007); and the novels *Oír su voz* (1992), *Cuando éramos inmortales* (1998) and *La vida doble* (2010). He also publishes articles in magazines such as *Letras Libres* and *Nexos* in Mexico, as well as in *El Mercurio* newspaper and on the website of Centro de Investigación Periodística (CIPER) in Chile.

La vida doble is a novel about the life of Irene/Lorena, a former French teacher who gets involved in a left-wing political group during Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship in Chile.⁹⁵ After being tortured by the police, she becomes a secret agent of the government and she has to infiltrate her former group, betraying her friends. The novel is written from the perspective of the victim, who is telling her life-story to a writer from exile in Stockholm. The period of the narrative oscillates between the time of the dictatorship, when Lorena remembers her time as a *guerrillera* in Chile and Cuba, and her peaceful, everyday life as an old woman in Sweden. There, she adopted a new identity and not even her daughter knew about her past. Fontaine created the protagonist based on the life-stories of the real ex-militants Luz Arce, Marcia Alejandra Merino and Carmen Castillo, who had already published their own testimonial books. The author said he had long conversations with one of them and with former secret agents, whose identities he has kept anonymous (see interview 3). The author also obtained information from testimonies and documents made public by the Comisión Nacional de Verdad y Reconciliación, established in 1990 to investigate the crimes committed under Pinochet's dictatorship. In 2011, the novel was awarded the Premio Las Américas in Puerto Rico and Premio José Nuez in Chile. Although it has not been fully analysed in academic journals, it was largely and positively reviewed in Spanish and English language media,

⁹⁵ The work was translated into English as *La vida doble: a novel* (2013).

such as *El País*, *Letras Libres*, *El Mercurio*, *World Literature Today* and *The Guardian*. In a press article, Carlos Fuentes (2010) called Fontaine the major representative of contemporary Chilean narrative, highlighting his wise use of imagination and language, as well as his indepth exploration of the moral dilemmas under Pinochet's regime.

5.1 Who are you?

Exhausted after telling her life-story, Lorena shouts desperately at her interlocutor, the self-referenced narrator of Fontaine's *La vida doble*: 'Basta, ¿no? Dejemos esto aquí. No quiero seguir. Es demasiado. No me gusta tu mirada curiosa, las comisuras de tu boca no me gustan, un dejo obscuro. Siento que me humillo y ensucio mientras te cuento. Y es inútil. No entiendes nada. Nunca podrías.' (24) Before sitting down to write, Fontaine did archival research and interviewed women in exile who were victims of government violence during the Chilean dictatorship. Instead of a journalistic book, he decided to write a novel with the information gathered. In his opinion there was no way other than fiction to make sense of the stories of the victims: 'la conversación estimuló mucho mi imaginación porque hubo miles de cosas que no se podían resolver en esa conversación'. The conversation was the author's way of approaching the source in order to understand her suffering. Nevertheless, it is precisely through this conversation that he realises the impossibility of such a task. The information gathered from testimonies is not enough to help the writer tell the story he imagined.

In the work of documentary writers there is a risk of failure, or disruption, in their communication with others. This is particularly evident in situations in which the interviewee has suffered traumatic experiences that the listener cannot totally relate to. Peter Berger and Thomas Luckman (1967) describe it as 'unsuccessful socialization'; that is, a discrepancy between identity and the representation of objective reality. The absence of a shared objective reality, according to Berger and Luckman, is common in societies in which the role of each individual is not clear. This may explain why, at least in Latin America, violence — rather than dialogue — is a more common response when the diverse realities of each individual are confronted.

Lorena's character in the novel *La vida doble* is an outstanding example of the loss of social roles in a broken society. Although Fontaine and his interviewees belong to the same generation of Chileans citizens, their lives under Pinochet's regime were so different that they cannot share the same idea of reality. It is understandable, thus, that in

violent contexts, such as the Latin American dictatorships, the encounter between the self and the other may cause a disturbance in each individual's sense of reality, as is depicted in the dialogues between the narrator and Lorena in Fointaine's novel.

According to Cavarero (2000), the first question that we should ask one another is: 'who are you?'. Reading Cavarero, Butler (2005) postulates that this question opens an opportunity to recognise the other in his uniqueness:

This question assumes that there is an other before us whom we do not know and cannot fully apprehend, one whose uniqueness and nonsubstitutability set a limit to the model of reciprocal recognition offered within the Hegelian scheme and to the possibility of knowing another more generally. (31)

Asking 'who are you?' opens the space for dialogue. Therefore, the other will be known through his responses to the one who takes time to listen to him. 'Who are you?' is in fact the initial question that the narrator seeks to address in any story based on testimonies. In their dialogues with the writer, sources exhibit the vulnerable position of those who are expected to answer. In fact, in *La vida doble*, Lorena tells the truth about her hidden past because she is being asked to speak by someone with more power than her. For Cavarero and Butler, the vulnerability of the other is exposed as a part of social interaction: 'In stark contrast to the Nietzschean view that life is essentially bound up with destruction and suffering, Cavarero argues that we are beings who are, of necessity, exposed to one another in our vulnerability and singularity, and that our political situation consists in part in learning how best to handle — and to honour — this constant and necessary exposure' (Butler 31–32). This may explain why stories of mourning and violence are particularly difficult to tell. The exposure of the other, who trusts his story to someone else, requires an ethical response from those who listen.

There is, therefore, a need for a reading of this particular kind of testimonial narrative that considers the role of those who listen. This reading might provide clues towards an understanding of the value of mediated testimonies in contemporary societies. Regardless of the claims that subaltern subjects now have more freedom and tools to express themselves individually, there is a new boom in testimonial narratives mediated by a professional writer. I believe that this way of dealing with real life stories remains an option because of the intrinsically confessional nature of the *testimonio*, especially with regard to stories about violence and mourning.

If vulnerability is an inevitable consequence of human interaction (Butler 2005; Cavarero 2000), it is natural that it can be exposed in books that aim to reproduce real encounters between individuals. Therefore, I suggest that vulnerability is also a condition of the creation of journalistic stories. Journalism, I believe, consciously exposes the journalist and his or her sources, particularly in the genre of interview. Of course, one must be aware that the journalistic interview differs from other types of interviews. If not in the techniques of interrogation, or in the topics, then in its intentions. According to Janet Malcolm (1990), while the legal, psychoanalytic, medical or social sciences conduct interviews intended to help the interviewees somehow, the journalistic ones have no direct effect on them. Journalists are aware of their professional role while in the field, listening to Others, as Guerriero recognizes:

tengo en cuenta que esto no es un intercambio de favores, esto es periodismo: si tú me querés contar tu historia, yo la voy a contar, pero no esperes a cambio que yo te publique carta de lectores en el diario, te ayude a solucionar tu vida, ni que me transforme en tu amigo.

As opposed to a fiction writer who can construct characters' identities as his imagination wishes, the documentary author is destined to fail in giving a complete account of his characters' lives. No matter how long the conversations with the other are, the response to 'who are you?' remains incomplete.

Judith Butler draws attention to the role that the real experience of encountering Others has in constructing subjectivities, for it is through 'proximate and living exchanges' that individuals address the question of 'who are you?' and relate to each other (30). Documentary narratives show that this question is asked by both social actors involved in the conversation: the journalist and the source. Therefore, the self is also exposed and can eventually take the place of an other by choosing to respond to the questions of his interviewee. Contemporary writers, as I will explain later in this chapter, do let the Others speak. They do this, however, not by reproducing a full transcription of their testimony, as their colleagues from other generations intended to do, but by allowing them to interrupt their own authoritarian speech.

5.2 Empathic listeners, unreliable writers

Trust is an essential requirement for a successful relationship between the journalist and their sources, and sometimes it is the only way to obtain the desired information. It is not surprising then that the books start or end with acknowledgements dedicated to their informants: ‘A todas las personas de Las Heras, que generosamente me contaron sus historias’ (Guerriero 2006: n.p); ‘A todos los personajes de este libro por prestarme su voz’ (Roncagliolo 2007: n.p).

As a condition of earning this trust, the authors referred to in this chapter insisted on the importance of being empathetic. While talking about his first approaches to his sources, Roncagliolo emphasized his conscious intention to be pleasant: ‘trato de ser profundamente simpático. Trato de que se sientan en confianza, relajados, de que sientan que pueden conversar [...] que voy a contar la historia tal y como ellos me lo cuentan, que no los voy a traicionar’.

If, for Roncagliolo, earning the informants’ trust is a matter of strategy, for Guerriero it is a natural consequence of being someone discrete:

Por algún motivo creo que la gente siente que puede confiar en mí para contarme una historia que no le contarían a otra persona. Me parece que a lo mejor cierto grado de discreción tiene que ver, pero creo que sobre todo la capacidad que la tengo desde muy chiquita de no juzgar.

The author–informant relationship also depends on the conventions and expectations they have of the genre in which the testimony will be told. Fontaine, for example, highlights the difference it makes for victims of Augusto Pinochet’s dictatorship to talk with a novelist rather than to a journalist: ‘ellos sabían que yo era un escritor de ficción y eso hacía que no estuvieran tan en guardia y tomábamos, conversábamos; el humor, el tiempo, y a mí me interesaban los detalles, a mí no me importaba nada en concreto’. He emphasized that he did not interview with them, but shared conversations. Nevertheless, in methodological terms, the process of research for Fontaine’s novel does not seem to differ much from that of more journalistic books, in which their authors also refer to the encounters with others as conversations rather than formal, structured interviews.

All authors focus on the importance of avoiding judgements, because this attitude is for them the key to building up empathy during fieldwork. Regardless of the authors’ declared intentions, it is worth noting that in their writing they are constantly judging their characters. There is, then, a contradiction between their attitude towards fieldwork and

what they ultimately do with the informants' stories in their books. I believe this is understandable because of the role of documentary authors as creators of, as well as actors within, social frames. According to Goffman (1974), a social frame is a selection of flesh-and-blood activities in which the individuals are exposed. In order to give meaning to what they witness, documentary authors need to set some limits, to frame the naturally chaotic experience that reality presents. They do so by selecting certain information from the Others' lives, and from their own encounters with them.

Nonetheless, during the process of investigation, authors relate differently to their informants. When I asked about his method for approaching informants for the first time, Alarcón explained that he is extremely clear about who he is and the purposes of his investigation: 'A mí no me sale mentir, no me surge la impostura, soy demasiado frontal y se me nota todo, y como se me nota todo no hago grandes esfuerzos por evitar mi condición anfibia en todo sentido'. Like Alarcón, Guerriero prefers to be 'herself' and behave in the most honest way possible:

cuando la gente es realmente distinta y pertenece a un mundo que no tiene nada que ver con mi mundo tengo una actitud incluso como muy discreta, muy humilde, muy cautelosa te diría, porque primero no quiero ser como demagoga y camaleonizarme y transformarme en parte del mundo de esa persona cuando no lo soy y tampoco quiero ser ofensiva y contravenir alguno de los códigos tácitos que hay en la vida de las personas y que uno todavía no alcanzó a comprender.

For Leila Guerriero, there is no difference between the *persona* and the journalist-narrator, 'uno se lleva puesto a uno todo el tiempo'. However, there is a contradiction in Guerriero's interview responses regarding the question of self-representation. Whilst she intends to represent her real self in her texts, she recognizes the fact that she would never meet certain people or go to certain places if she were not a journalist:

El periodismo es la mejor excusa para meterse en cualquier lado. Entonces los periodistas suelen ser personas curiosas, intrépidas. Tener la posibilidad de meterte en el mundo de las pandillas en El Salvador, qué sé yo, con el oficio perfecto, también es como muy atractivo, ¿no?

Guerriero's self-portrait of the intrepid reporter is recurrent in other *cronistas*; it is actually a role some journalists like to play. Roncagliolo's emphasis on the exciting variety of roles that journalism offers does not differ much from Guerriero's explanation of the advantages of the profession: mainly getting into other people's business. This is illustrated by Roncagliolo's response in our interview regarding the first-person narrator of *La cuarta espada*:

Yo creo que el narrador es el yo que yo era en ese momento, normalmente no soy tan político, normalmente trato de ser bastante más frívolo que el hombre que escribe ese libro, porque creo que tu vida es mejor así, pero cuando haces una investigación periodística te conviertes en otra persona, tienes que convertirte en otra persona.

Self-defined as a journalist and not a literary writer, Guerriero emphasizes being herself because in doing so she reinforces the pact of truthfulness with the reader. It is not surprising then that the authors who are more able to describe the role of the journalist as an actor are the ones who also write fiction. As opposed to Guerriero's view, Roncagliolo showed no shame in declaring that he transforms himself in order to obtain the information he wants:

Yo me transformo en una persona diferente para cada libro, porque me tengo que mover en un medio diferente, recabar información de gente diferente y a esa gente hay que demostrarle que entiendes su lenguaje, que hablas su lenguaje y que te interesa lo que te están diciendo. Eso es lo que más me gusta. En la ficción vives la vida que tú quieres de manera solitaria y personal, pero en el periodismo [...] te conviertes en la persona que podría haberla entendido y comprendido.

Roncagliolo views the journalistic investigation as a process of characterization, along with Caparrós and Villoro (see Chapter 4). In order to obtain the desired information for his story, the author needs to transform himself. If, as Goffman states, the self is not a well-defined entity, but 'a changeable formula of managing oneself' (573), then it might be true that Guerriero is being herself when she is reporting in the field, just as much as all the other authors are themselves, although they do so in a more cynical way, perhaps. The self that they will expose to the readers later, when they come back home to write, is another story.

5.3 The potter's hand

In *La cuarta espada*, Roncagliolo exposes the reader to his conversation with Elena Ipaguirre, the partner of Sendero Luminoso's leader Abimael Guzmán. It takes place in a Peruvian prison and the self-referenced narrator displays curiosity about Guzmán's opinion of his latest novel, *Abril rojo*:

—El señor Guzmán ha leído su novela.
—¿En serio? ¿A usted le permiten verlo?

—Sólo en las sesiones del juicio. En una de ellas me pidió su novela, y yo se la hice llegar.

No supe qué responder. Como es habitual en estos casos, dije lo más estúpido que me vino a la mente:

—Espero que le haya gustado.

—Aprecia que, por primera vez, un autor hable de nosotros sin insultarnos. Pero considera que es demasiado neutral. En este tema hay que definirse, hay que tomar posición.

—Ya. (230)

By this point in the book, the reader knows that the narrator has a cynical perspective on leftist ideology, or indeed on any ideology: ‘Soy un burgués satisfecho, y dejé atrás la edad universitaria [...] Terminaré la investigación, me sumergiré en otra cosa y esto habrá terminado’ (190). Roncagliolo-narrator, however, hides this aspect of himself from the informant, isolating it for the reader’s knowledge only. The author is aware of the importance of listening rather than talking during the process of investigation. Listening empathetically, thus, is a journalistic strategy. In our interview, Roncagliolo expressed his awareness of the importance of this strategy: ‘cuando tú haces la investigación tienes que ponerte de su lado, aunque sea provisionalmente, tienes que entender por qué ha hecho esas cosas, por qué te está contando esas cosas’. If Roncagliolo feels that the trust that people give to him is highly valuable, this is only to the extent that trust is essential to obtain the information for his story. The author remains silent during the interview, but the narrator speaks for both in the book. Storytelling becomes, thus, the interviewer’s space for full expression.

Translating the other’s speech onto paper is certainly part of a journalist’s task and, therefore, it is professionally justified. From the authors’ perspective, in doing so they are practising journalism. Nevertheless, making public a private, intimate conversation can be highly problematic in terms of ethics, for representations of real encounters usually expose more information than the mere interpretation of events.

For Walter Benjamin, information and storytelling were two clearly differentiated modes of communication, which have competed with one another:

The replacement of the older narration by information, of information by sensation, reflects the increasing atrophy of experience. In turn, there is a contrast between all these forms and the story, which is one of the oldest forms of communication. It is not the object of the story to convey a happening *per se*, which is the purpose of information; rather, it embeds it in the life of the storyteller in order to pass it on as experience to those listening. It thus bears the marks of the storyteller much as the earthen vessel bears the marks of the potter’s hand. (1973: 113)

By the end of the twentieth century, however, the distinction between information and storytelling was no longer as clear. Documentary narratives, at least in the Latin American case, demonstrate the blurred boundaries between literature and journalism. This is shown particularly in scenes in which the journalist–narrator feels uncertain of the success of his or her investigation. Self-reflection concerning the purpose and nature of the job are common in this kind of narrative. For example, in Guerriero's *Los suicidas...*, the journalist finds herself alone in a hotel room with no television signal, questioning the reasons for her travel to a dusty and windy town in Patagonia: 'Qué fui a buscar ahí. No sé qué vi. Qué estaba buscando' (26).

Today's documentary narrators are situated in a medial position in the cultural field, because they are a blend of two figures: the storyteller and the professional listener to the truths of others. The former comes from the literary tradition, while the latter emerges from the journalistic one. This is why an analysis of documentary narratives as a cultural phenomenon must encompass a reading that considers the narrative voice or, in Benjamin's terms, the traces of that potter's hand on the vessel. According to Benjamin, the storyteller works not only with his voice, but also with his body, since he has to displace or relocate himself in order to observe and listen to other people's stories. The storyteller comes back to his community to re-tell those stories, but the stories he tells are marked by the traces of his own experience:

One can go on and ask oneself whether the relationship of the storyteller to his material, human life, is not in itself a craftsman's relationship, whether it is not his very task to fashion the raw material of experience, his own and that of others, in a solid, useful and unique way. (1999: 107)

For Benjamin, the act of storytelling is a craft. There is no doubt, then, that we must consider the creative element in any kind of narrative. It seems, however, that the documentary writer, is more reluctant than most types of author to accept that their narrator is a literary construction. In fact, some *cronistas* strongly defend the idea that the narrator is a faithful representation of the real person who interviews people, taking notes and strolling around.

The representation of the journalist within the text depends, however, on how each author conceives of the profession and of his or her role in the cultural field. Some authors do agree that the narrator in documentary narratives is a consciously constructed process. It seems, thus, that for literary journalists the decision to write in the first-person is primarily a matter of ethics. If they cannot invent the story they are telling, then nor can

they imagine a narrator other than themselves. This may explain why the writers interviewed were so reluctant to consider the narrator as a fictional character, as Caparrós ironically said ‘si el narrador es un personaje, es un personaje que se me parece mucho’ (see interview 2). In the same line of thought, Guerriero said:

yo no soy muy distinta a lo que aparece en los textos [...] Siempre hay un personaje narrador que es un poco una construcción, pero es una edición de uno mismo más bien, ahí está puesto lo que la historia necesita, pero no es una invención.

There is then a strong defence of the first-person narrator as a faithful representation of the author, as opposed to a literary character. I believe this attitude is related to the question of authority in the text, for the authors are well aware of the importance of their role as witnesses. Roncagliolo, for instance, thinks that in *La cuarta espada* he represents just another source of information, ‘yo era una fuente más, alguien que creció ahí y te puede contar, no es un corresponsal de Nueva York’. During our conversation, Roncagliolo was actually annoyed when I rephrased the question in order to emphasize the effect that the narrator has on a sceptical reader:

Liliana Chávez: Hablo de ‘narrador’ porque como lectora no sé si eres o no él...

Santiago Roncagliolo: ¡Soy yo, soy yo! No hay ninguna ambigüedad: ese señor soy yo, todo lo que cuente es cierto, todo lo que dice es lo que a mí me pasó.

LC: Bueno, en un discurso es un narrador

SR: El discurso en una novela, pero no en un libro periodístico. El narrador es el autor.

Of course, admitting that the first-person, self-referenced narrator is not the flesh-and-blood author, is equal to admitting that the text is not reliable as a true story. Nonetheless, and despite their journalistic intentionality in telling real-life stories, the authors are playing with the rules of narrative. Both fiction and nonfiction stories aspire to verisimilitude in order to make sense of reality beyond a mere account of facts. Verisimilitude, therefore, is a literary effect that the authors must consciously construct (Riffaterre 1990). This is why I believe that the narrator in a literary journalistic text is still a fictional construct.

The construction of the first-person narrator is, therefore, the key element of literariness in this kind of narrative. Nonetheless, this literary effect goes against the authors’ declared intentions in representing themselves. According to the interviewed authors, the choice of a first-person narrator is driven by ethical concerns regarding the other’s word and not, apparently, by aesthetic reasons. Leila Guerriero claims that dialogues are a strategy used in the portrayal of the interviewee’s identity, but not in her

own: ‘Siempre que aparezco es para que la pregunta refleje algo del entrevistado, no de mí [...] por lo general son diálogos muy chiquitos cuando entro yo, o es que hay preguntas de cuatro líneas o cosas por el estilo’. Guerriero points to the limited space she gives to her own voice, in contrast with the interviewee’s testimony, as evidence of her aim to erase the marks of the potter’s hand from the vessel. Although in our interview she did not recognize dialogue as an important part of her own narrative, I consider it to be precisely in the dialogues where the narrator exposes more about herself than about the other.

Certainly, these authors claim to show reality by representing real conversations, as when Guerriero declared in our interview ‘cuando aparecen esos dialoguitos así, claro, acontecieron en la realidad’. With this attitude, they may be underestimating the powerful literary effect of dialogue as a narrative technique, whilst defending their position as reliable storytellers.

In *Los suicidas...*, Carolina, the young sister of a teenager who committed suicide, interrupts the narrator in her role as interviewer. For a moment, Carolina takes the position of the journalist, for she stops answering the journalist’s questions in order to ask the interviewer about her life in the city:

¿Vos tenés seguridad en tu casa en Buenos Aires? Porque acá dicen que tenés que vivir atrás de una reja.
 —No es para tanto.
 —Dicen en la tele. ¿El hotel donde vos estás parando es muy lujoso?
 —No.
 —Dicen que las habitaciones son un lujo. ¿Querés saber mi sueño?
 —Dale.
 —Eh... no se va a cumplir.
 —¿Por qué?
 —Y, no, porque no se va a cumplir. Que vuelva otra vez mi hermana —dijo, y se hizo un silencio pesado. (88)

The contrast between the two participants in this dialogue is another example of how impossible it is to have an equal encounter with Others. First, what is a necessity for the foreign reporter — a hotel room — is a luxury for the interviewee. Second, whereas it is not difficult for the young interviewee to talk about the feeling of loss, for the interviewer this is almost impossible. When there is nothing else to say, silence ends the conversation, for silence is the only way to express the emotions of both characters.

This passage demonstrates that, even in a guided conversation, the roles of the participants can suddenly change, and the one being questioned can become the inquisitor. In consequence, there is an inevitable exchange both of identities and

vulnerabilities. This exchange echoes Butler's reading of 'narrations of the I' as accounts that are always interrupted by others, and thus begin in media res. I believe that the repetition of situations in which the interviewer becomes the interviewee shows a fracture, an interruption of the perpetually unequal dialogue. By representing this exchange of roles, therefore, documentary narratives exhibit the limits of approaching the other, as well as of representing oneself.

The limits of getting to know oneself, as Butler states, makes it possible to approach the other, by recognizing a mutual vulnerability. For although it is true that *Los suicidas...* cannot be read as a truly autobiographical presentation of Guerriero, it still can be read as the experience of a female journalist from a capital city travelling to a small town in Patagonia in order to understand why young people there commit suicide:

Cómo será, pensé, no verse reflejado en las noticias, no entrar nunca en el pronóstico del tiempo, en la estadística, no tener nada que ver con el resto de todo un país. Imaginé una vida así: sin que a nadie le importe. (149)

Guerriero uses self-reflection here as a narrative technique to communicate her interpretation of the contrasting experiences between an urban woman and rural people. The book, therefore, is the result of a process of framing (Goffman 1974; Brunner 1990), and it shows the journalist's aim: to make sense out of the chaotic situation she is witnessing. In fact, Guerriero said that she used the first-person narrative as a way of contrasting points of view:

por eso lo escribí en primera persona, para establecer ese contraste entre la mirada naturalizada de todos esos vecinos pobres que estaban olvidados del mundo, que habían asumido que eso era lo que había tocado y que había que lidiar con eso sin hacerse mucha mala sangre y este habitante eje de ciudad grande digamos, con qué sé yo: en su casa tenía conexión a internet, podía moverse libremente por el mundo y no se estaban matando los vecinos cada tres días. Ese contraste entre alguien para quien lo brutal no tiene que ser parte de la vida cotidiana y esta gente para la cual lo brutal era lo único que era parte de la vida cotidiana me parecía súper importante para el libro, para que el lector entendiera el grado de brutalidad, de embrutecimiento, que estaba viviendo esta gente.

Regardless of the social differences that these narratives constantly, and consciously remark upon, it is interesting to note that authors try to erase traces of inequality, both in their fieldwork and their writing. On one hand, from the perspective of journalistic practice, authors are aware of the dialogical nature of the task they are performing. In consequence, they are able to share their own stories with the informants who ask in reciprocity, as Alarcón expresses: 'Estoy dispuesto a entregar información de

mí mismo y mi propio mundo al otro, no me resguardo y entonces el camino es mucho más directo. No me da miedo.’ Leila Guerriero also recognizes that she is exposed to sharing part of her own life story with informants, even if this exchange of information may not be the norm among journalists: ‘yo voy a ser depositaria de una historia que para ellos es la historia de su vida, no me parece nada mal que quieran saber quién soy’.

What is striking is that, in order to tell the story, authors try to avoid the dominant presence of the ‘I’. According to my interviewees, this is because they do not wish to interrupt the other’s testimony by becoming protagonists in the story. However, I believe that it is not the trace of the author’s self that interrupts the other’s story, but the other who interrupts the journalist’s account of himself. The problem, I argue, is not in the use of the first-person narrator but in the reading of testimonial-like narratives as a straightforward account of the lives of Others. I think that this kind of narrative is rather a collective product, in the sense that it is an account of all selves involved in the encounters represented.

A reading of these narratives as a type of narrative of the self, as I perceive it, changes the position of the other towards his or her storyteller. It is in fact the other who interrupts the narrative of the self. This can be noted in Guerriero’s *Los suicidas...*, for the interviewees’ responses frequently interrupt the narrator’s reflections:

Salí a comprar agua, aspirinas. Era una mañana de domingo y el pueblo un espectáculo conmovedor. Una manta de silencio había caído sobre todo, y salvo por las putas que baldeaban en los bares la masacre del sábado, la mañana era tierra muerta. Cuando pasé por Bronco, un pub en una esquina, una rubia pajiza mantenía las puertas abiertas con crueldad y un par de sillas, y baldeaba, al aire la bombacha roja, lanzando espumarajos de agua jabonosa sobre el piso. Imaginé cómo sería acostarse con esas manos: dejarse tocar así.

Cuando volví, en el hotel me esperaba Martina Díaz. (201)

The narrator decides to hide what she really thinks during the conversations with her sources, saving her thoughts for her readers. This kind of situation, in which the author confesses to the reader what he or she cannot say face-to-face with the informant, is common in the narratives of other authors, such as Alarcón and Roncagliolo. Rather than the ethical considerations that they claim to be inspired by, the use of self-representation is a textual strategy. It is in their texts that authors transform themselves from professional listeners to authoritative speakers.

In her aim to understand contemporary social problems, Guerriero, like all the documentary journalists studied so far, approaches her informants in a different manner to her readers. Guerriero constructs a self-reflective narrator who is able to relate to her

readers and guide them through another reality. I argue, therefore, that framing or schematizing is the author's creative and ethical response to an incomprehensible, chaotic reality (Brunner 1990).

Guerriero's descriptions of space are quite apocalyptic in theme, and romantic in style, particularly when she exposes the narrator's solitary reflections to the reader: 'Miré por la ventana. Polvo, viento y árboles desgarrados. En alguna parte –en Buenos Aires– había sitios con luces, casas con las ventanas abiertas, cines, revistas. Teléfonos. Pero todo eso quedaba en un lugar inexistente. El norte. Lejano norte' (109). In contrast to Guerriero's intentions of writing a journalistic book based on recent events, *Los suicidas...* also evokes the trope of civilization versus barbarism which has been present in Argentinian literature since Domingo Faustino Sarmiento's *Facundo: civilización y barbarie* (1845).⁹⁶

Another case of 'necessary' contrast between the self and Others happens with Roncagliolo's *La cuarta espada*. In our interview, the author explained that he did not opt for a first-person narrator as a mere narrative strategy. From his perspective, metafiction is a literary device in his book, but only because that was a way to connect his own life-story with that of the ideal reader, as the author explained:

Si fuera un recurso estilístico estaría justificado también, pero creo que tiene que ver con cosas personales, de mi proceso con el libro, de tratar de entender mi propia historia dentro de este libro y a la vez con la necesidad de hacer un libro que fuese legible fuera de Perú, que tuviese traducciones, que se publicase en varios países, que sirviera para entender lo que había pasado ahí, y eso implicaba no asumir que es un lector peruano que ya sabe todo lo que ha pasado ahí. ¿Cómo decir las cosas sin que sean aburridas? Pues contando mi propia historia.

In this response, the author expresses his intention to connect with humans from all cultures, beyond Peruvian borders. He also demonstrates awareness of the two assumptions made by other documentary writers, that might influence their style more than they normally acknowledge. First, that some strategies are led by the book market, and second, that real-life stories must not be boring. Roncagliolo's narrative solution is to construct a first-person narrator. This narrator is depicted as a cosmopolitan journalist who knows the contexts of his informants and his readers, and therefore is able to inhabit both worlds. There is a discrepancy, however, in the representation of the self within the text and the self-perception of the author in the face-to-face conversation with the informants.

⁹⁶ Tomás Eloy Martínez referred to *Facundo* as a 'crónica magistral' (2004b: 11).

5.4 Profane encounters: an erotics of testimony

Cristian Alarcón-as-narrator compares the journalist's search for an interviewee with the search for a lover:

Tantas veces intenté que me recibiera Mauro que llegué, a lo que yo mismo había decidido sería la última oportunidad, lleno del pudor que provoca la insistencia rayana en el ruego o en la molesta intromisión. Pasado más de un año desde mi primer intento a través del llamado de Sabina Sotello, temía que una nueva aparición en su casa me significara la violencia o la sorna cruel que puede padecer el amante que se siente no correspondido. Pensaba en la vieja norma del oficio que indica que cuando una entrevista deja de ser una propuesta que el otro acepta o rechaza, y se transforma en una larga seducción y negociación, resulta evidente que en la mezquindad de esas palabras se esconden los secretos. (2003: 137)

It is clear from the quotation above that the search for an informant sometimes becomes a game of seduction. This is comprehensible if one considers that any true story, published as part of a journalistic investigation, can only be known if the source agrees to share it freely. Alarcón's self-reflective narrator reminds one again of the notion of the journalist becoming an actor in order to obtain his desired reward: the other's story. Furthermore, Alarcón overacts in the game of seduction that he plays in order to interview gangsters in a poor neighbourhood of Buenos Aires. To earn the trust of his informants, it is not enough to say that he is a journalist, he needs to pretend he is the type of journalist the other expects him to be. Another example is the first encounter between the narrator and the thief, Manuel. Manuel is an important source of information to Alarcón, as he is one of the closest friends of the gangster who formed the subject of Alarcón's research, 'El Frente':

Lo conocí finalmente en la oscura cocina de la casa de Estela [...] Manuel parecía tranquilo, dueño de la casa, sabía que hacía mucho que pretendía entrevistarle. Yo estaba francamente nervioso. Pensaba en cómo haría para ser ante él un recio periodista que recorre la villa con prestancia, con todo el 'respeto' necesario para ganarme sus favores de chico recién salido a la calle. Tomamos cerveza. Ahugué rápido, en tres vasos, mi repentina timidez. Comenzamos hablando de su infancia. (42)

Because Manuel had been in prison, the narrator was not able to meet him sooner. Manuel became an object of desire for the journalist up until the point when they finally meet, and Alarcón confesses his nervousness to the reader; as if he were on a first date. In Alarcón's book, the limits between the professional and personal are blurred, and the exposition of this fact becomes part of the plot. Exchanging stories with one another

becomes more meaningful than the information offered by the stories. These situations show that the differences between the self and the other may be mitigated by dialogue, and through writing. I think, following Doris Sommer (1990), that in societies in which there are huge differences between citizens, the only possibility for a harmonious encounter among individuals can occur through narrative. Due to the specificities of the Latin American context, it can be useful to approach this kind of meta-documentary narrative as what Sommer called ‘an erotics of politics’, when analysing the role of sex and politics in foundational fictions of the region.

If romantic novels served the end of the nation-building process in the nineteenth century, as Sommer proposes, then I suggest that documentary narratives at the turn of the twentieth-first century likewise serve a collective desire to make sense of a chaotic reality, one that goes beyond the literary imagination. In these narratives, I believe, dialogue is eroticized in order to show the difficulties inherent in approaching Others in times of fear and uncertainty.

During the process of investigation of a true story, as I have mentioned, it is important for the authors to earn the trust of their sources. In building up a trusting environment, empathy and seduction play an essential role. I propose that today’s Latin American testimonial authors are more interested in seducing the other than in just letting him speak. This might be due to the change in the position of the subaltern in contemporary Latin America, even if his identity remains the same. This other tells his or her testimony in a context in which freedom of speech is more widespread — at least in comparison to the dictatorial periods — and access to new communication technologies has created more democratic platforms of expression, particularly through the internet. The other is thus more aware of his right to choose who he can tell his story to, and how. The environment in which the encounter between the self and the other takes place is now one of negotiation, rather than a simple interrogation. Arturo Fontaine describes it as an intimate atmosphere that has to be produced by the interviewer:

Si tú creas ese ambiente de confianza y la persona confía, se produce un ambiente de intimidad que hace que esos tabúes que están normalmente operando caigan y entonces tú obtienes una cantidad de información que no puedes obtener de otro modo.

As I stated earlier in this chapter, storytelling allows for, or even demands, the exposure of both the informant and the journalist. For the narrator, the latter occurs particularly when they confront unexpected situations with their informants. For example, in *La cuarta espada*, the narrator, Santiago Roncagliolo, visits a women’s prison in Lima in

order to investigate the life of Abimael Guzmán for a Spanish newspaper, and finds himself overwhelmed by the compliments and flirtations directed at him:

Hay tres internas sentadas en esa mesa. Lejos de la marcialidad ideológica que esperaba, las tres tienen una sonrisa gigantesca. Me ametrallan a preguntas. Quieren saber quién soy, a quién visito, de dónde vengo, si España es bonita, si está muy lejos, a qué me dedico. Nunca me habían recibido con tanto entusiasmo. Imagino que se aburren. Sobre todo las que llevan quince o veinte años. Cualquier cara nueva les hace ilusión. Sólo cuando digo que soy periodista, noto un cambio de actitud [...] Quiero fumar. Las internas mueven cielo y tierra para buscar el único encendedor del pabellón y una conchita que sirva de cenicero. No sé qué decir. Trato de ser familiar. (174–175)

A similar scene is depicted in *Los suicidas...*, when one of Guerriero's informants, Cecilia, an ex-prostitute turned evangelist, comes to her hotel room unexpectedly to give her a farewell present: 'Estaba por cerrar la puerta cuando me dijo que, si ella fuera lesbiana, se enamoraría de mí y querría hacer el amor conmigo. Le dije gracias. No supe qué decir.' (182) Confrontation with otherness may leave the interviewers with no words in the moment, but the representation of this type of scene highlights the self-awareness of the narrator.

Metadocumentary narratives must involve the representation of the journalist, but his presence in the story is not due to a narcissistic trend in self-narration, as Hutcheon (1984) has claimed, but because every testimonial narrative enters the game of storytelling. This game, according to Adriana Cavarero (2000: 91) acknowledges the existence of the uniqueness of the other and his or her 'desire for narration'. This acknowledgement, however, is normally mixed with the recognition of the meaning of one's own self, particularly when the story is about suffering and misery. For Cavarero, lovers exchanging their life stories are the model of the close relationship between Eros and narration. It is through love, Cavarero argues, that the self can recognise the uniqueness of the other:

Similar to feminine friendships, love is indeed often characterized by a spontaneous narrative reciprocity. The reciprocal desire of a narratable self into a suitable narrator of her story is of course part of the narrative. In love, the expositive and relational character of uniqueness plays out one of its most obvious scenes. On the stage of love, the questions 'who am I?' and 'who are you?' form the beat of body language and the language of storytelling, which maintain a secret rhythm. (109)

In real-life stories that are the product of a conversation, it is interesting to identify whether the protagonists really present a desire for narrative as evident as that identified by Cavarero in a loving relationship. Alarcón, Roncagliolo, Fontaine and Guerriero's

books show that there is a process of seduction involving the telling of real-life stories, and it is normally initiated by the journalist. However, in places where giving a true account of the facts involves so many risks, telling one's own story to a barely known other may not be as easy, or as pleasant as in Cavarero's example. The process of approaching Others can be a long one, and requires patience and creativity from the investigator. It is not surprising then, that some of the authors interviewed referred to their relationships with certain of their informants as obsessions. Roncagliolo, for instance, mentioned that interviews are the last stage in his investigative process:

No arranco con las entrevistas. Generalmente busco toda la documentación escrita, archivada, en internet, trato de llegar con la fuente ya muy informado, si no le haces perder el tiempo. Cuando llego ya me siento muy identificado con el personaje, en eso es igual un personaje periodístico que de ficción: tú vas y te obsesionas con él, te transformas en él en tu cabeza. La manera de escribir de alguien es comprenderlo muy bien, si no, no puedes escribir sobre él. Piensas mucho cuáles son sus deseos, sus anhelos, sus fobias. Eso crea un vínculo con la fuente.

In a more passionate tone, Alarcón suggests that the process of 'finding the character' is not a conscious one, but a desire looking for realisation: 'Yo sigo las obsesiones de las que me provee mi inconsciente, no me alimento de una decisión estratégica que pretende dar cuenta de una zona de la realidad porque no fue habitada o descubierta'. These quotations show that during the writing process authors do not make a distinction between fiction and reality, for they treat the real story and its protagonists as they would treat literary characters.

One of the revelations from looking at the authors' processes of production, is that their motivation often has less to do with the ideals of investigative journalism — that is, getting to know the truth about certain events — and more to do with their desire to get to know the other. The interviewer, therefore, lovingly anticipates an encounter with the other. Before this encounter, the other is a desire, but after the investigation is done, he or she will be treated like any other source of information, or like a character waiting to be written. What is left in between is the dialogue, which becomes the space where reality and fiction meet.

The desire to know the Other, which is never accomplished in writing alone, can be fulfilled to a higher extent in the actual approach to the informants. In the dialogue with the informant, what Cavarero describes as 'the comfort of similarity' emerges. Looking for similarities may be a more effective way of approaching a barely known other, rather than pointing out the differences. Besides, in the real conversations, the

writer's *persona* is as vulnerable as the other. This is because his desire to be empathetic wins over the desire to exert authority, which must later be recovered through writing. The uniqueness of the other, thus, is only shown in the process of writing, and not in the face-to-face interactions.

Through writing, nonetheless, the author initiates another game of seduction. This time, the game is played with the reader, as Lorena tells her interviewer in *La vida doble*:

Y el lector se marea y nada le parece ni real ni irreal y queda apresado en tus abismos e invenciones, no tiene escapatoria, sólo puede seguir colaborando dócilmente en la otra, la nueva, textura, la del nuevo saco, el nuevo manto que enmascara al combatiente... Esto eres si es que eres escritor: un engañador que desengaña para engañar una vez más. Es el poder, *mon chéri*, el ingrato poder que siempre se muestra enmascarado. ¿O no? (129)

Recognizing the uniqueness of the other implies that the other will always be 'another' (Riffaterre 1990), even if the desire that motivates the writing is that of getting a response to the question 'who are you?' This was precisely the question Fontaine was looking to answer when writing his novel, according to his own reflections in our interview: 'lo que me mantuvo escribiendo fue nada más que esa pregunta: ¿quién es esta mujer? ¿Quién es Lorena? ¿qué la hace ser como es? Y realmente me sedujo esto, por años estuve tratando de entender quién es esta mujer'.

If the act of reading is a desire, as much as writing is the representation of desire, the desire to represent reality is never accomplished through language. That desire positions the writer in a more emotional state in their search for a truth, as opposed to conventional social scientists. Leila Guerriero refers to it as a perpetually unsatisfied curiosity:

siempre hay algo que me mueve la curiosidad, siempre hay punto oscuro o punto ciego que a pesar de que uno se puede leer muchas notas sobre esas personas, me sigue generando curiosidad, intriga, y no logro responderme quién es esa persona, qué pasó con esa persona; creo que es eso: la curiosidad insaciada.

In order to satisfy their desire, or curiosity for the other, the writer may exploit the other's own desires. According to Foucault (2012), people tell their story because of the desire to be heard. Cavarero and Butler take Foucault's idea further, proposing that beyond that desire to be heard, there is also, maybe a stronger desire to be narrated. Guerriero's *Los suicidas...* can certainly be read from this perspective, particularly when the narrator exposes the 'behind the scenes' of an interview with a prostitute:

—¿Cuántos años tenías cuando viniste?
 —Veintiún años —susurró—. Eh... ¿no me vas a grabar?
 —Si querés.
 —Sí, sí, quiero —saltó con entusiasmo exagerado.
 Encendí el grabador.
 —Listo.
 —¿Tenés preguntas?
 —Pensadas.
 —Ah. No las tenés escritas —dijo con desilusión.
 Entonces hizo gestos frenéticos señalando el grabador y lo apagó.
 —No, no, no lo apagues. Escondélo atrás de la panera que me pone nerviosa. Y poné que me llamo Cecilia, y aclará que el nombre está cambiado para proteger la identidad. Esta es, entonces, la historia de Cecilia. La historia que Cecilia quiso contar. (152)

If Guerriero had wished to write a conventional report, the reader would not have needed to know about this dialogue, for it does not offer relevant information to explain why young people were committing suicide in Patagonia. What this passage offers, however, is two identities in dialogue, negotiating the terms of a story. Just by showing both women in conversation, this story is already covering more than one individual's account of the facts.

Beyond a technical discussion of the limits of genres and discourses, I have tried to show here how documentary narratives put people and facts into dialogue. By doing so, these narratives are confronting and renegotiating the rights of individuals to tell the story they want to tell. For it is true that Cecilia's story will be the one Guerriero chooses to divulge, at the same time as that particular story, her story, can only be told via the narrator.

The value of these narratives goes beyond the telling of news in a more comprehensible, entertaining, or more 'literary' way. Real stories, told in a metafictional format, are indeed a ludic speech act that crosses the limits of conventional media. They are also, nonetheless, a blend of voices that is able to represent an erotics of testimony, rather than merely a utilitarian way of reproducing reality.

If the account of oneself is always an account given to a specific other, the game of telling and listening depends on the peculiarities of each actor involved and the particular relationship they construct during their encounters. Although this is hardly accepted by the journalistic authors I interviewed, it is certainly a concern expressed in Fontaine's novel when Lorena tells her interviewer: 'Ordeno este material de horror onírico y borroso para ti, para mí. Llevo años y años con esto guardado y trabajándome por dentro. No quería hablar de esto. No quería la obscenidad de la descripción detallada que todo lo rebaja' (21). It is clear in this example that the genre of the novel offers a

more critical position from which to analyse the ethical implications of the encounters with (real) Others.

Journalists such as Guerriero and Alarcón listen to testimonies in order to make sense of certain (newsworthy) events; the individual stories are alternative sources of information for the narrative. Unlike them, Fontaine's narrative is focused on the protagonist's testimony itself, which is the result of a long process of healing undergone by the victim. By deciding to tell her story to the novelist, the victim expresses her desire to be heard, and narrated by someone who recognizes value in her unique life-story. In all cases analysed here, however, an equal dialogue between the self and the other remains impossible. The approach to Others can be the most empathetic or intimate one, but the storyteller still maintains a foreign perspective on them. I believe this foreign perspective is a distinctive mark employed by the author to legitimate himself or herself as a reliable storyteller. By the end of his investigation, Alarcón is so engaged with the everyday life of his informants that he is able to pray, cry and eat with them during a funeral, as if he were part of the neighbourhood:

Yo acompañé a Sabina, a los hermanos del Frente, y a Manuel, hasta la tumba del ladrón que me había hecho llegar hacía tanto tiempo ya, a la villa. Nos paramos frente a su foto en blanco y negro, ante las ofrendas de los chicos todavía intactas, ante las botellas de *Pronto Shake* que la decoraban. Cada uno besó la foto. Yo también. Cada uno se persignó. También lo hice. Y luego todos nos quedamos callados durante un buen rato. Lloramos hasta que Sabina nos dijo que partiéramos. Volvimos a la villa La Esperanza. Comimos juntos. (170–171)

The aim of the self to connect with Others is represented in the narrator's use of the first-person plural, so as to indicate his belonging to the community. However, the last line of the book pictures him leaving the *villa*: 'Luego, al atardecer, me alejé hacia la estación' (171). The narrator does not just go away, for he could use the verb *partir*; instead he uses the reflexive *alejarse*: he removes himself from the scene as if he were finally escaping, or recovering his initial distance from that poor neighbourhood.

The medial position in which documentary writers move allows them to explore other worlds, but also to come back home to recount their stories. The narrative of that (failed) expedition, however, constitutes the trace of a desire for otherness that language still seeks to fulfil. For it is the existence of that desire that maintains the hope in storytelling as a space for the exchange of human experiences, even if the other remains a mystery.

CONCLUSIONS

*y este instante
que no acaba de abrirse y revelarme
dónde estuve, quién fui, cómo te llamas,
cómo me llamo yo:*
Octavio Paz

In these times, where the other has access to more tools to speak for himself, mediated testimonials are still necessary, even if only to prove that someone else is still there, listening. Nonetheless, the representation of the performance of both the self and the other, through narrative techniques such as dialogue, indirect free speech and monologue, influences the interpretation of facts. Echoing Hayden White's ideas regarding historiography, I believe that information and narrative technique cannot be mixed without putting the transparency of a true story in doubt. Under particular contexts of censorship and violence, the journalist's job cannot be seen only as that of a professional who listens to others and transmits a truth in their name (as the task of a journalist is usually defined). It is not surprising then, that the authors studied here are more concerned with the ethics of representation than the technical methods for transmitting what they hear word-by-word. The narrator thus becomes a blend of storyteller and professional investigator, attempting to diminish the risk inherent in the transmission of the truths of Others. The product of this mix of techniques — that I refer to as documentary narrative — can be studied either as another form of journalism, or an alternative way of telling the truth in response to particularly dangerous circumstances. In either case, they represent forms of knowledge, even if their unorthodox methods have not yet been legitimized, as have those of other factual discourses.

It is difficult to situate these texts in a concrete position within the chronology of a region's literary history. Yet I think they can be read as works by dislocated modern writers in a postmodern world, already anachronistic in their postmodernism. This is why I find useful Sarduy's reflections on *lo neobarroco* to refer to their style: as a form concerned with superabundance and waste, the baroque opposes information. Documentary narratives are, I propose, baroque, eccentric products of literary journalism. While they transgress the utilitarian function of information in the press, they also subvert

both literary and journalistic fields, transforming into an alternative vehicle through which to tell the truth (or certain truths).

Nevertheless, it seems that uncovering the truth is no longer the sole aim of documentary authors; they also seek to know the other. They are situated on a threshold. As modern writers, they assume their role in the construction of Latin American reality, contributing to the completion of a total narrative. They use irony and analogy as modern writers do, in order to confront otherness: if irony marks the differences with the other, exposing *lo bizarro*, then analogy finds similarities through *lo bello* (Paz 1974). Thus, these narratives prove that approaching the other — these strange people, as Kapuściński notoriously defined them — is still possible. The encounter, however, is never equal. As my analysis of narrative dialogues shows, there is an unresolved tension between the speech of the self and that of the other. The other becomes a narrative strategy used by the journalist to document fragments of collective memory. Recording and translating their voice onto paper is an act of care for their identities, but it is also a creative activity, for editing the other's testimony displaces the experience of the real encounter into the realm of the author's aesthetical aims. This is why I conclude that Latin American documentary narratives no longer focus on the representation of the other, but on the self and his or her transformation after having approached the other. Confronted with terrible facts, this narrator is still able to break from the paralysis of shock in order to describe what he witnesses, for he is a mediator between the world and his reader. Each true story becomes an individual creation, based on a real moment; an encounter with otherness.

Literary analysis assumes that, when reading a narrative, one must separate the real self in action from that of the narrator. This assumption is difficult to apply to hybrid texts such as the ones analysed here, because in praxis, the documentarists do not actually separate their real self from the one on the page. They defend the use of the first-person in order to show to the readers their supposedly fair, trust-based relationship with their informants. In spite of that, I perceive that these authors play diverse roles, depending on the field in which they are performing and how they perceive their two interlocutors: the informant and the reader. During fieldwork, authors act as professional listeners. They try to adapt to the informants' expectations and look for similarities with them in order to develop empathy. Afterwards, in their writing, they try to connect with the reader, by stressing the differences between them and their informants. Whether the author depicts him— or herself as an outsider, or someone who manages to infiltrate Others' worlds, what the reader gets to know is indeed a literary construction of the self, reliable or not. While the other is at risk of devolving into stereotype — a character in an edited version of their

lives — the author's self becomes the most literary element. The fictional devices employed by non-fiction texts are found not in their 'literary' use of language, but in the construction of a self-reflective narrator. As opposed to other narrative genres, however, the nature of this type of narrator has to be traced throughout the nonfiction works of each author, for it evolves through time as the real self does. However, this stylistic decision, of including the self in the narratives of Others, does not diminish the collective, dialogical nature of these texts, for they are striking examples of multiple selves exposing their desires for narration.

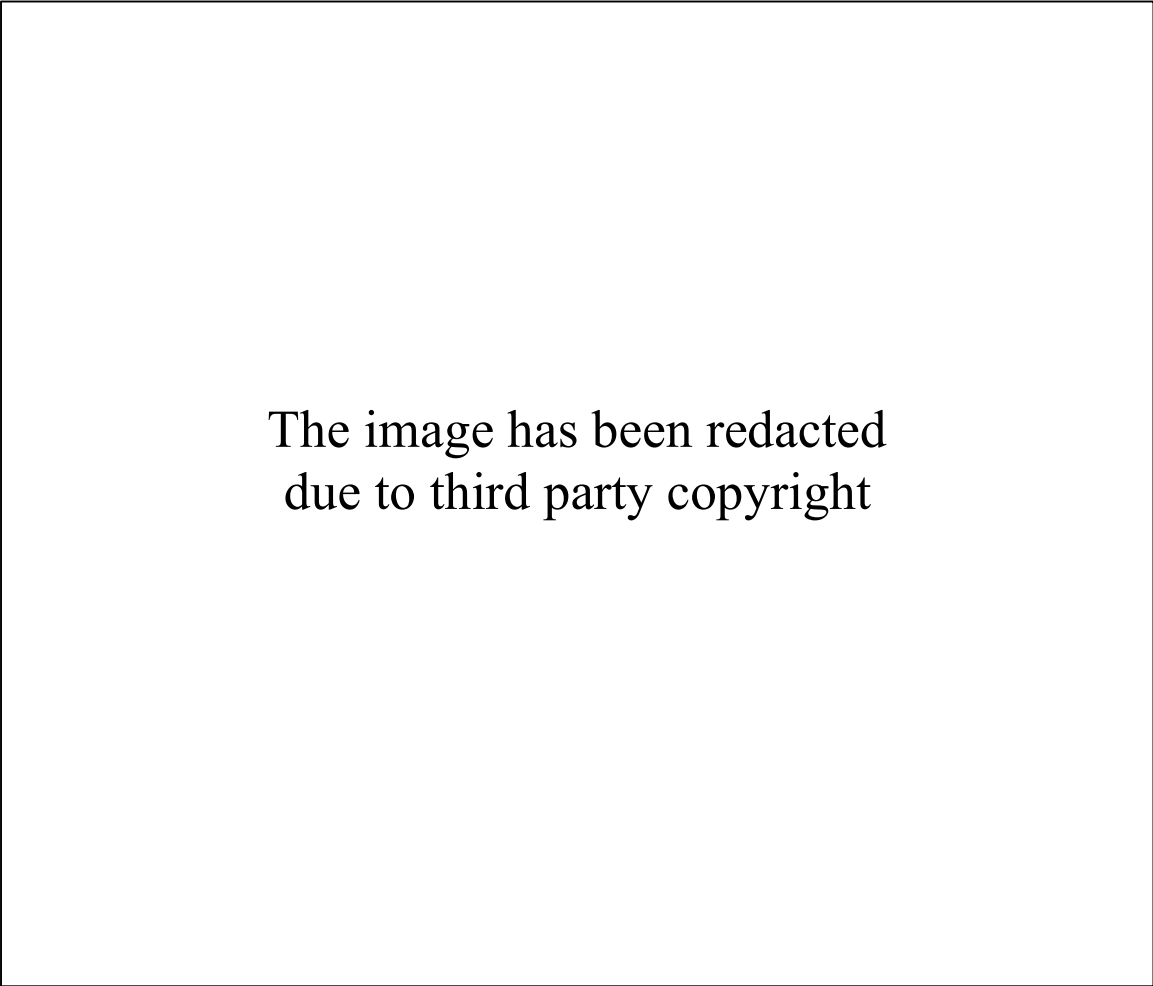
I have read these narratives as both a cultural discourse and an act of truth telling. Rather than judging them by their literary quality, I sought to understand how their literariness contributes to, and departs from, specific forms of culture grounded in Latin America. In a region that still has lower than average literacy and generalised access to higher education, it is understandable that forms trying to preserve and to understand a rather archaic oral culture through the written word emerge. This element offers an additional cultural significance in comparison with audio–visual documentary forms, like documentary films or photojournalism. Although they are not emblems of popular culture per se, I claim that these narratives are situated at the intersection between not only diverse social and economic contexts, but between the diverse worldviews that are constantly colliding in the everyday encounters of the inhabitants of Latin America. For these reasons, this concrete documentary form can be considered truly Latin American, although similar forms exist in other regions where inequality, instability and uncertainty affect society.

Finally, I did not seek to legitimise or delegitimise authors or works, but to illustrate with their work a broader phenomenon that comprises far more names than those I was able to study in full. I hope I have enlarged the scope for the recognition of the diversity of worldviews, styles and identities exposed through the Spanish language.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1. ILLUSTRATIONS

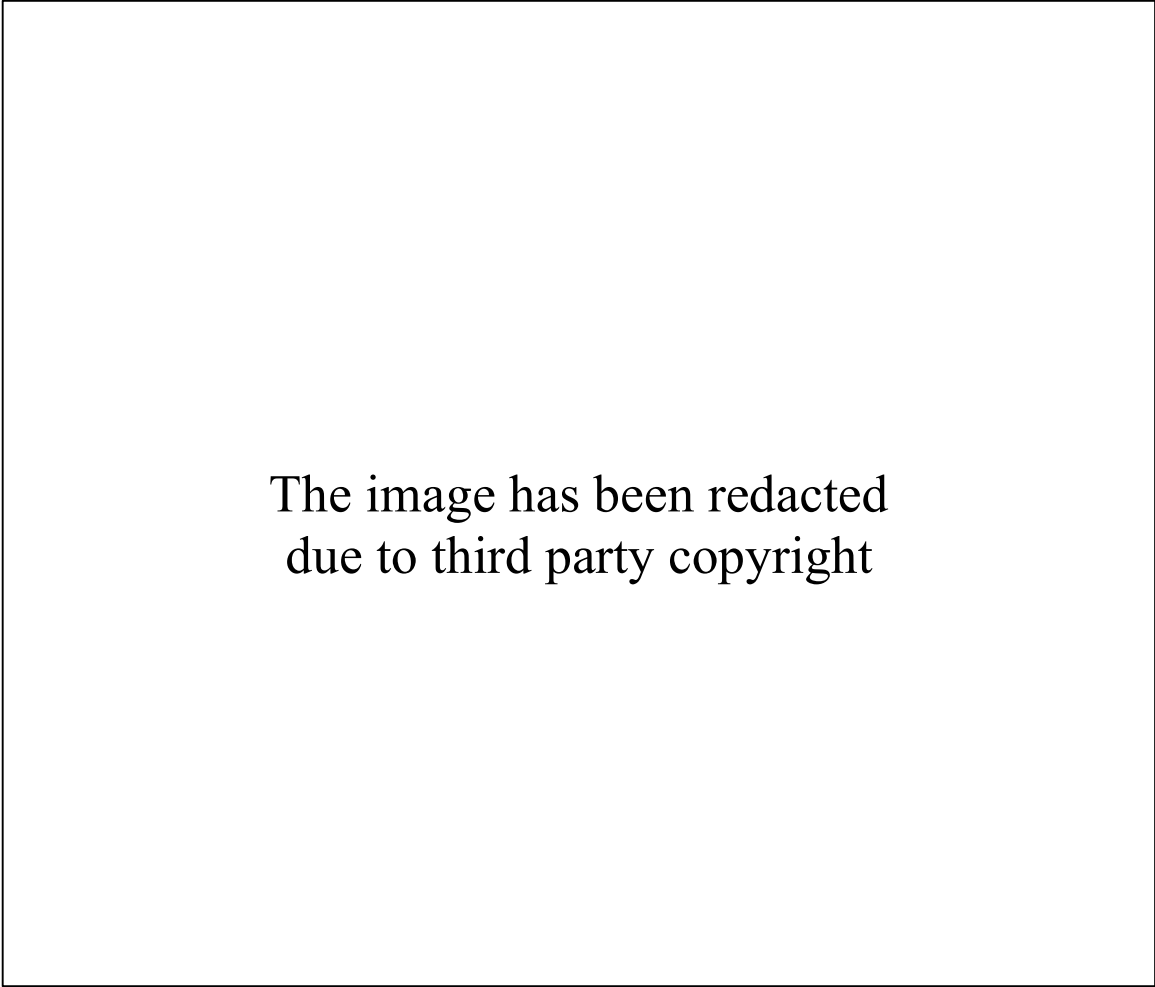
1. 'La odisea del náufrago sobreviviente del A.R.C. Caldas', *El espectador*, 28 April 1955



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Source: Biblioteca Nacional de Colombia (Bogotá).

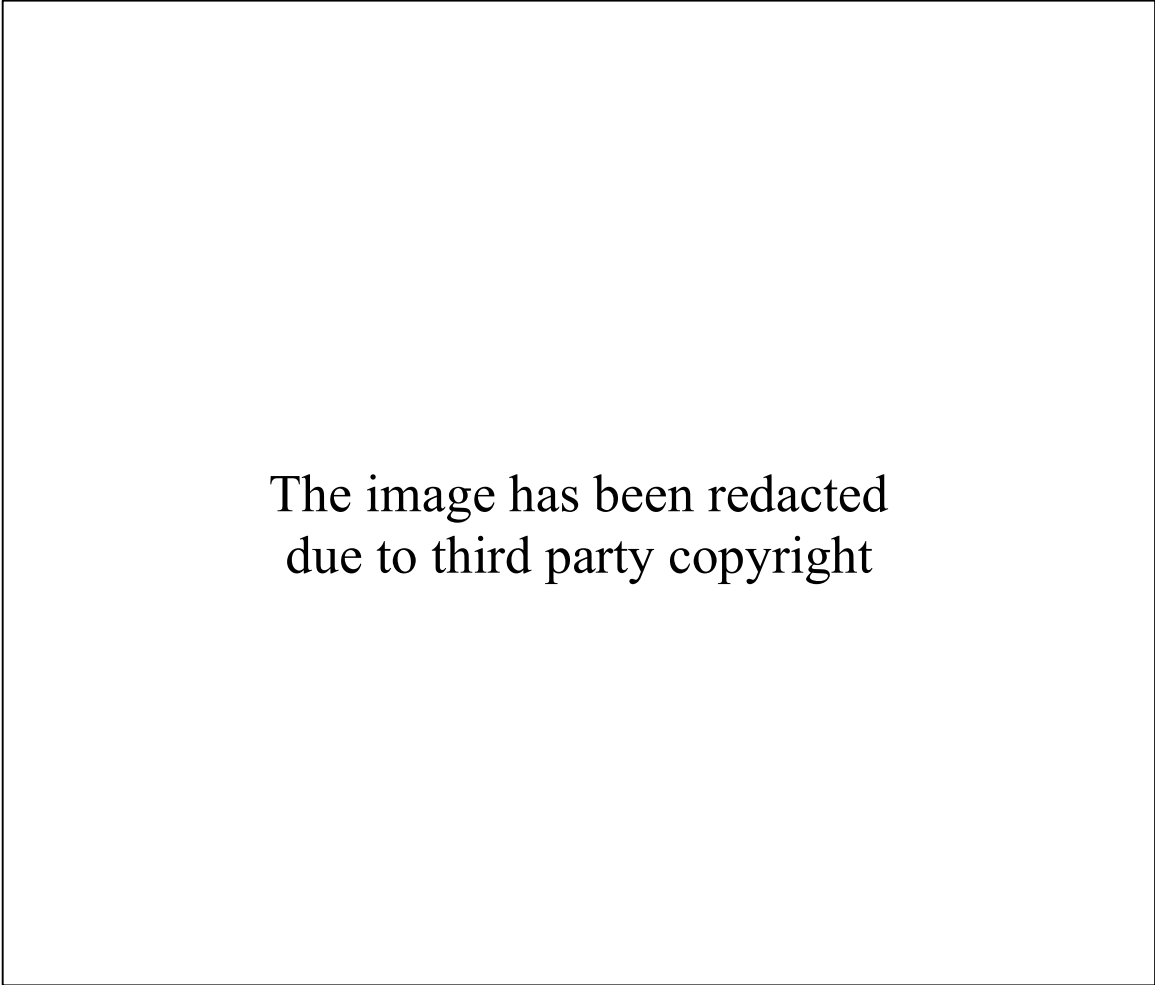
2. 'La verdad sobre mi aventura', *El espectador*, 28 April 1955



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3. Cover of *Mayoría*, 27 May 1957



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Source: Archive of the Ibero-American Institute, Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation (Berlin).

4. Rodolfo Walsh's 'La Operación Masacre', *Mayoría*, 27 May 1955, p. 8

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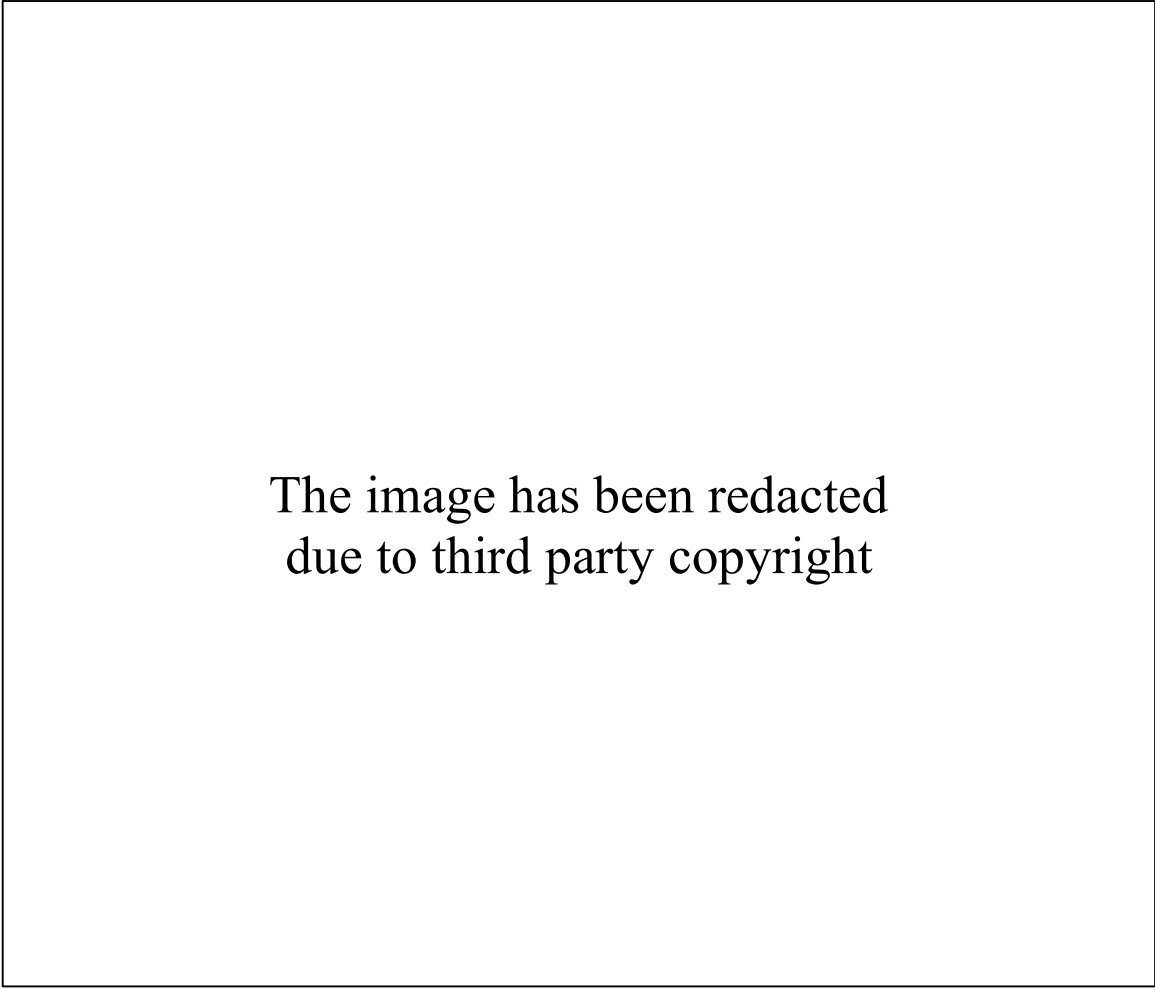
Source: Archive of the Ibero-American Institute, Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation (Berlin).

5. Josefina Bórquez and Elena Poniatowska, photograph by Héctor García

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Source: Poniatowska, Elena. 1994. *Luz y luna, las lunitas* (Mexico City: Era), p. 61.

6. Cover of Carlos Monsiváis's *Los rituales del caos*, illustrated by Rafael Barajas 'El Fisgón'

A large rectangular box with a thin black border, containing the text 'The image has been redacted due to third party copyright' in a black serif font, centered within the box.

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Source: Monsiváis, Carlos. 1995. *Los rituales del caos* (Mexico City: Era).

7. Cover of *Panorama*, 14–20 April 1970

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Source: Archivo TEM, Fundación Tomás Eloy Martínez (Buenos Aires).

8. 'Las memorias de Juan Perón', *Panorama*, 14–20 April 1970, p. 20

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Source: Archivo TEM, Fundación Tomás Eloy Martínez (Buenos Aires).

9. Juan Domingo Perón and Tomás Eloy Martínez at Puerta de hierro, 1970

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Source: Postcard in Martínez, Tomás Eloy. 2014. *Tomás Eloy Martínez: Juan Domingo Perón: encuentro en puerta de hierro* (Buenos Aires: Fundación TEM).

10. Letter from Tomás Eloy Martínez to Norberto Firpo, 1970, pp. 1–3

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Source: Archivo TEM, Fundación Tomás Eloy Martínez (Buenos Aires).

11. Juan Villoro's 'El sabor de la muerte', *La nación*, 6 March 2010, p. 4

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Source: <<http://servicios.lanacion.com.ar/archivo/2010/03/06/004/DT>> [accessed 11 April 2017].

APPENDIX 2. INTERVIEWS

The following transcripts are edited versions of recorded interviews. They respect the order of the conversations, as they happened. The mark ... at the end of a phrase symbolises an interruption by the other speaker, the mark [...] acknowledges deviations from the topic which were omitted, and the mark *** acknowledges any radical change in topics, or the end of each session. Except for Leila Guerriero's, all interviews were conducted face-to-face, in dates and places chosen by each interviewee. The length and number of sessions was determined by the availability and preferences of each author.

Interview 1. Cristian Alarcón

This interview was conducted in Alarcón's office in Puerto Madero neighborhood, in Buenos Aires on 19th November 2014.

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Interview 2. Martín Caparrós

This interview was conducted in Barcelona, during three sessions on 7th July, 16th July and 24th August 2014. The meetings took place in two cafés of El Borne, where the author was living.

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Interview 3. Arturo Fontaine

The interview was conducted in two sessions in Santiago de Chile. The first session took place at the authors's house in Providencia neighbourhood, on the 13th November 2014, and the second one was conducted the next day in a coffee shop close by.

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Interview 4. Francisco Goldman

The interview was held in Mexico City, on 9th January 2015, in a café in the Colonia Roma neighbourhood.

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Interview 5. Leila Guerriero

This interview was conducted in a single online session through Skype, on 6th October 2015.

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Interview 6. Elena Poniatowska

There were two interviews on 3rd September 2013 and 9th January 2015. Both were conducted in the author's house in the neighborhood of Chimalistac, in Mexico City.

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Interview 7. Santiago Roncagliolo

The interview was conducted in three sessions on 7th, 8th and 9th July 2014, in restaurants in El Borne neighbourhood, in Barcelona.

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Interview 8. Juan Villoro

The interview was conducted in Mexico City on 8th January 2015. It was held in a book shop in Coyoacán, the author's neighbourhood.

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