

¿Cómo nombrar en este mundo
con esta sola boca en este
mundo con esta sola boca?
[How to name in this world
with only this mouth in this
world with only this mouth?]
—Olga Orozco, *Eclipses y fulgores*

INTRODUCTION

The documentary film, *Fernando ha vuelto* (Fernando returns) (directed by Silvio Caiozzi, 1998), narrates the efforts of forensic scientists to identify a skeleton that had been exhumed years earlier from a common grave for Pinochet's victims. After examining photographs, dental x-rays, and comparative DNA chartings, the medical team was able to prove conclusively that the bones belonged to young Fernando, a MIR activist who disappeared in 1973. They then presented the reconstructed skeleton to the victim's spouse. This was a shocking, intensely dramatic scene, filmed from an angle that invited the viewer to recall Mantegna's Christ or the celebrated photo of Che Guevara's corpse. Here, the widow's flesh drew near to Fernando's bones, the couple's first encounter after more than twenty years. The materiality of the body (and what greater density could give expression to the body than its weight in bone?) was thus unmistakably claimed; bone and personal identity, past history and current moment were linked in a single image, joining the visual presence of the skeleton to the highly unrepresentable aspects of physical and emotional pain. Only family drama—inaugurated by the gendered gaze of Fernando's wife—offered a transition from fact to narration; it supplied a well-known arc of emot-

ment leading to the couple's reunion while also instigating a melodrama to veil spectators from the naked harshness of death.

I saw this documentary in Chile in November 1998 as part of the concluding program of a conference commemorating fifteen years of achievement of the Casa de la Mujer la Morada, a nongovernmental organization devoted to feminist activism from the time of the dictatorship period. La Morada had invited to the screening members of the Agrupación de Familiares de Detenidos-Desaparecidos (Organization of Relatives of the Detained and Disappeared) along with prominent Chilean intellectuals, all of whom were deeply moved by both the film and the historical circumstances in which it was shown—a time when the detention of Pinochet in London sparked heated debate throughout Chile. The fortuitous conjunction of these events tested many questions of memory and oblivion, injustice and rectification, and, not least among them, the relationship between truth and representation, private horror and public spectacle. But the gathering also stirred reminders of an intellectual issue: Could those of us committed to intellectual work and coming from geographic points far away share a common register of perception with family members of the disappeared as we together viewed a drama of unrelieved abjection? Are there artistic avenues of access through which a particular loss might help us make sense of a social whole? These questions prompt us to reflect on the interventions offered by practitioners of a formal aesthetic in monitoring the experiences of others.

I raise these points in order to address the relationships between experience and language, between image and notation, but also to reflect on the encounters sustained between intellectuals and their objects of study. These tensions are, of course, the basis of many approximations to society and culture, but in the Southern Cone, in the postdictatorship years, a number of peculiar issues emerge to sustain my attention here. First, a tug-of-war, which, in the representational field, amounts to a conflict between the mask and the face, between identity and its occlusion, often detonates a critical consciousness about the workings of democracy, its blindness and exclusions. Too, this crisis is often registered through metaphors of subalternity and gender. As in the film about Fernando's bones, the inquiry that leads to proof of his name reinserts questions of social class in the public eye; this tension is frequently mediated—although some might claim supplanted—by a highly gendered presence. As if to compensate the interest in subalternity that formerly preoccupied Southern Cone intellectuals, at least through the 1980s, gender enters as a guiding trope to affirm the powers of the margin. As such, the gendered field activates an anxiety about the shortcomings of representation; it introduces unevenness and

double readings in a field where conflict once appeared settled. It resituates intellectuals in relationship to distant subjects and urges, however problematically, a linkage between worlds commonly divided by indifference.

The Art of Transition will try to come to terms with these issues in Chile and Argentina in the postdictatorship years by inquiring about cultural strategies to name and represent the “real” and by tracing the strategies of concealment and revelation that occur in politics and culture. Myriad examples herein serve to focus on the role that literature plays in managing these crucial issues. Faced with the numbing logic of neoliberal regimes, literature offers an intervention in order to consider identity and voice, to consider representation in both the political and artistic sense of the term. If neoliberalism, as a celebration of free-marketneering, paints a sheen of apparent neutrality on social contradiction, erasing strands of memory that bound individuals to their past and suppressing discussion of “value,” literature and art instead cultivate tension, revealing the conflicts between an unresolved past and present, between invisibility and exposure, showing the dualities of face and mask that leave their trace on identitarian struggles today. In this way, cultural texts interrupt the comfortable “flow” of post-dictatorship regimes, so easily given to the sale of “difference” yet so often indifferent to the depths of experience. They revel in many identities to push a point about society’s blindness while also emphasizing in grander terms the shifting practices of a formal aesthetic in order to record one’s conflicts with history. The art of transition thus evolves from duality and movement: a transition in political strategy from dictatorship to neoliberal democracy; a transition in cultural practices from focus on social class alone to matters of sexuality and gender; a transition in styles of representation that weave between modernist yearnings and postmodern pastiche.

In all of this the alignment of Argentina and Chile is, of course, not fortuitous; although habitually the two nations are not studied as a pair. Argentine culture, for its record of state authoritarian practice dating from the nineteenth century, has provoked countless intellectual meditations on the crisis of liberal thought and the failures of history; consequently it generates, as its dominant note, a peculiarly masculine narrative about one’s quest for authenticity and subsequent intellectual disillusion, textual histories of the kind that Ricardo Piglia once described, citing Borges, as a test of the “prolixity of the real” (1980). More recently, the abuses by military governments and the corruption of neoliberal democracy have prompted desires among artists and writers to recuperate a totalizing story that might tell the fate of the nation in which even accounts of minor detail serve to allegorize the national dilemma. By contrast, Chile appears to have truncated any faith in the “grand narrations,” those overarching fables that ex-

plain intellectual aspirations toward conquest and triumph or even of the intellectual's doubts with respect to the veracity of historical fact. Dismemberment and violence, instead, become the focus of Chile's national tale, truculent micronarratives observable from the nineteenth century, in the writings of Lastarria and Vicuña Mackenna or in countless legends about the notoriously vicious Quintrala.¹ In this tradition, Chilean fiction and history are littered with mutilated corpses and body fragments, grotesque metaphors for the decomposition of any desired social whole. It is perhaps the contrast between the Argentine anxiety for a *grand récit* and the Chilean cultivation of minor yet violent detail that separates, in a primary (and reductive) reading, the approaches of intellectuals of these two countries with respect to an appraisal of the real. Yet both might find common terrain in their cultural attraction to society's marginal or abandoned figures, those who cast a dilemma about the representation of otherness. As such, they announce the troubled plight of the "outsider," a figure who has become feminized in relation to the eye of the patriarchal state. Dual approaches to resolving the tension between universal and particular desires, the reemergence of subaltern figures is, this time under a postdictatorship gaze, marked by the unmistakable stripe of gender. The deliberate emergence of gendered drift as a metaphor for identitarian struggle bears uncanny fruition in the cultural texts of postdictatorship years and often supplies a dimension of representation that subalternity alone no longer affords. So when Chile inherited the "miracle" of economic reform and Argentina (despite its propitious start under Raúl Alfonsín) soon came to find itself mired in corruption and misgivings, popular subjects—now increasingly gendered and torn from their earlier, essentialized moorings in social class—absorbed the many issues produced from democracy's struggles, although their avenue of access to public space was often mediated by the market.

The Chilean "miracle," sociologists have told us, sparkles from the gloss of consensus, a concerted effort—until the recent detention and release of Pinochet—to "forgive and forget."² Argentine democracy, by contrast, has taken a more fitful path, with five aborted coups between 1987 and 1992 and a continued tradition of public protest, where citizens, ready to denounce government corruption, are answered by cover-ups and lies. Small wonder, then, that the metaphor of the mask represents neoliberal democracy's face, stressing a state-driven theatricality at a time when government has so much to hide and citizens are forced to dissemble in order to comply with the drive toward consensus. Whereas, in Chile, dissidents protest the scripts of state by recurring to cloaked identities and disguise that might protect them from surveillance, in Argentina, the state is described as the

ultimate impostor. Both national cases remind us that the authoritarian past has not been dismantled and also signal that the basic cultural strategies for explaining this disjuncture remain intact: Argentines continue to refer to their national dilemma through a narrative desire for an all-encompassing history, while Chileans isolate small segments of local truth to disqualify larger versions of events. In both instances, however, they admit the impossibility of finding an authentic past that might settle once and for all their anxieties about misrepresentation. The centerpiece of their meditation often comes forth through a narrative tension sustained between truth and lies, between an array of dissident identities that circulate in civil society and the prescribed veils or cover-ups required of citizens by the fraudulent state. The discovery of Fernando's bones is but one element in a larger story about efforts to uncover a body and link it unmistakably to a name.

These tensions come to the surface in recent political events in both countries. The request for Pinochet's extradition, for example, incited a debate in Chile about the repressions of truth fostered by democratic rule. The hearings in London thus prompted a renewed interest in the ethics of representation, obliging individuals to ask about the connections between memory and justice and the burdens of accountability when public recollection of atrocity wanes. Ariel Dorfman addressed this issue in *La muerte y la doncella* (Death and the maiden) (1992), a dramatic work whose first staging in Chile coincided with the publication of the Rettig Commission Report on the horrors of military rule. Exposing the tenuous balance between civil order and the demands for justice, Dorfman pointed to the shifting boundaries between truth and fiction, between the experience of torture and the consequence of its representation, asking us if one person's truth might count more than another's, if one's story must be suppressed in order for the illusion of social harmony to thrive. The gap between truth and representation, so observable in this theatrical work, also depends upon stereotypes of gender and power that allow it to be detected easily through international venues. It touches upon the contradiction of all political representation in art that, in order to reach a global audience, must simplify complex positions. This is seen in recent debates about the Pinochet case and also in regard to those military officials responsible for the "Caravans of Death" of the dictatorship years and who today demand legal defense.

In Argentina, narratives of the "death flights" bring into alignment the mismatched quilt of truth and lies regarding the fate of disappeared persons. The revelations of retired navy captain Adolfo Scilingo in Argentina (1995) confirmed long-held public suspicions about the body drops from

helicopters into the Atlantic Ocean. Practiced on a routine basis by members of the Navy School of Mechanics, these operations brought a horrendous finality to victims of the dirty wars but were not confirmed until the formal confessions of Scilingo followed by subsequent apologies from other military officials.³ These admissions shocked public consciousness once again and also generated forceful reminders among cultural practitioners of the strategies of official cover-up and the feigned ignorance of the public. I am particularly interested in two responses to this undeniably painful aspect of the hidden past: the first obliging us to think about the *market* for social memory; and the second in which memory, surpassing the constraints of institutional politics, functions as an impetus for future social action. Both issues shift discussion, leading us to contemplate even more intricate issues regarding the ethics of representation.

In February 1999, Argentine rock star Charly García was scheduled to give an outdoor concert at a stadium near the River Plate. His plan was to stage a rock performance introduced by the arrival of helicopters, which were to dispatch life-size mannikins into the water below, a spectacle that was to evoke the “death flights” during the years of the dirty war. But observers such as Hebe de Bonafini, leader of the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, perceived the gesture as a commercialization of pain and loss, a way to move the spectacle not toward remembrance, but mercantile gain. “You can’t stage a show with death,” she claimed.⁴ Although cancellation of the simulated death drop allowed many well-known progressive figures to issue a sigh of relief, the episode nevertheless carries important elements pointing to the ambiguous relationship between art and one’s profit from memory. Who is allowed to recall the past? Can the mediations of art ever respect the memory of horror? And, conversely, should one impose restraints on projects of avant-garde art? Our culture, both North and South, is densely marked by twofold inquiries of this kind, recalling the delicate line separating experimental innovation in art and potential abuse of the past as they also remind us of the stringent demands placed on individuals for narrations of firsthand experience, an insistence upon eyewitness accounts and testimonial values, usually to the exclusion of the aesthetic. In these circumstances in which personal pain confronts the test of art, art suddenly appears to be the enemy of truth, the violator of authenticity and singular experience, a traitor to the ethical values with which one might read the past.

On the underside of this model, the intervention of Argentine youth, who tag the doors of torturers’ homes in order to remind the public of the cruelty of their neighbors, invites a different, although equally perplexing, reading of our relationship to the past. *Los escraches*, as this independent

protest movement by children of the disappeared is known, have rallied hopes among the elders for a transgenerational pact, a way to find a place for youngsters within the broad spectrum of social movements devoted to human rights issues in Argentina. Yet the participants in this widespread activity claim, through graffiti-style “tagging,” an autonomous voice of their own. Their random exposure of military agents responsible for human rights violations during the years of the dirty war carries an independent assertion of memory that refuses to be bound by political order. Against the usual strategies of citation that recognize a line of continuity with the past, *los escraches* leave random and unexpected marks in the scriptural politics of memory, bound as it has been by a clear genealogy and a disciplined political vision. Instead of relying upon traditional testimonial gestures to anchor a social movement, the taggers find an alternative citational system to register their opposition to the cover-ups that had prevented the circulation of truth. They thus produce a version of public memory with an independent course of its own and, in the process, surpass the inadequate efforts of politicians to rectify violations of human rights under the measures available by law.⁵ Stretching the limits of the citational system, the names of former agents of murder appear in the public eye; as such, a youth-bound artistic movement comes to announce alternative forms of knowledge and rallies the public to action.

These initiatives remind us that while the dictatorships and even democratic regimes have tightly controlled our understanding of the real, cultural practices constantly subvert that discursive order, deregulating the seemingly fixed relationship between the real and its simulacra, reconstituting fields of identity and difference, testing the so-called authentic representations of “truth” against creative recastings. These interventions thus construct alternative communities of knowledge that override usual approaches to citation. Of course, conventional citation tends to deaden the possibilities of cultural critique, canceling free oppositional spaces so that they all appear to echo some earlier form, reinforcing the stability of temporal order, genealogy, and paths to the future. Traditional citation fixes the relationship between the state and its opponents, between North and South, East and West, city and country, men and women. It leads critics and philosophers to express a suspicion of these strategies as a dependency on imported ideas. Accordingly, when creative writers disrupt this expected transit, dismembering the reigning binarisms of social logic, they also question conventional alignments of truth. They disrupt the axis of intelligibility ordered by global and local cultural tensions. Scriptural shiftings erupt, new languages and encodings emerge such that cultural maps are rewritten, the cartography of the knowable is altered.

A final example helps to think about the disruptive practices of cultural texts in mediating the distance between truth and lies and altering the hierarchies of citation. *Un espacio al olvido* (A space from oblivion, 1997), an Argentine video directed by Sabrina Farji and filmed by Marcelo Brodsky and forming part of Brodsky's larger installation of photographs of the graduates of the Colegio Nacional, manipulates two forms of memory, two contrary citations of history.⁶ The film tracks the experiences of a father whose son had been abducted by military forces during the dictatorship years and who here assembles images of the boy's life through old home movies and photographs. Superimposed upon this narrative, the filmmakers focus their camera on the turbulent ocean waters, presumably the tomb of the disappeared child; the ocean then becomes the background for traversing clips of super-8 film that show the boy, as a youngster, bathing at the sea. Saturating the viewers with reminders of redemption and death, the water commands dual orders of reflection: the super-8 film returns us to a nostalgia for childhood, the leisure-time activities of seaside fun, while the larger frame focuses on the silent ocean and points to the final resting place for victims of the dirty war. "The work of the father permits us to rescue the past; the work of the son permits the exercise of memory," reads a text superimposed on images of water, reminding us of the paradoxical reversal of time and the usual order of citation. Just as the River Plate is both the point of arrival and hope for immigrants new to America and also, in the case of the "death flights," a final destiny and tomb for youth, this dual system of citation opens alternative readings of history that challenge chronological flow. Not without its obvious ironies, the father, the elder of the set, constructs a future memory for a time of social justice, but it is the child who has tutored the parent, teaching the adult how to read the past and open to speculations on a possible future. More importantly, the collaboration between father and son wins a space against oblivion in order to defeat forgetfulness and loss, to interrupt the unquestioned advance of history and insist on the power of interpretation in restoring meaning to life.

Examples such as these point to the ways in which cultural texts intervene to alter the confidence of any *sensus communis*, to signal the contradictions between the "good sense" capability of citizens and the kind of common sense that flattens debate and critique just as it numbs our judgments and inhibits the power of voice.⁷ The risk of art is staked here on exposing multiple truths and lies. It results in a struggle for social control over the symbolic field; it signals the importance of *representation* for ordering a social whole. One might say, of course, that the tension between truth and fiction, between one's absolute confidence in "fact" and the indeterminate nature of naming is the engine of the postmodern, the motor that propels

our fin de siglo craft through often murky waters. But the Southern Cone experience with dictatorship makes this tension dramatically serious, taking away the frivolous aspects belonging to any sense of the global postmodern. Pastiche and parody, the playful exchange between original and copy, the exaltation of the regime of signs over the referents named are among the many techniques that lubricate the postmodern narrative machine; however, when applied to literature and culture that offer a reflection on authoritarian rule, the terms become laden with unsuspected meaning, the gratuitous free play of signs is lost and indicates other dimensions of experience. In a telling example belonging to Luisa Valenzuela's novel *Novela negra con argentinos* (Black novel with Argentines), a character acrimoniously comments on the pleasures offered by sadomasochistic sex parlors in New York: "How do you expect me to like sexual torture for pleasure when I come from a country where they tortured, let's say for political reasons, for the pure sake of horror, desperate victims who were under no circumstance compliant?" (1990, 151). While the representational free play of pleasure and pain travels beyond national borders, the example also reminds us of the ethical commitment that is found in Southern Cone literature and culture of the 1990s, a rejoinder to those poststructuralists who would dismiss the political potential of the literary text. It also restores an interest in gender that goes far beyond the visions and aspirations of first-wave feminist theory. Linked to issues of memory and market as well as the articulation of aesthetic value, gendered readings of postdictatorship culture deliberately take us to a critical scene where ethical issues cross with artistic choice.

In this arena of debate, a vexing question haunts all critical inquiry: Why is it so difficult to speak of the linkage between ethics and the texts of high culture? The sharp disjunction between the two has come to be regarded as uncontested fact, an axiom for that branch of cultural theory that equates the presence of imaginative texts as the last gasp of a once triumphant bourgeoisie, one that no longer carries weight in today's decentered economy of new technologies and mass-media practice. It has resulted in an *ars non grata* approach among those who would find art separate from social action and locate the political beyond high culture's reach.⁸ From the aestheticist perspective, art and literature are said to evolve on their own ground, without any moral propellant; content, political interest, and the field of the "social" are separate from the purview of art.⁹

While, of course, literature cannot stand in for political activity in the manner assumed by nineteenth-century nation-building texts such as Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the poetry and chronicles of José Martí, or Domingo F. Sarmiento's *Facundo*, recent debates nonetheless re-

mind us of the power that still lingers around the literary-ethical pairing. This discussion centers most forcefully around the capacity for aesthetic projects to bring us back to the larger project of linking universal and particular interests. Anthony Cascardi (1999), for example, premising his readings on Kant's third *Critique*, reminds us of the experience of critical thinking that emerges from one's surrender to the aesthetic aura. Arguing against the "autonomy of art" position, he draws us to the possibility of political claims formulated at the moment of aesthetic encounter. In this instance (and in accordance with Kant), our conceptual structure will not accommodate the unrepresentable nature of pleasure or pain; instead, we are left principally with an awareness of the distance between image and ethics. The seemingly unbridgeable gap is recuperated by the exercise of critical consciousness, which in turn stimulates questions of agency and then offers the conceptual possibility upon which to build future action (82).¹⁰

Provocative gaps of this kind remind us of the dislocations between the realm of "appearance" and one's claims for the real, the massive use of irony that expands its purview under the wing of postmodern influence, the constant and forced encounters in art between representations of the abject and allusion to the uncanny or absurd. All of these demand a reassessment of our avenues of access to knowledge, our constitution as readers and thinkers, the role of subjective agency in initiating a response to misalignments of reality and representation. In this respect, the aesthetic and ethical link invites us to move from particular self-interest to a grander logic of alliance and community, from visions of the dismembered past to a possible collective future.

Many defenders of cultural critique, weary of the tired exaltations of high culture, refuse this argument and lodge a major indictment against these literary-aesthetic claims, especially when they purport to bridge the gap between elite and popular sectors. Those who have engaged in debate about the phantom of authenticity generated by the *testimonio* of Rigoberta Menchú have especially considered this issue.¹¹ George Yúdice, for example, taking his cues from Terry Eagleton, argues that the aesthetic reinforces the illusion of individual freedom belonging to bourgeois necessity; moreover, he claims, contrary to the advances of the avant-garde, that art which is necessarily separate from life practices cannot be expected to represent the "other" save to reproduce strategies of repression (1996, 48–50). Observing the crisis of "high culture" models, Alberto Moreiras notes the reduction of the literary field in paradoxical conjunction with the "pretensions of the cultured literary elite to keep dictating taste" (1996, 192) as well as the illusions of progressive intellectuals to find in literature a bridge of identity linking social groups. The effect of literature cannot be one of alli-

ance, he writes, since this pact is beyond the scope of possible representation; at best, the testimonio can only produce a “poetics of solidarity,” a pact that leaves readers in the realm of complacency and self-indulgence (198). Responding to positions such as these, Santiago Colás asks with straightforward clarity: “What’s wrong with representation?” (1996, 161–71). And from the realm of literature itself, poet Juan Gelman recently writes: “And what if we saw the novel not in its traditional configuration as a literary genre belonging to the spiritual climate of an emerging bourgeoisie, but as an expression of the ancient human need to tell of the disturbing aspects of social crisis, to learn from this experience, and to claim the crisis as our own?” (1999). The literary text thus becomes mobile, in subtle dialectic with the times. In other quarters, this is played out as a defense of the discursive, whereby a mobility between universal and particular interests is said to constitute the very activity of art. It is the engine of spectator cognition, the initiator of cultural critique; it leads to the repair of the gaps in the damaged social fabric.

In Latin America, Beatriz Sarlo and Nelly Richard have been the principal theorists of the aesthetic turn. After thirty years of constant engagement in the political and cultural debates of her native Argentina (and articulated most prominently through her journal, *Punto de Vista*), Sarlo has rightly earned the title of public intellectual. Her incursions into theory are prolific, but for my purposes here, I am especially interested in her understanding of the relationship between politics and art. Troubled by Argentine democratic traditions that failed to rally a common agenda, Sarlo frequently protests the shortcomings of any *sensus communis*; yet she often finds resolution to this quandary by seeking out the aesthetic values that link individual judgments (1997, 32–38). She thus turns to a sensibility founded on principles that might recall Eliot’s defense of “individual talent,” but also to restore faith in a Habermasian public sphere. Sarlo intervenes to stop the flow of a debased politics and halt the aura of “false” common sense by proposing an alternative mode of intelligibility, reclaiming ongoing difference as the basis with which to form “good” political and aesthetic judgment. Her viewpoint sustains a faith in democratic polis based on the impossibility of a truly universal consensus, although it enables an intersubjective space through which all parties might accept a compact of recognizable criteria and judgments. Although difference is the desired sign of democratic practice, Sarlo nevertheless distrusts the “particular” when it comes to threaten the more appreciated aspects of recognized social tradition emphasizing reconciliation and union.

Her theory poses a number of residual problems that have made her the target of recent criticism. Sarlo understands the role of art as a vehicle of

the disruption, breaking up the kind of political authority that often extracts an unwillful and blind agreement from the public. For Sarlo, the *disruption* of mediocrity in political action is found, paradoxically, in a return to the *ordering principles* of the aesthetic, a value that celebrates internal differentiation among texts, hierarchies obeying a universally acknowledged code of merit, an almost ironic *nescio quid* regarding democratic thinking. Difference thus shows itself not necessarily by the pulsational forces within a given text, but surely by the comparative measurement and evaluation of one text against another. This position, of course, recalls the kind of Enlightenment pedagogy that utilized aesthetic identification to train the judgments of compliant, ethical citizens.¹² The basis of nation-building ideology, it aimed to establish a number of universal standards for the management of cultural and political life. In this respect, Sarlo cultivates similar ties between democracy and the manifestation of artistic difference insofar as both are premised on an understanding of what might be seen as the disordering effects of cultural process.

Another perspective on the aesthetic is offered by Nelly Richard (1998). A cultural critic of cutting-edge vitality who has achieved somewhat of a celebrity status among postmodern thinkers, a reputation assured by the journal she founded, the *Revista de Crítica Cultural*, Richard is a bridge figure among U.S., European, and Latin American critics although she has remained committed to specific debates originating in Chile. Despite what might appear to be a move in the direction of universalized, transnational discourse, Richard is inspired by a Deleuzian celebration of the “minor”; also echoing the arguments of radical democracy proponents Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, she reaches for the power of disruption found in local resistance and social action. Translated to art and literature, a splintering of any totalizing vision stands as a form of rebellion against state power and its patterns of fixed representation. By extension, the local struggle shows the exclusions of postdictatorial democracy and neoliberal rule; its expression of choice in the realm of literature and art is found in the fragment.

Like Richard, other theorists, eager in recent years to flee macrohistorical accounts of history, have turned to the power of the fragment and celebrate the power of the local. In this way, they privilege the *microspace* (Deleuze, Foucault, Perlongher), the *entre-lugar*, or in-between (Bhabha, Silvano Santiago); they celebrate *interstitiality* and *disjuncture* (Achugar, Appadurai, Hopenhayn) or turn to the powers of *ungovernable subjects* (the subaltern studies group in India or Latin Americanists under the same rubric working in the United States). Through these images, critics seek to excavate the potential of counterhegemonic oppositional forces, to engage the

prospect of revolt from below, to alter the monolithic discourses that dominate our times.

Yet is the fragment sufficient? My plan is to present the conditions for a reflection on alliance through critical thinking, to argue the ways in which art and literature do not cultivate the (gendered) margin simply for effects of scandal, but instead take these representations to reconsider our contemporary crisis, thereby leading one to the workings of a social whole. In this respect, the fragment or the microspace defended by certain voices of continental philosophy is not in itself forceful enough to recruit this desired insight; instead, what propels us is a constant longing for completion, a totalizing logic that links universal and particular forces both within the text and through the symbolic registers of a social whole. From the aporia or “dark hole,” from the vortex of possible signifiers whose meaning has not been set, we are prompted to a practice of suture; we awaken to interpretation and the desire to travel *en route* to a conceptual whole, one which is not an allegorization of national quandary (as in the style of novels of the Boom), but more likely a response to the flattening gloss of the market, the so-called waning of affect that has been identified with the times. One might rightfully identify my faith in literature and art with modernist desire itself (or, for a faith in hermeneutics, with the foundations of what once was identified as the power of “reader response”), but I am here especially interested in the ways in which these strategies make themselves obvious at a time when individuals feel especially disabled in light of neoliberal rule. Art and literature thus force us to think of interpretative strategies of resistance, interrogating the past and leading to a politics of cognition with which to move toward the future. Against the marketed package of “ready-made” cultural products and ideas that neoliberalism places at our disposal, the cultural experiment provokes forms of thinking that move toward alternative frameworks for apprehending social forms. In this respect, mine is a course identified neither with those of Sarlo or Richard, although their different projects have a strong resonance in the chords of argumentation raised in the pages of this book. Rather, I am urged to track the linkages between order and difference, their overlaps and points of conjuncture in order to show how a critical sensibility is shaped from the realm of cultural texts and offers the potential of a political future. Literature and art open the way for readers and spectators to take the conceptual leaps necessary for the practice of politics; they also signal the monumental impasses that travelers find in their path.

The mechanism of translation also supplies another step toward this process of cognition. In the best instance, it constructs a desired bridge between individuals and the culture at large; minimally, it exposes the inade-

quacies of any claims to a universal language. Translation thereby places in evidence the multiple and irreducible languages belonging to the social whole; it enacts the performance of language on an international stage. By contrast, through the odysseys of North/South travelers who speak in many tongues, but without the security of comprehension, we are also reminded of a long-term practice that locks postdictatorial subjects from global inclusion, suppressing their particular symbolic registers and their local languages of self-definition. Translation, as the trope of interpretative practice, announces the limits of difference and the glaring gap between experience and language, between traditional order and flight. Starting from its condition of error, translation leads one to rethink the social whole.

These tensions, or “force fields,” multiply paths for reconsidering art and social forms (amen Walter Benjamin, who once referred to the force fields that separate past and present¹³). Extending the metaphor here, I consider the force fields constructed by artistic pulsations of global and local desires, tensions between North and South, and the claims of fixed versus fluid identities that settle on the postdictatorial landscape. These tensions also map the uneven terrain of intellectual authority set against popular voices, the rhetorical constructions that separate “men” and “women,” the ongoing pull between “authentic” expression and its supposed derivation or copy, and finally the market-run logic directing the “business” of literature versus the slow preponderance of ideas required by experimental texts. These polarities were announced during the dictatorship years, and, of course, one might claim that they are as old as literature itself, but I especially want to emphasize the way the cultural field is redefined in light of neoliberal regimes, where the dual faces of Janus are emblematic of a way of life. This doubleness marks the status of citizen-subjects under postdictatorial rule; not only an obligation of social life, doubleness becomes the guiding principle of a late-twentieth-century aesthetic. Nevertheless, from the tensions produced by these conflicts of articulation and action, a condition of possibility emerges with which to imagine a politics of alliance.

This book is organized under three principal headings: masks, maps, and markets. The first section points to the scripts that have been set in place in critical debate during the dictatorships and continue during democratic governance, most especially with respect to the representation of popular subjects. In a first instance, under the years of military rule, a yearning for democracy was articulated through the celebration of *lo popular* (a category that includes subalternity as well as a conceptualization of deviant figures, marginals, and delinquent subjects). Popular subjects thus

entered cultural critique to give name to desired opposition to the state while often expressing a nostalgic longing for populism itself; in a second instance, however, and with the transition to democracy, critics come to regard the popular subject with suspicion. Although the appetite for lo popular responds globally to what might be likened to a postmodern fetish, allowing intellectuals to constitute a field of difference and facilitate the transit between canonical and emergent discourses or find a connection between the distinctions of “high” and “low,” under democracy in Argentina and Chile, subalternity (albeit the product of an essentialist passion) becomes the focus of distrust; it stands for the disenfranchised groups who live on society’s margins and is regarded as the disruptive element that fragments a social totality. Replacing this, gendered subjects have come to attract more recent interest and allow for a signifying field of popular and artistic difference that often substitutes for the draw offered by lo popular. In other words, the gendered field now fills in for the possibilities of political and aesthetic difference offered previously by popular subjects, allowing one to reexamine the critical distance between experience and representation in its various deployments. As an entry into discussions of literature and art, this first chapter makes a case for the political and social uses of gender that, framed in essays in critical inquiry, lead to unsuspected pacts and alliance, surprising negotiations of identity and desire. This sets the stage for discussion of the ways in which gender will create a critical consciousness about political and aesthetic formation.

In the second chapter, I focus on the question of *representation* taken in its double meaning—as a problem that addresses the theatrical illusion of representing some distant subject, as a promise of representation within the political sphere. Operating between the affirmation of individual identities and the consensual expectations placed on citizen-subjects by the larger social body, between theater as a metaphor for deception and as a strategic entry of individuals on the political stage, the metaphor of the mask enables a consideration of the gap between truth and lies, challenging the kinds of identities imposed by state and market. “The mask was the most costly face that each person gambled,” writes Chilean novelist Guadalupe Santa Cruz (1997a, 182). The mask calls attention to our dual identities in the political sphere, but it also serves as a metaphor for sexual difference, articulating the struggles between masculine and feminine, between privileged and marginal identities. A principal argument connects the various sections of this chapter: if during dictatorship literary texts revealed a range of oppositional and “deviant” identities to challenge the patriarchal state, then under democracy an awareness of the market frequently drives these representations, tying sexual identities to the politics

of commodification and sales. As the market becomes the new arena for the promotion and sale of “difference,” alternative gendered identities lose their political thrust and are often considered commodities or tokens of exchange. I take into account the evolution of this problem through a number of Chilean and Argentine texts and settle on the writings of Manuel Puig and César Aira: the former, because he was far ahead of his time in unmasking the illusions of gender constructs and the vacuous proposals that sustain sexual normativity in language and social life, and the latter, as a formidable postmodern, possible heir to the projects of Manuel Puig, insofar as he incessantly meddles with the sexual economies regulating literature, thought, and markets.

Much of the identitarian debate is drawn not simply in the local arena, but through a reconceptualization of North/South axis and metaphors of translation. “Maps,” the second section of this book, is devoted to these cartographies. In the film *Buenos Aires vice versa* (directed by Alejandro Agresti, 1996), a character affirms, “We have to end this crazy idea that claims North as North and South as South. We have to turn the map upside down.” Chapter 3 first explores the way the Latin American gendered subject is often exoticized by both the northern academic lens and the phenomenon of the mass-market best-seller; I later turn to the ways in which Latin American critical theory and experimental literature answer those proposals. “Tell me, haven’t you ever thought that the West might lie in the opposite direction?” (1994, 65), asks Diamela Eltit with a wry observation of the artificial frontiers separating cultures. By contrast, Diana Bellessi proposes a gesture of appropriation: “Is South an illusion? / By choice of the turning earth / a voice of faith rises . . . / South is / the continent whole” (1998, 122). *Feminaria* (Argentina) and *Revista de Crítica Cultural* (Chile), prestigious journals with reputations for theorizing these hemispheric divides through the lens of gender, set the groundwork for investigating the gloss of global theory that effaces local cultural production or rarifies its critical thought. Against ventriloquy of the kind that reinforces subservience, contributors to these venues propose local cultural answers to accommodate the realities of the South. This affirmation is played out, finally, in literature itself; here, South answers North through novels enjoying global “best-seller” status and through those that follow an avant-garde practice.

In chapter 4, these geopolitical anxieties are further considered by focusing on gender and translation. Instead of accepting the North/South cartography that has dominated Latin American culture, many writers redraw the map, shifting emphasis to an East/West axis. Equally important, they make apparent the ways in which culture is filtered—and changed—

through the lens of translation. The recuperation of “Orientalism” among contemporary Latin American writers paradoxically supplies a challenge to fixed ideations of Anglo-European modernism that have journeyed South just as it alters the mechanics of the “translating machine” that once achieved a certain prestige under the modernist brow. Gender is the principal token that moves on this gameboard of global meaning, showing the failures of naming, the arbitrariness of citation, while alerting readers to the dangers of arresting difference in order to transport it through geographic frontiers. These articulations in literature signal the sense of exclusion that Latin American writers—both men and women—experience in relationship to externally imposed discourses and distant aesthetic proposals, but they also indicate the possibility of an untested ethical and aesthetic pact that might be drawn by a community of intellectuals superseding national lines. The chapter thus dances through a mine field of imaginings about Asia as a way to open geographic containment, to alter the paths of citation that depend on a northern center, to show the points where gendered bodies fail to be accommodated by the languages of translation, but also—in its least complicated proposal—to point to the futility of monolingual expression.

Examining the distance between politics and representation necessitates a discussion of the ways in which the politics of the text resists the market. The aesthetic and ethical conflicts evoked by literary texts—among them, the *crónicas* of Pedro Lemebel, the recent novels of Ricardo Piglia and Diamela Eltit—structure the fifth chapter of this book. In particular, I focus on the representation of popular subjects in literature insofar as they help writers resist the homogenizing demands of the market, but paradoxically indulge the market’s voracious appetite for novelty and “difference.” The dilemma urges us to reconsider the concepts of culture we manage and the limited languages available to us for engaging in dialogue with others; it signals the ways in which literature articulates a crisis in our understanding of the “real.” The project assumed by these writers is not to represent an allegory of neoliberalism, but rather to present the possibilities of alternative languages grounded in the materiality of popular voice. The subaltern subject these writers construct thus resists assimilation by the canonical values of realist fiction yet supplies an impetus to question the ethical values of literary and social projects in contemporary times. If chapter 5 manages these issues with respect to the conventions of prose, the final chapter delves into the politics of voice emerging principally from contemporary poetry by women. Here, in the strip of cultural production so isolated by the market—the margin of the margin, so to speak—the writings of Argentine and Chilean poets whose works began

to circulate in the 1980s reconfigure the landscape of representation, revindicate place and language, and introduce a dynamic that resolves the ethics of alliance through the materiality of representation. A movement toward an all-encompassing ethics to join universal and particular meanings, experimental poetry foregrounds its function as a *bridge* over islands of non-correspondence. Throughout this book, examples abound of writers who propose to explore the gap between experience and language, finding ways to sustain and reintegrate difference, to seek a common space for dialogue outside of neoliberal divide. This, then, is about their art of transition, moving *en route* to critical thinking and the imagined possibility of future alliance through a grasp of aesthetic form. They show us how the politics of culture vigorously asserts itself as the new millennium begins.