

ARGENTINE SOCIOPOLITICAL
COMMENTARY, THE MALVINAS
CONFLICT, AND BEYOND:
Rhetoricizing a National Experience

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La cultura nacional se define entonces por la parálisis que impone el miedo a descubrimos y, mientras impere ese miedo, la nación a él sometida seguirá identificada mucho más con lo que oculta que con lo que muestra de sí.
Santiago Kovladoff,
Una cultura de catacumbas y otros ensayos

It was inevitable that after the demise of the series of military dictatorships that ruled Argentina so violently between 1976 and 1983, the return to democratic institutions would occasion an outpouring of the kinds of writing and cultural activities banned or censored by the generals. Movie distributors in Argentina today cannot keep up with the demand for films that could not be seen during these years (or were seen only with extensive and capricious cuts). Theaters are competing with each other to present works dealing with human rights violations and related themes. Television programming, which the military assiduously controlled, has now begun to evince some social consciousness. Meanwhile, the print media have filled bookstores and kiosks with myriad publications bearing witness to the attempt to recover a cultural tradition altered and fragmented by the so-called Proceso de Reorganización Nacional.

Yet as is often the case with attempts to control culture in a complex society, some publications had already begun to circulate, and the nonprint media had already begun to experiment with open expression before the late 1983 election of Raúl Alfonsín and the Radicales, a party committed to a democratic society. Within Argentina, coverage of and response to the 1982 conflict with Great Britain over the Malvinas provided an opening for considering the ideology of the Proceso leading to this international conflict and its relationship to what life in Argentina had become. Furthermore, Argentine exiles who had lived through the

early and most terrifying years of the Proceso and who had lost family and friends as a consequence of the military's *guerra sucia* published works abroad as part of the human rights campaign against the dictatorship. Some of these works were published in Spanish in Spain, while others first appeared in French or English versions.

Censorship in Argentina was officially abolished in November 1983 by outgoing president General Reynaldo Bignone. This act made possible the unrestricted circulation of new titles as well as Argentine publication of writings by Argentine exiles that had circulated only clandestinely before that date. But it would oversimplify and distort the history of culture in Argentina between 1976 and 1983 to say that no works of significant sociopolitical commentary were published within Argentina. Many were, and many authors suffered the consequences of defying a situation whose rules were all too clear to everyone concerned. One need look no farther than the fiction of Enrique Medina for an example of a writer who remained in Argentina and whose works constituted an open challenge to the official goal of a collective silence. *Las muecas del miedo* (1981) is perhaps the touchstone for this writing, and Medina succeeded in getting the novel past the censors to a wide audience. As indicated by the title would indicate, the book deals with a national reality where the "grimaces of fear" are the abiding constant.¹

But beginning in late 1983, the possibility unquestionably existed for the kind of free expression that disappeared in Argentina even before the military toppled the no-less-fascist regime of María Estela (Isabelita) Perón in March 1976 (during her two-year government, La Alianza Anticomunista Argentina, or AAA, began operations as a death squad to eliminate guerrillas and other subversives). Since late 1983, one finds—in addition to an array of literary works, theatrical events, and artistic expositions—an outpouring of sociopolitical commentary analyzing the country's recent experiences during both the military regime and the Malvinas war.

The goal of this study is to examine some of these writings, focusing on those that are most representative because of the prominence of their authors, the format of their text, or the specific aspects of Argentine social history they discuss. My specific interest is neither to summarize their topics nor to synthesize their interpretations. Rather, I have chosen works that are noteworthy, in my opinion, for the discourse strategies employed while developing the text. Critics have come to accept contemporary theories of cultural writing that assert that no text can be simply the innocently transparent exposition of meaning, but that all writing is an ideologically conditioned rhetoricizing of the reality it purports to represent.² It is therefore natural to approach documents dealing with the intense social conflicts in the con-

temporary Argentine national experience from the perspective of the writer's inescapable need to elaborate a rhetorically persuasive discourse. In this sense, the works I have chosen to analyze are not just those works where the rhetorical superstructure is most immediately evident or impressive, given that all writing is a matter of rhetoric rather than the neutral transmission of meaning.³ Instead, the six essays examined in the following pages are those that I consider to be most interesting because of the coherence of the rhetorical strategies they employ.⁴

This study seeks to address the ways in which the authors view their activities as sociopolitical commentators. It deduces and examines the authors' presuppositions about their implied readers, the manner in which the events of recent Argentine history are bracketed, and the structural patterns that the authors suggest give meaning to these events. Attention will be paid to the rhetorical strategies employed in these attempts to elaborate a text that elucidates and explains recent events and their suggested meanings. A particular focus will be the ways in which the author or narrator mediates in the text as a voice or character in it and the degree to which narrativization—the representation in terms of a cause-and-effect sequence of events portrayed in terms of “characters” (historical or otherwise)—is a primary textual strategy in these writings.⁵ All writing is in some sense rhetoric, and I am not asserting that these texts have some privileged claim to persuasive efficacy. What is especially interesting is to observe the development of a rhetoric capable of speaking of certain still painful issues. While readers may be drawn to the works primarily because of their content, it is their individual rhetoric that makes them interesting as cultural documents of a particular juncture in Argentine history.

FROM MONOLOGUE TO DIALOGUE: SPEAKING TO THE GENERALS

Por último, expreso mi gratitud a los artículos de la Constitución de mi país que amparan la edición de esta obra. (P. 9)⁶

Marcos Aguinis, a doctor, has attracted considerable attention for his fiction, particularly for his novel *La cruz invertida* (1970). Although a major spokesman for a liberal and critical segment of the Argentine Jewish community, his fictional writings as a whole probe the spiritual malaise, the emotional uneasiness, and the psychological disorientation of successful middle-class Argentines. The ways in which his characters address the simple fact that they are not happy with their life-style constitute one literary image of the forces at work beneath bourgeois gentility and urban comfort in Argentina today.

In *Carta esperanzada a un general: puente sobre el abismo*, Aguinis

addresses some of the issues confronting contemporary Argentine society in essayistic format as an alternative to the fictional narration characteristic of his novels and short stories. *Carta esperanzada* is dated "enero-julio 1983," before the elections and before Alfonsín was sworn in as president; the essay was published in December, when it was clear that a transition to democracy would take place. Nevertheless, Aguinis obviously prepared his letter convinced that elections would take place (he campaigned for Alfonsín and currently serves as an undersecretary of culture in the Radical administration) and that a transition to democracy would transpire. He also hoped that it would once again be possible to hold an open dialogue on national issues, as guaranteed by the Argentine constitution. The entire text of *Carta esperanzada* is predicated on these assumptions, which are necessary presuppositions for its meaning. This is true because open dialogue must be a characteristic of both the present status of free speech in Argentina and its future at a time when the Alfonsín government is engaged in addressing the complex forces shaping Argentine political life.

As a statement of ideas definable in sociopolitical terms, *Carta esperanzada* is a meticulous and unyielding dissection of the sort of military mentality that has made a mockery of Argentina's claim of participating in the orbit of American- and European-style liberal democratic traditions. The fact that the military has repeatedly violated the constitution in the guise of defending it is but one thread in Aguinis's argument. Exemplifying an essay structured according to identifiable rhetorical strategies, *Carta esperanzada* utilizes the conventional epistolary format wherein the role of the addressee in an idealized dialogue is usurped by a gracious, but unrelenting, speaker.

Aguinis's fundamental points of departure are the concepts of language as the verbal articulation of ideas, speech as a pragmatic act of information exchange through language, and communication as a successful intellectual and spiritual exchange. The title of his essay refers explicitly to one of the oldest figures of speech describing the nature of dialogue—a bridge spanning an abyss. In this case, the abyss results from the entire network of ideas and values separating the military from the civilian mind and experience, which gives rise to the problem of communication between the military and civilians. Thus the "letter," which is addressed to a prototypic general and is signed by one Marcos Aguinis, constitutes a text undertaking to bridge this abyss. The act of writing in *Carta esperanzada* is a tangible gesture of communication subordinate to the dominant metaphor of the essay, in which language and speech are the "bridge" and communication overcomes the abyss alluding to the distance between the Argentine people and one of their primary social institutions.

Clearly, the fictional construct of a letter confirms the importance

of the work's many allusions to language and communication, either as a private correspondence to which the reader happens to have access or as an open document in which a larger public beyond the specifically addressed audience is implicated. In the first place, Aguinis characterizes military formation (that is, officer training) as "de-formation" built on depriving its trainees of language and communication and thereby deforming them. Without language, the individual is deprived of identity (see pp. 18–19). *Carta* functions by asserting, if only by implication, that this situation of deprivation and its deforming consequences can be critically dealt with in a document such as the one addressed to the General, a document that we as readers are privileged to examine. As a result, Aguinis continually addresses the General (not without considerable irony for the presumed benefit of his readers) as unique in his willingness to read the letter, consider the issues it raises, and persevere in the face of assertions that are necessarily unsettling if not scandalous for the institution the General represents. Expressions of the writer's gratitude to the General for continuing to read the text are complemented by observations as to how unusual his addressee must be, given the military mind's need to avert its gaze unreflexively from (in a word, to censor) any expression of external criticism.

Thus Aguinis's text must assume the possibility of communication, even though that possibility is repeatedly questioned and denied by the author's analyses of the military's aversion to open dialogue and communication uncircumscribed by institutional deformation. This characterization is heightened by Aguinis's use of pathological metaphors:

La enfermedad autoritaria nos aleja de la realidad porque ésta insiste en informarnos de que estamos crecidos, que nos acordamos tarde de ser niños, que no debemos buscar un papá afuera sino en nosotros. . . . El lenguaje del individuo autoritario no es sincero, sino una semántica de la manipulación. Sus palabras se enhebran con fórmulas que repite continuamente para convencer y convencerse, para conjugar ritualmente una realidad incontrolable. Engaña a los otros y a sí mismo con su tendencia a la mitificación. Necesita y disfruta del secreto. El secreto facilita precisamente la mitificación y ambos vehiculizan el miedo y la sospecha. (P. 121)

This disjunctive characterization of a military dysfunctional language as opposed to the free exchange of communication characteristic of the democracy repressed by the military is a corollary of the epistolary fiction of *Carta esperanzada*. What makes Aguinis's text an example of free speech, in addition to its overtly articulated sociopolitical theses, is the possibility for communication that it exemplifies. The work's being addressed to a general who must read the text through (if he were to abandon its reading or to destroy it, there would be no text for the circumstantial reader to glimpse) constitutes an expression of faith in

the possibility of a healthy dynamic of communication being (re)established in a country where events have conspired against it.

It is for this reason that the epistolary format used by Aguinis is so rhetorically conceited. *Carta esperanzada* is ostensibly addressed to an unnamed general, but of course, it is read in practice by the purchasers of the book—those interested in Aguinis's writing, those attracted to the topic, or chance readers. I have called the letter artifice of the text a *fiction* not because Aguinis is uninterested in his comments being read by the Argentine generals; the kind of communication Aguinis seeks is even more necessary now that Argentina has returned to democracy and the military must seek to redefine its role in national life. Rather, the artifice of the text comes from the fact of its publication as a book, and the epistolary format is consequently only the general structural principle underlying the published text.

The implications of this circumstance are evident. In the first place, a disjunction exists between the overt addressee of the text and its actual readers. The General (or "the generals," as the common shorthand for the military in Latin America goes) is both the intended reader (the one who is explicitly identified) and the ideal reader (a certain sort of general who will agree to follow Aguinis in his exposition, no matter how offensive it may be to conventional military self-images). Therefore, the "real" or "actual" readers of the text must necessarily be the broad spectrum of Argentines who read Aguinis, buy books, and are interested in cultural and sociopolitical topics like the one broached by *Carta esperanzada*. Thus the ostensible reader, a potentially hostile general but one whom the author hopes is curious enough to read the document, is necessarily supplemented by actual readers who in varying degrees are sympathetic to Aguinis's point of view and his discursive strategies.

The supplemental nature of the civilian readers of *Carta esperanzada a un general* is reflected in the general tone of the text. The conventional polite formulas of epistolary address are complemented by numerous ironic, perhaps even sarcastic, asides. The unrelentingly trenchant characterization of military (de)formation undermines the formal graciousness of the epistolary format. Meticulous demonstrations of the internal contradictions of the military point of view complement insistent dissections of the commonplaces of military life—titles, formulas, slogans, bywords—in a manner that would be considered boorish in a real-life dialogue, whether face-to-face or epistolary.

The result is that despite the apostrophes to the General opening each of the thirty-two excursions of *Carta esperanzada* and the various other direct appeals to him throughout the text, Aguinis's essay quickly defines a secondary ideal reader, one who is not explicitly identified but who accepts the fundamental legitimacy of the author's line of inquiry.

If congratulating the General for his willingness to persevere in reading the letter is necessary rhetorical disingenuousness, *Carta esperanzada* is sincere in assuming that legions of Argentine readers do not need to be convinced of the legitimacy of its sociopolitical presuppositions. This assumption is particularly evident in the many passages where the author attacks the military worldview. Italics, quotation marks, rhetorical questions, and exclamations all characterize the author's assumptions. The latter may be diametrically opposed to those of the overt addressee of *Carta esperanzada*, but they are intended to be recognized as valid formulations by the real readers of the text. Hence, in the following quotation from the discussion on the military concept of honor, the direct references to the General are effectively a gesture made behind his back to the real readers:

Le ruego, General, que ahora repase muchos conflictos armados, tensiones desgastantes y obstinadas reivindicaciones. Las justifica el suntuoso letrero del honor. Y por mantenerlo encendido nadie se atreve a cuestionar la racionalidad de su violencia. Creo que se asombrará. Porque irá develando una a una las pruebas de un esfuerzo descabellado (e hipervalorado) por mostrar que se tiene virilidad. Que se es suficientemente *macho* para "lavar" el honor (la puesta en duda de su sexo). Se asombrará de las dificultades ridículas que impiden una negociación o el acceso a la reconciliación mientras la parte "ofendida" no considere salvada su imagen viril. (P. 83)

Carta esperanzada thus becomes a text of attribution, demanding that both the explicit addressee and the nonovert secondary addressee accept its characterization of the military worldview. The unrelenting presentation of contradictions, ill-founded assumptions, vacuous clichés, unresolvable oppositions, and antilogies provides a text that Aguinis's real readers will be likely to endorse as witnesses of recent Argentine history. The defining characteristic of *Carta esperanzada* is the irony that its explicit addressee is not likely to accept the legitimacy of this characterization of the military mind or the right to criticize it from a civilian point of view, no matter how gracious and hopeful a tone the author assumes. The disjunction between this truth and the therapeutic image of communication on which *Carta esperanzada* is based combine to provide the special features of Aguinis's essay.

THE ANTILOGIES OF STATE TERRORISM

En todos los diálogos mantenidos con liberados, el relato de esta primera experiencia en mano de sus captores: su detención, secuestro y tortura en las primeras 24 horas como prisioneros clandestinos concita generalmente, más del cincuenta por ciento del relato total, incluso de aquellos que permanecieron más de dos años en los campos. Apuntamos las siguientes observaciones sobre las razones de esa fijación especial: en primer lugar, la contundencia traumática de esta primera experiencia; en segundo lugar, que este impacto inicial es percibido desde su "vieja" identidad personal aún incólume y sometido a los jui-

cios de valor de su mundo previo a la entrada al campo. En cambio, la experiencia posterior del detenido-desaparecido está interrelacionada con los intentos de desintegración de su identidad y con el proceso de adaptación a ese mundo hostil y ligada por lo tanto, a juicios de valor y a una cosmovisión distinta: la impuesta en el mundo de sus captores. (P. 154)⁷

Two motives recur in the sociopolitical writings that have appeared in Argentina since the Malvinas conflict and the return to constitutional democracy. The first motive has been the imperative to reveal a secret or hidden reality: the details of the plans for social, economic, and political control by a series of dictatorial military governments, plans of which the Argentine people had only the sketchiest notion at the time. Argentines suffered the effects of this control daily. But because of censorship and the denial of free access to information, they could perceive only a fragment of the operations undertaken in the name of the Proceso de Reorganización Nacional. One group of writings has undertaken to set forth the full details as they have surfaced.

The second goal is a logical extension of the first: the belief that it is not enough to inform the Argentine people that a well-wrought program of institutionalized terror was an integral part of the Proceso. Readers must be convinced that the horrifying story being outlined for them is indeed accurate, that it is not an exaggeration of the facts by yellow journalism but is based on considerable corroborative documentary evidence.

Eduardo Luis Duhalde's *El estado terrorista argentino* is in the best tradition of contemporary investigative reporting. Little effort is made to dramatize the information for greater effect. But many verbatim reports from victims and witnesses are quoted in detailing the installation of a regime of terror as part of a clearly defined social and political plan by the military and its national and international clients and bosses. A lawyer, journalist, and university professor, Duhalde left Argentina in late 1976. He subsequently worked with the Comisión Argentina de Derechos Humanos, which provided him with the opportunity to assemble the documentary information and interview the individuals quoted in *El estado terrorista argentino*. His meticulous outline is followed by three sections describing the establishment of the terrorist state (the March 1976 coup and its goals), the mechanics of the regime of terror (the pattern of arrest, torture, prison, and death experienced by the *desaparecidos*), and the struggle against the regime. Like many books dealing with recent Argentine history, *El estado terrorista* was first published abroad (in Spain), with an Argentine edition following the return to democracy.

Duhalde constructs his documentary presentation on the premise that the military government that came to power in 1976 legitimized itself by exploiting the article of the Argentine constitution that permits

a “state of exception” in the event of a threat to national security. The unilateral definition of such a threat and the response to it in the form of a military coup allowed the military to dissolve the already tottering government of Isabelita Perón and implement the Proceso de Reorganización Nacional. Duhalde argues that the Proceso’s basic goal was to maintain Argentina’s dependent role in a capitalistic order at the expense of popular demands for social and economic reforms.

Thus the title of *El estado terrorista argentino* is an oxymoron defining Duhalde’s interpretation of the military’s response to political circumstances in Argentina in the mid-1970s. If the idea of a “state” refers to a constitutional order, the terrorist state that came into existence in Argentina in 1976 involved a program of institutionalized violence that contradicts the entire concept of constitutional guarantees and legal due process. A logical extension of this corrupt use of the text of the constitution to create a terrorist state was the regime’s need to create a parallel reality. While on the surface of everyday public life, the government preached the patriotic goals of its process of national reconstruction and moral realignment, it clandestinely pursued a program of silencing and eliminating any vestige of opposition. This alternate, secret reality—which Duhalde and the other writers discussed here sought to reveal in detail—is the antiphonic text to the public declarations of the military government:

Aniquilar físicamente al enemigo, fue la orden del 24 de marzo de 1976. Matar, asesinar, ejecutar, pero con las características de clandestinidad y simulación que hemos narrado a lo largo de este trabajo.

“Yo sostengo públicamente que en la Argentina durante un largo período, no se quiso reconocer que el país vivía en guerra, en aras de la imagen exterior y para no comprometer las ayudas económicas internacionales, no se decía la verdad de los hechos. Se quería minimizar la realidad, pensando en la continuidad de los créditos, que seguramente tampoco se habrían interrumpido si se hubiese planteado la verdad en toda su crueldad.”

El pretoriano General [Ramón] Camps, no vacila en reconocer la existencia del accionar clandestino y simulado. También explica una de las razones justificantes de la negativa a reconocer lo que se instrumentaba cotidianamente desde el aparato represivo del Estado. No explica, claro está, *las formas de ocultamiento de la política de asesinatos*. (P. 221)⁸

While the general outlines of Duhalde’s book follow the clear plan of contemporary journalistic reporting, the contrast between the public voice of the junta and the clandestine actions to eliminate dissent provides the essential rhetorical strategies of his exposition. The contextualization of the activities of the military’s hidden hand involves a series of redefinitions that begin with the structural features of government and extend to the complex cultural institutions in Argentina. Duhalde’s approach is to show not only that events were far worse than they appeared to be (individuals stopped on the street or taken from

their homes by armed agents were not being arrested by police discharging their legal function) but that the events the public could witness and on which the heavily censored press could report were only the prelude to a horrible clandestine drama (those arrested entered an underworld of torture, imprisonment, and extermination). The details of *El estado terrorista argentino* present a new social reality far more complex and nefarious than the circumstances of yet another in a long line of repressive military governments.

Of particular prominence in Duhalde's account is his analysis of the duplicitous nature of the military government's language. In addition to the false texts produced in the junta's self-legitimizing documents, the public language of government underwent a transformation. Because of the need to ignore and deny a clandestine reality impinging daily on the lives of more and more citizens, words were used euphemistically with cynical meanings that bespoke the new social reality:

Las modificaciones que la dictadura operó en todos los planos de la realidad, se observa también en el lenguaje hablado y escrito de los argentinos.

Por una parte, la multiplicidad de situaciones inéditas socialmente, creadas por la represión legal, obligaron a la incorporación de nuevos términos con que describirlas. También palabras habituales adquirieron una nueva significación en el contexto dictatorial. Incluso, los lenguajes técnico-profesionales—como el médico y el jurídico—debieron incorporar acepciones que pudieran caracterizar correctamente estos nuevos fenómenos no previstos científicamente.

Al mismo tiempo, tanto la dictadura a través de sus voceros, como la propia realidad de los campos [de concentración], aportaron una *jerga* específica que ha trascendido a un uso mayor. (P. 138)⁹

Duhalde's book lacks the sustained narrativization characteristic of most of the documents examined in this study. Except for the personal narratives of the witnesses whose testimonies are included as documentary corroboration, *Estado terrorista* is more strictly journalistic. Yet the burden of reconstructing and interpreting an intricate social reality inevitably leads to a set of rhetorical strategies that provide the book with much of its coherence. As Duhalde asserts, "Escribir sobre el Estado Terrorista, cuando éste se asienta sobre el dolor y la sangre de nuestros hermanos, no es tarea fácil ni agradable" (p. 10).

EXPROPRIATING THE LANGUAGE OF STATE TERRORISM

Porque en algo tenían razón los militares golpistas del 76 y quienes los apoyaron: al cabo de cinco décadas de golpes de Estado, represión y crímenes impunes; de corrupción y entrega; de mojigatería y censura; de injusticias sociales y económicas; de complacencia interesada y servil de la mayoría de los dirigentes políticos y sindicales y de no pocos intelectuales, hubo un momento en que todos nos hicimos subversivos. (P. 21)¹⁰

Carlos Gabetta's *Todos somos subversivos* must count as one of the core documents in the analysis of contemporary sociopolitical writing in Argentina. Although the Argentine Spanish-language edition only became possible with the return to democracy, a French-language edition had appeared four years earlier as part of the considerable effort made by Argentine exiles and their supporters to turn international opinion against the military regime.

Read in French, *Todos somos subversivos* is an eloquent series of personal testimonials by individuals who were the victims of the so-called guerra sucia (which was later termed the Proceso de Reorganización Nacional in the propaganda of the dictatorship, when it became clear that the government was no longer "merely" killing guerrillas but was persecuting citizens innocent of any violation of the criminal code). These victims were the parents and loved ones of the disappeared, individuals who themselves had suffered arbitrary arrest, torture, and incarceration, as well as Argentines who were living in exile in France and elsewhere as a consequence of having exercised their constitutionally guaranteed rights. When read in the delayed Argentine edition in Spanish, *Todos somos subversivos* becomes more than simply the case-book record, a relentless chronicle of human suffering. It is the formulated response to the lies of those guilty for the repression of the Argentine citizenry that could not be articulated in Argentina until the formal return of democracy in late 1983. In a very real sense, the publication of Gabetta's interviews in the original Argentine Spanish in which they were conducted is not simply the supplanting of the French translation by the Spanish original—it is the restoration of the original voice of the individuals interviewed, and in this sense, it is a significant cultural document.

Todos somos subversivos records a series of interviews conducted by Carlos Gabetta around 1979. In Argentina, journalist Gabetta specialized in political affairs, working in radio and for newspapers and magazines; he also wrote several books on sociopolitical issues in Argentina. Like several hundred fellow journalists, Gabetta was in exile at the time he conducted these interviews. It is customary for the interviewer to be a detached observer, an objective professional who in a certain sense is a voyeur viewing the noteworthy experiences of the interviewee. But the fact that Gabetta shared the circumstances of the persons whose testimony he sought means that he too is one of the *todos* of the title. This circumstance underdifferentiates his role as a well-defined, remote source of the opportunity for "real" people to speak for themselves. That is to say, when his interviewees answered Gabetta's questions and responded to his request that they tell their story, they were also telling Gabetta's story. This interchange or ambivalence lies at the heart of the discourse structure of *Todos somos*

subversivos. The principal thrust of Gabetta's interviews emerges straightforwardly in an ironically syllogistic fashion: the military identified as subversive all those who, in exercising their constitutionally guaranteed rights, protested the regime's arbitrary rule and violent repression; all Argentines shared to one degree or another in the devastation and suffering imposed by the military regime in pursuing its self-assigned and self-serving programs; therefore, all Argentines are subversive. Of course, the terrible truth of this syllogism is borne out by the fact that so many Argentines from all walks of life and political persuasions were affected by the repression of the Proceso. The range of persons interviewed by Gabetta was unquestionably meant to bear witness to this avowed fact.

Gabetta's premise that all Argentines are subversive in the meaning imposed by the military results in a number of rhetorical consequences for the text of the interviews and for the reader's understanding of them. In the first place, the word *subversivo* becomes a trope because it is used in a special way, in this case in a distorted or twisted fashion. Gabetta's text—the text of his questions, the text of his interviewees' responses, and the text of his intercalated observations—begins with the premise that the military regime used the word in a deliberately misleading fashion. While it is true some individuals were committed to guerrilla activity and revolutionary overthrow of the military regime, Gabetta is not concerned with these individuals (whom the military effectively neutralized within a year after taking power in March 1976). He deals with ordinary citizens labeled as subversive because of various forms of legal opposition to the regime. One might add a third category of individuals who were erroneously identified as "subversive" as the result of private vendettas or guilt by association.

Thus Gabetta's title, *Todos somos subversivos*, is in reality a trope of a trope: it is the deliberately distorted usage of a term on the basis of a prior deliberate distortion of the word. One of the key segments of the book concerns Senator Hipólito Solari Yrigoyen. The grandnephew of Hipólito Yrigoyen (Argentina's first populist president, who was overthrown during his second term by Argentina's first military coup in September 1930), Solari Yrigoyen had a long record of opposing the military regime. Only because of international pressure and the intervention of the Venezuelan government was Solari Yrigoyen able to leave Argentina alive (unlike many lawyers, politicians, and public figures who acted legally and were tortured and murdered routinely). Solari Yrigoyen details the charges made against him by the military (p. 226). In the midst of Solari Yrigoyen's recitation of these charges and their consequences of persecution and the cynical corruption of meaning imposed by the "military mentality," Gabetta interjects his own contrapuntal interior monologue:

Pero Hipólito, ¡usted es un subversivo irrecuperable! Un delincuente de éstos que merecería estar en la galería junto al Pibe Cabeza, Scarface y la Banda Baader. . . . ¡A quién, sino a un agente del comunismo internacional, a un apátrida, a un colectivista ateo, se le ocurriría denunciar la represión en el Parlamento, oponerse a los enjuagues de la burocracia sindical, sospechar de la buena fe de nuestros heroicos marinos, infantes y aviadores en el manejo de los negocios del país y, encima, publicar libros! (P. 246)

Gabetta's sarcasm here is simply one emphatic example of the recurring theme in *Todos somos subversivos*: in order to justify its unchecked reign of terror, the military dictatorship defined subversion in such a way that it could be applied effortlessly to any citizen with a shred of belief in Argentina's much abused constitution (which the senator points out "califica de 'infames traidores a la Patria' a aquellos que se alcen contra un gobierno constitucional . . .") (p. 228). Because the agents of subversion were military officers who had led coups against constitutionally elected presidents, what they customarily meant by subversion is action that is both legal and constitutional. Argentines therefore should accept with pride the accusation that they were all subversive. This line of thinking is saved from being merely rhetorically ingenious by the ample references to unwitting collaboration by the military in the subsequent formulation of Gabetta's guiding conceit.

Complementing the use of the term *subversive* in a distorted sense is the concept of Gabetta's interviews as the appropriate response to years of official lies propagated with all the advantages held by dictatorships. Making a trope of the military's trope also means refuting the barrage of propaganda with the simple truth of his interviewee's testimonials. Of course, the reader has no way of verifying that what these people say is the truth, and their accounts must be credited in an act of goodwill by readers who accept the premise of the repressive nature of the military dictatorships in Argentina. But it is not important from the point of view of discourse strategies for readers to be able to verify testimonials of the interviewees. It is sufficient that readers believe them to be true in substance (even though it might be possible to verify the details satisfactorily) for the rhetoric of *Todos somos subversivos* to function successfully.

Another variation of the same calculus of interrelationship between truth and propaganda is the utterance of a denied truth, the recovery of the possibility to affirm a truth that repression, by the nature of its root meaning, had made it impossible to express:

En una oportunidad, hablando muy bajito con mi compañera de celda, comentábamos lo difícil que iba a ser poder explicar, si es que alguna vez sabíamos de allí, poder transmitir de la mejor manera posible, de la forma más entendible, la situación y la vida que se lleva allí dentro. Ellos buscan que el ser humano deje de ser tal, que se convierta en un animal, en un objeto constante-

mente humillado con hechos y palabras. No nos imaginábamos cómo íbamos a poder contar hasta qué punto vivíamos constantemente encerrados en una celda, a oscuras, sin poder ver, sin poder hablar, sin poder caminar, experimentando mil sentimientos diferentes, delirando de hambre muchas veces. . . . Nosotros que conocemos la realidad de nuestro país, que sabemos de la existencia de esos campos de concentración, no podemos tampoco llegar a tener plena conciencia del asunto, salvo haber estado allí. (Pp. 165–66)

Thus the unifying motif of Gabetta's interviews is the opportunity to speak about these sufferings, to tell one's own story and at the same time articulate a version of a national, collective experience that from the perspective of official propaganda is nothing but a subversive lie. As previously silenced sociopolitical history, the texts gathered together in *Todos somos subversivos* in the mosaic fashion typical of contemporary narratives propose both to undermine official lies and to remedy the generalized sense of an unstable and ill-defined collective identity resulting from cynical propaganda.

In conformance with this motif, Gabetta's interviews—whether spontaneous conversations or carefully crafted discourse that strives to create the impression of such conversations—consist of a network of allusions to sociopolitical events in Argentina since the Onganía coup in June 1966 as well as to intertextual echoes of the disingenuous propaganda of the entire machinery of repression. All these approaches contribute to a sense of documentary authenticity in that *Todos somos subversivos* implies a reader who accepts implicitly the legitimacy of its basic postulates and assumptions, a matter that is ultimately more significant than whether or not the specific interviews are verifiably factual or accurate in every detail. Thus even if subsequent journalistic writings contradict the points covered by the long interview with Senator Solari Yrigoyen or repudiate the details of incarceration provided by the exiles, no significant alteration would be required in the fundamental structure of Gabetta's narrative.

FILE FOLDERS ON A COLLECTIVE EXPERIENCE

A veces la realidad se pone rara (P. 47)

Las pasiones de hace seis, diez años atrás, se han convertido en fotografías sobre el escritorio. La Argentina entera cabe en una montonera de carpetas amarillas, que consulto con exasperación. Allá lejos y hace tiempo no es más el título feliz de Hudson que, de tan feliz, divino lugar común. Es una obsesión que visita al pensamiento día y noche, a cada hora. . . .

Pienso en lo que la foto muestra y también en lo que oculta. Y sé que me van a faltar o me van a sobrar palabras para expresarlo. (Pp. 359–60)¹¹

Miguel Bonasso's *Recuerdo de la muerte* displays two features that set it apart from the other works examined in this study. First, its image of military repression in Argentina between 1976 and 1983 refers exclusively to the struggle between the Fuerzas Armadas and the Mon-

toneros, the left-wing guerrilla segment of the multifaceted Peronista party. The Montoneros claimed to embody the true spirit of social revolution of the original Peronista program, which had been ignored by the self-serving party hacks who controlled official Peronismo in the wake of Evita's death and Perón's ill health and subsequent death after his triumphant return to Argentina in 1973. Isabelita Perón succeeded her husband as president in 1974, and she and her advisor, the nefarious José López Rega, were accused of initiating the "fascistic" repression that was expanded by the military after the takeover in 1976. Ostracized by the segments of the party in power since Perón's return and persecuted relentlessly by the military after 1976, the Montoneros saw themselves as the true, but persecuted, nucleus of La Argentina Peronista.¹² Bonasso served as press secretary for the outlawed Montoneros at their exile headquarters in Mexico City. He chose to write about the prison experiences of Montoneros in Argentina and the activities of their commanders in exile, who sought to save their imprisoned comrades and publicize their continued presence in Argentina for the Montonero cause.

The result is an undeniably intriguing story. Bonasso speaks throughout of the *carpetas amarillas* in which he files away documentary traces of the social and political events that he later writes about. For any reader who has not maintained one of these carpetas amarillas, the presumably historically identifiable individuals who move through the narrative take on the qualities of fictional characters in a novelized chronicle. This second distinguishing characteristic of Bonasso's book results from his decision to provide as novelistic an account as possible. This novelistic quality of *Recuerdos de la muerte* is both its main identifying characteristic and its principal rhetorical problem.

Any account is a narrative if it is based on a series of actions that follow a cause-and-effect pattern. Narratives are fictional only if some appeal is made to the reader (such as appending to the title the epithet of *novel*) to suspend the journalist's or historian's imperative that the facts portrayed be susceptible to verification. Readers are accustomed to believing that a clear-cut distinction exists between history and fiction and that narrative accounts belong expressly to one category or the other. But just as some forms of historical narration may utilize literary devices in order to highlight and enhance the human experiences they relate, the contemporary novel has often explored the rhetorical possibilities of documentary fiction, the nonfiction novel, new journalism, and other subgenres.¹³ The result has been to blur the distinction between history and novel (creating a cataloger's nightmare) as well as to suspend the question of whether the historian or the novelist provides the most valuable account of human affairs.

Recuerdo de la muerte covers much ground in describing the

military persecution of the Montoneros, surveying so many individuals that an index would be useful, but it deals primarily with the story of Jaime Dri. Dri's father was a Peronista leader in the province of El Chaco. The son served as a deputy in the 1973–1976 Peronista government and was a prominent Montonero in the high command of the industrial port of Rosario. During a Montonero operation in Uruguay late in 1977, Dri was captured and returned to Argentina. He was eventually sequestered in the Navy's Escuela de Mecánica (close to downtown Buenos Aires), one of the most infamous torture centers and concentration camps. (Because of its proximity to a stadium used for the 1978 World Soccer Cup matches, human rights groups and the international press made the Escuela de Mecánica a symbol of military repression in Argentina.)

During his imprisonment, Dri moved in a Dantean inferno of physical torture, mental anguish, and terrible death. He also discovered one of the most ludicrous aspects of the entire Proceso during the dark years of the late seventies. Despite the public image of a united military front against the "enemigos de la Patria," the usual sort of interagency military rivalry flourished. In Argentina these rivalries have been particularly strong between the Army, which traditionally dominated the juntas, and the Navy, which tended to view itself as the more aristocratic service.

Bonasso's report of Dri's story is a complicated one, but its general outlines are as follows: Emilio Eduardo Massera, commander of the Navy, nurtured presidential ambitions. Envisioning himself as a possible successor to Perón's charismatic role in achieving national unity, Massera felt that the "subversives" should be captured and coopted rather than slaughtered. The Escuela de Mecánica was chosen for this risky undertaking, a decision disliked by the Army command (indeed, the two branches competed seriously for the same prisoners). Individuals who had been arrested and persuaded to become turncoats (to save themselves from torture and death, to protect family members, or to take advantage of new possibilities for power) fingered comrades, aided the Navy's intelligence operations, and generally subverted what remained of the Montonero organization in Argentina and abroad. Bonasso once refers to these defectors as "Predicadores del Arrepentimiento" because Massera claimed to believe that once they had repented of their antisocial ways, they would convince other comrades to do the same.

While pretending to go along with this arrangement, Dri planned a successful escape during the Copa Mundial in mid-1978. Bonasso built his book around Dri's experiences. Moreover, in the course of reconstructing them for the reader, Bonasso manages to describe the activities of the Montoneros during the period since Perón's death, the

outlines of Massera's fantastic project (surely one that would be thoroughly unbelievable as the plot of a novel), and the sickening details of the apparatus of repression mounted by the military to reaffirm Argentina as a "Christian and Western" society.

Bonasso strives for a well-paced narrative, availing himself of all the features associated with the novel: stream of consciousness, interior monologue, ironic juxtaposition of narrative segments, fragmentation of time and space, strategic intrusions by an omniscient narrator, flashbacks, and other techniques. The resulting work combines features of the conventional spy novel and the contemporary postmodernist novel. To this array is added the element of the reader's morbid fascination with the revelation of a monstrous secret world. The following passage exemplifies Bonasso's narrative strategies in this regard. El Tigre, one of the authorities at the Escuela, attempts to seduce Pelusa by promising to free her imprisoned family. Although he previously tortured her and is free to rape her at any time, his self-image demands that he court her in a conventional fashion. One night he takes her out of the prison on a date to an elegant restaurant:

Pelusa seguía recordando aquella noche tremenda. Hasta tuvo [El Tigre] la desfachatez de ir a buscarla a la celda. Se había engominado y perfumado y vestía un blazer azul y un pantalón gris. Ella también estaba "arreglada" para salir. Los dos hacían más notorias las escasas sombras que quedaban arrinconadas en Capucha, en la eterna vigila del posible traslado.

La sacó en un Chevy celeste. El tapizado apestaba a colonia y las emanaciones estuvieron a punto de descomponerla. Era una noche despejada y tibia. El Tigre conducía a gran velocidad por Libertador, por Alvear, por la fronda suntuosa del Palermo residencia.

Cenaron temprano en un restaurante bacán que estaba frente de la Recoleta. . . .

Los ojos del Tigre relampaguearon con la luz del rojo velón que adornaba la mesa.

—Acá no tenés que decirme señor, ni tratarme de usted.

Ella bajó los ojos enormes hacia el mantel; luego los posó en la carta sofisticada. El Tigre extendió una mano temblorosa, con la palma húmeda, hacia la mano de ella, abandonada cerca de su copa. Pelusa la retiró bruscamente y el Tigre volcó su contrariedad con el mozo, que se había equivocado con el punto de cocción de los medallones de lomo. Salieron a la oscuridad. Una viejecita que parecía una pura pañoleta brotó de la vereda como una aparición, sobresaltando al marino.

—Un ramito para la dama, señor.

Pelusa hizo un gesto de negación, pero el Tigre insistió en comprarlo. Cuando sacó la billetera ella advirtió nuevamente el temblor de la mano que la había torturado. (Pp. 285–86)

One might be tempted to dismiss this sort of writing as a Third World imitation of cheap paperbacks purporting to detail romances in Nazi concentration camps, leavened with purple-prose evocations of abuse at the hands of characters who say lines like "Zo, my pretty

maiden." But Bonasso's story, in detailing events and referring to individuals who can be historically verified, demands that the reader accept it as unequivocally true. The fact that the recent history of Argentina has tended to outstrip the imagination of even the most vigorous fabulator makes it difficult to accept Bonasso's assertions as anything other than substantially true. Because of Argentine readers' urgent need to know the facts of the events between 1976 and 1983, Bonasso is able to count on a high degree of suspension of disbelief for his narrative.

Yet, precisely the narrative features of *Recuerdo de la muerte* that give it such novelistic coloring cause difficulty in analyzing its internal coherence. Unlike the other documents discussed here, which appeal to the reader as varieties of historical research (*Carta esperanzada* and *Malvinas*) or journalistic inquiry (*Los chicos de la guerra* and *Malvinas*) or as forthright chronicles of facts gathered by the author (*El estado terrorista argentino*), Bonasso's book raises serious questions about his sources of information and strategies of presentation. I will leave to historians the question of whether or not the facts Bonasso reports are accurate. What I refer to are the materials that Bonasso accumulated in his *carpetas amarillas* as a result of the usual activities of a reporter—interviews with individuals at the time of events and subsequently as well as parallel research among documents. Certainly, Bonasso would have interviewed Dri and many of the other persons mentioned in *Recuerdo de la muerte*, and an elaborate chronicle could undoubtedly have been constructed from such sources.

But Bonasso was not satisfied merely to reconstruct the outlines of events and to report and evaluate what people told him. Rather, in enhancing the narrativity of his book, he chose to supplement the documentarily and journalistically verifiable with an entire range of psychological perspectives typical of the repertory of the writer of fiction. It is possible that Dri and his companions could have shared with Bonasso their inner thoughts and associations during the various stages of their capture, torture, and imprisonment. Although the relevant passages might be more recreations than recollections, their attribution to the individuals involved may provide enough confirmation to support Bonasso's implied goal of historical accuracy.

But a serious problem arises when Bonasso deals with parties to whom he could have had not direct access, such as the dead, the agents of military repression, and high government officials. Yet Bonasso establishes a parallel between their presentation and that of persons like Dri, with whom he could have had direct contact. Interior monologues, stream of consciousness, and free indirect discourse ("X thought such and such," "Y imagined this and that"), are used as fully in accounts of inaccessible parties as with Dri and other available

sources. This problem arises most noticeably in the case of Dri's antagonist, the Navy officer nicknamed El Tigre, but also in the secondary characters like Admiral Massera and General Omar Torrijos of Panama. (Dri's wife is Panamanian, and because of political reasons as well as personal ties to her family, the Panamanian leader pressured the Argentine embassy on Dri's behalf.)

This feature of Bonasso's narrative is neither a "mistake" nor an irresolvable defect, although historians and journalists may legitimately doubt its documentary usefulness. I point it out as the specific rhetorical strategy Bonasso utilizes to increase the narrative reality of his account. As dramatist Alberto Adellach comments on the back cover of the book: "Bonasso pinta la cara oculta del horror que se vivió en la Argentina, con una precisión que sorprende y una autenticidad que subyuga; sin librar nada a la ficción, pues cuando se mete en los pensamientos, en la subjetividad del protagonista, o en el cuarto de hotel donde un represor ejerce su lastimoso erotismo, lo hace sobre bases ciertas, sobre recuerdos verídicos de quienes lo han vivido y lo conservan en el dolor de la memoria."

Adellach's phrase "dolor de la memoria" and Bonasso's title *Recuerdo de la muerte* invoke the elements that justify the narrative. Rather than documenting any specific historical fact, Bonasso's account strives for an effect, an impression of reality based on evoking the signposts of a collective experience. Dri is projected as the epic embodiment of this collective experience; his escape from the forces of repression symbolizes the ultimate liberation of his countrymen, a story that could only be told as *Recuerdo de la muerte* after that liberation became a reality.

RECENT ARGENTINE SOCIAL HISTORY AS POLITICAL FICTION

Por la noche, Galtieri le habló a la Nación y aseguró, sin rodeos, que la Argentina había recuperado las Malvinas "sin tener en cuenta cálculo político alguno." La euforia de aquellas horas sepultó la afirmación. Nadie le prestó atención o nadie la creyó. Y, al menos en lo que hace a la reacción internacional, era cierta. (P. 114)¹⁴

A substantially different perspective on the Malvinas conflict is provided by a team of political editors from the prestigious Buenos Aires daily *El Clarín*, for whom recent events are simply "política ficción" (p. 222). Clearly the work of trained investigative reporters, *Malvinas, la trama secreta* is an absorbing narrative based on research and interviews that is organized as a detailed chronology of public events and behind-the-scenes diplomatic maneuvers. While such events often result in "quickie" compilations that may be of short-term interest for the secret information they purport to reveal, closer scrutiny frequently exposes shoddiness in composition and coherence. The work of Oscar

Raúl Cardoso, Ricardo Kirschbaum, and Eduardo van der Kooy suffers from no such deficiencies, and its impressive publication record (over a dozen printings within six months of its original release in September 1983) could hardly result from aiming for the yellow journalism market. Although *Malvinas* makes no attempt to provide a scholarly interpretation of the conflict, it offers an authoritative discussion of the issues and personalities involved in the Malvinas conflict.¹⁵

The subtitle of *Malvinas* leaves no doubt about the basic rhetorical strategy pursued: the work seeks to detail the “secret plot” behind President Galtieri’s ignominious military adventure. The book’s central thesis asserts that Galtieri’s decision to retake the Malvinas by force was not simply the result of impatience with the long history of fruitless negotiations with Great Britain—by the eighties, these negotiations had become the legacy of a succession of modern Argentine presidents. Leopoldo Fortunato Galtieri was determined to be more than just another in the long line of army generals who became president. His ambition was to succeed Perón as a charismatic national leader and to fill the leadership vacuum created by Perón’s death. Although Galtieri had as little use for the Peronista movement as for the leftist guerrilla movement exterminated by the military at such great national cost, he was clearly convinced that his bold action in the Malvinas would allow him to forge a national consensus claimed by Peronistas as their unique destiny and to assuage the divisive impact of the military’s *guerra sucia*. His goal in undertaking the Malvinas misadventure was thus to become a national hero while shoring up his shaky power as a national leader. *Malvinas* explains the reasons why both goals were doomed to failure.

The narrative quality of the presentation of the events of the Malvinas war results from a series of rhetorical approaches that the authors employ: first, they assume and undertake to demonstrate that the Malvinas adventure was motivated by Galtieri’s political ambitions; second, they argue that the enterprise was marked by a tragic flaw of ignorance, which occurred when Galtieri, his fellow military leaders, and their chosen advisors miscalculated the response by Great Britain, other Latin American countries, the United Nations, unaligned Third World countries, and the United States; third, the authors reveal information and formulate interpretations that permit a kind of dramatic irony because the authors’ perspective is far greater than that of the “actors” (Galtieri and the others); and fourth, the authors mediate between Galtieri’s arrogant *triumfalismo* and the public demand to know the full story of an episode misrepresented by national leaders. Historians, political leaders committed to one point of view or another, and the many individuals mentioned in *Malvinas* are entitled to disagree vigorously with the information provided by the authors in the spirit of free journalistic inquiry. While criteria of veracity, accuracy, and fairness

must eventually be applied to *Malvinas* because of the sort of document it claims to be, my interest here is not to verify its story but to assess its rhetorical strategies.

Malvinas is permeated by recurring ironic motifs based on the claim that it is telling a privileged story. The advertising band accompanying the edition cited here announces the work's goal: "Para que la propaganda de los vencedores no se convierta en la historia oficial de los vencidos." The first irony regarding *Malvinas* is found in the use of the words *vencedores* and *vencidos*. This pair belong to the disingenuous bywords of the Revolución Libertadora that overthrew Perón in 1955. Although Argentines were promised that there would be "ni vencedores ni vencidos" but an evenhanded national consensus, historical events soon proved the hypocrisy of the slogan. Thus one might at first conclude that the goal of the report by Cardoso, Kirschbaum, and van der Kooy is to tell the story of the Malvinas war from the point of view of the Argentines (the *vencidos*) so that the British point of view (that of the *vencedores*), which prevailed early on in the non-Latin American international press, might not be the only version told. But it becomes clear that the authors of *Malvinas* are not interested simply in contrasting Argentine and British interpretations of the war. Although its considerable documentary information allows the reader to weigh the different diplomatic, political, and strategic principles involved, the reporters have not set out to replace a putative official British history of the war with an Argentine version. Rather, the juxtaposed terms *vencedores* and *vencidos* can only refer to the opposition between the military dictatorship and the Argentine citizenry. Having vanquished Argentines by imposing a military government, the *vencedores* undertook to extend their conquest to the Malvinas in order to prolong their regime. What Cardoso, Kirschbaum, and van der Kooy report is the failure of that undertaking, the process by which the *vencedores* become the *vencidos*.

Consequently, *Malvinas* is based on the privilege of irony resulting from both hindsight and access to information, documents, and sources that could be collated and analyzed in a way that Galtieri and his government were unable or unwilling to do. As a result, the dominant strategy of exposition is to refer to circumstances or events that were understood in one fashion but which now, in light of information established by the authors, must be perceived in quite another way. This double vision is the classic circumstance of dramatic irony: the audience knows more about what is going on than do the actors in the drama. If *Malvinas* tends to portray Galtieri and the military as bumbling fools, it is because of the superior information put forth by the authors as rhetorical trump cards. In the following passage, the authors use the word *escena* twice. Galtieri insisted that Alexander Haig use a

helicopter to return to his hotel rather than go by car as planned. Galtieri's strategy was to impress the American mediator with the theatrical spectacle of the multitude assembled in the Plaza Mayo in front of the Casa Rosada. But the scene staged to dramatize the determination of the Argentine people backfired on Galtieri:

No bien [el helicóptero] se elevó e inició un breve sobrevuelo para beneficio de sus pasajeros, los altoparlantes ubicados en el perímetro de la Plaza de Mayo anunciaron la partida del norteamericano y la voz de la muchedumbre se alzó en un solo rugido. La escena impresionó vivamente a Haig, quien murmuró algunas palabras referidas a Irán y permaneció unos instantes pensativo. Aunque los que planearon la escena con esmero no lo supieron inmediatamente, el efecto que habían creído poder obrar sobre el ánimo del mediador resultó totalmente contrario a la intención original. (P. 154)

Time and again throughout the detailed chronicle of events, the authors juxtapose the military's convictions about the course of the war with what the authors have subsequently determined (for examples, see pp. 127, 221, and 301). The strategy of juxtaposing what Galtieri and the military "thought they knew then" with what "we [the journalists] now know to have been the real facts and the inevitable outcome of events" is not simply a gesture of journalistic superiority. Certainly, Cardoso and his coauthors are justified in getting as much mileage as possible out of their hard work. But a major effect of the rhetorical strategy of juxtaposition is that it confirms eloquently how ill-informed Galtieri and his government were when they undertook the Malvinas operation. The larger importance of this rhetorical strategy of *Malvinas* lies in its contrasting the image of a controlled and manipulated press during the weeks of the conflict with the open reporting that the authors of *Malvinas* were subsequently able to perform. When Galtieri was struggling to retain power after surrendering to the British in the Malvinas, he attempted to stifle criticism of his actions, first through police repression and then through verbal threats:

Cuando los gases lacrimógenos todavía flotaban sobre el centro de Buenos Aires, Galtieri se asomó al televisor para dar su versión de la capitulación. El todavía Presidente bramó: "No habrá lugar para la especulación ni el engaño. El ocio será una estafa. El aprovechamiento de la situación, una injuria a la sangre de los que combatieron, y el derrotismo será una traición."

Su mensaje fue claro: nadie podría poner en duda lo actuado por el alto mando militar en la guerra. Eso sería una traición. (P. 310)

These sarcastic words synthesize the numerous references to Galtieri's self-seeking management of information during the war. It was impossible to question the decisions that were taken during his presidency—impossible to posit alternate information or to propose contrary interpretations. Only via publication of *Malvinas, la trama secreta* did it become possible to speak with a voice previously silenced by the censorship of military dictatorship: "*A lo largo de aquellas jornadas,*

cualquiera fuese el lugar en el que cada uno de nosotros estuviera . . . y ante cada episodio que atestiguamos, nos reiteramos el vago compromiso que encierra la frase 'algún día, con serenidad, habrá que escribir sobre todo eso'" (p. 11). Echoing the words of the book's advertising band, the authors speak of the need to counteract the effects of propaganda, affirming their support, despite the inevitable limitations of their information, of a posture toward events that has not always been possible in Argentina.

In this sense, *Malvinas* is a fascinating narrative: not only by virtue of the journalists' claim to more authoritative information but also as an opportunity to defy the censorship that had previously controlled and distorted the news for the benefit of blind personal ambition. Because of the outcome of events, the journalists were able to assert their version against the military's word. That is to say, the defeat of the Argentine military enterprise and the collapse of the Galtieri regime are what made *Malvinas* possible, not just the personal ambitions of a trio of political journalists.

ALLOWING THE PEOPLE TO SPEAK

Bien; ésta no pretende ser la historia de la guerra; sí el testimonio de estos jóvenes y de *su guerra, la que ellos vivieron*. Un grupo de chicos, podrá decirse, no constituye toda una generación; lo que piensan estos jóvenes no puede ser tomado como el pensamiento de todos los conscriptos que combatieron en las islas Malvinas. Es cierto. Tan cierto como que existen momentos en que resulta imperioso comenzar a escuchar a los que tienen derecho a hablar. Y de algún modo hay que empezar. (P. 12)¹⁶

Daniel Kon's *Los chicos de la guerra*, the most widely sold of the documents examined in this study, also utilizes the interview format. The author interviewed eight young conscripts at length. The number of copies sold (forty thousand in eight printings from mid-August 1982 through January 1983) documents the Argentine public's desire to hear what these young men had to say about their experiences. An immensely successful film version released in late 1984 (which employed the interviewees as advisors) repeated the popularity of Kon's book. Indeed, the title of the book has assumed the status of an epithet in postwar Argentina.

The first thing to remember about Kon's book is that like Gabetta's collection of interviews, it was published prior to the return to democracy. The outcome of the Malvinas conflict discredited the military as an armed force, adding to its noncredibility as a governing elite since early 1981. To be sure, most observers believe that the invasion of the Malvinas was a desperate attempt to restore Argentine confidence in the generals. Accordingly, although many writers took quick advantage of this discreditation to defy official censorship and speak out,

more cautious analysts understood that the military's reaction to public humiliation could not be predicted. Gabetta chose to publish his interviews in France, but *Los chicos de la guerra* was brought out in Argentina, which is the reason that the soldiers remain partially anonymous, being identified by their first names only.

The eight young men are more boys than men, and Kon repeatedly alludes to their perceivable boyishness despite their harsh experiences in the war. The chosen eight represent a convincing cross-section of the conscripts, coming from various parts of Buenos Aires and the provinces. They were generally young and unworldly, from backgrounds ranging from professional to working-class. All but one served in the front line of the war, experienced the combined hardships of weather and the incompetence of their country's war machine, and saw fellow combatants die. All accepted with youthful and uncritical patriotism the call to serve their country, yet all but one (who maintained an unswerving commitment to the Church and to the military that it endorsed so enthusiastically) returned with feelings of bitterness toward their commanders: "Antes de salir, en Campo de Mayo, nos habían hecho llenar una ficha con un montón de preguntas sobre cómo nos había ido en la guerra. Y yo no tuve miedo, los mandé al frente al sargento y a todos los encargados de mi sección, conté toda la verdad" (p. 105).

Clearly, one cannot apply a criterion of reliability to Kon's interviews. All of the interviewees naturally saw the war from a limited perspective, but a certain consensus in their accounts enables the reader to consider them as representative of all Argentine soldiers in the Malvinas. Nevertheless, their opinions cannot be mistaken for political or military analysis of the conflict. Kon sought instead to sound the feelings of those who suffered the brunt of the war, and herein lies the main interest of *Los chicos de la guerra* as sociopolitical commentary.

First, these soldiers, all in their very early twenties, belong to the generation that grew up in Argentina during the succession of military dictatorships beginning in 1966. All had just entered their teens when it became evident that the Peronista triumph of 1973 was only a prelude to confirming right-wing military rule, which proved to be the norm for twenty years. Kon does not comment on this circumstance directly, but his questions about the young men's feelings toward their country and its future and their reactions to the oft-stated assertion that the younger generation lacks commitment obviously allude to the somber sociopolitical situation in Argentina.

Although *Los chicos de la guerra* may be read as direct statements by representative young men about their combat experiences, their comments have considerable resonance for a collective Argentine experience extending far beyond their self-absorbed point of reference.

These eight men were understandably obsessed by their individual feelings and actions when Kon interviewed them within weeks of their return, dwelling on the details of their personal stories. Moreover, Argentina's defeat, the discovery that food and clothing had been ineptly distributed and that some superiors had actually hoarded provisions for their own comfort, and the soldiers' excellent, but condescending, treatment by the British during repatriation naturally contributed to a less than sanguine point of view.

The subtitle of Kon's book, *Hablan los soldados que estuvieron en las Malvinas*, stresses the aspect of personal testimonial. But the spontaneous speech of the soldiers is considerably mediated by the contextualizing operations of Kon's reportage, such as his comments, his organization of responses, and his juxtaposition of the words of various informants. The issue is neither the material that Kon creates to frame the book as a whole and to introduce the individual interviews nor the content of his questions, which are hardly a model of probing journalism. The point is that *Los chicos de la guerra* must inevitably be read against the backdrop of both the so-called guerra sucia preceding the invasion of the Malvinas and the information about military incompetence during the conflict that began to emerge the moment hostilities officially ended. In this context, repeated references to the lack of adequate clothing or food, to the sense of having been abandoned by superiors, and to information provided by their British captors all become less a litany of grievances about the ill-prepared Argentine war effort than a series of telling allusions to the cynicism of a military apparatus that used the entire country as an instrument of its ambitions. This aspect of Kon's interviews may not emerge for those readers who remain inalterably supportive of the generals, but it seems likely that *Los chicos de la guerra* was intended to strike a responsive chord among a disaffected populace, irrespective of the specific feelings of the young men interviewed. In this regard, Kon's document becomes much more than a series of personal statements.

Two consequences result from these circumstances of contextualization. The first is that *Los chicos de la guerra* represents the truth about the Malvinas conflict as told by those at the bottom of the military hierarchy. The second is that the truth inherent in their stories must be read as a counterpoint to the official and self-serving reports of military propaganda, which meant to deceive both soldiers in the trenches and civilians back home about the true course of the war. References to these twin circumstances form a dominant thread throughout the interviews:

Lo que más me dolió fue que ellos [los soldados ingleses] me tuvieron que dar de comer, con la propia comida argentina cuando estábamos en tierra, y con la comida inglesa en el barco. Eso me dolió; que ellos nos dieran de comer bien y

que los argentinos no hayan podido. Bah, o no hayan querido, qué sé yo . . . (P. 104)

Había gente en todas las unidades, soldados perdidos de sus compañías, oficiales que trataban de organizar un poco a sus hombres. Fue en ese momento que vi al general Menéndez [jefe de las fuerzas de ocupación] salir de la casa del general Jofré (a esa altura de la situación el comando se había trasladado allí), diciendo: *No, todavía estamos con pie firme . . .* Pero la verdad no era ésa, se notaba que el desorden era total. (P. 121)

T. vive hoy con la obsesión de sus tres amigos muertos: *No puedo soportar la idea de que hayan quedado enterrados allá, como perros, peor que perros, bajo ese barro asqueroso.* La última vez que la señora Galtieri [esposa del Presidente] intentó visitarlo [en el hospital] la echó a los gritos: *Fuera, váyase de acá, vaya a preguntarle a su marido si él me va a devolver a mis amigos. Pregúntele qué piensa de todo esto. ¿Ahora qué piensan todos de lo que pasó? ¿Nadie quiere contestar?* (P. 222)

These words end Kon's document, testifying to the abiding sense of disorientation experienced by the returning soldiers. To be sure, the acute problems of maladjustment of Kon's interviewees are no different than those of the survivors of any war, a subject powerfully treated in modern European and American literature (it is not surprising that the Spanish-language version of Hal Ashby's film *Coming Home, Regreso sin gloria*, was banned in Argentina). But the impact of *Los chicos de la guerra* must be appreciated in the double context of the guerra sucia in Argentina and the absence of armed conflict in recent history. Argentina had not experienced war since the time of the Guerra de la Triple Alianza in the mid-1860s, and thus military mobilization was a new experience for the national consciousness. Moreover, the loss of young Argentines in the Malvinas can readily be perceived as a perversely logical extension of the ten thousand citizens who lost their lives as a result of the military's efforts to "reorganize" Argentine political life. Both of these circumstances provide contextualizing referents for *Los chicos de la guerra* and add levels of resonance for its final unanswered questions, which go far beyond the transparent story of the "soldados que estuvieron en las Malvinas." It is no wonder that readers have been drawn to *Los chicos de la guerra*.

Perhaps few of these documents will survive the passage of time in a country with an intense publishing industry and so many platforms for intellectual debate (even if these platforms must function clandestinely during periods of repression). My guess is that Aguinis, Cardoso, Kirschbaum, and van der Kooy will be recognized as having contributed the two most authoritative documents of this group with *Carta esperanzada a un general* and *Malvinas*. But at a time when the urgent imperative in Argentina is to recover almost a decade of lost national culture and to restore pluralistic debate on the events of the

recent years, essays such as those examined in this study constitute important indexes of the directions that such debate is taking. Inevitably, these documents involve textual strategies and rhetoricize their attempts to discover the truth of the years of the Proceso and the Malvinas adventure. But these rhetorical strategies are not mere stylistics added to enhance straightforward exposition. They function instead as an integral part of these texts as cultural discourse and also indicate the bases of an appeal to collective self-recognition that is taking place in Argentina today.

NOTES

1. For an analysis of *Muecas* and other works published in Argentina during this period, see David William Foster, "Narrativa testimonial argentina en los años del 'Proceso'," *Plural*, 2d series, no. 150 (1984):21–23.
2. My theoretical points of departure are similar to those used in the essays in *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism*, edited by Josué V. Harari (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1979), and in the seminal writing of Hayden V. White, particularly his *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978). Works on Latin America that parallel in several ways my essay are Eliseo Verón, "Ideología y comunicación de masas: la semantización de la violencia política," in *Lenguaje y comunicación social* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Nueva Visión, 1976), 133–91; *The Discourse of Power: Culture, Hegemony, and the Authoritarian State in Latin America*, edited by Neil Larsen (Minneapolis: Institute for the Study of Ideologies and Literature, 1983), particularly Hernán Vidal's "La declaración de principios de la junta militar chilena como sistema literario: la lucha antifascista y el cuerpo humano," pp. 43–66; and Hernán Vidal, *Dar la vida por la vida: la Agrupación Chilena de Familiares de Detenidos Desaparecidos (ensayo de antropología simbólica)* (Minneapolis: Institute for the Study of Ideologies and Literature, 1982).
3. Indeed, one might argue that the attempt at the neutral transmission of meaning is an extreme example of rhetoric, as did Roland Barthes in his famous essay *Le Degré zéro de l'écriture* (Paris: Editions Seuil, 1953).
4. One should also consult *Nunca más: informe de la Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas* (Buenos Aires: Editorial de la Universidad de Buenos Aires). The preparation of this report was overseen by novelist and essayist Ernesto Sábato, who served as the president of the commission. This report is destined to be counted as one of the most important sociocultural documents in Argentine history.
5. Many of the terms and concepts I employ concerning narrative and semantic structure are related to the model developed by Algirdas Julien Greimas and Joseph Courtés in *Semiotics and Language: An Analytical Dictionary*, translated by Larry Crist et al. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982).
6. Marcos Aguinis, *Carta esperanzada a un general: puente sobre el abismo* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana/Planeta, 1983).
7. Eduardo Luis Duhalde, *El estado terrorista argentino* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones El Callito, 1983).
8. Camps played a prominent role in Jacobo Timerman's *Prisoner without a Name, Cell without a Number*, translated by Toby Talbot (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1981). Timerman's book was the first major document published outside Argentina on human rights violations, and its detailing the experiences of one of the powerful figures of Argentine journalism contributed to its international recognition. Significantly, the original Spanish edition, *Preso sin nombre, celda sin número* (Buenos Aires: El Cid Campeador, 1982), carries the cover title *El caso Camps: punto inicial*.

9. See also p. 159 on the language of the interrogators and pp. 221ff on the vocabulary of the processes of extermination.
10. Carlos Gabetta, *Todos somos subversivos* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Bruguera Argentina, 1983). The book was originally published in French in 1979.
11. Miguel Bonasso, *Recuerdo de la muerte* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Bruguera Argentina, 1984).
12. Another recent sociopolitical document that could have been included in this study is Juan José Sebreli, *Los deseos imaginarios del peronismo* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Legasa, 1983). A political journalist of considerable eloquence, Sebreli is described by the cover as examining "elementos bonapartistas y fascistas del peronismo. Sus relaciones con la clase obrera y la clase media. Imperialismo. Fascismo de izquierda: el fenómeno del terrorismo. La sociedad civil hoy."
13. Some of these issues are examined in David William Foster, "Latin American Documentary Narrative," *PMLA, Publications of the Modern Language Association* 99 (1984):41–55.
14. O. R. Cardoso, R. Kirschbaum, and E. van der Kooy, *Malvinas, la trama secreta*; 13th printing (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana/Planeta, 1984).
15. For a record of the extensive publications now available on the Malvinas, see Roberto Etchepareborda, "La bibliografía reciente sobre la cuestión Malvinas (primera parte)," *Revista interamericana de bibliografía* 34, no. 1 (1984):1–52.
16. Daniel Kon, *Los chicos de la guerra: hablan los soldados que estuvieron en las Malvinas*, 8th printing (Buenos Aires: Editorial Galerna, 1983).