

The Aesthetics of Care in Albertina Carri's *Los Rubios*

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Abstract

Nearly 20 years since its release, Albertina Carri's *Los Rubios* remains a crucial film for understanding the sequelae of the Argentine civic-military dictatorship (1976-1983). This article examines how *Los Rubios* renders visible certain processes of consolidation of memory and mythmaking while simultaneously challenging the discourses that were becoming dominant as Argentina was making significant headway in its pursuit of truth and justice. The film's iconoclastic representation of the dictatorship, resistance, and their aftermath brings attention to what dominant discourses of the dictatorship had rendered invisible. Carri rebels against the doxa of documentary filmmaking to more aptly depict the non-linear processes of memory. Considering political theorist Mihaela Mihai's work on the aesthetics of care and engaging in visual analysis, this essay posits that Carri's film undertakes a project of mnemonic care with a clear preoccupation for presenting a more complex and expansive memory of the dictatorship. Understanding the film as a work of mnemonic care illuminates how *Los Rubios* intervened in Argentine political memory when it came out as well as the stakes of the controversy that followed.

Key Words: Argentina, cinema, documentary, *Los Rubios*, dictatorship, memory

Argentine filmmaker Albertina Carri lost her parents, Ana María Caruso and Roberto Carri, to enforced disappearance during the Argentine civic-military dictatorship (1976-1983) when she was only three years old¹. Her parents were Montonero militants who were abducted from their home in 1977 in La Matanza, the suburban, working-class neighborhood where they were living underground. Carri's 2003 film, *Los Rubios*, depicts her search for information about her parents, poses questions about the reliability of memory and testimony, and challenges a number of the discourses about the Argentine dictatorship that were previously taken for granted in the collective imaginary. *Los Rubios* came out at the time when the post-dictatorship generation in Argentina, that is the generation who is too young to have first-hand memories of the dictatorship and learns vicariously through the older generation, was coming of age and beginning to tell their stories and organize. It was a moment fraught with an intergenerational struggle for memory after nearly two decades of slow progress towards truth and justice for the human rights violations of the dictatorship, but preceding an acceleration of legal proceedings towards justice that would occur under the governments of Néstor Kirchner (2003-2007) and Cristina Fernández Kirchner (2007-2015). Carri's film proved controversial, with reviews and academic analyses both praising and attacking *Los Rubios* for how it represents the memory of her parents and their generation, her experience as the child of disappeared activists, and the memory of the dictatorship period more generally.

Los Rubios is the subject a large body of academic work on the cultural production and memory of the Argentine dictatorship and of Operation Condor (Aguilar, Amado, Andermann, Bartalini, Blejmar, Draper, Forcinito, Forné, Garibotto, Kaiser, Lazzara, Macón, Noriega, Nouzeilles, J. Page, P. Page, Quílez Esteve, Ros, Sarlo, Sosa, Tandeciarz, Walas). Scholars have written about what *Los Rubios* contributes to memory discourses as a postmemorial work or posit that postmemory is an inappropriate framework for understanding the film, while some criticize it for how it portrays the parents' generation that struggled against the dictatorship. Others attack it for depoliticizing the disappearance of Carri's parents, while some scholars celebrate it as an innovative articulation of second-generation experiences of memory, of the search for information about her family, and for how it addresses the crisis of representation of atrocity and trauma. In relationship to that debate, in this essay I argue that *Los Rubios* renders visible certain processes of consolidation of memory and mythmaking while simultaneously challenging the discourses that were becoming dominant as Argentina was making significant headway in its pursuit of truth and justice. Considering political theorist Mihaela Mihai's recent work on political memory, I show how Carri: (1) reveals widespread complicity with the dictatorship, which raises questions about the revolutionary project of her parents; (2) shows the ongoing repressive and ideological apparatuses of the dictatorship in democratic Argentina, which goes against the discourse that the transition to democracy made a clean break with the past; and (3) intervenes in the heroization of the disappeared by showing how the older generation engages in mythmaking, both at the institutional and personal levels. As such, *Los Rubios*' iconoclastic representation of the dictatorship, resistance, and their aftermath brings attention to what dominant discourses of the dictatorship had rendered invisible. Following Mihai's work on the aesthetics of care, this essay concludes that Carri's film undertakes a project of mnemonic care with a clear preoccupation for "the health of the hermeneutical space of memory" (Mihai 9). Understanding the film as a work of mnemonic care illuminates how *Los Rubios* intervened in Argentine political memory when it came out as well as the controversy that followed. Artworks that foster mnemonic care from different post-atrocity contexts are unique and function to care for memory in distinct ways, but what they share is a preoccupation for challenging reductive and hegemonic narratives that flatten the possibility for understanding

1. I shy away from referring to Carri as an hija because of her repeated statements in which she distances herself from the activist organization, H.I.J.O.S. For more information about Carri's critique of H.I.J.O.S. refer to her book, *Los Rubios: Cartografía de una película*. Buenos Aires: Buenos Aires Festival de Cine Independiente, 2007.

the past. By including *Los Rubios* into the debate about the aesthetics of care, I will show how Carri's artistic intervention into the memory of the civic-military dictatorship effectively advanced a broader and deeper understanding of the impact of the dictatorship on Argentina even decades after transitioning to democracy. *Los Rubios* exemplifies how "due to their hedonic elements and mediated nature, artworks are better positions than historical and anthropological accounts of the past to interrupt cognitive and emotional investments in reductive mythmaking about the past" (Mihai 15). The dozens of academic articles and books that analyze the film and its continued importance in the canon of Latin American documentary are a testament to its impact. Interestingly, Mihai's work on post-Holocaust France, post-Communist Romania, and post-Apartheid South Africa helps me make sense of Carri's work as cohesive with other post-atrocity contexts in that it challenges hegemonic memory, combats erasures, and resists mythmaking and heroization.

Mihai's recent work on political memory and the aesthetics of care can shed light on the implications of Carri's aesthetic intervention in processes of memory-making in post-dictatorship Argentina. Mihai identifies a double erasure that occurs in narrative and memory-making in the wake of systemic atrocity and violence. The first erasure is widespread complicity and the second is impure forms of resistance. For Mihai, these erasures:

reflect various groups' unequal access to processes of meaning-making, which is itself a function of these groups' relative social, economic, and political capital within the community. Successor elites' politically motivated search for moral "fresh starts" and for robust public support often leads to certain perpetrators, victims, and heroic resisters ideologically overdetermining the public's imaginary of "what happened." (26)

Mihai shows how the damage control in post-atrocity situations tends to follow a pattern of rendering invisible certain aspects of the past in order to move on while maintaining power structures and the position of the elite class despite having benefitted from repression and state violence. Argentina is no exception to this pattern. In what follows, I will show how Carri combats erasure in her film, thus opening up space for different processes of meaning-making and remembrance.

***Los Rubios* and Combatting Erasure**

Los Rubios is widely recognized as a breakthrough film for post-dictatorship Argentina. Memory studies scholar Geoffrey Maguire points out that "Los Rubios was, of course, not the first to deal with the dictatorship period from the perspective of an *hijo*, but it did have the greatest impact on the cultural sphere" (28). In a 2003 interview with the director in *Página /12*, María Moreno calls Carri's film, "Una de las películas más originales y valientes del nuevo cine argentino." Carri's perspective as the child of disappeared activists diverges from the canonized memory of the dictatorship which had centered on the immediate victims of the dictatorship, such as her parents. In his *Estudio Crítico sobre Los Rubios*, Gustavo Noriega posits that the film resists meeting any expectations that a spectator might have when watching a film about the disappeared. Carri rejects the traditional approaches to biographical documentaries that set out to reconstruct and celebrate lives. Instead, "Todo lo que uno espera de un documental relacionado con desaparecidos no está o aparece oblicuo, distinto, tergiversado" (Noriega 21). For example, the photos that appear in the film are defaced or do not appear in their entirety in the shot and it is never clear who exactly the "talking head" interviewees are or what their relationship was to the Carri family.

Los Rubios exposes a crisis of representation through its depiction of its own creative process, and this extends to the other crises of representation that the film examines—the failure of individual memory, the deliberate and interested intergenerational transmission of memories in order to construct a cultural memory, the role of institutions like cultural associations and academia in authorizing and gatekeeping memory, and how all of these processes in tandem lead to selective mythmaking and erasures.

Much of the scholarship about *Los Rubios* comments on its innovative form as a meta-documentary and how the form relates to the film's themes of the construction of identity and memory. Tandeciarz posits:

The film's willingness to put on display its own process of composition not only highlights its conceptual sophistication it has the added benefit of laying bare some of the affective imperatives guiding Carri's choice of cinematic strategies. The use of a double to represent her is particularly instructive in this respect: it enhances the film's metacritical articulation through its insistence on performance as a key element in the construction of identity and simultaneously protects Carri from the exposure and vulnerability all recollection entails. (131)

The choice to hire an actress to play Carri is framed to be a consequence of the first interview, which Carri and her crew conduct with a neighbor in La Matanza. During this interview, the neighbor recognizes Carri and the interview becomes uncomfortable for everyone. Memory studies scholar Ana Forcinito observes that Carri's use of Analía Couceyro to portray her reveals the crisis of representation that is characteristic of Argentine films from this era, which is inextricably linked to the residual violence that permeates post-dictatorship culture. Indeed, "violent" is the word that Carri and her crew used to describe the first interview in La Matanza (*Los Rubios* 00:07:06-00:07:08). While featuring an actress seems to go against the doxa of documentary filmmaking, media studies scholar Laia Quílez Esteve points out that Carri's use of Couceyro in her film enables her the distance and anonymity necessary for directing *Los Rubios*.

I see Carri's engagement with erasure beginning with the formal structure and the ways in which the film reveals what is traditionally omitted from documentaries. *Los Rubios* calls attention to the creative choices and fictionalization that occur in documentary filmmaking, which typically presupposes non-fiction and faithfulness to a referent in what we consider the real world. Fictionalization opens up the possibility of challenging and expanding memory. The film shows the processes of pre-production, filming and directing, and even of seeking financial support for the project. Carri addresses the crisis of representation of the documentary genre by utilizing two diegetic levels to show filmmaking methodologies that are typically hidden in documentary. *Los Rubios* switches between diegetic levels, sometimes within the same scene, making it difficult to determine on what level a given shot is occurring and destabilizing these narrative levels. On the intradiegetic level, the primary level, is a narrative depicting Carri as she directs a film about her search for information about her parents; this level, shot sometimes in color and sometimes in black and white, shows Carri as she converses with her crew and directs the actress who portrays her. Then there is the film within the film, which operates on the metadiegetic level. The metadiegetic level is the film that the spectator sees being produced in the intradiegetic level: Carri, the character played by Couceyro, searches for information about her parents, and Playmobil toys act out certain scenes from Carri's childhood imagination. Testimonial interviews and scenic shots of the city and the country appear on these distinct diegetic levels, and oftentimes single sequences will jump between shots from the two levels, which are distinguished by the use of color of black and white

images. The film includes what seem to be characteristics of traditional documentary filmmaking, such as the talking-head interviews, but even these interviews prove unconventional as the interviewees are relegated to anonymity, and they transition from shots of the interview playing on a monitor that the actress is watching (a video within the film within the film) to shots of the interview taking up the full frame, suddenly shifted to the intradiegetic level. At times, the soundtrack and the visual shot are mismatched, such as when the actress contemplates photographs on the wall of the forensics center over the reverberating sounds of VHS tapes rewinding. By combining the shot of the actress examining photographs of human remains and images used in forensic investigation with the sound of the VHS tapes, the media used to record the testimony of her parents' friends and relatives, the sequence shows how these two distinct approaches to learning about the past are mediated by technology, like video, photography, and biological technology. Carri resorts to various resources to tell the story because each approach proves inadequate on its own. The depiction of complex processes of mythmaking and erasure in the post-dictatorship period calls for innovative forms that can replicate the non-linear processes of memory.

Carri's innovation includes undermining the authority that was presupposed in documentary filmmaking throughout the 20th century by drawing attention to her artmaking process in her documentary film. Her use of different diegetic levels to experiment formally with documentary functions as part of her aesthetics of care as she reveals the constructedness of her film on the constructedness of memory. Mihai explains that "certain artworks seductively sabotage reductive narratives about what happened by prosthetically enabling audiences to see the world of systemic violence in its complexity, from different points of view, and as it changes over time" (15). Including the art of documentary filmmaking as a theme in *Los Rubios* shows Carri's preoccupation for caring for and nourishing the memory of the dictatorship by problematizing the ways in which dominating narratives of the past offer a reductive glimpse of what happened at the expense of robust, plural, and messy narratives that can potentially foster new ways of remembering and understanding. Beyond merely being released at a moment when Argentina was beginning to make new progress in the struggle for justice following atrocity, *Los Rubios* catalyzes the conversation surrounding memory and accountability as a work of mnemonic care. Carri's film generated critical debate and contributed to a turn towards a more expansive and critical understanding of the past.

The concept of what literary scholar Marianne Hirsch calls postmemory and whether it is appropriate for analyzing Carri's film appears in much of the scholarship about *Los Rubios* (Aguilar, Amado, Andermann, Gómez, Lazzara, Macón, Nouzeilles, Ros, Sosa, Walas). In considering postmemory among other "post" movements, such as postcolonialism and postmodernism, Hirsch explains that she sees postmemory as "a structure of inter- and transgenerational return of traumatic knowledge and embodied experience" (6). One point of contention that arises in discussions of postmemory is the tension between the generations. From the position of a member of the post-generation of the Holocaust, Hirsch poses the question:

How do we regard and recall what Susan Sontag has so powerfully described as 'the pain of others?' What do we owe the victims? How can we best carry their stories forward, without appropriating them, without unduly calling attention to ourselves, and without, in turn, having our own stories displaced by them? How are we implicated in the crimes that we did not ourselves witness? (2).

While Carri does not explicitly set out to answer these questions with *Los Rubios*, she does touch on them by exploring the intergenerational struggle over memory in her film. *Los Rubios* challenges the older generation's hegemony over how the story of the dictatorship and disappearance is told and over how they represent themselves. She contests the older generation's ownership over memory by interrogating the contradictions inherent within it. In doing so she reveals how the older generation has shaped the memory of the dictatorship by rendering certain parts invisible, such as what Mihai calls impure resistance.

The erasure of impure resistance, that is resistance that might be cowardly or wavering, resistance that engages in violence and causes harm, or other forms of resistance that are problematic, enables the elevation of the memory of her parents to mythical proportions. The invisibility of impure resistance, as Mihai shows in her work, is a common feature of post-atrocity narratives around the globe. Like other works in the world that render visible impure forms of resistance in the face of state violence and genocide, *Los Rubios* problematized the choices of Carri's parents, thus depicting uncomfortable memories and inconvenient questions about their involvement in the resistance to the civic-military dictatorship. Ultimately, Carri's engagement with her parents' impure resistance reveals the imperfectly human decisions that her parents and surely thousands of others made while trying to navigate life under a murderous, authoritarian regime.

In 2007, nearly four years after the film's release, Carri published the book *Los Rubios: Cartografía de una película*, in which she describes her motivation for making the film and her intentions with its production. The book articulates Carri's self-awareness as a filmmaker and that she understands the film as a position that she assumes and as a turning point in the struggle over memory. Among her primary concerns is the sanctification of certain narratives that she recognizes as dangerous for memory in the post-dictatorship. Carri clarifies her position:

La historia argentina, sobre todo la reciente masacre de una generación, corre el riesgo de la santificación: la misma mitologización del pasado que no nos permite tener una mirada crítica sobre los actos y consecuencias que marcaron a las generaciones posteriores. La canonización y la necesidad de llenarlo todo, de reconstruir una memoria histórica y clausurar hasta el más remoto de los misterios dejándonos así sin espacio para la sorpresa o la pasión, lejos de acercarnos a una postura reflexiva nos expulsa del conflicto verdadero y sólo contribuye a distanciarnos de aquello que fuimos. No permite una verdadera interpelación a un pasado que, al no subrayar nuestra libertad, opaca. (Carri 23)

Carri consciously enters into the debate about memory as a frustrated daughter who has been disappointed in the narratives transmitted to her and the older generation's methods of transmission. Moreover, she enters as a filmmaker who has the talent and the habitus to make an impact². As her book and her film show, Carri's position is not one of competition with the generation of her parents, but rather it is one of multidirectionality in Michael Rothberg's sense of memory "as subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing; as productive and not privative" (3). This results in a generative critical analysis not only of her film, but of the status of memory in Argentina. Her questioning of memory, victimhood, and responsibility make space for the inclusion of other subjectivities to stake their claims in the discussion and negotiation of meaning of the past and the potential for a more nuanced reckoning with state terror.

2. Here I use habitus as Pierre Bourdieu describes it as "the subjective basis of the perception and appreciation of [a cultural producer's] objective chances" (64) towards a position in the field of cultural production. Randal Johnson describes it in clearer terms as "a set of dispositions which generates practices and perceptions" (Johnson 5), noting that it is often likened to "a feel for the game" (Johnson 5).

Complicity and the Continuation of State Violence

Los Rubios shows Carri's return to the neighborhood of La Matanza, the working-class neighborhood where her family lived underground when she was a toddler. The interviews with neighbors reveal the complicity of civilians with the military leading to the detention and enforced disappearance of Carri's parents. Carri's inclusion of the discourse of a complicit neighbor is an important aspect of how she combats the erasure of widespread complicity, which Mihai posits is one of the two principal erasures that tend to occur in memory-making following systemic violence. Whereas transitional justice mechanisms focus almost exclusively on those who can be individually defined as victims or perpetrators because of how transitional justice operates as a politico-legal framework, cultural production such as *Los Rubios* can expand the public's understanding of the violent past as more complex and layered. Carri includes an interview with someone who is in the grey area—the neighbor could not be considered a perpetrator by any legal, juridical, or transitional justice criteria despite being complicit—which expands the possibility of remembering positions and relations located outside of the victim-perpetrator dyad³. By delving into the grey area, Carri challenges the widely accepted view of society during the dictatorship as innocent and uninvolved as put forth in the theory of the two demons⁴. Through the revelation of the neighbor's cooperation and support of the soldiers who were staking out the Carri house, *Los Rubios* problematizes processes of mythification: first, it challenges the revolutionary project of her parents as a failure; and second, it shows that the fear that permeated the dictatorship years persists into democratic Argentina, thereby disturbing the temporal framing of state terror as being past.

On the first point, one of the opening scenes of the film introduces the revolutionary ideology of the movement in which her parents participated. The fictional Carri reads aloud from Roberto Carri's book, Isidro Velázquez: *Formas prerrevolucionarias de la violencia* on the infamous Argentine bandit.⁵ The close-up shot focuses on the lower part of her face and the adjacent cover of the book (*Los Rubios* 00:02:04-00:02:59). The excerpt that she reads describes the process of politicization of the masses through which "la muchedumbre se hace pueblo" (*Los Rubios* 00:02:35-00:02:36) and rises up to transform society towards a communitarian ideal. Some of the anonymous friends and family who appear in interviews celebrate the political ideals and activism of her parents. However, when Carri's crew goes to shoot in La Matanza, home to the popular classes who could mobilize, the film shows how disconnected the theory and the practice of revolution were. In an interview towards the beginning of the film, Carri (played by Couceyro) describes the position of the crew in the neighborhood, that they were "como un punto blanco que se movía y era muy evidente que no éramos de ahí, que éramos extranjeros para ese lugar. Y me imagino que sería parecido a lo que pasaba en su momento con mis padres" (*Los Rubios* 00:17:59-00:18:15). Towards the end of the film, Carri's suspicions are verified as she learns that her parents were indeed considered outsiders and treated as such. The revelation occurs at the climax of the film, when Carri and her crew interview a neighbor from La Matanza who collaborated with the state as they surveilled and prepared to abduct her parents. According to one neighbor's testimony, their neighborhood saw the Carris as outsiders, which the misnomer of "blond" to describe them symbolizes.

Los Rubios reveals the disconnect between the theory of popular uprising as Roberto's academic work represents and the failure of the movement to engage the working class, as is evident in the Carris' being perceived as outsiders. By showing this in her film, Carri contests how resistance had been shaped in the national imaginary and troubles it. Mihai posits that the "morally purist visions of resisters that dominate national myths" (44), like the vision of the Carris' resistance as their

3. More recent scholarship examines issues of complicity and implication of Argentines who were not directly victimized, nor were they perpetrators. See Carassai and Sheinin.

4. The theory of the two demons essentially assigns guilt to both political sides, positing that the military was forced to act in response to the threats that revolutionary, armed organizations posed to national security while society watched as a passive victim (Ros 16).

5. Isidro Velázquez (1928-1967) is a legend and a conservative columnist accused "leftist populists" of appropriating his memory for political means (Alaniz). Ironically, Albertina Carri engages with a double mythification, that of her father and of Velázquez.

comrades put forth, function to “obscure the ambivalence, hesitations, compromises, silences, betrayals, violent abuses, and bitterness political resisters often feel toward the very communities they fight for, but whose members fail to show solidarity with their struggle” (44). By presenting her parents’ struggle outside of the paradigm of morally purist heroization, Carri performs the labor of ensuring that memory includes nuanced accounts of the past to show its complexity and to challenge mythification.

On the second point, the film shows how the fear that proliferated during the dictatorship has rippled into the post-dictatorship period, which challenges the temporal framing of state terror as ending with the transition to democracy. Even in 2003, both of the neighbors who remember the Carris express that they are wary of problems as a result of speaking to the crew, which reveals that they believe in the possibility of negative consequences. The neighbor who appears early in the film speaks from behind the safety of her fence and from inside her home, speaking through an open window. Despite her claims of solidarity with the Carris and reiterating that they were good people, her distrust of the film crew is apparent in her repeated inquiry about why they are filming her and where the video will end up. She explains, “Porque una vive tranquila y no tengo drama con nadie. Jamás, jamás, toco madera, ¿no? me han molestado por nada” (*Los Rubios* 00:06:34-00:06:44), revealing her apprehension to speak and fear of consequences, although it is not clear who she worries might confront her with problems. Another neighbor interviewed, who collaborated with the repression and claims that the capture of the Carris was a relief after the military had ransacked her house, says twice, “No me metan en problemas” (*Los Rubios* 00:59:17), acknowledging the possibility of consequences as a result of speaking on camera. Again, the nature of the problems or the parties involved is not clear.

The neighbors’ mention of possible negative consequences as a result of speaking on camera about the Carris reveals that nearly 20 years since the end of the dictatorship, even people whose positions fall outside of the victim-perpetrator dyad understand engaging in memory practices or giving testimony as potentially risky. Showing the neighbors’ acknowledgement of possible consequences as a result of their speaking to the crew is one way that *Los Rubios* reveals the ongoing impact of the dictatorship over 20 years since the disappearance of Carri’s parents.

Beyond the affective sequelae, *Los Rubios* shows how institutions at the time were dealing with the aftermath of the dictatorship, either towards transitional justice efforts or towards reorganizing institutions so that they could conform to democratic norms after operating under a state of exception. Due to the nature of enforced disappearance, the specific events leading up to the genocide of an estimated 30,000 people in Argentina remain unknown. The scene in the forensics lab (*Los Rubios* 00:20:48-00:22:58) depicts a uniquely post-dictatorship practice that is an integral part of Argentine transitional justice: collecting DNA in order to identify the human remains that may belong to disappeared political prisoners. Forensic investigation offers some information about the bodies that are recuperated; therefore, many family members of the disappeared submitted DNA samples and some of them have received confirmation of the deaths of loved ones when their DNA has matched that of remains. The forensics lab appears in *Los Rubios* when the fictional Carri goes to the lab to submit a DNA sample. The scene at the lab transitions from one diegetic level to another. On the metadiegetic level, Albertina/Couceyro gives a DNA sample and the shot is in color. Immediately following, in a black and white intradiegetic shot, Carri herself submits a DNA sample. The DNA collection, despite consisting of a little prick, is a moment in which the physical trauma of her parents is reproduced. Because her parents were murdered by the state, Carri is compelled to submit her body to injury and give

her blood in anticipation of learning about the past. This scene shows the role of the post-dictatorship generation in contributing to an understanding of the past. Interestingly, Couceyro as the fictional Carri also submits her DNA although no personal information about the actress and any possible relationships to disappeared people appears in *Los Rubios*.

Another approach to understanding what happened to her parents was to visit the Sheraton, the former clandestine detention center where they were detained before their disappearance (*Los Rubios* 01:06:13-01:09:25). At the time of the filming, the building that once served as a clandestine prison was a functioning police station. As such, the building is a palimpsest of state violence, once clandestine and illegal and now official and legitimized. Before entering, the crew, Couceyro played by herself, Carri played by herself, and Carri's aunt prepare for their visit (as the intradiegetic level shows). Then, in a metadiegetic shot, the fictional Carri enters the police station. The building's interior immediately reveals the ongoing presence of state violence. In the lobby, the camera focuses on the officers' holstered guns interspersed with intradiegetic shots of the crew shooting and of Carri's aunt waiting. The violence of the state carries over though the officer's weapon, even though the Sheraton no longer serves as a concentration camp, but rather as a police station. An intradiegetic shot of Carri (as herself) holding a camera and walking through a hallway cuts to the perspective of Carri's camera, and from here the rest of the scene takes place on the metadiegetic level.

Regardless of the resources at Carri's disposal to learn about her parents' time at the Sheraton, including the actress, her aunt, access to the space, and her background information, what her visit shows is a rather unremarkable police station. Physically returning to the place where her parents were clandestinely detained offers little information. What the camera shows is the erasure of the past. The illegitimate state terror carried out under the guise of a state of exception that abducted Carri's parents is rendered invisible by the transformation of the space into that of a police station, with the police representing an official arm of the democratic state. While the state continues to hold a monopoly on violence, under democracy the police station at the ex-Sheraton is open to the public and offers certain kinds of transparency in contrast to the secret mode of operation of the Sheraton. When the crew arrives at the ex-Sheraton, the first shot establishes that it is a police station as the camera pans across the sign, "POLICIA." The next shot shows a bronze plaque commemorating the renovation and reinauguration of the police station with the names of the board of directors who oversaw the renovation listed below. The guns of the police are not concealed, rather they are displayed. The visit to the ex-Sheraton reveals that the clandestine, repressive organs of government transitioned to official and legalized forms of law enforcement and the violence it presupposes as Argentina transitioned to democratic governance.

The erasure of complicity, both of widespread civilian complicity from every facet of society—even the working class neighbors of La Matanza—and the institutional complicity of all organs of the state, is required in order to make a clean break with the past. Mihai explains

The historical carpet is thus drawn over widespread involvement *with* and accommodation *to* systemic violence, over historically continuous traditions of exclusion and violence, leaving the hegemonic self-understanding, as well as the distribution of power and privilege it justifies untouched (26-27; her emphasis).

The continuity of exclusion, violence, privilege, and power in the Argentine context is symbolized in *Los Rubios* by the transformation of

the Sheraton into the police station. The very infrastructure of state terror is remodeled and re-inaugurated as the house of law enforcement that may not disappear political prisoners, but is implicated in massacres and quotidian violence against the impoverished and working class of the villas.

Against Heroization

In the film, Carri (as a character and as a director) rejects her parents heroization despite efforts on both interpersonal and institutional levels to elevate their memory to mythical proportions. This rejection is apparent in the formal presentation of testimony from her parents' friends and family as well as in the film's narration. Testimony as arguably the most crucial method in the aftermath of the dictatorship towards fact-finding and learning about the past is undermined by the way the film integrates video testimonies. The speakers are never identified and when on the metadiegetic level the actress plays the interviews on her television, they are often in the background and not her primary focus in the scene. Even when the interviews jump to the intradiegetic level, the speakers are anonymous. In her 2007 book, Carri explains how she understands the role of testimony in memory:

El testimonio es un recurso que no legitima, no deja de ser 'ficcional.' Entonces la forma de tratar estos testimonios consistirá en trastocarlos—invertirlos—en palabras escritas en la pantalla y/o en la banda de audio, siempre en continuo movimiento de una versión a otra para dejar implícito este fracaso inicial e inevitable que se establece—para cualquier persona enfrentada a la memoria—entre el carácter indecible de la verdad y el acto de hablar—solo, en público o ante una cámara (28).

Carri goes on to say that by using different formats, she would convey the disorder and confusion inherent in the search for reality while also interrupting the possibility of any kind of intimate identification between the spectator and the witness.

As she spoke to her parents' comrades and family, she realized that the memories they shared with her did not tell her what she wanted to know about her parents. In a voiceover in the metadiegetic level, the fictional Carri narrates her critique of the way that the older people in her life construct the memory of her parents:

La familia, cuando puede sortear el dolor de la ausencia, recuerda la manera en que mamá y papá se convirtieron en dos personas excepcionales, lindas e inteligentes. Los amigos de mis padres estructuran el recuerdo de forma tal que todo se convierte en un análisis político. (00:34:16-00:34:31)

Rather than transmitting memories of who her parents were as people with tastes, habits, tendencies and personalities — the quotidian aspects of memory — she finds that the memory of her parents is flattened, only remembered in terms of their political positions and activism. In the same voiceover, she connects the inadequacy of memory to her struggle to make her film:

Tengo que pensar en algo, algo que sea película. Lo único que tengo es mi recuerdo difuso y contaminado por todas estas versiones. Creo que cualquier intento de acercarme a la verdad, me voy a estar alejándome. (00:34:41-00:34:53).

The more testimony she compiles and the deeper she delves into her investigation, the more unstable and unclear the narrative of the past becomes. *Los Rubios* interrogates this disconnect between what the

older generation, who assumes ownership of memory, is able to transmit and what the post-dictatorship generation wants to know. The intergenerational struggle over memory at the institutional level becomes apparent when a letter from the Comité de Preclasificación del Instituto Nacional de Cine y Artes Audiovisuales (INCAA) arrives rejecting Carri's application for support for *Los Rubios*. The letter reads:

En Buenos Aires, a los 30 días de octubre de 2002, el Comité de Preclasificación de Proyectos decide NO EXPEDIRSE, en esta instancia, sobre el proyecto titulado "LOS RUBIOS", por considerar insuficiente la presentación del guión. Las razones son las siguientes:

Creemos que este proyecto es valioso y pide—en este sentido—ser revisado con un mayor rigor documental. La historia, tal como está formulada, plantea el conflicto de ficcionar la propia experiencia cuando el dolor puede nublar la interpretación de hechos lacerantes.

El reclamo de la protagonista por la ausencia de sus padres, si bien es el eje, requiere una búsqueda más exigente de testimonios propios, que se concentrarían en la participación de los compañeros de sus padres, con afinidades y discrepancias. Roberto Carri y Ana María Caruso fueron dos intelectuales comprometidos en los '70, cuyo destino trágico merece que este trabajo se realice. (Carri 5)

The letter explicitly states the position of the INCAA: that while Carri's parents' story is valuable and must be shared, her approach is not how the INCAA envisions their story should be told. The letter privileges above all the testimony of the comrades of her parents, and insinuates that a film about Albertina Carri, daughter of disappeared activists, is not the rigorous and appropriate project that would merit institutional support.

The letter appears in the film on two diegetic levels: sometimes with Carri as herself and sometimes with the actress portraying her in the metadiegetic film. First, in a color shot, the actress prints the letter; in the next shot, also she reads it out loud; then the next shot appears in the intradiegetic level signaled by the use black and white, where the actress (now as Analía Couceyro, herself), the crew, and Carri (performing herself) discuss the letter. The discussion turns to the generational tension over how the dictatorship and its implications can be represented on film with the support of the INCAA:

Carri: No, en realidad quieren la película que necesitan.

Analía: Claro.

Jésica: ¿Como institución?

Carri: No, como generación, y yo lo entiendo. Lo que pasa es que es una película la que tiene hacer otro, no yo. [...] Ellos necesitan esta película y yo entiendo que la necesiten. Pero no es mi lugar hacerla o no tengo ganas de hacerla.

Marcelo: No es tu proyecto. . (*Los Rubios* 00:27:04-00:27:29)

Carri recognizes the position of the INCAA not as an institutional demand, but as the demand of a generation that controls the institution and that seeks to shape the construction of cultural memory. This scene reveals how institutions in post-dictatorship Argentina actively work towards canonizing particular forms of memory and excluding others that do not validate and consolidate their perspective of the past.

Clearly, Carri is aware not only of the intergenerational struggle over memory, but also of her film as espousing a position that falls outside of the narratives and stories that were circulated regarding the

dictatorship and the disappeared up to that point. In this sense, Carri personifies what sociologist Elizabeth Jelin calls “emprendedores de la memoria”, those who are pitching their version the past, engaging in a struggle over memory through which various groups and individuals vie for their narrative to become the widely accepted version of the past (49). For Jelin, the enterprise of the “emprendedor de memoria” is their narrative of the past that they are selling to the public, presupposing that the dominant discourses on the past will inform the future. In putting forth her story, Carri is challenging the older generation. The INCAA committee, as part of a government institution, has the power to support or reject emerging filmmakers in Argentina and therefore imposes their own vision to shape the Argentine film industry and position different filmmakers in the field⁶. The INCAA gives both funding and cultural capital to the filmmakers that they support bestowing them with a certain authority to tell stories through filmmaking. Carri, however, is not granted support; the INCAA does not respect her authority or creative endeavor.

In her description of the struggle over memory and the construction of an official story, Jelin describes the role that institutions play in permitting or blocking certain narratives from the mainstream. The inclusion of the INCAA letter and the cast and crew’s analysis of it in *Los Rubios* exemplifies Jelin’s argument in two interesting ways. First, it accounts for the INCAA’s position that the testimony of survivors is necessary, and second, it exposes the role of institutions in authorizing subjects, such as filmmakers, to contribute to the construction of memory. Jelin writes:

La memoria como construcción social narrativa implica el estudio de las propiedades de quien narra, de la institución que le otorga o niega poder y lo/a autoriza a pronunciar las palabras, ya que, como señala Bourdieu, la eficacia del discurso performativo es proporcional a la autoridad de quien lo enuncia. Implica también prestar atención a los procesos de construcción del reconocimiento legítimo, otorgado socialmente por el grupo al cual se dirige. (35)

At once, the INCAA simultaneously interferes in Carri’s filmmaking process by denying her support while also interfering in the possibility of her becoming an authority. To be sure, a filmmaker with institutional support is received as an authority just as a film with INCAA backing gains cultural importance as a project that merits institutional support.

By including the letter in *Los Rubios*, Carri exposes the agenda of the INCAA to foment a specific version of the dictatorship, which centers on the disappeared and the generation of survivors. In other words, the INCAA contributes to the version of the dictatorship that was dominant at the time that frames the families of the disappeared who were adults during state terror as the rightful owners of memory and the only authorities who can speak on the past. Carri addresses her inclusion of the letter in the film in interviews explaining that it indeed illustrated a point that she thought was key to understanding her experience.

Lo que me di cuenta es que la carta era sintomática, era parte de lo que la película estaba contando, por eso la incluí. Hasta sugería que yo estaba intentando hablar de mis padres y no me animaba. La carta era también como una palmada en la espalda por los ‘hechos lacerantes.’ (qtd. in Moreno)

For Carri, including the letter was an effective way of showing what she confronted, and the letter becomes a symbol of the struggle over memory more generally with which Carri is engaged.

6. Once again, I am using Bourdieu’s sense of the field of cultural production, which is “understood as the system of objective relations between those agents or institutions and as the site of struggles for the monopoly of the power to consecrate, in which the value of works of art and belief in that value are continuously generated” (78). The INCAA is one such institution operating within the field.

The intergenerational struggle over memory also seems to have spilled into the critical reception of *Los Rubios*. While the critical reception does not show a clear generational divide, it shows how the struggle over memory plays out in scholarship with some critics siding with the INCAA's view that Carri's film is not rigorous and does not offer anything in terms of understanding memory and the past, while other critics praise Carri's filmmaking as brave and innovative. Ros explains:

All the aspects of the past unearthed by Carri's film—the sensorial and the concrete, the armed struggle and the disagreements about it, the class gap between activists and members of the working class—unsettled the preestablished human rights narrative and therefore provoked strong reactions in the groups that identified with it. (41)

Indeed, the old guard of memory, which activist groups such as Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo represent, advocated for human rights while promoting a narrative that split the past in terms of good and evil, innocent and guilty, right and wrong. *Los Rubios* challenges such binaries by suggesting that these dichotomies inadvertently strip people of their humanity.

The tone that the film espouses regarding the older generation has been the subject of critique. Critics took particular offense to the scenes on the metadiegetic level in which the fictional Carri plays the recorded interviews with her parents' peers. Martín Kohan writes:

La actuación de Couceyro es en estos casos el despliegue de un vasto muestrario de modos de la desconsideración: da la espalda a la imagen grabada de quienes hablan, desoye, ensaya gestos o se pone a hacer otra cosa. (qtd. in Noriega 27)

In his analysis, Noriega posits that by screening the interviews on a monitor within the metadiegetic level of the film with its distorted sound quality and fuzzy images shows that

Los testimonios, entonces, deliberadamente no son centrales de *Los Rubios*; el contenido de esas conversaciones no es esencial a la película sino como demostración de una distancia insalvable entre la experiencia de aquellos que convivieron con Roberto Carri y Ana María Caruso y la de Albertina, que solo tenía tres años cuando aquellos fueron secuestrados. (Noriega 26).

What some read as belittling the experiences of the older generation, other critics, like Noriega, interpret as an approach to show the disconnect between the generations.

Beatriz Sarlo argues that Carri's film is not really about her parents, but a self-centered production about her search for her parents. In her reading, which deals exclusively with the narrative of the film, all but overlooking the possible interpretations available through formal analysis, Sarlo critiques how Carri portrays the interviews with her parents' peers. She argues that Carri mutes her parents' political projects and the reasons behind their activism (Sarlo 147).

Sarlo criticized Carri not only for choosing to focus on the non-political aspects of her parents, but also for focusing more on her childhood in the country, on her own search for identity and goes so far as to represent herself doubly through her own appearance in the film and through Couceyro, while relegating the members of her parents' generation to anonymity. Sarlo's more general critique of post-dictatorship memory's "giro subjetivo," (22) that is the privileging of testimony and first-hand experience, and more specifically the

post-dictatorship generation's subjective movement towards memory is that the affective connection that defines their position to past events also undermines the possibility of any rigorous understanding of the past. Sarlo's critique seems to agree with the INCAA's: that *Los Rubios* should be more focused on Carri's parents and what happened and less on her own feelings and experience. In response to Sarlo, Tandeciarz points out that Carri's film in fact, "Triggered precisely the kind of deep reflection and response that Sarlo and her counterparts reserved for *avanzada* aesthetics and for arguably more objective academic treatises, as if these were not also subjectively encoded" (xxx). Although Sarlo's critique is framed by a privileging of what she considers objective and rigorous works on memory of the dictatorship over the subjective and identity-centered works such as Carri's, this paradigm can also be understood as part of the intergenerational struggle over how memory of the dictatorship should be expressed and analyzed. Tandeciarz mentions that of the few works that deal with memory of the military dictatorship that Sarlo applauds are works conducted by survivors of state terror, such as Pilar Calveiro and Emilio de Ipola. To be sure, Calveiro and de Ipola both approach their excellent research from their personal and affective links to state terror as survivors of clandestine detention and torture.

Los Rubios is not merely a critique of the old guard of memory. Through her film, Carri relates her experience as a member of the post-dictatorship generation. The post-dictatorship subject, as her film shows, is someone with a mediated experience of state terror, and as such it is someone who must wade through the ideology and emotions of the older generation upon whom they rely for these vicarious memories. Carri suggests that ultimately, the politics of her parents and their revolutionary struggle do not matter to her, because what matters is that they are gone. In a scene in which the fictional Carri screams into the open space of the pampa, her voiceover poses questions about her parents' choice to stay and fight instead of fleeing with their children. She says "Me cuesta entender la elección de mamá. ¿Por qué no se fue del país? me pregunto una y otra vez. O a veces me pregunto ¿por qué me dejó aquí, en el mundo de los vivos?" (01:04:42-01:04:51). The question of her relationship to her parents leads to more existential questions about what happens after death, "¿Dónde están las almas de los muertos? ¿Comparten sitio todos los muertos o los asesinatos transitan otros lugares? ¿Las almas de los muertos están en los que venimos después? ¿En aquellos que intentamos recordarlos? Y ese recuerdo, ¿cuánto tiene de preservación y cuánto de capricho?" (01:05:00-01:05:20). This scene, which occurs purely in the metadiegetic level, shows the existential crisis of the post-dictatorship generation, particularly that of the children of the disappeared. She contemplates her parents' choices and asks questions that she can never answer about her parents' motivations. She connects her rage to her father's, suggesting a sort of inheritance, but rather than being outraged over the political situation like Roberto was, she is outraged for surviving her parents. Understanding her parents' political project is not urgent when compared to understanding why they chose activism over saving themselves for their children; a viewpoint that distances her from the *hijos* who set out to revive their parents' revolutionary projects. She is against their heroization and denounces the process of mythification that occurs on the personal level with the testimony of their peers, and institutionally with the demands of the INCAA while problematizing their resistance as a sort of impure one.

Mihai argues that impure resistance is one of the principle erasures that occurs in processes of constructing political memory following atrocity. *Los Rubios* was so controversial in part because it positions itself against heroization by focusing on the impure resistance of Carri's parents. Mihai explains:

This canonization [...] purifies all resisters of their vulnerabilities and uproots them from the very relationalities and structures that make their actions possible, while concurrently occluding the contributions of those who cannot be easily subsumed under this predominantly masculinist, exceptionalist blueprint. Resisters moments of cowardice, betrayal, and ambivalence, their silences and complicities and their flaws of character but also the violence and abuses they commit in their struggle are purged from inventories of honor. This erasure is enabled by the way in which national myths normally capture political violence in antagonistic, dichotemic terms of “us” versus “them,” reducing history’s cast of characters to “perpetrators,” “victims,” and “heroes” to the exclusion of those who do not neatly fit any of these reductive roles. (6)

Los Rubios reveals this process of national mythification as well as what must be purged from mythmaking: the impure resistance as revealed through: the testimony from one of Roberto’s peers who had a falling out with him over politics; Albertina’s rumination on her parents’ decision not to flee; and the ways that the La Matanza neighbors remembered the Carris. By including the impurity of her parents’ resistance in her film, Carri offers a more complex understanding of their revolutionary activities, returning to them their intricate humanity. She sheds light on the complexity of their commitment to the armed struggle, their sacrifices, and harm that came about as a result of their choices. These revelations, which run counter to what at the time were dominant narratives of resistance as heroic, idealistic, and pure, prompt what Mihai calls mnemonic hesitation, which “open up space for remembering and imagining differently” (46). Building on the work of philosophers Alia Al-Saji and José Medina, Mihai argues that mnemonic hesitation breaks the routine relationship between memory and the imagination, thus inviting the reconfiguration of memories and prompting the imagination to respond to what seems outside of the paradigm of our interpretive schemas (51). She writes:

The past is thus unlocked through a reorganization of memory, which means that both the present and the future are simultaneously rendered uncertain. Once the automatism of the mnemonic habitus and imagination is suspended, alternative ways of relating to others becomes possible. (51)

By prompting mnemonic hesitation by her iconoclastic depiction of the past and resistance to her parents’ heroization Carri creates possibilities for other ways of remembering, imagining, and understanding.

Through her film, Carri undertakes the labor of mnemonic care. By rejecting the limiting visions of the past and of her parents’ memory as the testimony of the older generation puts forth, and instead opting for a more complicated and uncomfortable portrayal of mythmaking, complicity, and the limits of memory and documentary, Carri triggers a productive conversation among spectators, critics, and scholars. By prompting these conversations, Carri is not merely being provocative, rather she takes care of the space of post-dictatorship memory. Considering *Los Rubios* through a lens of the aesthetics of care connects Carri’s documentary filmmaking with other artworks from other cultural contexts that utilize their form and their content to interrupt the consolidation of uncritical remembrance and mythmaking in a post-atrocity situation. *Los Rubios* problematizes the then-dominant narrative of the dictatorship’s temporality to show how the systemic violence that underpinned dictatorship-era state terror continues latently under the guise of legalized violence. Meanwhile, by showing the imperfections of the struggle and the failures of memory,

Carri broadens how resistance and remembrance can be defined to be more inclusive and robust, thus challenging the culture of memory to expand and confront its own contradictions.

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