Cooking, Feeding, and Eating:

Theatre and Dictatorship in the Southern Cone

by

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B.A., Rice University, 1991
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Submitted to the Department of Spanish
and Portuguese and the Faculty of the
Graduate School of the University of
Kansas in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

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Date Submitted 30 April 2002

Abstract

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This dissertation investigates dramatic responses to the military dictatorships in Argentina and Chile, focusing specifically on the way in which theatre has drawn on the domestic space of the kitchen and the related acts of cooking, feeding, and eating as framing devices for the events of the political realm. By masking their socially critical stance toward the military regimes with metaphorical representation, the playwrights examined in this project eschewed state-instituted censorship. Furthermore, the dramatic use of the kitchen and its related acts echoes the discursive practice of the military governments in question, which veiled their political projects in metaphors of domesticity, thereby rhetorically conflating the private and public realms.

Spanning a time frame from 1974 to 1993, these works use similar images as they constitute three different responses to the military regimes. The plays written during the early years of the dictatorships, *Puesta en claro* by Griselda Gambaro (Argentina, 1974) and *Lo crudo, lo cocido y lo podrido* by Marco Antonio de la Parra (Chile, 1978), portray agency on the part of the oppressed and/or a shift in power relations. *La nona* by Roberto Cossa (Argentina, 1977) and *De a uno* by Aída Bortnik (Argentina, 1983) were written further into the dictatorships, and center on the way in which seemingly innocent citizens become complicit in state-sponsored violence. Finally, the works written after the demise of the dictatorships, *Carne* by Eduardo Rovner (Argentina, 1985) and *Cocinando con Elisa* by Lucía Laragione (Argentina, 1993), offer a dark, chilling image of violence directed against the female body. While the recent academic revalorization of the domestic realm has focused on the kitchen as an isolated, idyllic site characterized by creativity and agency, I posit that this space must be reconsidered as a site that manifests and even determines the events of the public sphere, given the specific historical context of the dictatorships in Argentina and Chile.

Acknowledgments

My graduate career would not have progressed to this point were it not for the excellent mentoring that I have received in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at the University of Kansas. I am extremely grateful to my dissertation director, George Woodyard, for providing me with numerous opportunities for professional development, encouraging my research interests, and patiently accepting drafts in various stages of completion. I am indebted to Vicky Unruh for her guidance from my first semester in the program and for always helping me to see the bigger picture. Special thanks to Michael Doudoroff for pointing out that which, although obvious, nevertheless eluded me, and for ingeniously exploiting the culinary metaphor to its full potential. Thanks to my entire committee for understanding the value of positive feedback and for helping me to push through deadlines. The timely completion of this project would not have been possible without their dedication. A dissertation fellowship from the University of Kansas has allowed me to devote the past academic year to this dissertation. Thank you to Eduardo Rovner for graciously contributing his time, and to Jean Graham Jones and Jackie Bixler for generously sharing their expertise and suggestions. I am grateful to my friends for believing in me and for helping to make Lawrence a home. Finally, I am indebted to my family for their encouragement and unconditional love, and for celebrating the entrances and exits.

Table of Contents

Introduction

> *Aprender a escribir (no a hacer crítica literaria) es un quehacer mágico, pero también muy específico. También el conjuro tiene sus recetas, y los encantadores miden con precisión y exactitud la medida exacta de hechizo que es necesario añadir al caldero de sus palabras. Las reglas de cómo escribir un cuento, una novela o un poema, reglas para nada secretas, están ahí, salvadas para la eternidad en vasos cópticos por los críticos, pero de nada le valen al escritor si éste no aprende a usarlas.*
>
> Rosario Ferré, "La cocina de la escritura"

The idea that creativity and power underlie the act of cooking has informed a long tradition in Latin American literature. Beginning with Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, Latin American women writers including Rosario Castellanos, Rosario Ferré, Ángeles Mastretta, and most recently, Laura Esquivel, have challenged and inverted the traditional view of cooking as a meaningless, repetitive task and of the kitchen as a place representing women's subjugation. The academic world has recently witnessed a renewed interest in such "domestic" themes and the way in which they reflect, comment on, and shape gender roles. Latin American theatre has approached these topics from a variety of perspectives for over twenty years. While the concepts of cooking, feeding, and eating may traditionally connote nourishment, they can also have sinister

and violent undercurrents. Because these images lend themselves to the representation of power relations, in Latin American theatre they have served as potent vehicles for responding to the violence of the military dictatorships in both Argentina and Chile.

This dissertation investigates dramatic responses to the military dictatorships in Argentina and Chile, focusing specifically on the way in which theatre has drawn on the domestic space of the kitchen and the related acts of cooking, feeding, and eating as framing devices for the events of the political realm. Several of the plays examined in this project, such as *Lo crudo, lo cocido y lo podrido* by Marco Antonio de la Parra (Chile, 1978) and *La nona* by Roberto Cossa (Argentina, 1977) have long formed part of the academic canon of Latin American theatre. Others such as *Puesta en claro* by Griselda Gambaro (Argentina, 1974), *De a uno* by Aída Bortnik (Argentina, 1983), *Carne* by Eduardo Rovner (Argentina, 1985) and *Cocinando con Elisa* by Lucía Laragione (Argentina, 1993) have received less critical attention. Nevertheless, these pieces employ similar domestic images as they address the nature and effects of the military regimes in Argentina and Chile. Based on the time in which they were written, the works constitute three different responses to the military regimes, foregrounding either resistance, complicity with

state-sponsored repression, or violence enacted on the human body.

That power and violence figure as two of the most frequently recurring themes in theatre of the Southern Cone is not surprising given the region's recent history. Under the Argentine military dictatorship between 1976 and 1983, the army took hold of civilian institutions and implemented a systematic and brutal campaign of repression that resulted in thousands of victims. Rather than risk converting its victims into heroes and martyrs through public executions, the military engaged in what Marcelo Suárez-Orozco calls "the war by vanishment" (483). Victims were kidnapped at night and taken, blindfolded, to secret detention centers where they were imprisoned, tortured, and most often murdered. The military coup d'état in Chile on September 11, 1973, in which the democratic president Salvador Allende was assassinated, led to similar oppression and violence, resulting in over two thousand similar kidnappings and murders until the return to a democratically-elected government in 1990.

In Argentina, factors contributing to the military coup of 1976 included an unstable economy, characterized by a series of short cycles of growth followed by decline, as well as a worsening social and political situation throughout the 1960s and 1970s. As a series of military and non-Peronist governments failed in their attempts to eradicate Peronism,

tensions between the military and the Peronists continued to grow (Rock 320). The social and political tension erupted into armed struggle in mid-1970 with the formation of several guerrilla units, including the Peronist Frente Argentino de Liberación (FAP), the Montoneros, and the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias (FAR), as well as the non-Peronist Ejército Revolucionario de los Trabajadores (ERP). David Rock explains that although the individual guerrilla units differed in ideology, they shared a common frustration with the traditional left and a common goal of popular revolution brought about by gradually intensifying guerrilla activity (353-54).

The Right responded to the appearance of such guerrilla groups by forming counterterrorist groups, such as Mano (reported to be composed of off-duty police), which conducted their own series of kidnappings, targeting both students and union militants. Such abductions were a chilling foreshadowing of the extreme repression enacted during the dictatorship itself, as most of the victims vanished without a trace. Those who did regain liberty gave accounts of torture. Early in 1971 such disappearances numbered one every eighteen days (Rock 355). By 1974 the majority of kidnapping and execution of leftist militants was carried out by the Alianza Argentina Anticomunista or "Triple A," which appeared to be organized under the federal police (Rock 360). By 1975 the

three armed forces were fully involved in the war on "subversion." Backed by the state security police, each formed its own espionage network and clandestine operational unit. David Rock describes the atmosphere of mounting repression:

> These forces, which soon dwarfed their adversaries, imposed repression by the use of unchecked, random, indiscriminate violence that struck without warning or warrant. The definition of *subversion* was broadened and became increasingly capricious, encompassing the mildest protest, whether made by the parties, the press, the universities, the legal profession, or the unions. The number of persons who simply disappeared (*los desaparecidos*) mounted rapidly, with some held hostage to deter the guerrillas; guerrilla actions were answered by the execution of hostages. Corpses were found floating in barrels in the River Plate, or left charred and unrecognizable on refuse dumps; other captives were rumored to have been hurled to their deaths from aircraft. From the prisons came detailed accounts of systematic torture. (363-64)

Responding to the assassination of the Chief of Police Alberto Vilar, the government declared a state of siege in November 1974, providing the Army even greater authority in dealing with the guerrillas (Rock 364). Immediately, 3000 people

suspected of engaging in subversive activities were detained as a preventive measure (Caistor xii).

Finally, the surging inflation of over a year coupled with ever-increasing violence culminated in a coup d'etat by the Army, led by General Jorge Rafael Videla. After the Army abducted María Estela Martínez de Perón (Isabelita), the president and widow of the late Juan Perón, the military government immediately set about dismantling the Peronist state as it continued its program of destroying the last vestige of resistance.

Yet this repression by the military dictatorship went far beyond a simple retaliation for the violence committed by the guerrillas. While the victims of the latter had numbered at most between two and three hundred over the previous six years, the kidnapping, torture, and murder victims of the military regime are estimated at roughly 9,000.[1] Furthermore, in 1978 it was estimated that while fewer than 20 percent of the *desaparecidos* were guerrillas, 37 percent of these victims were factory workers associated with labor unions at the grass roots level (Rock 367). The National Commission on the Disappearances (Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas--CONADEP) reported in 1984 that the majority of victims were wholly innocent of terrorism, as the members of the guerrilla groups either died in battle or committed suicide before being apprehended by the death squads (10).

Indeed, the armed forces viewed their mission as not only eliminating those individuals directly engaged in armed actions against the government, but also the eradication of all those who could be considered sympathetic to the guerrilla cause, as General Videla expressed, "A terrorist is not just someone with a gun or bomb, but also someone who spreads ideas that are contrary to Western and Christian Civilization" (*The Times*, London, 4 January 1978, cited in Caistor xiii).

The report published by CONADEP explains that the excesses of the dictatorship's repression went beyond the sheer number of victims to characterize the entire process (16). The regime's leaders denominated their campaign against those they considered "subversive delinquents" the *guerra sucia*, alleging that they were drawing on tactics already used by the guerrilla factions such as unannounced bombings, kidnappings, and murders. Yet this term more aptly describes the gross and systematic violation of human rights in which the armed forces engaged in the name of national security (Caistor xiii). From the testimony of victims who were later freed and even perpetrators, the Commission established that the *modus operandi* of the armed forces followed a pattern of kidnapping-disappearance-torture, sometimes followed by execution (*Nunca Más* 8). The majority of victims (62%) were apprehended in their own homes during the night. Armed commandos or death squads known as *patotas* would surround the

block and enter by force, terrorizing children and parents of the victims, often gagging them and forcing them to watch the horrific acts they committed. The victim was beaten and sometimes tortured at that very site, then hooded and dragged into a waiting car or truck to be taken to a clandestine detention center (Centro Clandestino de Detención - CCD). While the prisoner was being forced into the vehicle, the remaining members of the *patota* would destroy whatever belongings they were not able to steal from the house (*Nunca Más* 8).

Numbering approximately 340 throughout the country, the CCDs were created, among other reasons, as places for carrying out torture with impunity (*Nunca Más* 26, 54). While their number clearly multiplied after the coup, in 1975 there were already at least two operational sites that served as pilot centers (*Nunca Más* 58). Victims were first taken to a transitory detention center (Lugar Transitorio de Detención--LT), where they were subjected to a first round of interrogation and most often torture. They would then be either liberated, or their imprisonment would become official, whereby they would be transferred to a police station, or they would be transported to a "Definitive Site" (Lugar Definitivo--LD). Frequently, however, a person's detention would be official, yet he or she would be removed from the police

station to a CCD, making it virtually impossible for family members to trace his or her whereabouts (*Nunca Más* 56-58).

Yet while some victims were deemed not valuable to the armed forces and subsequently released, most often the captors did not even bother to determine if their prisoner had information that could be useful. Thus, while kidnapping and torture victims included guerrillas, militant members of political parties, priests or laymen sympathetic to the problems of the poor, student activists, and union leaders, the highly indiscriminate methodology also targeted friends, family, and coworkers of the above, as well as people without any visible ties to subversive or political activity (Nunca Más 63). Furthermore, the torture practiced was so extreme that victims, suffering both physically and psychologically, would offer wholly false information. Daniel Eduardo Fernández, taken prisoner as an 18 year old high school student, describes the process:

> La idea era dejar a la víctima sin ningún tipo de resistencia psicológica, hasta dejarlo a merced del interrogador y obtener así cualquier tipo de respuesta que éste quisiera, aunque fuera de lo más absurda. Si querían que uno respondiera que lo había visto a San Martín andando a caballo el día anterior, lo lograban, y

> entonces nos decían que uno era un mentiroso, hasta que realmente uno lo sintiera, y lo continuaban torturando. (*Nunca Más* 47)

Some victims continued to be tortured even when they did not understand the questions posed to them by the torturers, who used a special jargon when referring to subversive activities plotted by guerrilla groups (*Nunca Más* 35).

Even while such atrocities were being committed by the armed forces, the military government adamantly denied the existence of the CCDs. When officials were faced with a growing number of accusations leveled by relatives of the *desaparecidos* and testimonies of victims who had been released, they admitted the existence of such centers but claimed that they were merely places where victims met rather than secret prisons (*Nunca Más* 55-56).

In the 1970s both Argentina and Chile suffered violent military coups followed by extreme repression. Furthermore, both share a strong tradition of an organized working class that threatened the more traditional landed and capitalist interests. However, their situations differ in several important aspects. First, Chile seemed in 1973 to have a firmly rooted democracy, despite the dominance of bourgeois interests. Furthermore, even during the seemingly distant dictatorship of the 1920s, members of the military resorted to imprisonment and exile rather than torture and execution as a

means of repression (Roxborough, et al. 1-2). Additionally, Chile's economy had been dependent on that of the United States since 1920 (and before that on that of Britain, right back to its dependence on colonial Spain), and as such has been at the mercy of the international capitalist market (Roxborough, et al. 2-4). The resentment of North American influence in the country and the tradition of working class mobilization seemed to suggest in 1970 that Chile would be a logical setting for a socialist experiment.

This experiment was the mission of the Popular Unity (Unidad Popular--UP) coalition, which came to power under the presidency of Salvador Allende in 1970. Allende envisioned a reformist transition from capitalism to socialism, carried out through non-violent, legal means without dismantling the bourgeois state apparatus so deeply entrenched in Chilean society (Roxborough, et al. 6). Specifically, the Unidad Popular planned to expropriate large foreign companies, particularly the finance, industry, and distribution monopolies, and all landholdings larger than eighty hectares (roughly 192 acres). However, while the working class would be organized under the coalition, it would not itself directly carry out any of these activities of economic restructuring (Roxborough, et al. 74).

In fact, however, the demise of Allende's government in 1973 revealed the difficulties of carrying out non-violent

socialist reform. On one hand, the Popular Unity government was partially successful in restructuring the economy, having gained in its first year almost complete control of the production of nitrates, iodine, copper, coal, iron, and steel, as well as between fifty and ninety percent control of other financial sectors (Roxborough, et al. 89). These gains were sufficient to threaten the Chilean capitalist class, the petty bourgeoisie, certain elements of the middle class, and the government of the United States. However, by insisting on working through the bourgeois state, the Popular Unity government committed a fatal error in that it left intact the real political power of the capitalist class, which used its majority in Congress and the Senate to protect its economic interests (Roxborough, et al. 74-75).

In addition to its failure to gain complete control of the economy, Allende's government was beset by numerous other problems that were only aggravated by Chile's economic crisis of 1972 and 1973. Despite Popular Unity's efforts to woo the middle classes with anti-imperialist, anti-monopolist and anti-oligarchic policies, ultimately these sectors were more swayed by the reactionary Right's campaign concerning the supposed threat of a working-class revolution that ostensibly would attack democracy, liberty, and private property (Roxborough, et al. 86).

Additionally, Chile's economic, cultural, and military dependence on the United States greatly aided the efforts of the U.S. government to undermine the Popular Unity government. United States investments in Chile were enormous and distributed among various sectors: copper mines, manufactured foodstuffs, petrochemicals, textiles, office equipment, paint, cement, radio and television, construction, motor vehicles, pharmaceuticals, telephones, banking, and hotels. Responding to the serious threat posed by Popular Unity's nationalization of key industries, the United States stopped aid and investment to the Allende government in January 1972. In addition to crippling the Chilean economy through sanctions, the U.S. government also directly financed many opposition groups and leaders (Roxborough, et al. 112-14). Even the Chilean military, which joined with the bourgeoisie to oust Allende and his Popular Unity government, received technical training from the United States armed forces (Roxborough, et al. 192).

Finally, Allende's trust that the armed forces would respect the constitution and would therefore support his legal government proved to be another fatal miscalculation. True, in the late 1960s the Chilean army embodied the principles of subordination to civilian authority, adherence to military hierarchy, and nonintervention in politics. However, the deep conflicts in Chilean society during the Popular Unity

government led to a criticism of authority, a breakdown of discipline, and political involvement, ultimately eroding the longstanding professionalization of the military (Arriagada 81-82). Furthermore, Allende's policy of "constitutionalism" essentially perpetuated the insulation of the armed forces from the political process that was radically changing the society around them. As Ian Roxborough and his associates have noted, the armed forces "missed three critical years of class education" (190). Additionally, this policy prevented Allende not only from altering the existing order of discipline within the military, but also from denouncing those members of the armed forces who planned to overthrow him (Roxborough, et al. 190).

The failure of Allende's government to gain complete control of the economy, the economic crisis in 1972 and 1973, the bourgeoisie's fear that a socialist revolution would take place despite the reformist elements of Popular Unity, and the maneuvering of the United States all combined to bring about the coup of September 11, 1973. At the time, the growing sense of crisis that characterized the Popular Unity government inspired civilians on both sides to support military intervention, with the assumption that the country would soon return to constitutional rule. The majority of the coup's supporters failed to predict the violence of the

takeover itself or that of the seventeen year military regime that followed (Merkx viii).

Estimates of the number of people killed during the takeover vary. One source calculates that 1500 people, including 80 soldiers, were killed in the combat between the military forces and armed contingents of guerrilla groups such as the Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionario (MIR) (Arriagada 5). On the other hand, the Swedish Ambassador to Chile estimated the number of people murdered during the coup as 15,000 (Roxborough, et al. 238). What *is* clear, however, is that the situation immediately escalated from a simple takeover to encompass a practice of violating human rights that would characterize the military regime throughout its existence. Due to its indiscriminate and widespread arrest of citizens (at any one point in time 7,000 people were being held by the authorities), the junta opened Santiago's two football stadiums for use as concentration camps and centers of interrogation (Roxborough, et al. 239). During October 1973, dozens of people were assassinated. While some were tried in a rigged trial conducted under improvised Councils of War and then shot, the majority of the victims were killed without even the pretense of a trial (Arriagada 6).

Human rights organizations have divided the regime into two distinct phases based on the nature of the abuse inflicted, the means employed, and those sectors of the

government involved in the abuse. The period from the coup until mid-1974 was marked overall by decentralized repression. Arrests were made by the police service of each branch of the military, as well as the national police or Carabineros. The difficulty of the government in controlling the multiple intelligence services led to legal and political irresponsibility. This decentralization of repression thus made it very difficult to locate political detainees (Arriagada 13, 17).

In addition, this initial phase was characterized by the abuse of the fugitive law (*ley de fuga*). The press, which was of course under the junta's control, frequently attributed the death of prisoners to their unsuccessful efforts at escaping. According to the press, when these prisoners refused to halt, they were shot by their captors. The day after the coup, the Chilean armed forces hastily amended the Military Code of Justice to stipulate that "when the security of the attacked [that is, the military] so requires, the attacker or attackers may be executed in the act" (Decreto-Ley número 5, 12 Sept. 1973, cited in Arriagada 6). In the first three months of the dictatorship, there were at least forty-two published reports of more than 410 prisoners killed while attempting to escape (*Report* 19).

While the formation of the Dirección Nacional de Inteligencia (DINA) in mid-1974 ended the decentralization of

the war against "marxist subversives," it certainly did not make the government any more accountable for its crimes against humanity. The agency was equipped with an infrastructure of secret agents, unmarked vehicles, and clandestine detention centers (Arriagada 13). Although the DINA was ostensibly created to provide the junta with control of the police, in fact only the Supreme Chief of the Nation, Augusto Pinochet, dictated the police's actions, as Genaro Arriagada explains:

> From mid-1974 until it was dissolved in August, 1977, DINA was the backbone of the regime; during this period, no agency in Chile had greater impact on national life. The President's absolute authority over DINA effectively dispelled any pretense of equality between him and those who, in the months immediately following the coup, had been his peers. (18-19)

With the creation of DINA, the regime passed into its second phase of human rights abuses. While it no longer applied the *ley de fuga* or conducted mass executions throughout the country, it nevertheless undertook the equally or even more atrocious practice of torture. The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights detailed its findings:

> [During the military regime] the practice of torture has been neither the result of individual excesses committed by members of security agencies nor a phenomenon

> tolerated out of indifference or weakness by other Chilean institutions; on the contrary, torture has been and continues to be a deliberate policy of the Chilean government carried out during the entire period that began on 11 September 1973. (111, cited in Arriagada 25)

Among the methods of torture used by the military were electric shock applied to sensitive parts of the body, fingernail extraction, shooting off guns next to the ear of the victim, as well as beating with gun butts, knife slashing, cigarette burns, sexual molestation and rape (*Report* 18). Although relations with the United States government during the administrations of Nixon and Ford remained cordial, the human rights abuses committed under the Chilean military dictatorship and the sheer number of foreigners who sought asylum in foreign embassies caused serious conflicts between the regime and the governments of many countries, among them Sweden, France, Colombia, Venezuela, Italy, Belgium, West Germany, and Mexico (Arriagada 14).

As Andrés Avellaneda notes, cultural production is always intertwined with questions of power (7). Particularly in the authoritarian dictatorships of Argentina and Chile, this power manifested itself in state-sponsored censorship that was designed, like the other repressive measures undertaken by these regimes, to eliminate all popular resistance. Under both dictatorships, any cultural expression not in keeping

with the official discourse on national values (that is, traditional values of the Western, Christian world) was considered subversive by those in power.

Although cultural censorship had been evident in Argentina since 1960, during the Proceso it was applied more widely and systematically (Arancibia and Mirkin 15). Television, radio, film and publications were all heavily monitored by official censorship (Graham-Jones, *Exorcising History* 17). The junta first set about controlling the media. Thus, immediately following the coup, censorship was established at the proof stage. A week later, the military government demanded that newspapers practice self-censorship, warning that publishers who failed to follow official guidelines or expectations would be fined. Countless Argentine journalists were detained, and foreign correspondents were arrested or, at the very least, threatened and cautioned to leave the country. Like the newspapers, radio and television also suffered censorship and occasional closure (Piacentini 6).

These extreme measures were not reserved for the media alone, but rather applied to all cultural production. The regime arrested the owners of numerous publishing companies, raided their holdings, and subsequently closed down their businesses. In Córdoba, owners of bookstalls and bookshops were ordered to burn all material considered to be subversive.

After the appointed deadline for destroying these documents had passed, security forces searched various sites in the city and confiscated any remaining "suspicious" material for later burning. Books were seized from university libraries and publicly burnt (Piacentini 5-6)

Unlike film and television, theatre underwent less censorial control by the government. The government was less threatened by what it considered to be theatre's relatively limited diffusion, as opposed to the popularity of other media. Furthermore, rather than draw attention by openly prohibiting a work, the junta preferred to ignore most productions, provided they took place in non-mainstream theatres. While some works, such as *Telarañas* by Eduardo Pavlovsky, *Juegos a la hora de siesta* by Roma Mahieu, and *La sartên por el mango* by Javier Portales, were officially prohibited, in general the repression directed against theatre practitioners remained anonymous. For example, performances were interrupted by government representatives planted in the audience, smoke bombs were set off, thus forcing the audience and the performers out of the theatre, and bombs and fires damaged and destroyed several theatres. Additionally, black lists with the names of actors, directors and playwrights considered subversive were circulated, making it dangerous for any film company or television and radio station to hire those listed therein. Certain theatre people were threatened in

letters or phone calls, and several disappeared (Graham-Jones, *Exorcising History* 17-18). Many artists were forced into exile for their own safety or in order to find work; others remained in Argentina but continued to work only under severe constraints.

Jean Graham-Jones identifies what she sees as two distinct phases in Argentine theatre under the military dictatorship. The extreme censorship and violence exercised between 1976 and 1979, the most repressive years of the regime, required playwrights and collective theatre groups to mask social and political criticism with metaphorical and allegorical representation. Such a non-mimetic dramatic approach was also the result of the surrounding violence, which forced playwrights to question traditional means of depicting horror. In particular, innocent games and family settings became powerful vehicles for commenting on the events of the political sphere. Graham-Jones describes the domestic metaphor in detail:

> In the plays of this period, family dynamics functioned as a metaphor for multilevel power relations, and paternalism reached authoritarian extremes while the offsprings' immaturity symbolized a national state of arrested infantilism. The enclosed space of the home effectively, and frequently, represented the country under dictatorship. (*Exorcising History* 21)

In turning to the domestic and familial realm as framing devices for their socially critical project, theatre practitioners echoed the discursive practices of the Argentine and Chilean dictatorships. The rhetoric of both military regimes likened the nation to a family with the strict father, represented by the junta, as the ultimate authority. In this way, the regimes deemed the private sphere as central to their nationalistic agendas.

By using the kitchen as a framing device for the public realm, the works explored in this dissertation demonstrate the metaphorical use of the domestic space described by Graham-Jones. In these plays the kitchen, long the site of familial dynamics, represents the private realm as a whole. However, rather than perpetuate the traditional, facile division between the public and private spheres, the pieces in question portray a complex relationship between these two realms. For example, *Puesta en claro*, *Carne*, and *Cocinando con Elisa* enact the discursive and actual conflation of the public and private spheres during the Dirty War, although the works offer wholly distinct responses to the dictatorship. While *Puesta en claro* presents the kitchen as a site of agency for the female protagonist, *Carne* and *Cocinando con Elisa* represent this space as a torture chamber for the violent exploitation of the female body. On the other hand, *La nona* and *De a uno* present a dynamic relationship between the public and private spheres

as they treat the question of complicity with state-sponsored violence. Finally, in its use of the restaurant as a framing device, *Lo crudo, lo cocido y lo podrido* enacts the Pinochet dictatorship's discursive creation of a closed, timeless, utopian space, questioning the viability of this project and suggesting the possibility of resistance to systems of domination. Given that these plays span a time frame from 1974 to 1993, I will demonstrate that the setting of the kitchen has continued to be a powerful metaphor for the military state well after the demise of the dictatorship.

Graham Jones explains that between 1980 and 1982, a period that witnessed the junta's decline, theatre continued to evade censorship through the use of metaphor but simultaneously undertook a questioning of national and cultural archetypes. Thus, while playwrights sought to convey the repression and suffering of life under the dictatorship, they chose national myths as their referents. Graham-Jones elaborates: "In essence, they embarked on a 'masked' project of 'unmasking' the processes that both transcended and perpetuated the country's present condition . . . . " (*Exorcising History* 57). By examining the beliefs that had shaped Argentine culture and history, theatre practitioners thus interrogated the role of such myths in the creation and perpetuation of the dictatorship.

In 1981 the playwright Osvaldo Dragún, together with other theatre practitioners, organized the first cycle of Teatro Abierto as a form of protest against the political and cultural repression of the dictatorship. The objectives of the event were manifold, including the demonstration of the existence and vitality of theatre under the regime, the affirmation of freedom of expression, the assertion of solidarity through artistic means, and the recuperation of a public that had been lost under repression. The organizers asked twenty-one playwrights to write one-act plays, and then chose twenty-one directors to stage the works. With the production of three pieces at a time, and each cycle lasting a week, the "festival of metaphors" lasted an entire month. Even when the project's site, the newly remodeled Teatro del Picadero, was destroyed in an "accidental fire," the festival immediately found another home and continued its run (Graham-Jones, *Exorcising History* 92-93). Teatro Abierto gave new meaning to the process of collective creation by bringing together the entire theatre community. In addition to playwrights, directors, and actors, the event involved the artistic collaboration of scenographers, technicians, and musicians, all dedicating themselves to the project not for pay, but rather for the experience of working together. This solidarity was felt by the spectators as well, who began to feel that they were capable of changing the oppressive

situation in which the country found itself (Arancibia and Mirkin 21-23). The project was repeated with new material in 1982, 1983, and 1985.[2] While Teatro Abierto was clearly a powerful display of the vibrancy of theatre under the dictatorship, it is important to note that even before its inception in 1981, theatre practitioners were boldly and creatively responding to the oppression of the regime.

As in Argentina under the Proceso, theatre in Chile during the Pinochet dictatorship was not subjected to the harsh censorship that was applied to television, film, and printed texts. Because the members of the Chilean military junta saw theatre as serving only a small sector of society, they deemed its potential as an instrument of mass protest to be minimal (Villegas 175 footnote). Although the government occasionally closed a theatre, banned a work, or issued anonymous death threats to members of the theatre world, in general it avoided creating a scandal and opted instead for more indirect censorship.

University theatres, which had long been the site of dramatic vibrancy, renovation, and education, were dismantled, or at the very least fell under the control of the government. Although there existed no group of established censors at the university level, theatre practitioners were required to submit dramatic texts to an appointed authority for approval. These authorities often did not openly prohibit a text's

production; however, their recommendation that certain plays not be staged for the safety of those involved ushered in the phenomenon of self-censorship (Epstein, et al. 87). As the director and actor Héctor Noguera explains, in the first years of the dictatorship theatre practitioners at the universities dared to stage only classic works such as *Hamlet* that the audience could interpret as metaphors for criticism of the prevailing regime (Epstein, et al. 86).

In the case of the few independent theatre groups that did not disband during the dictatorship, the government exercised censorship through economic channels. For example, the theatres were taxed 20% of every ticket sale for any work not considered "cultural" by the government authorities. Since there existed no established criteria for determining if a work was cultural, the theatres were at the mercy of the government's whim (Epstein, et al. 89). Yet just as practitioners in the university theatres found a means of responding to the conditions of the dictatorship, some professional theatre groups reorganized and through the process of collective creation began to treat critically the Pinochet dictatorship and its impact on society. Due to the censorship that prevailed at the time, the public's ability, and even need, to recognize metaphorical and allegorical allusions to the political reality of the country was key for the success of theatrical productions, as María de la Luz

Hurtado explains: "Por supuesto, esta actividad dramática fue incentivada por la enorme repercusión que tuvo en la sociedad, la que le proveyó un soporte orgánico para sobrevivir económica y políticamente" (153). Although practitioners were forced to exercise extreme caution in "el decir y el cómo decir," the public became complicit in the process (154).

The majority of works that appeared in this resurgence of professional theatre referred to the political situation of the country only implicitly, denouncing the dictatorship by focusing on the massive unemployment it had precipitated. Pieces such as *Pedro, Juan y Diego* by ICTUS and David Benavente, *El último tren* by Gustavo Meza and Imagen, *Tres Marías y una Rosa* by T.I.T. (Taller de Investigación Teatral) and David Benavente, and *José* by Egon Wolff maintained a realistic dramatic approach to their material, even as their authors relied on metaphorical representation to mask their critical stance. Other plays such as *Lo crudo, lo cocido y lo podrido* by Marco Antonio de la Parra and *Testimonios sobre las muertes de Sabina* by Juan Radrigán distanced themselves from this dramatic realism. Given that "official culture" was defined by the dictatorship as classic, European drama, the mere fact that the above works foregrounded the anguish of the common Chilean citizen, drawing on popular speech and mannerisms, made them contestatory (Hurtado 154).

Thus, the extraordinary violence of the Argentine and Chilean military dictatorships had a profound and undeniable impact on theatre on several levels. The extensive censorship exercised by the regimes forced authors to mask social criticism with metaphorical representation. In both Argentina and Chile, playwrights drew on the images of the kitchen and its related acts of cooking, feeding and eating as they responded to the atmosphere of violence and death which was so pervasive under military rule.

The context of military dictatorship demonstrates Hannah Arendt's theory that power and violence usually appear together (52). However, despite their intimate connection, the two phenomena are not identical. While power is the human ability to act in concert (44), violence arises when this power is in jeopardy:

> . . . every decrease in power is an open invitation to violence - if only because those who hold power and feel it slipping from their hands, be they the government or be they the governed, have always found it difficult to resist the temptation to substitute violence for it. (87)

As Severino Albuquerque indicates in his study of violence in Latin American theatre, four characteristics of violence enumerated by Arendt are especially applicable to theatre: dramatic quality, implementality, instrumentality, and

destructiveness. Violence is dramatic in the swiftness of its acts and the immediacy of its results. It is instrumental in that it is a means to an end, and as such has no justification of its own. Finally, it is implemental because it is carried out with certain tools. And while the obvious tools might be guns, Albuquerque shows that in the theatre violence is conveyed verbally (in spoken language, both coherent and unintelligible, as well as in silences and pauses) and non-verbally (in body language, gesture, movement, and use of space) (12-13). In Latin America, playwrights have drawn on this variety as they search for non-mimetic tools to respond to the horror of the dictatorships.

In this project, cooking, feeding, and eating have proved to be useful framing devices for representing power relations and both verbal and non-verbal violence. Given that the preparation of food in Latin American culture, as well as in many others, has been traditionally delegated to women, typically the kitchen is conceived of as a gendered, feminine space, central to the private sphere made up of home and family. Despite the creativity involved in cooking, this act, the women who carry it out, and the space in which they work are all devalued by a society that considers production as possible only in the public sphere. As a result, for many women the kitchen does not represent a space of creativity and agency, but rather signifies their subordinated position

within a patriarchal society and the strict limits that this society has imposed on their lives.

In a similar manner, the "domestic" concept of cooking and its related themes has been traditionally ignored by academia. Lisa Heldke explains that the lack of academic interest in cooking has its roots in the Western philosophical tradition, which distinguishes between mental and physical labor. This system dismisses the preparation of food as a manual activity that yields a transitory product. Similarly, the traditional characterization of cooking as a non-intellectual pursuit leads to the assumption that recipes and the knowledge they transmit are mechanical and prosaic. Furthermore, the division between mental and physical labor has perpetuated and is in turn supported by a race, class, and gender prejudice against those who perform manual tasks (203-204). While within this framework *haute cuisine* (traditionally practiced by male chefs) qualifies as an art form, the daily process of sustenance practiced by women is discounted as a repetitive task (Theophano 293).

Nevertheless, as far back as the seventeenth century Latin American women writers have challenged and inverted this traditional view of the kitchen and the domestic acts associated with it. Many critics have noted the subversive subtext present in Sor Juana's "Respuesta a Sor Filotea de la Cruz." While maintaining a submissive tone as she responds to

the societal mandate that women should not seek knowledge beyond the domestic realm, Sor Juana nevertheless lauds the kitchen for the knowledge of the world that it provides:

> Pues, ¿qué os pudiera contar, Señora, de los secretos naturales que he descubierto estando guisando? . . . Pero, Señora, ¿qué podemos saber las mujeres sino filosofías de cocina? Bien dijo Lupercio Leonardo, que bien se puede filosofar y aderezar la cena. Y yo suelo decir viendo estas cosillas: Si Aristóteles hubiera guisado, mucho más hubiera escrito. (838-39)

As Josefina Ludmer has pointed out in her seminal article "Tretas del débil," Sor Juana takes the place assigned to women by the patriarchal system (a place of imposed silence and not knowing) and deftly reinterprets this space as one of agency (53). By returning to the kitchen in order to carry out this "trick," Sor Juana resignifies this space traditionally associated with passivity.

This revalorization of the kitchen and the acts carried out there has been echoed by other Latin American women writers. In the novel *Como agua para chocolate* (1989), as well as in the movie of the same title, Laura Esquivel challenges and inverts the negative images of cooking and of the space of the kitchen. The novelty of her work exists on a formal as well as on a thematic level. With respect to the former, each chapter begins with a recipe that gives way to a narration of

events. By organizing her narrative exposition as a cookbook, Esquivel privileges the traditionally feminine discourse of cooking and elevates it to a literary level. Thematically, within the narrative, the kitchen is reinterpreted as a magical space in which social and racial barriers are eliminated to create a community of women. Through the act of cooking these female protagonists influence the world that surrounds them, gaining a certain amount of agency.

Esquivel's work is groundbreaking in that its popularity has ushered in a wave of previously nonexistent literary criticism dealing with the "domestic" concept of cooking and its related themes. The reinterpretation of recipes, the space of the kitchen, and the act of preparing food, catalyzed in part by Esquivel's work, is key for the re-negotiation of women's position within a patriarchal society. As Debra Castillo explains, "Sharing recipes in august pages of respected journals like *PMLA* is one way of talking back . . . Uncovering the sinister undercurrents in the rituals of eating and being fed is another. Dissimulation of intellectual as manual labor, yet a third" (xv). This revalorization of "women's work" is twofold. On one level, the very treatment of such themes indicates their suitability for academic scholarship. Furthermore, the reinterpretation of cooking as a creative process defies its classification as a manual act, underscoring instead the imagination it requires. As this

introduction's epigraph demonstrates, writers such as Rosario Ferré have traced analogies between the acts of cooking and writing. Both processes require not only knowledge, but also imagination, which serves as "the most powerful fuel that feeds all fiction" (Castellanos 151). Thus, a work that incorporates recipes may appear at first glance to be purely sentimental, yet in reality it poses a very real threat to the systems of power that dictate the social and physical parameters not only of literature, but also of women.

As the site of this creative process, the kitchen no longer signifies a woman's passivity, enclosure, and limitation, but rather her own space in which she can express herself artistically, as María Claudia André notes:

> Domesticity, as these texts suggest, is no longer a synonym for house arrest, slavery or feminine submission, where women feel obligated to obey traditional *kirche, küche, kinder* (church, kitchen, children) masculine mandate[s] but, to the contrary, it is a territory viable for the understanding and assertion of collective and individual identity. (6)

These "culinary narratives" recast the space of the kitchen as sacred and safe, "the farthest room away from the pressures of capitalism and patriarchal contamination" (André 21). Furthermore, the analogy between writing and cooking has been extended in the reevaluation of the space of the kitchen, as

expressed by Debra Castillo: "For both of us, to some degree, the kitchen is the 'room of our own' Virginia Woolf recommends as essential to women's spiritual advancement, the place where we write - or more often speak - our cooking secrets and lives" (xiii). Reinterpreting the kitchen as a site of expression not only makes room for the creative self-exploration of women through cooking, but serves itself as an act of creativity.

The reconsideration of the act of cooking and of the kitchen has been followed by a sudden academic interest in recipes and cookbooks. Because the latter exist mainly within the private sphere, they have great potential for illuminating the interactions among those who inhabit this space. As Susan Leonardi explains, a recipe connotes the transfer of information from one person to another: "Even the root of *recipe*--the Latin *recipere*--implies an exchange, a giver and a receiver. Like a story, a recipe needs a recommendation, a context, a point, a reason to be" (340). Although they may appear to be simple and straightforward, recipes are written according to certain codes, following the assumption that the reader has a basic knowledge of culinary vocabulary (Theophano 290). This supposition, which often remains implicit, has traditionally characterized recipes as a gendered discourse coded only for women.

While recipes are written following specific conventions, they are also shared according to established social rules. A certain level of culinary rivalry between women is permitted, provided that recipes are on the one hand voluntarily shared and, on the other, acquired through honest means (Leonardi 345). Overall, however, the recent reinterpretation of recipes has emphasized the potential for creating a community of women in which race, class and generational barriers are eliminated (Leonardi 342).

While these feminist culinary fictions draw on the images of the kitchen and its related acts of cooking, feeding, and eating in order to challenge patriarchal restrictions, Latin American theatre of the Southern Cone has explored this domestic site as a way of responding to the oppression and violence of the military dictatorships. Spanning a time frame from 1974 to 1995, these works use similar images as they constitute three different responses to the military regimes. The plays written during the early years of the dictatorships portray agency on the part of the oppressed and/or a shift in power relations. The pieces in the second group were written further into the dictatorships, and center on the way in which seemingly innocent citizens unwittingly become complicit in the violence that surrounds them. Finally, the works written after the demise of the dictatorships offer a dark, often bloody image of violence directed against the human body.

Chapter One, "Dishing It Out: Service and Resistance," discusses the questioning of authority and the shift in power relations presented in *Puesta en claro* by Griselda Gambaro (Argentina, 1974) and *Lo crudo, lo cocido y lo podrido* by Marco Antonio de la Parra (Chile, 1978). In both works, those who appear to be compliant with the dominant system of power subvert this system from its very center. In each case, the act of serving food is central to this resistance to systems of oppression. Furthermore, the principal protagonists of both plays reject their passive roles and dare to step past the confines of the closed space that represents the authoritarian state.

The second chapter, "Feeding the Violence: Complicitous Acts," examines *La nona* by Roberto Cossa (Argentina, 1977) and *De a uno* by Aída Bortnik (Argentina, part of the 1983 cycle of Teatro Abierto). Both works use the space of the kitchen and its related activities to comment on the way in which seemingly innocent citizens became complicit with the state-sponsored violence of Argentina's Dirty War. In both plays, the supposedly private sphere of the family kitchen, far from being isolated from the surrounding political violence, is actually affected by and in turn impacts the public sphere. Feeding one's family only nourishes the violence, and those who think themselves far removed from events in the public

sphere in fact contribute to the violence of which they claim to be innocent.

The third and final chapter, "Consuming Violence and the Female Body," investigates *Carne* by Eduardo Rovner (Argentina, 1985) and *Cocinando con Elisa* by Lucía Laragione (Argentina, 1993). These two plays offer the most chilling vision of how violence is played out on the human (in this case female) body. By revealing the violent and exploitative undercurrents present in the acts of cooking and eating, these pieces foreground the violent treatment of the female body in the military's discourse as well as in the practice of torture during the Dirty War.

As this project demonstrates, the domestic space of the kitchen and the acts of cooking, feeding, and eating have lent themselves to the non-mimetic representation of power and violence in theatre of Argentina and Chile. The dramatic manifestation of these images during and after the dictatorships has much to say about the way in which the seemingly isolated, private space of the kitchen reflects and even determines the events of the public, political sphere, given the specific historical context of the dictatorships in the Southern Cone.

Chapter 1:

Dishing it Out: Service and Resistance

Puesta en claro by Griselda Gambaro (Argentina, 1974) and *Lo crudo, lo cocido y lo podrido* by Marco Antonio de la Parra (Chile, 1978) convey a questioning of authority and a shift in power relations through the image of cooking and serving food. In each work, those who are exploited by the dominant power system defy this structure from its very center, participating in the system that they ultimately challenge. Their apparent complicity with those in power and the fact that they veil their acts of resistance with seemingly benign and subservient tasks such as preparing and serving food allow them to pass undetected by those they oppose. In this way, the principal protagonists of both plays creatively transform the conditions of their oppression. The possibility for agency portrayed in each work has much to do with the context of its creation. Both *Puesta en claro* and *Lo crudo, lo cocido y lo podrido* were written relatively early on in the respective military dictatorships of Argentina and Chile, before the extent of the regimes' violence was fully known.

In *Puesta en claro*, Gambaro uses the figure of a heterosexual couple in order to examine not only Argentine politics but also gender relations. The central character is the blind woman Clara. Similar to many Argentine people

during the dictatorship, she does not dare question or oppose those in power (in this case her husband) Yet after a series of abuses by her husband and his supposed children (who are adult men), Clara avenges herself by cooking and serving them a poisoned meal. While the play never makes clear whether this poisoning is an intentional act of revenge or an innocent mistake by a blind woman who is under pressure to please, it is obvious that Clara's vulnerability as a blind woman has become a tool for self-protection. In this way the act of serving, while traditionally connoting submission and blind obedience, has been reconfigured as an act of resistance.

The framing device in *Lo crudo, lo cocido y lo podrido* is a restaurant in which the waiters serve a select clientele of corrupt politicians. In an allegory for a series of Chilean dictatorships, the restaurant represents an army barracks and/or the nation under Pinochet, the waiters represent members of the military, and the act of serving food represents the perpetuation of oligarchical systems of domination. While at the beginning of the play the waiters comply with the strict rules of their governing body, one of them gradually begins to question this authority and the official discourse behind it. With the demise of the system imminent as of the end of the work, the waiters abandon their role of service and reenter the society that exists outside the restaurant. As in *Puesta en claro*, serving food

represents accepting as veridical the official discourse espoused by those in authority. In both works, however, there exists a possibility for agency on the part of the oppressed or those who participate in the hierarchical structure of domination.

Thus, both *Puesta en claro* and *Lo crudo, lo cocido y lo podrido* portray the possibility of challenging systems of oppression from within these very structures, echoing Michel Foucault's ideas on power. For Foucault, relations of power are inherently unstable because they are always accompanied by resistances, or multiple forms of resistance. Furthermore, these resistances do not only originate outside the systems of power they oppose. Rather, they are often formed at the very place where power is exercised ("Power and Strategies" 142) The instability of relations of power that Foucault explores sets the stage for the possibility of agency represented in both *Puesta en claro* and *Lo crudo, lo cocido y lo podrido*. In *Puesta en claro*, the female protagonist appears to comply with the norms of the patriarchal family, only to overturn this social structure from its very core; that is, from the kitchen. Foucault's theories about the way in which resistance can originate in the system of power itself are also applicable to de la Parra's work, given that the hierarchy of power in which the waiters participate is weakened from the inside out.

The ruse of working against those in power from the very site of their domination that appears in *Puesta en claro* and *Lo crudo, lo cocido y lo podrido* recalls Michel de Certeau's concept of the tactic. De Certeau sees current Western society as entirely permeated by systems of discipline originating in the dominant cultural and economic order. Yet, for de Certeau, those citizens who may seem docile or passive in fact have ways of operating within the prevailing system that allows them to adapt it to their own interests. Rather than working from their own base of power, those who exercise this resistance deviously infiltrate the governing order:

> The place of the tactic belongs to the other. A tactic insinuates itself into the other's place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance. It has at its disposal no base where it can capitalize on its advantages, prepare its expansions, and secure independence with respect to circumstances. (xix)

Because they must penetrate the dominant cultural economy in order to manipulate it for their own ends, those citizens or consumers who engage in tactics of resistance do so through quotidian acts, elaborating what de Certeau calls a "practice of everyday life." Among the seemingly innocent acts that have the potential to become a tactic is cooking, as de Certeau explains:

> The weak must continually turn to their own ends forces alien to them. This is achieved in the propitious moments when they are able to combine heterogeneous elements (thus, in the supermarket, the housewife confronts heterogeneous and mobile data--what she has in the refrigerator, the tastes, appetites, and moods of her guests, the best buys and their possible combinations with what she already has on hand at home, etc.) . . . (xix)

While cooking appears to be an utterly neutral task assigned to individuals who are at the whim of those they feed and the economic system, for de Certeau food preparation is the epitome of a political act because through it the weak make use of the strong (xvii).

De Certeau's characterization of cooking as a creative act of resistance echoes the feminist revalorization of the domestic realm and its activities. Although the task of cooking and feeding one's family has been traditionally discounted as a manual chore, the endless variations that are made possible by substituting different ingredients in a time-honored recipe suggest that the cook has real power in determining the outcome of this culinary process. Susan Lucas Dobrian describes this reinterpretation of cooking in her study of *Como agua para chocolate*:

> Culinary activity involves not just the combination of prescribed ingredients, but something personal and creative emanating from the cook, a magical quality which transforms the food and grants it powerful properties that go beyond physical satisfaction to provide spiritual nourishment as well. (60)

In a similar manner, Verta Mae Smart-Grosvenor colorfully describes the power and creativity that underlie the act of cooking:

> Cooking is a creative thing. Cooking is one of the highest of all the arts. It can make or break life. The word must be Gemini cause more manure has hit the fan over the twins' love and hunger than any other forces. So, if you cook with love and feed people, you got two forces cooled out already. Dig, food can cause happiness or unhappiness, health or sickness or make or break marriages. (296)

The fact that cooking is traditionally dismissed as a rote task assigned to those members of society who are most oppressed and exploited contributes to its inherent power by masking its potential as a subversive act.

While not treated specifically by de Certeau as a tactic employed in the practice of everyday life, food service shares characteristics with cooking that make it a viable means of navegating and manipulating the dominant order. The very

nature of food service implies an uneven relation of power in which one party dictates and the other complies. Yet despite the apparent authority of those who are being served, in fact those who are seemingly subject are in a position of control. Because food has tremendous power over those who consume it, it follows that those who serve food become empowered in the act. The act of serving food is a tactic *por excelencia*, given that the agency that is latent in it can only be realized by working from within (i.e. serving) the system of power. Furthermore, as in the case of cooking, the sway held by those who serve food goes undetected by those in power, given the assumed subservience of those who perform this act.

The power inherent in food preparation and service in turn resignifies the sites where these acts take place; that is, the kitchen and the restaurant. Following de Certeau's model, these two spaces belong to those who are in power, and traditionally connote exploitation of those who are dominated. Through the tactic, however, those who ostensibly cook and serve food in fact gain a measure of agency through these acts, thereby resemanticizing the site of their subjugation. Thus, the use of the kitchen as a framing device for Argentina during the Proceso in *Puesta en claro* is not surprising, given that this space lends itself to the representation of power relations and resistance. In a similar manner, in *Lo crudo, lo cocido y lo podrido,* the institutional setting of the

restaurant works well as a metaphor for Chile under the Pinochet dictatorship.

In *Puesta en claro*, Griselda Gambaro collapses issues of power, violence, and gender by presenting a heterosexual couple that points to the Argentine military's discourse on the nation as family. By staging the dramatic action in the family setting, she also enacts the conflation of the public and private spheres during the Dirty War, both discursively and in practice. In the militarized nation-home represented in the work, the act of cooking is reinterpreted as an act of rebellion by the oppressed female protagonist.

The issue of power relations central to this play defines the dramatic trajectory of Gambaro, who, in addition to having written over thirty plays, has also authored several novels and short story collections. Although many of her plays can be read from a psychological or metatheatrical perspective, they are most often interpreted as political allegories (Cypess 126). Such is Diana Taylor's analysis:

> . . . el teatro de Gambaro manifiesta la descomposición inicial y el posterior intento de legitimación inherente en el proceso de ruina social en un marco histórico concreto, es decir, en la Argentina durante las últimas tres décadas. ("Paradigmas" 11)

Taylor posits three major phases in Gambaro's dramatic corpus, based on the playwright's use of various dramatic innovations

and the shifting attitudes of the protagonists as they confront situations of oppression.

While plays from the 1960s such as *Las paredes* (1963), *El desatino* (1965), *Los siameses* (1965), and *El campo* (1967) represent various manifestations of the Argentine social crisis at that moment, they portray this pervasive violence without analyzing its causes. The protagonists suffer persecution, yet they are incapable of recognizing their own victimization and invent elaborate rationalizations that contradict the dramatic action witnessed by the public. In the end, their passive response to oppression has fatal consequences for them. The conflation of the public and private spheres in these plays prefigures the same dynamic in later works such as *Puesta en claro* (Taylor, "Paradigmas" 12-14).

Gambaro's plays from the 1970s, including *Decir sí*, *El despojamiento*, and *Información para extranjeros* (1973), share characteristics of her earlier work, including the thematic preoccupation with violence and the passivity of the victimized protagonists. However, this period of intense experimentation forced the spectators to confront the extreme violence occurring around them and to question their role in these events. For example, the dramatic action of *Información para extranjeros* is staged in rooms of an actual house and the audience, split into various groups, physically moves through

the scenes of torture represented in the play. In this way, the work echoes the junta's appropriation of the domestic sphere and the complete collapse of the public and private realms. Similarly, the piece erases the boundaries between stage and life, suggesting that the systems of terror portrayed "get us where we live, nullifying the existence of any safe space" (Taylor, *Disappearing Acts* 127).

In the subsequent decade, plays such as *Real envido* (1980), *La malasangre* (1981), *Del sol naciente* (1983), and *Antígona furiosa* (1986) take on a more analytical approach to the violence portrayed, examining the social mechanisms used to legitimize and reproduce power systems. Additionally, these works are protagonized by active women who, in an attempt to liberate themselves from oppression, rebel against those in power (Taylor, "Paradigmas" 18-19; Cypess 139).

Puesta en claro thus shares characteristics with Gambaro's work of the 1970s and 1980s. As in previous plays, it subverts the borders between public and private, pointing to the government's invasion of the domestic sphere. Although it does not exhibit the innovative staging of *Información para extranjeros*, it challenges the spectators to see the violence around them and not just the "given-to-be-seen," or that version of events put forth by the official discourse of the dictatorship (Taylor, *Disappearing Acts* 122). Finally, the female protagonist of *Puesta en claro* rejects passivity,

anticipating the more openly active female roles in Gambaro's dramatic works of the 1980s.

The principal protagonist of *Puesta en claro* is Clara, a supposedly blind woman who appears to be defenseless. Although the bumbling yet authoritarian Doctor has operated on her four times and fancies himself a first-rate surgeon ("Soy un cirujano de primera"), Clara alleges that he has failed to restore her vision. Nevertheless, he refuses to accept her word and insists that she lie to him by telling him she can see perfectly. At the same time, however, her blindness is convenient for him because she is less likely to question what he offers her: marriage, two children, a grandfather, an enormous house with a garden, a maid, and a cook. Having been "rescued" from her life as an indigent, Clara complies with the doctor's wishes in order to reap the security of home and family with which he has bribed her. In reality he brings her to a shack to care for three adult men who are supposedly his children, and a grandfather who appears as uncomfortable with his designated role as Clara is with hers. She is expected to cook for and feed the family, all the while being subjected to violent, sexual exploitation by all but one son.

By portraying a married couple, Gambaro is able to question the private, domestic sphere and the public, political one simultaneously. As Sandra Cypess explains, "In *Puesta en claro*, Gambaro presents a traditional man/woman

couple whose descriptions accentuate not only the political aspects of the play vis à vis Argentina, but the gender politics in which most Latin American women live" (135). Given that the public/political and the private/familial were conflated during the Proceso, both discursively and in practice, it is logical that the family as a framing device should provide comment on both the domestic and the public spheres.

According to the Argentine military government, the only hope of establishing peace in the country lay in the restoration of the "true" and "natural" values that defined the "essence of the national being" and that were incarnated in the trilogy of "God, Nation, Home," terms that underscore the Catholic underpinnings in the rhetoric of the Armed Forces at that moment. In order to restore such values, it was necessary to protect the nation, the family, and the individual from contamination by subversive elements. While individuals were defined by their traditional roles within the family, families in turn represented cells that together constituted the social body, conceived of as an organism in the junta's discourse. The preservation of the family thus became critical for that of the nation as a whole. Given its pivotal role in the country's stability, the dictatorship regarded the family as the principal site of moral education. Through extreme censorship, the junta attempted to control all

cultural content and ensure that any images of the family or state coincided with that set forth by its discourse. There were to be no representations of adultery, divorce, abortion, or wife, child, or elder abuse (Avellaneda 155).

In the family, which served as a microcosm of Argentine society, social roles were clearly defined according to traditional, gendered criteria, and parents acted at once as models for and guardians of their children's conduct (Filc 34-36, 42). Diana Taylor elaborates:

> And in this new militarized "home," families, like armies, were reorganized and hierarchized. There had to be a clear system of command: fathers had to occupy their place of authority; mothers were responsible for household affairs; children had to respect and obey their parents. Parents were designated military proxies and asked to police their children . . . . (*Disappearing Acts* 104)

The military's discourse defined as good women those who carried out the traditional role of housewife and mother. Although the government attributed a great deal of power to mothers within the private sphere, these maternal figures were expected to use their influence to further the mission of the military dictatorship (Laudano 30-31). In addition to policing the actions of their children, mothers were to busy themselves with domestic details such as buying groceries at

reasonable prices and feeding their families (Taylor, *Disappearing Acts* 78; Laudano 24). Claudia Nora Laudano describes the discursive practice that sought to control women and delineate their social role:

> Aprovechando en este sentido tanto su imagen sacralizada como la culpabilización correspondiente por el no cumplimiento de los deberes asignados, los discursos militares tratan de instituir en la madre las prioridades en la crianza y cuidados cotidianos; a los cuales, por otra parte, se pretende que subordinen el interés particular en función del objetivo general. (31)

Mothers were thus expected to sacrifice themselves for their families and the nation as a whole, foresaking their own needs in the name of the general good. In this discursive model, the woman must give of herself in order to feed others. Thus, cooking and feeding as they are defined in the military's discourse imply the woman's submission.

In addition to representing the family unit as the moral building block of the nation, the junta's discourse directly equated the two by invoking the image of the "gran familia argentina" (Filc 101). The concept of the nation as family in turn laid the basis for the portrayal of relations between the state and its citizens as familial rather than political. For example, at the head of the nation-family was the strict but well-meaning state-father. Following the Catholic model, the

role of the mother was to nurture her children and serve as guardian of tradition. Finally, the official discourse represented the country's citizens as immature children who were in need of discipline, replacing the concept of rights and responsibilities with that of filial obedience (Filc 47).

By invoking the traditional, Catholic concept of family, the authoritarian government defined this social unit as a site of "natural" love in which relations of affection relied not on common experience or on ideology, but rather on ties of blood that implied a moral obligation (Filc 44). Nevertheless, the claim that the "great Argentine family" was in turn constituted according to biological laws proved to be merely discursive. In fact, only those "good children" or citizens who upheld Christian and Occidental values were deemed by the state-father as worthy of belonging to this national family. The political aspect of the state under the dictatorship was thus veiled in the metaphor of the nation as family, hiding the arbitrary and purely political methods by which the government mapped out a new Argentine society (Filc 46-47).

Just as it reconfigured national boundaries around the dichotomy inside/outside, the discourse of the dictatorship also delineated new divisions between the public and the private spheres. The junta's discourse represented the nation as a closed space that needed to be protected from penetration

by subversive elements, an illusion that laid the basis for the violent opening up and evisceration of all social institutions, including the family, by the military government. With the dictatorship's emphasis on the private realm as the site of the country's moral recuperation, the public or political realm ceased to exist, at least discursively. However, given that only the state was capable of judging the moral value of its citizens or of any social act, in reality the entire private realm fell under the control of the government. Although the junta's discourse considered the family the moral foundation of the state and represented it as the only safe place for the formation of "true" Argentines, in fact the private realm, like the rest of the state, was militarized and violently turned inside out. In this way, the politicization of the domestic space signified an eradication of the boundaries between the public and the private realms, resulting in the complete collapse of these two spheres (Filc 38-39).

The simulacrum of a family represented in *Puesta en claro* points not only to the traditional, gendered roles imposed by the military government, but also to the discursive practice of equating the nation with family. In this way, the work stages the familial role-playing dictated by the military's rhetoric. By foregrounding the illusory nature of the domestic bliss that the Doctor offers to Clara, such a

metatheatrical approach brings to light the discrepancy between the idealized "great Argentine family" in the military's discourse and the reality under the dictatorship, thereby calling attention to the constructed aspect of these familial relations. Furthermore, the violence that Clara encounters in the Doctor's house subverts the government's discursive representation of the private sphere as the safe, inner sanctum of the nation. While Clara initially seems complicit with her assigned role as wife and mother, she ultimately overturns the family structure that dictates her submission. However, she must play her own compliant role in this already contrived family in order to subvert it. Key to her tactic are the acts of cooking and serving food, seemingly subservient tasks that mask power for those who perform them.

The idyllic domesticity that the Doctor promises Clara in exchange for her avowal that the latest operation has been a success appears to conform to the ideal image of the family set forth in the junta's discourse. From the outset, however, the Doctor makes it clear that Clara's admission into his home and family is predicated on her acceptance of his version of the truth, that is, on her reassurance that she can in fact see.

CLARA: Usted . . . ¿Se casaría conmigo?

DOCTOR: Y sí. Se me dio. Pero no soy viejo. Nos podríamos tutear.

CLARA: Lástima que no veo.

DOCTOR: Yo sí. (*Reacciona bruscamente*) ¿Cómo no ves?

CLARA: Es la verdad.

DOCTOR (*ofendido*): Entonces, no dije nada. No prometí nada. Ni casa ni casamiento. (*La echa de sus rodillas*) Si me agradecen así . . .

CLARA: ¡No, no se arrepienta! Todavía . . . (136-37)

For her part, Clara is tempted by the vision of comfort and security offered by the Doctor and quickly learns to tailor her responses to his cues. By accepting his interpretation of even her own reality (that is, what she sees or does not see), she recognizes the Doctor as the ultimate, dominant authority.

Clara's difficult social position that renders her vulnerable to the Doctor's lies not only reflects the subjugated position of women in a patriarchal system, but also echoes that of the Argentinean people during the military dictatorship, as Cypess notes:

> In the same way that Clara does not contradict the doctor's statements that she can see, and pretends to see whatever the doctor tells her she sees, many Argentine citizens did not (dare to) oppose the military dictatorships and concurred with whatever the authorities put forth as "true," as legitimate sociopolitical claims. (130-31)

Just as the figure of Clara conflates the public, political reality of Argentina and the private, domestic situation of many Latin American women, the Doctor recalls the authoritarian state-father elaborated in the junta's discourse. As Cypess points out, the Doctor may in fact represent José López Rega, the minister of Social Services under Isabel Perón who recalls the authoritarian, anti-democratic, terrorist techniques characteristic of the pro-Nazi branch of Peronism (131).

The issue of food preparation and service is central to the vision of an ideal family described by the Doctor and desired by Clara. The Doctor clearly expects Clara to play the traditional role of wife and mother. Although Clara is aware of this patriarchal agenda, his offer remains attractive to her in part because the package deal includes a servant and a cook, suggesting that she will be spared from working in the kitchen. Little does she know that her acceptance into this contrived family as well as her survival within it will depend on her culinary knowledge.

Clara soon discovers that the home and family she inherits are far from the idealized image that the Doctor has described to her. To begin with, the Doctor is no more a loving husband and father than he is a talented surgeon. At the hospital he uses Clara's position as a woman and her ostensible blindness to subordinate her, settling her on his

lap like a child or a doll or whistling at her as he would a dog. Even after bringing her home with him, he continues to take advantage of her blindness for his own amusement, coaxing her to lean back in her chair (in reality a simple bench) until she falls over, and then laughing at her. Although at times he directs extreme tenderness towards her, it is only to reward her for properly having played the role he has defined for her.

As she struggles to adapt to her "natural" role as wife, mother, and granddaughter, Clara follows the cues of her newly acquired relatives, who expect her to be familiar with established social scripts and expectations.

DOCTOR: Pero el abuelo está fuerte, ¿no, Clarita?

CLARA: ¿Cómo es?

DOCTOR: Pesado. Con hoyuelos en las mejillas, como yo. ¿Te acordás ahora?

CLARA: ¿Cómo me voy a acordar si nunca . . . ?

DOCTOR: Clarita, un esfuerzo. No quiero traer a mi casa una extraña. Todo lo mío es tuyo, hasta la parentela. Habíamos quedado en eso. ¿Te acordás ahora?

CLARA: Sí, ahora . . . me acuerdo. (141)

Although the Doctor states that he does not want to bring a stranger into his home, in fact the members of his little family are all strangers to one another, thrown together as

they follow the Doctor's familial script. A stranger, then, is someone unfamiliar, or unwilling to comply, with the dominant, patriarchal model. As Clara soon learns, key to her admission into the family is her ability and willingness to cook and serve.

As Clara is introduced to the man who is supposedly her grandfather, it is obvious that he is struggling as well with his own role.

ABUELO (*tímido*): Hola. Buen día . . .

DOCTOR: Clara.

ABUELO: Clara (*La mira. Aprueba con la cabeza*) Cada día más linda. ¿Cómo estás?

CLARA: Bien.

DOCTOR: Bien, ¿qué?

CLARA: Abuelo. (142)

The tyrannical treatment of the grandfather by the Doctor and his two brutish sons, Félix and Lucio, is far from the respect and affection that one would expect to be afforded the trunk of the family tree. Taking advantage of the old man's frailty, the two sons repeatedly knock the grandfather to the floor, threaten him with a knife, force him to rock the third son, a grown man as well, in his lap, and send him to bed without supper. Terrified by their brutality, the grandfather endures their abuse:

ABUELO: Me dan un revés y me voltean. Y entonces . . . tengo miedo. Me ves, (*ríe temblorosamente*) ¡no me ves!, todo arrugado, y adentro soy una criatura que se asusta. No sirvo para defender a nadie, nietita . . . (174)

Indeed, the grandfather's reaction recalls that of a torture victim who is immobilized by fear. Rather than establishing the moral tenor of the household as a traditional grandparent would, he capitulates to the sadistic tendencies of those who surround him. In fact, he participates in this exploitative system by attempting to take advantage of Clara's blindness.

ABUELO (*se acerca*): Dame un beso. (*Clara lo besa*)

DOCTOR: No lo besaba así. ¿No es verdad que no lo besaba así?

ABUELO: No.

CLARA: ¿Cómo?

ABUELO (*se señala la boca*): Acá.

DOCTOR: Llévele la mano.

ABUELO: Permiso. (*Toma la mano de Clara y la guía*) Te quedabas un rato.

CLARA: ¿Un rato?

ABUELO: Chupando.

DOCTOR (*Ríe estentóreamente*): ¡Este viejo verde! (142)

After Clara and the grandfather briefly engage in an antagonistic exchange, and although he continues to make lewd

advances toward her, the two finally settle down to rehearse their assigned relationship.

CLARA: Qué viejo estás abuelito . . . (*Anticipándose a su reacción*) Pero erguido . . . Los años no pasan para vos . . .

ABUELO (*que ha aprobado lo último con la cabeza*): Sí, sí, pasan. Pero si envejecer significa que tú . . .

CLARA (*lo interrumpe*): Que vos.

ABUELO: Que vos crecés. No suena. Que crecés.

CLARA: Pero no debieras envejecer, abuelito. Crecer juntos, sin envejecer.

...

ABUELO: No voy a dejarte, hija, cariño. (*Le sale con acento televisivo. Rectifica, buscando el tono justo*) Hija, cariño. (148)

While this negotiated performance results in an obviously contrived outcome, the two are relieved to have successfully complied with their respective roles.

ABUELO: Nos salió bien, ¿eh?

CLARA: Fue fácil. (150)

Through this interaction, Clara gains confidence in her own ability to dissimulate in this alien, often hostile environment.

Although Clara and the grandfather establish a sometimes awkward yet overall workable relationship, the dynamic between

her and two of her supposed sons is characterized by violent exploitation. The three boys are in fact grown men, complete with beards and moustaches, who shuffle towards her on their knees and grab at her skirts, feigning the speech of young children. When Clara, taken aback by their facial hair, inquires about their ages, they reply that they are as old as they act:

CLARA: ¿Cuántos años tienen?

FÉLIX: Los que representamos . . . (153)

While they are unsure as to the specifics of their assigned roles, the sons hide behind their alleged "innocence" as children while they perform acts of violence against the grandfather, purposefully knocking him to the floor. Although they eventually elicit his forgiveness, it is only after threatening him with a knife.

FÉLIX: ¿Nos perdonás, abuelito? . . .

ABUELO: No.

FÉLIX: Y para colmo, son chicos los que te piden perdón.

ABUELO: No.

(*Lucio canta acercándose al Abuelo. Intenta una caricia que el Abuelo rehuye, rígido. Pasa al lado de Juancho, cierra el cajón, le inclina la cabeza sobre la mesa, suavemente. Pasa del lado opuesto, abre otro cajón, saca un cuchillo y con la cabeza inclinada, sonriendo, mira sugestivamente al Abuelo*)

CLARA: ¿Qué pasa?

FÉLIX: ¿Nos perdonás, abuelo?

ABUELO (*apresurado*): Sí, sí, los perdono. (154)

While on the surface the exchange between Lucio, Félix, and the grandfather could be interpreted as a sentimental attempt at making peace, the wielding of the knife and the suggestion of torture is a subtext of which Clara appears to be unaware. Indeed, for Cypess the two violent children may be allusions to the secret police masked behind civilian dress (131).

Later, after the two sons rape Clara, they again invoke their identity as children, alleging that they are in fact the victims. The Doctor, complicit with the patriarchal myths governing the house, believes them:

DOCTOR: Clarita, ¿es cierto eso? Clara, contestame. Aj, Clarita, ¡qué proceder tan sucio! Te traje a mi casa, te confié mis hijos. Clara, ¿dónde estás? (*Da unos pasos tanteando. Comprende su error*) No, la ciega es ella . . . (165)

And yet, even as he affirms the innocence of his children, the Doctor forgets his own role, believing for a moment that *he* is to play the part of a blind person. His mistake not only undermines the legitimacy of his constructed family, but also suggests that in promoting lies, he himself is blind to the truth of the situation.

Initially believing that the Doctor has offered her real safety and comfort, Clara struggles to reconcile the vision presented by him with the less-than-ideal situation she encounters. As she begins to play out the roles of wife and mother that often seem alien to her, she is repeatedly called upon to explain the discrepancy between her actual position and the romanticized myth of matrimony:

ABUELO: Tenés ojos de huevo duro. Quieren impresionar. ¡ja! Nadie te limpia las uñas. Están largas, llenas de roña.

CLARA: Se olvidó el Doctor.

ABUELO: Ese se olvida de lo que le conviene.

CLARA: No hablés mal de mi marido.

ABUELO: ¡Marido, marido! Es viudo. ¿Te llevó al Registro Civil?

CLARA: No cree en esas cosas. *(El abuelo ríe)* ¡Pero me llevó! Firmé . . . unos papeles.

ABUELO: Papel higiénico . . . (147)

As she becomes aware of the abuse and violence that permeate her new home, Clara repeatedly declares that "it shouldn't be that way," ("Así no debe ser"), expressing her dismay at the way in which her new family deviates from the mythical model promoted by the Doctor (153). However, she initially accepts the conditions of her new identity. For example, although she attempts to discipline her supposed children, they warn her

that she must comply with the established practice: "No, mamá. No empecés a cambiar todo. Si sos nueva, respetá nuestras costumbres" (156). In other words, Clara's role as mother must be to perpetuate the traditions already in place, as set forth in the official ideology of the military junta.

Eventually, however, Clara begins to speak out against what she sees as moral violations, such as the sons' physical abuse of the grandfather.

> LUCIO: ¡El abuelo se cayó porque es un pelotudo!
>
> CLARA (*como si lo viera*): ¡No digas eso!
>
> LUCIO (*con tono normal*): ¿Y por qué no? ¿Quién me lo prohíbe?
>
> CLARA: Pero así no puede ser. Así no puede ser. (*Como tratando de poner orden*) Los acepto grandes. Son mis hijos. Los acepto grandes. ¡Pero procedan como hijos! (152-53)

Although Clara has begun to sense that her new family does not fulfill her expectations, she is still willing to negotiate her role as wife and mother.

Given the aberrant and violent nature of her new family, Clara's blindness initially appears to be a necessity. While she at first relies on her blindness to gloss over the perversions taking place in the house, the third son Juancho and the grandfather develop different tactics of survival. Juancho falls asleep whenever the Doctor and the other two

sons enter the room and regularly invokes his alleged identity as a half-wit. Although his (feigned?) impediment makes him vulnerable to his aggressors, it also exempts him from having to confront them. By closing his eyes, hiding his head in his arms, and inarticulately expressing himself with stuttering speech, he is able to avoid having to oppose those in power, as when Clara asks him if he has witnessed her being raped:

> CLARA: ¿Viste?
>
> JUANCHO (*se inmoviliza*): ¿Qué?
>
> CLARA: Lo que pasó.
>
> JUANCHO: Dormía.
>
> CLARA: ¿Sí? ¿No te diste cuenta? Te llamé.
>
> JUANCHO: ¿A mí? (*Agita la cabeza*) Vine cansado y dormí mi siesta.
>
> CLARA: Qué suerte, ¿eh? No ves nada, como ciego.
>
> JUANCHO: Soy medio tonto. (160)

As Cypess argues, Juancho and his voluntary narcolepsy recall those Argentines who preferred to remain ignorant of the perversities occurring under the military dictatorship (131).

Similar to Juancho and his tactics of evasion, the grandfather uses his frailty and age as an excuse for not protecting Clara, as in the above quoted passage in which he confesses his fear of Félix and Lucio. Having been ordered to bed by the two grown sons, he subsequently claims to have slept through the violation. Like Juancho, the grandfather

reconfigures his own subservient position in order to protect himself. However, although both have managed to eschew responsibility, they have also precluded the possibility of acting in solidarity with each other, and with Clara.

Although the title of the play suggests that all will be made clear, from the outset the fact of Clara's blindness is not obvious. At the hospital, the Doctor attempts to convince a doubtful colleague that the operation has been a success, while simultaneously flaunting Clara as his new prize. Walking away from her, he summons her to him, his lips puckered grotesquely for a triumphant kiss. As she gropes her way towards him, she suddenly changes direction, and with seeming deliberateness embraces the colleague instead. Is this apparent mistake in fact an act of rebellion designed to undermine the Doctor's authority? Can Clara really see, and is she feigning blindness in order to gain the comforts promised her by the Doctor? The events that ensue inside the house, including the death of the Doctor and the two aggressive sons, only contribute to this ambiguity.

At the Doctor's house, it remains unclear whether or not Clara can see the reality of her surroundings. Although she appears to be tricked by the Doctor and his sons, there is evidence that she is gradually becoming empowered in her new surroundings. For example, at several points the stage notes indicate that she makes her way about the hut with movements

that are almost confident, and that she fixes her gaze on family members as if she can see them.

CLARA (*Como si viera, vuelve fugazmente la cabeza hacia Félix y Lucio*): Conformalos. . . (156)

On the surface Clara is simply complying with her allotted maternal role by governing the behavior of her children. However, her comment also serves as a succinct warning, indicating that she perceives the sons' true nature and their intentions, whether or not she can see in the traditional sense of the word. This tactic of appearing to submit to the patriarchal model while actually creating room for maneuver within it is critical for Clara's subversion of the Doctor's family, and surfaces again in the acts of cooking and serving food at the end of the play.

As Clara and the grandfather rehearse their roles in a stilted exchange steeped in contrived sentimentalism, a meaningful communication occurs between the two.

CLARA: ¿De verdad esta casa es un palacio? (*El abuelo la mira sorprendido. Mira a su alrededor, jocoso*) Hace frío, tiene goteras. No huelo . . . el jardín.

ABUELO (*la mira. Borra su sonrisa*): ¡Claro que es un palacio! Es . . . un techo. Y basta. Uno tiene que guardarse, reservarse para el dolor.

CLARA: ¿Para qué?

ABUELO: ¡Por ahorro! (*Triste*) . . . Si empezamos a sufrir demasiado pronto, después . . . Nunca antes de tiempo.

CLARA (*Se le caen las lágrimas*): ¿Cómo saberlo, abuelito?

ABUELO: Y bueno, el momento justo es . . . cuando uno ve que . . . no ve . . . (*No sabe qué decir*) Cuando uno siente que es una pobre bestia que . . . Y los otros son como . . . cazadores . . . de bestias . . puede ser que . . . entonces . . . (149)

In her desperate question "¿Cómo saberlo?" Clara asks when it will be the opportune moment to resist those in power. The grandfather encourages Clara to accept the illusion invented by the Doctor until the moment is ripe for her to rebel. This notion of timing is crucial for de Certeau's concept of the tactic, as he explains:

> I call a "tactic," on the other hand, a calculus which cannot count on a "proper" (a spatial or institutional localization), nor thus on a borderline distinguishing the other as a visible totality . . . The "proper" is a victory of space over time. On the contrary, because it does not have a place, a tactic depends on time--it is always on the watch for opportunities that must be seized "on the wing." (xix)

Thus, if Clara is to overturn the relations of power that prevail in the household, she must first submit to utter

exploitation (in the grandfather's words, much as if she were reduced to an animal). Only then will the moment be right for her to invert the power structure that is in place.

The theme of food is intimately tied in with the question of power in *Puesta en claro*. For example, the Doctor and his sons dominate the grandfather by controlling his food intake. While Félix and Lucio send the grandfather to bed without supper, the Doctor later serves the old man a single mouthful, instructing him to chew it one thousand times before he is entitled to additional servings. Furthermore, although Clara repeatedly fails to comply with the Doctor's expectations, he threatens to divorce her only after she has cooked an inedible meal. Key to her subjugation is thus her ability to cook for and feed others, echoing the traditional role of the mother as nurturer espoused by the junta's discourse. Having believed the Doctor's falsehoods about the presence of a maid and cook in his palacial home, Clara initially appears wholly unprepared for such domestic exigencies:

> CLARA: Preparé mal la comida. Esperaban comer bien. Por lo menos, tenía que saber cocinar.
>
> ABUELO: Lo menos.
>
> CLARA: Pero me dijo que había mucama, y cocinera.
>
> ABUELO: ¿Y le hiciste caso? (171-72)

Clara's incompetence encompasses not only cooking, but also the act of serving food, as she clumsily deposits the supper

directly onto the table, entirely missing the plates. Her blunders seem to indicate that she has absolutely no control in the kitchen or the private sphere it represents.

Despite her ineptitude in the kitchen, Clara attempts to conform to the domestic mandate. Given the importance of the culinary act for maintaining her position in the family, she resolves to prepare a new dish:

CLARA: Voy a preparar . . .

ABUELO: ¡Una torta!

CLARA: Sí. Para que se queden contentos. Para que . . me perdonen. (172)

Indeed, as Clara offers the Doctor her new creation, they are both all too aware of the consequences that will ensue if she has failed to produce a palatable meal:

CLARA (*tiende el plato*): Es rica, comé.

DOCTOR (*súbitamente serio*): ¿Sabés lo que arriesgás? (*Le saca el plato*) No me divierte tirar la plata a la basura. Si es un asco, te mando a los caños, de donde saliste. ¡Y no son promesas! (181)

Clara's willingness to cook seems to signal her complicity with the system. Furthermore, she prevents the grandfather from partaking of the meal, echoing the behavior of the Doctor and his sons:

ABUELO (*deja su plato sobre la mesa y se abalanza*): ¡Un pedacito, un pedacito, nietita!

CLARA: No, abuelo. Para vos no hay.

DOCTOR (*contento*): ¡Está aprendiendo! (178)

Given that the dish in question contains poison that kills the father and the two sons who have abused Clara, it is unclear just what Clara has learned. Is she in fact protecting the grandfather, and later Juancho, by withholding their portions of the meal? The play does not explicitly indicate whether the poisoning of the pivotal last supper is a deliberate act of revenge or a simple accident. In either case, however, the work makes clear the power inherent in the acts of cooking and serving food.

Although Clara's oppressors are aware, perhaps only unconsciously, of the leverage created by the acts of cooking, feeding, and serving, they assume that her blindness prevents her from capitalizing on these domestic skills. They thus lay themselves open to her attack, as the grandfather observes:

ABUELO: No ves y entonces . . . cualquiera puede equivocarse. ¿A quién se le ocurre mandar a una ciega a la cocina? ¡Quiso aprovechar demasiado! Se jorobó.

CLARA (*neutra*): Un accidente. (183)

That the Doctor brought about his own death as a result of such a miscalculation is ironic given his previous comment to Clara on the dangers of trusting too much or not enough: "La confianza mata al hombre y la desconfianza lo hiela" (140).

In the end, the Doctor is killed by his own confidence or trust in what he thinks *he sees* (her blindness and ineptitude in the kitchen) and in what he thinks *she does not see* or detect (his lies and abuse and the power available to her through the acts of cooking and serving food). Meanwhile, unlike Juancho or the grandfather, Clara refuses to let herself be rendered impotent when faced with her distrust in the Doctor and his world.

In fact, Clara uses her blindness as a shield as she creatively departs not only from the norms that govern her role as a wife and mother, but also from the recipe for the infamous, fatal dish. As Félix falls victim to her cooking, it is apparent that Clara has irreverently altered the usual ingredients:

DOCTOR (*Come*): La masa es rica, pero adentro, ¿qué tiene? (*Mira*) Indescifrable.

CLARA: Carne picada, y huevo, y cebolla frita.

FÉLIX (*Se levanta bruscamente con un alarido*): ¡Ajjjjj!

DOCTOR (*Mira reprobador*): Se atragantó.

CLARA: Y pimienta. Mucha pimienta. (181)

After the Doctor expires, Clara again hints that she may have added an unconventional ingredient to the meal, but invokes her blindness rather than openly admitting her subversive act:

ABUELO: ¿Qué hiciste, nietita?

CLARA: Nada, abuelo. Soy ciega.

ABUELO: ¿Qué metiste adentro? . . .

CLARA: . . . Puse carne picada, huevo duro. No sé si agregué algo más. (182)

In addition to modifying the contents of the dish, Clara has also challenged the traditional connotation of cooking as an act in which women give of themselves to appease another's hunger, leaving themselves weakened.

Clara converts her vulnerability (blindness) into a tool for self-protection, and the site of her oppression (the kitchen) into a site of agency. In doing so, she subverts the entire familial system and the Argentine nation under dictatorship that it represents. Given the importance of the family as a pillar of society under the military junta, Clara's confinement to the domestic sphere in fact gives her a real power over the Doctor's house. Her resistance to this system of power recalls Foucault's idea that relations of power are always unstable and are often challenged from their very core, where power is exercised. Thus, once inside the house and family, Clara uses her ostensible complicity with the system to overturn it completely. Hannah Arendt's distinction between power and violence illuminates this dynamic. For Arendt, although power and violence are intimately linked, they are not identical. While power is the human ability to act in concert (44), violence arises when this power is in jeopardy (87). Thus, the violence enacted by

those in power (the husband and sons) in fact signals the instability of the system of domination and the fact that their power is in jeopardy, laying the basis for the destruction of the entire system at the hands of Clara.

Clara not only changes the nature of the private sphere, but also chooses to leave the circumscribed space previously defined by the Doctor. Given that the private and public realms are collapsed in the play, echoing the regime's discourse, Clara's physical departure from the house represents her rejection of the authoritarian state as it is defined by the Doctor-dictator: "No, no me gusta esta casa. No tiene jardín. El doctor me mintió. Le mentira es peligrosa, tan grande. Me voy a buscar otra casa . . . con jardín" (183). Thus, the final message for the spectators is that they can rebel against systems of domination and take an active role in changing the political situation of the country. Furthermore, as Clara demonstrates, even quotidian acts such as cooking and serving food have the potential to be pivotal in this resistance.

The rejection of a passive, complicit role in a system of domination and the physical departure from the enclosed space representing the authoritarian nation surface as well in the Chilean play *Lo crudo, lo cocido y lo podrido* by Marco Antonio de la Parra. Given that the play was to be de la Parra's debut, its prohibition by the government the day before its

opening in 1978 marked him as subversive and contestatory in the theatrical world of Santiago. Although the authorities alleged that the work was banned due to the vulgarity of its language, which was not in keeping with the mission of the sponsoring Universidad Católica (Villegas 185), it was obvious that the dictatorship considered the play politically dangerous for its attacks against the government and the military (Moody 203). In reality, the play denounces the decadence of corrupt power systems and empty myths as it scrutinizes the Chilean political crisis in general, not just that encompassed by the coup of 1973 and the ensuing Pinochet dictatorship.

Although the reference to the country's situation in 1978 is present in the play, limiting the work to this single interpretation would be erroneous. While the critical stance of *Lo crudo, lo cocido y lo podrido* did not go undetected by the official arbiters of culture during the Pinochet dictatorship, in general this ambiguity helped de la Parra avoid the repressive censorship exercised in Chile during the 1970s and 1980s. However, the fact that his work can be read on several levels goes beyond a mere strategy, speaking to his distaste for simple models and prescribed solutions. The playwright's comments on his later work *La secreta obscenidad de cada día* (1983) illustrate his position:

> Nada es tan imantador para mí como lo ambiguo, lo doble, lo conflictivo. Detesto los maniqueísmos, las claridades y las definiciones. Me huelen a flores artificiales, a fotocopias, a pintura falsificada. Tienen un no sé qué de infame y mentiroso. Sólo creo en la verdad de dos aristas; y tres y cuatro, si es posible. El Ave Fénix es para mí el único pájaro posible y sólo las antagonías me señalan los caminos de encuentro. La ambigüedad me parece el requisito de todo verdadero pensamiento. Ser capaz de poner en juicio lo sagrado es la actitud del verdadero creyente y la duda es la génesis de las certezas en que no creo más que por aproximación, deslinde, semejanza. (Bravo Elizondo 33)

The ambiguity of *Lo crudo, lo cocido y lo podrido* is due in part to the work's dream-like quality and its creation of a surreal world governed by rituals. Together with the de la Parra play *Matatangos,* which also premiered in 1978, *Lo crudo, lo cocido y lo podrido* represented a distinct break from the Chilean theatrical tradition by eschewing psychological realism. Until that moment, only the work of Jorge Díaz that emerged in the early 1960s had definitively broken away from dramatic realism.[3]

De la Parra's work was innovative as well within the movement of critical theatre that emerged in 1976. For a period immediately after the coup, Chilean theatre seemed to

have lost its voice, a victim of the censorship that controlled the cultural life of the country (Boyle 145-46).[4] After this initial period of silence, however, theatre experienced a resurgence, and with it some groups began to treat critically the Pinochet dictatorship and its impact on society, in particular the layoffs and the ensuing economic hardships suffered by the majority of the population during the regime. Plays such as *Pedro, Juan y Diego*, by David Benavente, *El último tren*, by Gustavo Meza and Imagen, and *Tres Marías y una Rosa*, by T.I.T, evaded censorship by veiling their political and economic commentary with metaphorical representation. Nevertheless, they continued to work within the realistic theatrical tradition (Hurtado 154). In *Lo crudo, lo cocido y lo podrido*, de la Parra breaks with this pattern by attacking the authoritarian state through allegory, symbolism, and ritual (Cozzi 120; Boyle 146). Key to his project is the framing device of the restaurant. By using food service as a metaphor for the military's involvement in the dictatorship, de la Parra suggests the possibility of resisting the regime from within its very center.

Although the once elegant restaurant featured in *Lo crudo, lo cocido y lo podrido* is filled with clientele and the reserved spots are all spoken for, in reality the oligarchs who populate the site are long dead and buried under the floorboards. Meanwhile, the members of La Orden Chilena de la

Garzonería Secreta practice their trade through a series of strictly regimented exercises, rehearsing for the mythical day when the messianic senator Ossa Moya will grace the locale. The long wait, the lack of new clientele, and the crumbling structure of the restaurant belie the inevitable demise of the political system in power, inspiring the waiter Efraín Rojas to question the viability of this system and his role in it. The arrival of the drunken, slovenly, and corrupt senator who has been defeated in the democratic election signals the impossibility of recreating the old regime. The senator is buried with his predecessors, and the waiters venture out of the decaying structure.

As with de la Parra's entire body of work, *Lo crudo, lo cocido y lo podrido* is a multifaceted piece, eschewing any single interpretation. In general, the play uses irreverence and irony to criticize the decadence of corrupt power systems, the meaningless and routine rites that form their infrastructure, and the myths and empty rhetoric that support them. The fact that the dramatic text alludes at once to pre-Allende Chile as well as to the Pinochet regime serves as evidence of de la Parra's trademark ambiguity. However, the chronological shifts in the work also point to the discursive strategies of the military dictatorship, which represented its mission as the restoration of a lost state of glory. The discourse of the regime described this reestablished utopia as

a closed, timeless space in which all the state's citizens joined together to support the same values. Key to the salvation of the country were the Armed Forces, which, through strict discipline and unassailable moral character, would oversee and protect the nascent state in preparation for its future splendor. Marco Antonio de la Parra stages this discursive representation of Chile in *Lo crudo, lo cocido y lo podrido* in which the restaurant serves as a framing device for the mythical utopian state put forth by the regime's discourse. In the work the waiters represent members of the military who, in serving food to their customers, in reality manipulate the careers of these politicians and therefore control the political events of the country. Yet the increasingly obvious decay of the system, represented by the crumbling restaurant, signals the impossibility of achieving the utopia envisioned by the dictatorship. The questioning of this project by one of the waiters, who has previously been pivotal in the perpetuation of the system of power, only contributes to the disintegration of the hierarchical structure from the inside out. The act of serving, once a surreptitious maneuvering for power within a corrupt order, is now an empty ritual.

Despite the often slippery nature of de la Parra's work, the employees of the restaurant in *Lo crudo, lo cocido y lo podrido* clearly recall members of the military. First, their

secret order is organized into a rigid hierarchy in which the waiters, Efraín Rojas and Evaristo Romero, form the common ranks and are overseen by the maître, Elías Riquelme, who demands total obedience. They take an official oath upon entering the order, carry out exercises and rituals based on the art of service, and are decorated with badges or medals for their faithful duty:

> EVARISTO: . . . ¡Acuérdate que yo fui condecorado por el maitre Riquelme con la bandeja de bronce!
>
> EFRAÍN: Pero yo recibí la orden del mantel de punto . . (814)

The waiters are terrified of the punishment meted out to anyone who strays from the established guidelines, and repeatedly accuse each other of violating these norms. Overall, they are required to suppress any trace of individualism, including feelings, thoughts, or ideas, and must always strive to resemble one another:

> ELÍAS: Por favor . . . un garzón no siente . . . un buen garzón jamás siente ni piensa . . . no tiene más vida que la que le dé el cliente, su nombre, su apodo, su propina . . . Recítale, Evaristo.
>
> EVARISTO: (*Con sonsonete de recitar.*) "Mi destino es mi cliente, sólo él me hace diferente. Su palabra es mi decreto, mi existencia es un secreto." ¿Cómo me salió?

ELÍAS: Ensayen el tono de voz . . . Aún somos muy diversos . . . debemos ser idénticos . . . que nos confundan incluso . . . (832-33)

As Juan Andrés Piña points out, the fact that the two waiters and the maître all share the same initials (E.R.) points to their desired interchangeable nature (17).

Similar to a military company, the members of La Garzonería Secreta structure their world around a series of rites whose principal role is to reinforce discipline. These exercises recall religious rituals, yet simultaneously, through de la Parra's irreverent humor, they are imbued with elements related to food consumption. For example, when Efraín expresses his doubt that Ossa Moya will ever appear, Elías takes on the role of his confessor as an attempt to rid him of his dangerous thoughts. Although Elías prompts the tormented waiter to divulge his unsanctioned plans for modernizing the locale with a jukebox and French fries, he subsequently orders Evaristo to flagellate Efraín with a napkin. By using food metaphors to frame the disciplinary measures of the Orden, de la Parra brings to light the power implied in the act of serving food and the site where it is carried out. For example, as the head waiter, Elías possesses all the institutional authority of a confessor who has the power to absolve or punish. On the other hand, the playwright's ridiculous treatment of the rites performed by

the waiters undermines the dominance of *all* authority, whether religious, military, or culinary.

The characterization of the maître as a military authority figure and a religious intermediary recalls the dictatorship's discursive representation of Pinochet himself, as seen in the following analysis of the regime's discourse:

> Finalmente, se presenta como intermediario entre la Patria y la Divinidad pidiendo "al Altísimo que lo ilumine y le dé fuerzas para afrontar las difíciles tareas del gobierno." El sujeto Presidente es definido como "fuerte," "leal," que "defiende a los débiles;" que tiene "fe y optimismo," "sentido de la autoridad" "conciencia de sus responsabilidades morales." En suma, como un "viejo soldado." (Munizaga, et al. 79)

As Elsa Gilmore points out, the physical atonement to which Efraín is subjected also points to the practice of torture during the dictatorship, and stands in stark contrast to Elías's purported support of freedom of speech, thereby echoing the hypocritical nature of official propaganda (245). Other rituals in the work that employ a similar mix of the religious and the gustatory include a funeral for the restaurant's guard dog (the waiters pray by reciting the menu in French); a wedding ("Que lo que el Supremo Chef del universo ha unido, no lo separe un cliente" [861]); and a baptism.

Although the waiters must appear to be subordinate to their customers, in fact they control the actions of the politicians who make up the restaurant's clientele. That they are able to access the system of power is due to the importance of food for political success, as Ossa Moya observes: "Traiga . . . traiga . . . Cómo come el partido . . . Un partido bien comido merece ser elegido . . . Este país no es para muertos de hambre . . ." (853). Having worked their way into the system, the waiters then make themselves indispensable by subtle machinations that go undetected by their customers. For example, all the tables in the restaurant are purposefully rigged with one leg shorter than the others, so that the waiters can sweep in and effortlessly remedy the imbalance with a well-placed bottle cap or piece of paper, dazzling the clientele with their resourcefulness. Furthermore, they practice the improper pronunciation of French dishes, providing their customers with the opportunity to correct them and thereby feel superior:

ELÍAS: ¿Se dan cuenta? Se trata de parecer vulgares . . nadie debe saber que sabemos.

EVARISTO: Es un disfraz.

ELÍAS: Eso, somos máscaras.

EFRAÍN: Por eso no debemos mirarnos al espejo.

ELÍAS: Por eso. Por eso no tenemos rostros . . . ni

> nombres . . . borrosos . . . sólo servimos . . . No podemos aplastar al cliente con una pronunciación académica . . . Debemos darle la oportunidad de sentirse rodeado de inferiores . . . Cierto que a algunos clientes los aplastamos premeditadamente . . . A esos arribistas, advenedizos, nuevos ricos . . . Por eso la garzonería es secreta . . . A pesar de nuestra influencia.
>
> EVARISTO: ¿Nuestra influencia?
>
> ELÍAS: ¿Cuántos crímenes? ¿Cuántos amores? ¿Cuántas glorias y pasiones guiamos en nuestro restorán? . . . Que ellos se sientan controlándolo todo . . . pero basta un gesto nuestro y podemos quitar un candidato a la historia. (829)

Thus, service as it appears in *Lo crudo, lo cocido y lo podrido* has a paradoxical nature. On the surface the waiters serve their customers by bringing them food and catering to their egos, but in reality they are satisfying their own hunger for power. However, although they subvert the power relation between customer and server, the waiters perpetuate the corrupt political system as a whole.

The workings of La Orden Chilena de la Garzonería Secreta and the importance of the waiters for the political system in *Lo crudo, lo cocido y lo podrido* recall the role of the Armed Forces during the Pinochet dictatorship. Similar to the

Argentine military junta, the Chilean military government semantically remapped national boundaries by defining as citizens all those Chileans who, rejecting the previous Marxist government, participated in the coup of September 11, 1973 (Munizaga, et al. 71). Within this new group of national citizens, the regime regarded the Armed Forces as indispensable for the success of its national project. According to the discourse of the dictatorship, while the common Chilean could be tricked or corrupted into betraying the essential values of the *patria*, the morally superior members of the military remained exempt from such contamination:

> Las FF.AA., en cambio, han mantenido una existencia inalterable a través de la historia no dejándose infiltrar ni corromper. Lo que las hace portadoras y guardianas exclusivas de la chilenidad. De allí que sean los únicos sujetos que puedan salvar a la patria y con ello "abrir un nuevo destino para Chile" o "llevar a Chile al plano que la historia y el futuro le señalan" (Munizaga, et al. 73)

The spirit of sacrifice, indestructible and monolithic unity, resourcefulness, and absolute and silent surrender to the nation were among the specific moral qualities attributed to members of the military, marking them as a model of proper conduct for the rest of the population (Munizaga, et al. 73).

Furthermore, the Pinochet dictatorship deemed discipline--in all aspects of life--as central to the national project of moral recuperation spearheaded by the Armed Forces (Munizaga, et al. 77). Such qualities echo those regarded by the maître in de la Parra's play as essential for any good waiter:

> ELÍAS (*Suspira como un general tras haber pasado revista a sus tropas*): Uno de estos días entrará don Estanislao por esa puerta . . . y no debe encontrar desertores, sino garzones llenos de la sabiduría del gremio, constantes, incondicionales, dispuestos . . . (826)

Indeed, the waiters in *Lo crudo, lo cocido y lo podrido*, faithfully carrying out their exercises in isolation from the rest of society who they disdain, patiently awaiting the arrival of their messiah who will reinstate their former glory, clearly allude to the Armed Forces under the regime. However, while the latter were portrayed as pure and loyal constituents of a morally upright government, the staff of Los Inmortales resembles parasites living off a corrupt system. Fully invested in perpetuating this degradation, the protagonists of de la Parra's work defy the mythical treatment of the military set forth in the dictatorship's discourse.

In its treatment of time and space, *Lo crudo, lo cocido y lo podrido* also echoes the temporal and spatial representation of Chile and its history in the discourse of the Pinochet

regime. The initial stage notes set the dramatic action in the present; that is, at the time of the work's creation in 1978. However, the inhabitants of Los Inmortales make multiple references to past periods in Chilean history, thereby striving to create the sensation that time has stood still within the walls of the restaurant. For example, at the outset of the play Efraín and Evaristo engage in competitive role-playing, each pretending to read about his own exploits in national newspapers. The headlines they invent, however, hark back to the political career of General Carlos Ibáñez between 1927 and 1952 (Varela 85). From further interactions we learn that although Efraín supposedly has been serving clientele for a century and therefore must be well over 100 years old himself, he is still expected to dye his hair in order to mask his age. Furthermore, the maître, Elías, claims to be 140 years old.

The waitstaff's desire to paint itself as timelessly pertinent, attested to by the name of the restaurant, is part of its project to recapture the glory of a past epoch. During the golden days of Los Inmortales the locale gleamed with fine china, Dutch porcelain, and Belgian lace tablecloths, and spilled over with powerful politicians and members of the oligarchy who contrived underhanded plots over a four-course meal and a cigar, with elegant and attentive women at their

side. Efraín longingly recalls the typical events of the period:

> En serio . . . Si a lo mejor volviéramos a estar de moda . . . otra vez veríamos crímenes políticos. (*En su entusiasmo dolido se ha encaramado a una silla.*) Esos nobles adulterios de la gente culpable . . . Esas borracheras de las autoridades . . . Esos ministros maricas . . . Esos guardaespaldas vulgares, esos hoyos de bala en el espejo . . . Volver a recoger esos secretos . . . Evaristo . . . Otra vez . . . Como antes . . . Llenos de secretos. (825)

It is precisely because these events have become only a memory for them that the waiters go to such lengths to create an atmosphere of timelessness and continuity, comforting themselves with the illusion that the history of the restaurant has been an uninterrupted series of successes.

Just as the staff of Los Inmortales interprets events and manipulates their representation in order to deny to themselves the reality of the restaurant's gradual disintegration, the discourse of the Pinochet regime carried out a reinterpretation of Chile's history and the government's role in it. In conceptualizing its national project of creating a future utopia, the dictatorship discursively linked the present with the remote, ahistorical past, superseding the recent past (Munizaga, et al. 68). The regime thus portrayed

the founding of the future Chilean state not so much as the establishment of a new moral order, but rather as the search for and restoration of a past system (Munizaga, et al. 83). According to the discourse, once this new society was firmly established it would exist in an eternal state of perfection:

> Postulada como la "patria futura" el destinatario de la acción iniciada el 11 de septiembre es definido como un estado permanente donde todos los elementos constituyentes del Chile de hoy adquieren un carácter absoluto: "desarrollo pleno," "soberanía absoluta," "orden perfecto," "felicidad total." Representa, por lo tanto, el logro de un estado cerrado, donde el tiempo se detiene en el gozo perpetuo de la forma de ser alcanzada. (Munizaga, et al. 93)

As the protagonists of *Lo crudo, lo cocido y lo podrido* imagine it, Los Inmortales recalls this idealized image of the fully realized Chilean state: voluntarily cloistered, ordered, and timelessly grandiose. For the waiters, the restaurant is a privileged site accessible only to those who are integral to the system in power, as Evaristo explains in response to Efraín's suggestion that they open the door: "¿Y que se cuele cualquiera? . . . ¿De esos que pasan ahora por la calle? . . . Alguien incapaz de entender lo que es un garzón . . . Don Elías nos advirtió el peligro de abrir (817)." Yet, as Efraín points out, it is not that the door is closed so that no one

will enter, but rather that the door is closed *because* no one *wants* to enter. Furthermore, even Evaristo expresses an interest in the plebeian world beyond the restaurant's borders, as evidenced by the common chewing gum that Efraín finds stuck underneath one of the tables. In fact, this privileged site is characterized by the dead and dying. While the waitstaff congratulates itself on serving a full restaurant, all the customers present are actually dead. In an attempt to comfort Efraín, the cashier Eliana lauds the tranquility and order of the site: "Pero si ahora todo está más tranquilo, mira el local, tenemos orden, limpieza, tenemos paz . . . Nos acostamos más temprano y los clientes están calladitos, tranquilos, cada uno en su reservado (839)." The eerily silent scene Eliana describes makes clear allusion to the Pinochet dictatorship, in which order was achieved at the price of human lives. As a representation of Chile under the dictatorship, the stuffy and antiquated space of Los Inmortales subverts the mythical image of a utopian state asserted in the regime's discourse.

As bookkeeper in *Lo crudo, lo cocido y lo podrido*, Eliana's role is to record the official history put forth by those in power and the myths that perpetuate this version of events. Since there are no new clients and therefore no new activity to report, she busies herself with executing meaningless tasks such as tallying the silverware, the menus,

but also the nails in the wine cellar, words, the folds of the curtains, and images in the mirrors. Even Evaristo and Efraín are recorded as inventory, highlighting the order's view of them as faceless servants rather than individuals. Indeed, Eliana's manipulated data is taken as law, and the existence of any element that contradicts this official propaganda is simply denied:

> EFRAÍN: A veces tengo tantas dudas; antes era más fácil, pero ahora veo las puras telarañas, siento la humedad, me crujen las tablas del piso . . .
>
> ELIANA: No existen esas cosas, Efraín. No están anotadas en mis libros . . . Así que no existen.
>
> EFRAÍN: Tiene razón . . . Si no están ahí, es que no existieron nunca.
>
> ELIANA: Ven . . . pobrecito, ven. Si quieres, revisaremos mis libros.
>
> ELÍAS: Revisarlos, será mejor, sabrás a qué atenerte. (839-40)

However, the multiple inaccuracies in Eliana's records belie the huge discrepancy between the order's official view of events and the ever-apparent disintegration of the system, alluding to the empty discourse of the Pinochet regime.

Although he struggles to accept the explanations that the other staff members offer for the increasingly chaotic nature of their surroundings, Efraín is unable to convince himself of

the continuing viability of Los Inmortales. However, he initially tries to suppress his doubts and conform to the model of unquestioning discipline set forth by the Orden:

ELIANA: Debo revisar mis reservas . . . Ah, ustedes coloquen los manteles y el servicio.

EFRAÍN: ¿De qué manteles habla?

EVARISTO: ¡Cómo que de qué manteles!

EFRAÍN: Apenas quedan algunos . . . llenos de agujeros . . . todos manchados.

EVARISTO: Ay, Rojitas, . . . tan criticón que estás.

EFRAÍN: Perdona . . . En serio, perdona, . . . mejor arreglémonos. (816)

Efraín's last name and its derived diminutive Rojitas suggest his allegiance to Marxist-oriented principles. Indeed, his dreams of modernizing the locale by making it accessible and attractive to the common citizen, installing a juke box, hanging autographed photos of famous singers on the walls, and selling take-out sandwiches, indicates that he is seduced by the mass culture typically shunned by the members of La Garzonería Secreta. Eventually Efraín succumbs to his doubts, regardless of the potential consequences, given the undeniable signs of the restaurant's disintegration.

Despite the claims to the contrary of the restaurant's staff, the decay of the structure and the system it represents becomes increasingly evident. First, the shortage of new

customers indicates that the oligarchy, which makes up Los Inmortales's clientele, is a dying race. As José Varela points out, the use of the word *momios* in Chilean vernacular Spanish to designate members of this class colorfully underscores the fate of the oligarchy in de la Parra's play (82). Additionally, the physical deterioration of the edifice and damaged or missing tools of the trade, including silverware, dishes, and linens, serve as further proof of the system's demise. Finally, Eliana's disturbing and prophetic dream ushers in the total collapse of the old system, but not before Elías, the designated military and spiritual leader of the order, attempts to control its interpretation:

> ELÍAS: (*Minimizando, arreglando a su antojo el sentido del sueño, demagógico, chamullento, sin perder su aire de experto.*) Escucha: . . . el sueño anuncia . . . la gloria del futuro; eso, el padre le dice . . nada más . . . lo que significa . . . nada más de problemas . . . (843)

That Elías is powerless to prevent the decay of the restaurant is immediately apparent, however, as Efraín points out the rotten smell that has permeated the ostensibly impeccable locale. Still, the staff is hopeful that the stench has originated outside Los Inmortales. When Eliana asks if the wind might have brought odors of a massacre in the south, the piece makes clear reference to the clandestine common graves

found throughout Chile after the end of the military dictatorship (Varela 83). However, through a hole in the rotted floorboard (again, evidence that the restaurant is anything but immortal), the staff at last identifies the source of smell as the carcass of Adolfo, the guard dog.

While Elías accurately interprets the dog's death as a sign of Ossa Moya's imminent arrival, the nature of the senator's appearance heralds the downfall of the system rather than the consummation of a utopian state. In the mythical version set forth by La Garzonería Secreta, the politician is an imposing figure, popular, and larger than life:

> EVARISTO: . . . Acuérdate cómo entraba. (*Canta.*) Se abrían los portones . . . Un murmullo en aplausos estallaba, con sus enormes zapatones . . . Ahí, entonces, se paraba. Su corbata, su abrigo inglés . . . y los gritos de la gente . . . aplaudían con los pies. Él sí que era diferente. ¡Viva Ossa Moya! ¡Viva Ossa Moya! Los escotes resoplaban. ¡Viva Ossa Moya! ¡Viva Ossa Moya! . . . (*Habla.*) Aquí estoy para salvarlos, así él hablaba. (*Canta.*) ¡Viva Ossa Moya! ¡Viva Ossa Moya! . . . Dilo y lo podrás recordar . . . (*Cambio.*) Pase el señor, viva el señor . . . siéntese, señor . . . era sensacional. (819)

Yet as the waiters soon witness, the degraded and intoxicated figure that lurches into the restaurant is a grotesque version of the messianic savior they so patiently awaited. Far from creating oratorical fireworks, the formulaic speech he directs at the nearly empty restaurant is peppered with vulgar and profane language, standing in stark contrast to his propagandistic characterization as the candidate of decency and respect: "O sea, mi candidatura será la del respeto, el orden y la limpieza . . . Eso que esos jovencitos que se las dan de publicistas, mocosos culeados, esos que los llaman slogans . . . lo repito, el orden y el respeto . . . " (853). Having been defeated in the democratic elections, the senator is so disheartened that ultimately he cannot carry out the charade of his campaign, as he confides to the waitstaff:

> OSSA M.: Por favor . . . no sigan . . . estoy muy recagado . . . me estoy muriendo, Elías . . . no me dejen solo (*Se deja caer al suelo berreando como un bebé.*) . . buuuu . . . buuu . . . Estanislao Ossa Moya . . . debía haber pampeado en la elección . . quién mierda inventó el voto secreto . . . lo teníamos todo cocinado . . . y no resultó . . . esta cagada de democracia . . . perdimos . ahora me pudro . . . (855)

While Claude Lèvi-Strauss's 1964 seminal work *The Raw and the Cooked* asserts the division between nature (the raw) and

culture (the cooked), with concomitant divisions such as instinctual/social and evil/good, de la Parra's play challenges the fundamental nature of these binary oppositions. Elsa Gilmore explains: "In the drama's title, the inclusion of a third element--'the rotten'--suggests the preponderance of corruption as the final, universal condition which inexorably reduces the other two" (238). Rather than signifying an artistic act, cooking is resemanticized in the play as the misuse of power ("cooking" the elections) that results in the rotting or death of the power structure from its very center.

In the play, the act of service undergoes a transformation as well. Before Ossa Moya is married off to Eliana and the two are buried with his vanquished predecessors, the staff prepares his farewell banquet. Yet no food remains, not even a drop of wine:

ELÍAS: Tú servirás, Efraín.

EFRAÍN: ¿Y qué voy a servir?

ELÍAS: El mejor de los menús, para monarcas, para emperadores, para presidentes . . .

EFRAÍN: No sé, ya se me enredan todos . . .

ELÍAS: Entonces cualquiera . . . que tu palabra invoque, él imaginará y comerá y celebrará. (858)

Like the political process they support, the rituals of serving and eating are in fact purely rhetorical and devoid of content.

The imminent collapse of the power system in *Lo crudo, lo cocido y lo podrido* reveals the deceptive nature of the Orden's discursive treatment of time and history. With the burial of Ossa Moya, Elías recognizes the finite nature of his reign and resolves to take his own life. Before downing his portion of venomous wine, however, he admits to Efraín that he is only seventy years old rather than the 140 he previously claimed to be, and that his name is actually Ismael, Elías having been the name of the late maître whom he succeeded. With this revelation, Elías exposes the manipulation behind the Orden's claim of immortality, and de la Parra's work suggests the suspect nature of the military dictatorship's discursive creation of a timeless, utopian state.

Furthermore, although the work stages a cyclical return, it is hardly the restoration of a golden age hoped for by the waitstaff. As José Varela has pointed out, the numerous references made by the play to the 25-year period spanning General Carlos Ibáñez's caudillo-like career is not coincidental. The period of upheaval in the early 1920s resembles in many ways that occurring between the late 1960s and early 1970s in Chile. In both instances, increased politicization of the proletariat and concomitant social reforms brought about a severe reactionary backlash leading to military control of the government (Varela 85):

> A partir de aquí es fácil ver las semejanzas: si en los años 20 la pugna entre el reformismo y la reacción abrió las puertas, primero a la intervención militar, luego a la dictadura de Ibánez, y finalmente al *Frente Popular*; en los años 60 la pugna entre el reformismo de la Democracia Cristiana y la ceguera de la reacción posibilitó el triunfo de la *Unidad Popular* cuya política nacionalista y anti-oligárquica fue interrumpida por la *Junta Militar* de 1973. (Varela 86)

The similarities between the two periods in question suggest that, if the earlier dictatorship gave way to what would prove to be a predominantly Marxist government, then the Pinochet dictatorship in power in 1978 would eventually fall as well. In this way, *Lo crudo, lo cocido y lo podrido* warns against the regime's arrogance in its reinterpretation of Chile's history and its role in these events. As Elsa Gilmore notes, the piece is significant in that it establishes a basic premise of de la Parra's work as a whole: that the specific period of oppression it denounces is not unique, but rather a reoccuring tragedy throughout history, both Chilean and otherwise (238).

The violent rupture of the seemingly timeless continuity that prevailed inside the restaurant is reinforced by the opening up of that previously closed-off space. Before taking his own life, Elías attempts to perpetuate La Garzonería

Secreta by passing on his name (previously that of his predecessor) to Efraín and encouraging him to carry on in his absence. Efraín not only rejects the title, but also repudiates his already assigned name and its interchangeable initials E.R., reminding Elías that his real name is Óscar. Refusing to take part in the corrupt and dying order, he and Evaristo change into civilian garb and head out into the world outside the restaurant's doors. In this way, the work suggests that it is possible to escape, and even to alter, the cyclical historical process characterized by corruption (Boyle 148).

As in *Puesta en claro*, the system of power in *Lo crudo, lo cocido y lo podrido* is subverted from its center by those who appear to be complicit with it, again echoing Foucault's model in which resistances accompany power systems at their base. Furthermore, both works portray the opening up of the previously closed space that represents the authoritarian state. In both cases the spectator, like the principal protagonist, is presented with the possibility of resisting the oppressive state from the inside, making the escape from its confines physically possible. Finally, each piece foregrounds the everyday practice--in de Certeau's words--of food service as a means of resisting systems of repression.

The ambiguous nature of *Lo crudo, lo cocido y lo podrido* and its irreverent treatment of power, authority, myth, and

their abuse surface as well in de la Parra's later work *La secreta obscenidad de cada día* (1983). This piece follows two raincoat-clad flashers named Carlos and Sigmund as they compete for a park bench and the territorial right to expose themselves to a group of schoolgirls. The two protagonists take on various roles in a series of metatheatrical games, finally exposing their identities (if not other aspects of themselves) first as Marx and Freud, and later as torturers who, upon breaking away from those in power, were made victims of torture themselves. In his parodic treatment of these two well-known figures, de la Parra denounces the degradation of myth while simultaneously creating a work that implicitly alludes to the violence of the Pinochet dictatorship. The real perversion in the text is not the exposure of the men's bodies, but rather the misuse of their respective ideologies by those in power to torture members of the opposition.

While *Lo crudo, lo cocido y lo podrido* posits the possibility of ideologically and physically distancing oneself from corrupt power systems, *La secreta obscenidad de cada día* examines the issue of complicity of a nation's citizens with these systems of oppression. Although Carlos and Sigmund find themselves preyed on by those in power, they have been instrumental to their own victimization by contributing their knowledge to the regime's practice of torture. In this way, the drama alludes to the role that society as a whole played

in the events prior to and during the dictatorship. De la Parra expresses this sentiment of shared culpability:

> . . . para la clase media sobrevivir es ser culpable. Esto te pone en una situación donde denunciar es difícil. Venir yo a denunciar es creer que no tengo algo que denunciar desde mi interior. . . Y en eso, siento, que quizás mi generación rompe absolutamente con la anterior. En Chile hay un teatro anterior que está muy contento consigo mismo y que critica a partir de una posición supuestamente pura. Entonces, la generación mía y la más joven está mirando todo esto diciendo "nosotros también somos parecidos: yo soy Pinochet, yo soy de la C.N.I., yo soy todo esto que está aquí." (Hurtado, et al. 40)

As Enzo Cozzi notes, this stance is explained in part by the context of the work's creation. By this later stage in the dictatorship, the longevity of the regime had forced playwrights to question the individual responsibility of every citizen for the continuing violence and repression (124). In fact, the 1983 work makes an implicit allusion to *Lo crudo, lo cocido y lo podrido*, with the reference to "el gordo Romero," the torturer who trained the protagonists and who worked in "that restaurant where all the bodies were found" (111). While the 1978 play portrays the waiter Evaristo Romero abandoning his role in La Garzonería Secreta and the political

structure it serves, in 1983 he is recast as a vital participant in this corrupt and violent system.

While both *Puesta en claro* and *Lo crudo, lo cocido y lo podrido* stage the possibility of resistance to systems of domination, the act of serving food plays a different role in each work. In Gambaro's play, cooking and feeding no longer signify blind obedience, but are resemanticized as subversive acts that overturn the power structure and change the nature of the domestic realm. In de la Parra's piece, serving food signifies complicity with the dominating corrupt power system. In this case, agency is represented as a *refusal* to serve. In both plays, however, the principal protagonists reject their passive roles and venture out of the confining structure, whether house or restaurant, that represents the authoritarian state.

Chapter 2:

Feeding the Violence: Complicitous Acts

> *Almost all of us are responsible for the fight among Argentines, either by act or omission, by absence or excess, by consent or advice . . . the deep-seated blame lies in the collective unconscious of the Nation.*
>
> \- Army Chief of Staff[5]

In this statement given in 1995, Argentina's Army Chief of Staff emphasizes that the blame for the violence of the Dirty War lay not just with the members of the military junta. Indeed, the healing process that the nation has undergone in the wake of the Proceso has involved not only the implication of those more obviously responsible for the disappearances, torture, and assassinations, but also the questioning of the role of seemingly innocent citizens. What was the role of those Argentines who refused to believe that the disappearances were actually occurring? By ignoring the violence, were they somehow complicit in it?

The two works examined in this chapter use the space of the family kitchen and the acts carried out in it as a framing device as they investigate this issue of complicity. Roberto Cossa's farcical work *La nona* (Argentina, 1977) portrays the destruction of an entire family as they continue to feed their voracious grandmother, who consumes every last resource at

their disposal. In Aída Bortnik's work *De a uno* (Argentina, 1983) the disappeared are shoved under the kitchen table as the family takes care of its own, turning a deaf ear to the voices emanating from under the tablecloth. In both works the seemingly benign and private space of the kitchen, far from being isolated from the surrounding political violence, is actually affected by and in turn impacts the public sphere. The act of feeding one's family only nourishes the violence, and those who think themselves far removed from events in the public sphere are in fact complicit in the violence of which they claim to be innocent. Rather than reduce the treatment of space to a facile division between private and public, both works present a complex and dynamic interaction between these supposedly independent spheres.

As Michael Issacharoff explains, the visual and three-dimensional nature of theatre necessarily implies a multi-layered use of space. Theatrical space actually consists of three distinct components: theatre space, scenography, and dramatic space. Both theatre space (as architectural design) and scenography (stage and set design) can be relatively fixed in meaning. Dramatic space, however, is elusive and dynamic because it is mediated by and represented through various elements, including language (both dialogue and stage directions), gesture, and props. Given that this treatment of space as a semiotic system varies according to playscript,

dramatic space is never univocal (55-57). Issacharoff further divides dramatic space into mimetic and diegetic space. While the former is represented onstage and remains visible to the audience (primarily through sight but sometimes additionally through dialogue), the latter remains offstage and as such is purely verbal (58). Far from being independent, mimetic and diegetic space interact dynamically to produce meaning and dramatic tension in a given dramatic work. When mimetic space is fixed by the use of a single set, the diegetic tends to be manifold, representing several spaces at once. Conversely, a more varied use of mimetic space tends to be accompanied by a more restricted use of the diegetic (66). In addition to this visual interplay between the mimetic and diegetic, auditory elements may also contribute to dramatic tension. For example, offstage sounds may be used to represent diegetic space. The very fact that these sounds are audible to the public, however, in effect transforms the invisible (that is, the space they represent that the public cannot see), into the visible (61).

Issacharoff's ideas are helpful in examining the treatment of the kitchen in *La nona* and *De a uno*. In these works, the mimetic space is the domestic space of the kitchen. The diegetic space is the greater public sphere, characterized by the political context of the Dirty War. Through the dynamic system of dramatic space described by Issacharoff,

these works manipulate mimetic and diegetic space, questioning the traditional division of the public and private spheres and the extent to which seemingly innocent citizens were complicit in the violence of the Dirty War.

Clearly, then, in these plays the issue of space moves beyond the aesthetic realm of performance to embrace greater societal concerns. Contemporary social theorists have explored space and spatial organization as expressions of abstract social relations, investigating the way in which physical and geographical markers shape positions in society such as identity, community and borders. Michael Keith and Steve Pile use the term "spatiality" to describe this relationship between the spatial and the social. In the place of traditional notions of private vs. public, Keith and Pile argue that "simultaneously present in any landscape are multiple enunciations of distinct forms of space" (6). Indeed, the multitude of existing and often irreconcilable understandings of space indicates the elusive nature of space and spatial relationships suggested by the plays in question.[6]

While theorists including Keith and Pile (as well as others such as Henri Lefebvre and Michel de Certeau) emphasize the unfixed nature of any given space, nearly all acknowledge the extent to which our daily lives are organized around the concept of irreducible and strictly delineated sites. Michel

Foucault elaborates on the series of seemingly dichotomous and inseparable values that permeate many modern societies:

> And perhaps our life is still governed by a certain number of oppositions that remain inviolable, that our institutions and practices have not yet dared to break down. These are oppositions that we regard as simple givens: for example between private space and public space, between family space and social space, between cultural space and useful space, between the space of leisure and that of work. ("Of Other Spaces" 23)

The plays examined in this chapter challenge this entrenched separation of the public and private spaces, representing instead a dynamic interplay between the two spheres.

For Foucault, this insistent division between spaces in modern secular society has its source in the deeply entrenched concept of the sacred. In his analysis of the individual spaces delineated by society, Foucault conceives of spatial organization in terms of units called sites, which he defines as "relations of proximity between points or elements" ("Of Other Spaces" 23). Thus, rather than privilege a hierarchical model for the organization of bodies fixed in space, modern society concerns itself more with sites, which are only transitory combinations of various points in the trajectory of moving bodies.

Foucault goes on to describe two particular types of sites, or organizations of points in space, pervasive in modern societies. The first, utopias, are a perfected or inverted representation of society, and are unreal to the extent that they have no real place in society. Heterotopias, on the other hand, exist as real places. Rather than invert or perfect society, they encompass it by representing, contesting, and inverting all other sites within a culture. As such, Foucault refers to them as "counter-sites" ("Of Other Spaces" 24). Foucault further divides heterotopias into two subcategories. Crisis heterotopias are privileged, sacred or forbidden places set aside for individuals considered to be in crisis, such as menstruating or pregnant women ("Of Other Spaces" 24). These sacred spaces, however, are slowly being eclipsed by heterotopias of deviation, such as rest homes, psychiatric hospitals, and prisons (25).

Foucault's concepts of heterotopia are particularly useful when analyzing the treatment of social space by and during Argentina's Dirty War, as well as the treatment of dramatic space in the plays in question. Heterotopias of deviation multiplied in Argentine society under the Proceso in the form of Centros Clandestinos de Detención (CCDs), where the victims of kidnappings were tortured and literally made to disappear. Yet given that the ideology behind the Dirty War was one of curing the ailing country and cleansing it of all

subversive elements, the CCDs resemble as well heterotopias of crisis. In the Dirty War ideology of cleaning up diseased elements, the CCDs could even be described as those heterotopias "entirely consecrated to these activities of purification" (Foucault, "Of Other Spaces" 26).

The desperate attempts by the protagonists of Cossa's *La nona* to rid themselves of their grandmother and her destructive appetite by either enclosing her in her cave-like room or displacing her onto society echo the creation of heterotopias of deviation elaborated by Foucault. As Cossa's work demonstrates, however, the violence and death incarnated in La nona originate and are perpetuated in the space of the family kitchen, making it impossible to isolate the domestic realm as a sacred and uncontaminated sphere. In this way, *La nona* turns its gaze on those who, in feeding the violence, bring about their own destruction or disappearance. Although at first glance the play appears to be a farce about a voracious grandmother who eats her family out of house and home, *La nona* in fact comments on the sinister way in which violence and death can permeate even the most quotidian situations. The play's central protagonist is an Italian-born centenarian with an absolutely insatiable appetite. She communicates to her family only by constantly demanding nourishment. Realizing that their meager (collective) income is not enough to feed her, family members unsuccessfully try

various strategies to rid themselves of her. Eventually, however, her appetite causes the death or desperate self-exile of all other members of the family.

That Cossa chooses the home of a typical *porteña* family as the setting of the play is not surprising given the constant preoccupation in his work with the experience of the middle class. The playwright, member of the so-called *"generación del 60,"* elaborates:

> Creo que en mí funciona mucho el hecho de que veo una clase media argentina, que es mi material, que no se ha realizado. Más bien ha ido en decadencia desde que yo era chico, fundamentalmente donde se produce una ruptura política en el país muy importante, que es la irrupción del peronismo, donde esa clase media empieza primero una decadencia cultural política y finalmente económica y llega a los niveles en que está hoy--totalmente pauperizada, proletarizada por lo menos en sus medios económicos. (Magnarelli 55-56)

The frustrations and disappointments of Argentina's middle class have continued to be a constant theme of Cossa's artistic production since the appearance of his first work in 1964, although his style has undergone a series of transformations.

Cossa's earlier pieces, including *Nuestro fin de semana* (1964), *Los días de Julián Bisbal*, *La ñata contra el vidrio*

(1966), and *La pata de la sota* (1967), place him clearly in the tradition of *realismo reflexivo*, one of the two dominant theatrical practices present in Argentina in the 1960s, according to Osvaldo Pellettieri. Like other playwrights working in this vein, such as Ricardo Halac, Germán Rozenmacher, and Carlos Somigliana, Cossa drew on Argentine theatrical traditions such as *lo grotesco* as he represented the decadence of the middle class. By examining this sector's social and economic disillusionment, he and his contemporaries thus broke with the previous realistic treatment of the middle class, which had eschewed such a critical gaze (Pellettieri 11-12). Basing their tragicomic works on clear ideological premises and elaborating the dramatic action through direct dialogue in everyday language, Cossa and the other proponents of *nuevo realismo* sought to move the spectator by representing the tragic daily struggle of the Argentine middle class (Pérez 52). For Cossa, the realism of these works stems more from their focus on the reality of the middle class situation than from a purely straightforward dramatic structure:

> . . . el realismo debe ser siempre conceptual y no formal. Es decir, que cuando yo me definía como realista o cuando definíamos a algunos autores como realistas, era por la necesidad de insertarnos en nuestra realidad. Lo cual no quería decir que debíamos limitarnos a una forma

> realista, a un teatro naturalista donde las cosas tenían que pasar fotográficamente. (Cossa, "El pensamiento" 24)

For example, the influence of Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* is evident in the thematic content of *Nuestro fin de semana*. Later, however, it reappears in the dramatic structure of *La pata de la sota*, which employs a series of flashbacks in order to trace the decadence of the Dagostino family (Ciria 446).

By 1970, however, this somewhat strict adherence to realism practiced by the proponents of *realismo reflexivo* was already giving way to experimentation with new theatrical languages, such as epic theatre, theatre of the absurd, and theatre of cruelty, which had already been applied to Argentine theatre during the 1960s by *neo-vanguardistas* such as Eduardo Pavlovsky, Griselda Gambaro, and Alberto Adellach. With *El avión negro* (1970, written in collaboration with Germán Rozenmacher, Carlos Somigliana and Ricardo Talesnik), Cossa abandons his previous realism to experiment with concepts set forth in European vanguard theatre (Pérez 57). Representing the mythical return of Juan Perón as described by his followers, this work serves as an example of another predominant theme in Cossa's work; the myths of the *porteño* middle class that either hark back to an idealized past or weave beliefs and fantasies regarding the future (Pérez 54).

With *La nona*, Cossa distances himself even further from the realism of his earlier works to draw largely from the grotesque and theatre of the absurd, yet still employing the middle-class family as a vehicle for social criticism. As in *De a uno*, the protagonists of *La nona* comprise a family spanning four generations, including the grandmother (La nona), her daughter (Anyula), the latter's nephews (Carmelo and Chicho), and Carmelo's wife (María) and daughter (Marta). Despite the sense of normalcy present at the beginning of the work, however, the family kitchen in which the majority of the action occurs is soon transformed, at the mercy of the ostensibly benign grandmother, into a death trap. In the context of the Dirty War, the Cossian middle class family becomes a metaphor for Argentine society under the dictatorship, thereby exploring the ramifications of state violence in both the macro- and micro-settings.

Within each of the two acts of the work, the dramatic action is presented in a linear fashion and is divided into a series of brief, independent scenes, separated by blackouts. Each scene follows the same general sequence of events: the conception of a plan for displacing La nona, the execution of the plan, and finally its failure (Pérez 60-63). The succession of increasingly shorter scenes and the growing desperation of the family with La nona's appetite create a sense of growing momentum toward inescapable ruin. While the

first act, which represents the frustrated attempts of the family to rid themselves of La nona, is generally comic in tone, the second act is characterized by a darker class of humor, as eating reveals itself as a form of killing.

In elaborating the dark humor of *La nona*, Cossa draws on the Argentine tradition of *grotesco criollo*, most often associated with the work of Armando Discépolo. This autochthonous theatrical form has its roots in the Italian grotesque practiced by Luigi Pirandello, whose work was well-known in Argentina, and the Spanish *sainete* or *costumbrista* theatre that in Argentina came to reflect the life of immigrants and *criollos* in the *conventillos* (tenement housing) of Buenos Aires. The *grotesco criollo* fuses these two traditions by representing the tragic grief and disappointment of Argentina's immigrant sector. Having arrived in the country to "hacer la América," the protagonists of these works have encountered only failure, corruption, humiliation, and familial dissolution, usually caused by financial difficulties. The grotesque anti-hero is described as part puppet, part human, and part beast--an identity that is reinforced by his staggering and clumsy movements. Because the immigrants portrayed are typically of Italian origin, the language of the *grotesco criollo* is characterized by the use of *cocoliche*, or a mix between Spanish and Italian, and by the use of vulgar terms. Finally, in place of the patios of the

conventillos that framed the dramatic action of the *sainete*, the *grotesco criollo* moves its action into the dark interior of the family apartment, represented by realistic scenography (Pérez 34-39).

In *La nona*, Cossa draws on this tradition of the *grotesco criollo* while continuing his preoccupation with the everyday tragedy of Argentina's middle class. Overall, the grandmother herself is painted in grotesque terms, likened to a half-human, half-beast who darts out of her cave-like room only to consume with feverish voracity all that is put in front of her. Her language, in addition to resembling the *cocoliche* of *grotesco criollo*, exhibits the exaggeration and poor taste connoted by the Italian understanding of the grotesque (Pérez 30, 65). For example, her appetite remains intact even after she has learned that everyone but Chicho has died or fled:

NONA: ¿E Carmelo?

CHICHO: Murió, Nona.

NONA: ¿E Anyula?

CHICHO: Murió.

NONA: ¿E María?

CHICHO: Se fue.

(*Se hace una pausa prolongada*)

NONA: ¿E la chica?

CHICHO: ¿Qué chica?

NONA: Cuesta chica . . . que iba e venía . . . (*Hace un gesto con la mano de ir y venir*) Buuuuu . . . Buu . . .

CHICHO: ¿Marta?

NONA: ¡Eco!

CHICHO: Murió también.

(*Pausa prolongada*)

NONA: ¿Qué yiorno e oyi?

CHICHO: Viernes.

NONA: Viernes . . . ¡Pucherito! Ponéle bastante garbanzo, ¿eh? ¿Compraste mostaza? Tenés que hacer el escabeche, que se acabó . . . E dopo un postrecito . . . Flan casero con dolce de leche . . (135)

Characterized solely by her exaggerated appetite, La nona herself incarnates the grotesque.

Roberto Previdi Froelich examines La nona as a grotesque inversion of the typical values associated with a grandmother (135). For example, the traditional ideology regarding a grandmother appeals to a sense of nostalgia for a benign and gentle presence in one's childhood, as when her grandson Chicho invokes this sentimental discourse:

CHICHO: ¿Cómo le vas a negar un poco de comida a la Nonita? *(Le acaricia la cabeza.)* Nonita . . . la cabeza blanca como paredón iluminado por la luna.

Y esas arrugas que son surcos que traza el arado del tiempo.

ANYULA: *(Embelesada.)* ¡Qué cosas lindas decís!

CHICHO: Nonita . . . ¿Se acuerda cuando me llevaba a pasear a la plaza?

(La Nona, que ya terminó con la porción que le dio Chicho, mira fijamente el plato de su nieto.)

CHICHO: Un niño que descubría un mundo agarrado a la pollera de una abuela.

(Le agarra la mano en el preciso momento en que la Nona ha tomado un pedazo de pan e intenta mojar en la salsa del plato de Chicho.)

CHICHO: Nonita . . . el niño aquel se hizo hombre y la abuela es un rostro dulce que lo mira desde el marco de una pañoleta negra.

(Durante esta última tirada se ha producido un forcejeo de la Nona por tratar de untar el pan en el plato de Chicho. Finalmente, lo logra y come. Busca más pan, pero no hay.) (77-78)

The romanticized figure of a kindly grandmother to which Chicho clings can only be ironic given La nona's real nature. The sense of romantic nostalgia that Chicho experiments is prevalent in Cossa's work, as he explains:

Yo creo que la nostalgia forma parte del ser humano. Es decir, en definitivo el pasado está permanente en

> nosotros como al par de nosotros mismos y, aunque uno rechace algunas cosas del pasado ni esté muy feliz con su pasado, permanentemente lo recuerda. Es una manera de volver hacia sí mismo, volver hacia la infancia, volver a su adolescencia, volver al comienzo, al comienzo de uno mismo. Esto es una condición humana. (Magnarelli 55)

While the tendency to fall victim to nostalgia is natural, ultimately it renders the protagonists, particularly Chicho, vulnerable to the real, destructive force that underlies the myth of the revered grandmother.

For Previdi Froelich, Cossa inverts the ideology of the benign grandmother in order to question the state ideology of the dictatorship (132). He points out that similar to fascism, La nona's demands are endless, and the destruction she leaves in her wake undeniable (136). Nevertheless, she does not directly cause the death of the other protagonists. For instance, Marta's death is caused by her work as a prostitute and her ensuing contraction of a venereal disease; Carmelo (who suffers a heart attack) and don Francisco (an exploited paraplegic) die as a result of their disappointment and grief; Anyula's demise is brought about by error, as she mistakenly drinks the poison intended for La nona; and Chicho kills himself out of desperation (Pérez 60). In fact, La nona's power grows proportionately with the evasion practiced by the other characters, as they ineffectively scramble to rid

themselves of her. This passivity of La nona may appear to be the binary opposite of the desperate actions of the other family members. Nevertheless, Miguel Angel Giella explains that this seeming activity is really passive in nature and therefore ineffective because together the family does not agree to do away with La nona (125-26). In other words, they are unable to act collectively and therefore become complicit in their own destruction.

The work implicates not only the grandmother, but also the other family members who continue to feed her, just as certain sectors of Argentine society were complicit in the violence enacted during the Dirty War. If eating in this work represents death, then feeding is a way of nurturing this violence. The following scene exemplifies the family's desperation with La nona as they concede to her demands:

> *(A partir de ese momento, mientras la Nona mastica sin cesar, las dos mujeres y Carmelo despliegan una actividad permanente. María sirve un plato de sopa y lo coloca frente a la Nona)*
>
> NONA: U pane.
>
> MARÍA: *(A Carmelo.)* Sacá pan del aparador.
>
> *(Carmelo saca una panera y la coloca sobre la mesa)*
>
> . . .
>
> *(En el momento en que Carmelo se sienta, la Nona - sin dejar de comer - golpea con el tenedor el borde del vaso,*

reclamando vino. Carmelo se levanta y saca una botella del aparador)

CARMELO: El destapador, María.

(*María saca un destapador del cajón de la mesada y se lo tiende a Carmelo, mientras la Nona sigue golpeando*)

CARMELO: ¡Ya va, Nona! No sea impaciente.

(*Carmelo comienza a destapar la botella, mientras la Nona sigue golpeando*)

NONA: ¿No hay escabeche?

(*María busca un frasco de escabeche y se lo tiende a la Nona, que lo vacía en el plato*)

. . .

NONA: Termené.

(Anyula y María se dirigen a las hornallas para servir el guiso a la Nona)

NONA: Formayo.

(*Carmelo se levanta, saca un pedazo de queso de la heladera y se lo pone delante a la Nona. La Nona vuelve a reclamar vino. Carmelo le sirve. María coloca frente a la Nona un plato de guiso cubierto hasta los bordes*)

NONA: Formayo.

CARMELO: ¡Y ahí tiene, Nona!

NONA: (*Enojada*) ¡Ma no! ¡Formayo de rayar! (75-76)

Thus, feeding la Nona only serves to further fuel her appetite, just as complying with the demands of the military

junta under the Proceso signified relinquishing civil rights, including even the right to perceive the violence that was so pervasive at the time.

Just as certain sectors of Argentine society refused to believe the extent of the atrocities committed under the dictatorship, the members of the Spadone family are reluctant to admit that La nona is the source of their financial difficulties. Scholars such as Juan Carlos Kusnetzoff and Juan Corradi have cited this denial of evidence of abject practices as one of the key modes of adaptation to fear in civil society. In Cossa's work, the family's efforts to displace La nona--and the responsibility for her destruction of everything around her--recalls the "passion for ignorance" described by Corradi (119). The family first takes her for a physical examination, hoping that her health will fail imminently and they will be relieved of taking any decisive action. Unfortunately, the doctor reports that she is in perfect condition and the Spadones can look forward to having a grandmother for many years to come. They subsequently marry her off to Francisco, the eighty year-old owner of a local kiosk, who is under the impression that he will inherit valuable land in Italy when she dies (again Cossa renders suspect the myth of origins). La nona, however, consumes all his merchandise and remains fit as ever, leaving him to suffer a nervous breakdown and lose control of all bodily functions.

Both of them return to the Spadone household, thereby adding to the already burdensome task of feeding the family. Following this failed attempt to marry off the grandmother, all the family members take on odd jobs. Even don Francisco is stationed at busy street corners to collect donations, until he mysteriously disappears, probably to be exploited by another family ("¡Si el viejo es negocio!" [124]). Finally, the family attempts to kill La nona. They first try to asphyxiate her with carbon monoxide (she finds the stove, produces a frying pan and proceeds to fry up some eggs), and subsequently attempt to poison her.

Even when they wish for La nona's destruction, however, the family members are unwilling to bring it about actively. They set up a possible "accident" (her asphyxiation or poisoning), then leave the room and hope that the problem will be solved when they return. This ineffectiveness has its origins in their blind respect for the abstract idea of family, and particularly for the importance of the grandmother as the trunk of the family tree. When Chico suggests that they send La nona to the street to work as a prostitute, Carmelo becomes inflamed and retorts that the family has always been decent (89). The fact that Carmelo and María's daughter Marta is contributing to the family income precisely by working as a call girl, however, reveals the illusory nature of this decency. Even when Marta begins to serve her

clients in her bedroom, emerging exhausted and ill in her bathrobe only to meet her basic biological needs, her parents prefer to believe that she is a well sought-after manicurist.

If the Spadone family serves as a metaphor for Argentine society during the Proceso, then Chicho represents one of the main modes of adaptation to fear outlined by scholars such as Corradi, that is, the adoption of selfish strategies for survival (119). While the other family members are reluctant to admit La nona's culpability in their situation and take direct action, no one deludes himself more than Chicho. Supposedly a composer of tangos, not one of which he has completed, Chico lives in a dream world in which he refuses to take responsibility for his actions (or lack thereof), even if it means his own destruction and that of his family. When Carmelo asks him to work in order to contribute to the family income, Chico devises a series of desperate schemes rather than finding a job. As Previdi Froelich explains, while La nona exploits the power of the consenting majority, Chicho's strategy is based on the interests of a self-serving minority (136).

For the Spadone family, the space outside the house signifies economic hope, specifically the opportunity to unburden themselves of the financial strain represented by La nona. Rather than examining themselves as the possible cause of their own destruction, they repeatedly try to displace the

responsibility outward, into the diegetic realm, whether onto the physician, don Francisco, or society at large. The root of their suffering, however, lies not only within their home, but in themselves and their adherence to false values such as extreme individualism (Chicho), happiness and self-realization based on material wealth (Carmelo), and blind obedience to an idealized concept of family, even at the cost of the individuals in this social nucleus. The corruption and very blindness of the protagonists is what has given birth to the monster that is La nona (Pérez 65).

While the kitchen and other rooms in the house are made visible to the audience, La nona's room is merely suggested, thus existing only as diegetic space. This space is described as a cave from which she greedily emerges solely to eat, underscoring her monstrous qualities. In order to control the extent of her damage, family members attempt to confine her as much as possible to her circumscribed space, much like the heterotopias of deviation described by Foucault. In the end, however, they succeed in doing so only by bribing her with food:

NONA: U pane.

CARMELO: ¿Qué pan, Nona? Ya comió.

NONA: ¿Galleta marinera no tiene?

CARMELO: ¡Qué galleta marinera! ¡Vamos! Váyase a dormir.

NONA: El postre.

CARMELO: María, dale dos manzanas. Y que se vaya a la pieza. ¡Vamos! (78)

Yet by feeding La nona, the family is actually complicit in her existence. The fact that the cave is separate from the other living quarters indicates not the innocence of the other family members, but rather their desire to hide, deny, or displace the corruption that exists amongst them (Previdi Froelich 137). In fact, the cave's proximity to the kitchen, where the family gathers and eats, ensures that the destruction incarnated by La nona spills out into this familial space, sucking up everything and everyone in its path. As the work progresses, the effects of this ravage become apparent not only in the protagonists themselves, but in the house, as one by one the appliances and furniture are sold in order to feed La nona. By the play's end, the familial sanctum represented by the kitchen is empty, devoid even of the falsely reassuring image of the family meal.

Since the play's premiere in Buenos Aires in 1977, the interpretation of the grandmother figure by theatre practitioners, critics, and spectators has undergone a series of transformations. Perla Zayas de Lima traces this evolution as it is manifested in the posters announcing the various productions of the piece. For the show's first staging the grandmother was portrayed as a typical elderly immigrant

woman, wrinkled, toothless, dressed in black, and toting a metal can in her bony hand. Her representation on stage by the male actor Ulises Dumont underscores Cossa's interpretation of her character as anything but realistic, as he explains in an interview conducted in 1990:

> Escribiendo la pieza yo no pensaba ni en un símbolo, ni en una metáfora; yo sólo caí en la cuenta de que no era un personaje realista. Cada uno puede interpretarla a su manera. La nona es lo que nos destruye, nos devora desde lo interior . . . Si hoy se me pregunta qué es, yo diría que puede ser "la muerte," justamente porque toda la segunda parte tiene que ver con la violencia de este período de la Argentina y que muchos de mis amigos, colegas escritores y periodistas fueron las víctimas de esa violencia. Inscribí la violencia y la muerte cotidianas sin abandonar el tono de la farsa. (Zayas de Lima 202-203)

Just as Cossa's own interpretation of La nona changed over time, so too did that of dramatic artists, critics and spectators. During the initial staging of the play in 1977, some interpreted her as time, some viewed her as a reference to immigration, while still others saw her as representative of a consumerist society. However, her graphic representation in posters gradually took on more menacing qualities, reflecting her eventual reception as an allegory for the

dictatorship. In 1979, two different productions of the play created more sinister versions of the centenarian. The poster announcing the staging by the Elenco Estable de Santa Rosa, under the direction of Eugenio Filipelli, presented a figure swathed in a black tunic, with a skull supporting the metal can. Another production from the same year by the Grupo Escena '75 advertised using a witch-like form stirring a cauldron containing two cadavers. When Filipelli again staged the work in 1985, following the publication of the CONADEP report on the disappeared and the divulgement of the atrocities of the Dirty War, the representation of La nona became more malevolent than ever. The poster presented a figure covered with a black cape and hood. Superimposed on its back, which faced the spectator, appeared an inverted masculine face possessing a mouth-like orifice and displaying its teeth and gums. In this way, since its first portrayal in 1977 as a symbol for consumerism or the immigrant experience, La nona came to represent the Argentine nation devouring its children (Zayas de Lima 203-204).

The fact that Cossa apparently did not intend *La nona* to be an obvious implication of the dictatorship stems in part from his tendency toward dramatic metaphor. He elaborates on this method of writing theatre:

> Yo escribo siempre buscando la metáfora de la realidad. No utilizo a los personajes de mis obras para expresar

> directamente conceptos políticos. Esto es algo que me permitió escribir y estrenar en pleno régimen militar. Aunque en todas las obras de esa época la política gire en torno a los personajes, no me propuse atacar abiertamente a la dictadura, como fue el caso del Teatro Abierto, un movimiento claro y frontal contra la misma. (Einés 46)

Thus, while Cossa's mission to keep his work firmly rooted in Argentine reality led him to paint the decadence and disappointments of the middle class in earlier works such as *Nuestro fin de semana*, in 1977 it inspired him to portray the country's undeniable atmosphere of death, even if he did not clearly name the dictatorship as responsible for the violence. Even in his subsequent work *Gris de ausencia*, in fact, written for the 1981 cycle of Teatro Abierto, Cossa alludes only obliquely to the dictatorship by treating issues of exile and nostalgia. *De pies y manos* (1984), written after the return to democracy, touches on the themes of memory and justice, yet within a familial context (Einés 46).

Aside from Cossa's stated propensity for metaphorical representation, his indirect criticism of the dictatorship in *La nona* is logical given that the work was written and initially staged in 1977, at the height of the repression that characterized the Dirty War. The gradual shift over time in the play's reception reflects the *abertura* or "opening up"

that the nation experienced with the demise of the military regime. While *De a uno* also operates as a metaphor (feeding represents abetting violence), the work's allusion to the dictatorship is far more obvious. This directness is due in part to the context of its creation. The year 1983 saw the return to democracy in Argentina and the establishment of the CONADEP, Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas, to investigate the process whereby thousands of citizens were kidnapped, tortured, and murdered. With the daily explosion of testimonies and previously inaccessible information, voices that had been silenced now made themselves heard (Graham-Jones, *Exorcising History* 114).

While *La nona* examines the role of the middle class in its own destruction and social dissolution, *De a uno* implicates those citizens who, in attempting to seclude themselves in the supposedly uncontaminated private sphere, actually contributed to the state-sponsored violence of the Dirty War. In Bortnik's work, the family members that occupy the mimetic space of the kitchen participate in the disappearance of relatives, friends and neighbors by shoving them under the kitchen table or turning a blind eye while someone else commits a similar act. The memory of these victims, represented in the play by the voices issuing forth from under the tablecloth, recalls Juan Carlos Kusnetzoff's description of the *desaparecidos*:

> Ellos [los desaparecidos] condensan un período de nuestra historia, nos hablan de los lugares desde los cuales los observamos; nos hablan de nuestra intensidad y calidad de participación; nos hablan de nuestras propias desapariciones. (112)

Thus, these voices testify as well to the emotional and psychological disappearances of those survivors who, in losing loved ones, suffered crises of personal identity and social interaction as a result.

Although the protagonists of *De a uno* perceive the family kitchen as a consecrated space, echoing the concept of the sacred that Foucault sees in modern secular society, the violent events that ensue in this domestic realm denote the intimate link between the private and public spheres. The play's events unfold in the kitchen during a family meal on "a long Sunday that lasts for eight years" (58). While the eight-year duration of the Proceso is thus compressed into a continuous meal, the public sphere with its kidnapping, torture and murder is represented by the space under the kitchen table, which is likened to an altar and is tall enough to accommodate standing actors underneath. The family members are determined to isolate themselves from the violence and chaos that surround them, distracting themselves with the ritual of a Sunday meal and its associated tasks of cooking, feeding, and eating. Yet one by one the inhabitants of the

kitchen are pushed or pulled into the space under the kitchen table. By turning a deaf ear to the constant reminders of the *desaparecidos* emanating from under the table, the entire family--and the nation it represents--becomes complicit in the violence they try to eschew. Cooking and feeding, far from being neutral acts of nourishment, actually nurture the escalating violence.

That the dramatic action of *De a uno* occurs on a Sunday, as well as the initial stage directions indicating the altar-like quality of the kitchen table, helps to establish the concept of the family kitchen as a sanctified space. The parent protagonists, Daniel and Julia, repeatedly invoke the quasi-sacredness of Sundays when admonishing their children. For example, Julia warns her daughter not to irritate her on a Sunday: "Ponémelo de mal humor un domingo y te juro que te mato Gaby, eh?" (59). In a similar manner, Daniel emphasizes the higher expectations he has for his family on a Sunday: "¿Te puedo pedir que no grites los domingos . . . ? Aunque no fuera más que los domingos, me parece que tengo derecho a pedirle a mi familia que nos sentemos a comer como la gente, ¿no?" (61). Later, he reminds his children that a cardinal rule in the family is to behave respectably at the dinner table ("respetar la mesa" 63).

As the play progresses, it becomes obvious that the morality upheld by Daniel and Julia precludes any involvement

in or awareness of the greater political climate surrounding them. For example, Daniel celebrates the act of shaving as a symbol of civilization:

> (*De pie. A un lado del escenario. Con una toalla como babero se afeita frente al público*) . . . se renueva la cara al afeitarse . . . símbolo de civilización, eso es una cara afeitada. Los pelos nos acercan a los animales y nos alejan del aire, de la luz, del contacto sensible con la vida. . . . Afeitarse, cada mañana, es renovar el encuentro con el calor y el frío del mundo y enfrentar ese encuentro como un hombre entero, como una criatura liberada de los atavismos de la especie . . . (58)

Daniel's references to maintaining contact with the world around him are strikingly ironic given his obsession with blocking out anything not related to the immediate disciplinary problems associated with the family meal. He goes on at length about the virtues of sealing a house, a new invention that hermetically protects the structure and those within it from dust, noise, or anything else originating from the outer world:

> Encima te ahorrás la aplicación, porque es autoadhesivo y te queda la casa sellada, completamente sellada: ¡está garantizado! ¿Vos sabés lo que significa que ninguna puerta y ninguna ventana te deje filtrar la tierra, ni el ruido, ni nada? ¡No se filtra absolutamente nada! . . .

> ¡No me digas que no es un invento sensacional! En el medio de la ciudad podés estar aislado . . . (68)

Daniel's praise for this method of physically blocking out the surrounding world reveals his zeal for remaining isolated from far more serious threats than those posed by dust and noise--namely, the violence taking place in the name of national security.

Like Daniel, the grandfather seems to crave contact with the outer world, yet avoids any knowledge of the violence that permeates it. For example, the grandfather listens continuously to radio news reports, even during the family meal. Although he is ostensibly pleased to be surrounded by family, as indicated in his statement that "Lo bueno del domingo es que están todos en casa"(58), his headphones effectively cut him off from anything occurring in the domestic sphere. While he appears to be connected to the outer world through the news reports, these cover events in every part of the world except Argentina itself. For example, he informs the family of a news item he has just heard regarding efforts to save the tiger from extinction:

> "Salve al tigre" se llama la campaña, toda la gente contribuye . . . Pensar que si vieran un tigre de verdad . . . saldrían corriendo. Tienen buen corazón . . . porque, pensándolo bien, no son útiles . . . No es como las ballenas, que se usa todo . . . Pero la gente quiere

> un mundo con tigres. A lo mejor por las películas de Tarzán, o por los sueños con la selva, que soñó cuando era chico. En los sueños siempre hay tigres. Y a lo mejor para eso contribuyen, para que no desaparezcan, no del Africa, sino de los sueños . . . (70)

The vision of a species *disappearing* is a chilling one given the continually growing population under the kitchen table. Nevertheless, the grandfather remains unaware that his comments have obvious implications for the reality that surrounds him.

As the play progresses, this effort to remain ignorant of the greater political situation becomes increasingly difficult. At the beginning of the play the family members are able to ignore the subtle movements of the tablecloth and the knocks that emanate from this space, as described in the stage directions regarding Julia: "Un movimiento en el mantel la detiene. Se queda sin dejar de batir. Esperando. El movimiento se repite. Acomoda el mantel y lo patea delicadamente debajo de la mesa. Vuelve a esperar. Todo quieto, continúa su andar" (59). However, the subtle movements under the table grow in intensity throughout the play, and eventually the protagonists themselves are shown disappearing or being pushed into this never-never land representing the public sphere. Jean Graham-Jones explains that each protagonist who is sacrificed represents a different kind of

victim of the Proceso: Julia's brother Héctor is pushed under the table by Daniel when he announces his voluntary exile to Europe; Gaby's boyfriend José is sent into hiding because his sister, Inés, is disappeared by the military police; Rita, the mother of José and Inés, is pushed under the table by Julia when she asks for support. The youngest son's death in the Malvinas/Falklands War makes him the final victim (*Exorcising History* 113).

In this way, the moral policy of "taking care of one's own" practiced by Daniel and Julia can only come to signify an abandonment of those who need them the most, as family members are gradually victimized by the political situation. For example, Julia always prepares a special cake for Héctor when he visits. After his exile to Europe, however, she blocks her memories of him by obstinately focusing on her role as a nurturing mother.

PABLO: ¿A quién era que le gustaba tanto el pastel de Mamá?

JULIA: A vos, tesoro . . .

PABLO: No, yo digo a alguien que venía de visita, que vos se lo hacías especialmente . . .

JULIA: Yo siempre hice el pastel para ustedes tesoro, acaso alguna vez viste que tu madre se preocupara más por los extraños que por su familia? (68)

Because Julia is unable to tolerate the political conscience embodied by Héctor, her own brother passes from representing family to being a complete stranger.

In a similar manner, the image of the nurturing mother who gives sustenance to others takes on sinister characteristics when Rita, the mother of the now-disappeared José and Inés, arrives asking for support.

> RITA: ¿Vos crées que una madre puede quedarse callada?
>
> JULIA: ¿Qué tiene que ver Gaby? ¡Claudio no era amigo! ¡Pablo es demasiado chico! Cuando uno se pasa la mañana cocinando, lo menos que puede esperar es que prueben un pedacito. . . ¿Qué te cuesta probar un pedacito? (*Ha ido subiendo el tono hasta el grito, mientras empuja a Rita, que no se resiste, hacia abajo de la mesa. . . Acomoda el mantel, prolijamente. Mira a su alrededor*) Si nadie repite, voy a creer en serio que estoy perdiendo la mano . . . (69-70)

Rather than providing nourishment, then, food in *De a uno* represents an obligatory palliative for the violence of the political situation.

The play's dramatic structure underscores its thematic reinterpretation of the Sunday meal ritual as a scene of negation and complicity. Within this one-act play, the dramatic action is framed at once by the structure of the

eight-year meal and the victimization of the above-mentioned characters. The first cut establishes the familiar setting of a family meal, as Julia prepares the food, Gaby sets the table, and Daniel and the grandfather prepare to partake of their weekly vermouth. Héctor's self-exile occurs as the family enjoys the main dish. As Julia clears the table and prepares dessert, José and Inés join the ever-increasing population under the table. During dessert, Rita joins them. As Pablo leaves for the war in the Malvinas/Falklands Islands, Gaby forgets José and follows her mother's example of distracting herself with cooking and feeding. The victimization of each of these characters and the passage to the next "course" of the meal are marked by a slight rise in volume of the distorted *criollo* waltz. In the final two cuts, the illusion of a meal is no longer intact as the protagonists turn on each other with resentful accusations for the death of Pablo. Thus, as this family is apparently nourished, in fact it eats away at itself and others until there no longer exists any semblance of tranquil unity.

In the society of fear created by the military during the Proceso, Argentina's citizens chose not to see the violence that surrounded them, just as the protagonists of *De a uno* remain ignorant of the ever-growing population under the table. Even in 1976 and 1977, at the height of the disappearances, Argentines refused to believe the gravity of

the carnage occurring in their own country (Suárez-Orozco 470). Terrified and paralyzed by the military's show of force, Argentinean citizens became metaphorically blinded and mute; nobody saw anything, nobody knew anything. Juan Carlos Kusnetzoff has denominated this phenomenon "percepticide," or the literal and voluntary death of perception (107). This knowing what *not to know* in fact constituted a coping mechanism that corresponded to the military's method of disappearing its victims.

The vacuum or emptiness created by the disappearance of a loved one and the need not to know in turn produced a vacuum in the social function of the remaining individuals, manifesting itself in the disintegration of both macro- and micro-groups (Pelento 232). The overarching cruelty of the dictatorship caused a proliferation of what Juan Corradi calls "micro-despotisms" in schools, work places, family settings, and public places (119). Marcelo Suárez-Orozco elaborates: "A massive and unparalleled social centrifugal force was set in motion. People no longer trusted one another, not even close friends. The terror induced silence and, perhaps more importantly, social isolationism and alienation" (483). Thus, while the military appropriated the vocabulary and images associated with the family, the violence it enacted ultimately undermined this sacred unit. The meaning of "private" space,

those who inhabit it, and the activity carried out in it were all resemanticized given the atrocities of the Dirty War.

The protagonists of *De a uno* desperately attempt to separate the private and public spheres. For them, the private space of the family kitchen (the mimetic space) can be easily closed off from the surrounding, public sphere (the diegetic space). The fact that this political reality is represented by the space under the table, however, signifies that the public sphere is subsumed within the private. From this central point the black hole under the table exerts both a centrifugal and centripetal force on the kitchen and family. First, it spills out into the surrounding space, contaminating the seemingly benign domestic sphere with its kidnappings. Second, those in the kitchen push others under the table, contributing to the inward pull that sucks up all in its wake. Any attempts to seal off the family unit from the outside are fruitless, as the point of vulnerability lies precisely in the heart of the kitchen. The final line of the play, the grandfather's repeated declaration that "Lo bueno del domingo es que están todos en casa" (72), has acquired an ironic significance. "Everyone" now refers not only to family members, but to all the victims who reside in the "collective urn" represented by the kitchen table (Glickman 182). These victims of the Dirty War are constantly present in the

domestic sphere as a reminder of each individual's complicity in the state-sponsored violence.

In addition to the dynamic interplay between the ostensibly independent mimetic and diegetic spaces, the auditory elements of the play also underscore the complicated relationship between these two spheres. The stage directions indicate the presence of a "frenetic criollo waltz" that periodically becomes distorted, rising and falling like an animal's cry, at times distant and muffled, sudden and loud, or monotonous and resigned. At times the protagonists should appear to hear the cries and to want to scream in order to smother them, while at others the sounds go unnoticed (57). The other auditory component is comprised of the knocks and voices emerging from under the kitchen table. Each protagonist who is pulled or pushed into this space repeats his or her respective line. For Héctor, it is the reminder that "No se puede vivir sin testigos y sin memoria"; for José, the question "¿En serio le interesa mi opinión?"; for his sister Inés, "Es una suerte que no sepa nada"; and for their mother Rita, "¿Vos creés que una madre puede quedarse callada?" In this way, the voices serve as a constant reminder of the victims of the Dirty War. In Issacharoff's words, this invisible, auditory space "invades the inner, mimetic space. The invisible thus invades and finally overcomes the visible" (61).

The transformation of the diegetic into the mimetic in *De a uno* makes the previously invisible events of the public sphere visible to the spectators, challenging them to witness the violence that the play's protagonists willfully ignore. In this way, Bortnik's work implicates not only the representatives of the middle class that it portrays, but also those members of the public who refuse to come to terms with Argentina's recent past, preferring to contain the country's proverbial dirty laundry under the kitchen table. The central position of the public sphere, on the stage and in the play's project, manifests the *abertura* that marked the context of the work's creation. On the other hand, in *La nona* the public realm--represented by the grandmother's cave--remains diegetic and therefore not visible to the audience. This more indirect treatment of the political realm is logical given the repressive atmosphere in Argentina in 1977.

Just as the political reality sucks up the seemingly private sphere of the family in *De a uno*, the junta's ideology appropriated the space and language of the private domain. Likening the country to a house that needed to be put in order, the military drew on familial metaphors in order to more easily control the population and the spaces it inhabited. As Diana Taylor has elaborated, families were organized into a strict gender-based hierarchy, with fathers in the position of authority, mothers responsible for

household affairs, and children expected to obey their parents (*Disappearing Acts* 104).

The protagonists of Bortnik's work repeatedly invoke these clearly delineated family roles. For instance, Julia prepares the meals, and at the end of the work her daughter Gaby also assumes this role. Gaby is always assigned the task of setting the table. Daniel elaborates his views on family values and politics and frequently admonishes his children to respect their elders and the ritual of the Sunday meal. This strict adherence to a gender-based division of labor speaks not only to traditional family values, but also to the ideology of the junta.

Yet, despite the centrifugal action in which the violence of the public sphere permeates the private realm, the remaining protagonists have essentially isolated themselves from others with whom they could seek solidarity, as expressed by Claudio, the oldest son:

> DANIEL: ¡Con esa mentalidad derrotista no vamos a ninguna parte! Este es un momento para estar unidos . . .
>
> CLAUDIO: ¿Unidos con quién, Papá?: ¿Con quién querés unirte, ahora? Ahora no podemos . . . Tenemos ese material autoadhesivo en las ventanas, no deja entrar el polvo, ni los ruidos . . . ¡No deja entrar, Papá! ¿No te acordás? (72)

Again, the micro-setting of the family serves to represent the macro-setting of society as a whole, isolated and paralyzed as a result of state-sponsored violence. As Juan Corradi notes, "A major problem for social movements of resistance is to move away from defensive to positive action, from the quest for insulated identity to meaningful collective enterprise" (126). Through their strict adherence to an empty discourse on family, the protagonists of *De a uno* have trapped themselves in the kitchen, which represents anything but a utopian space. The viscous material they have applied to the house as a form of protection thus serves as a metaphor for fear and ultimately ensures their social alienation rather than their survival.

As Nora Mazziotti has noted, in *De a uno* Bortnik utilizes certain images traditionally associated with *costumbrismo*, such as the family, the family table, the tablecloth, and the music (the *criollo* waltz), yet resemanticizes them as she implicates the Argentine middle class for their submission to dictatorial power. In using the image of a family gathering around a table, Bortnik draws on a long tradition in Argentina's theatre as well as in the collective imagination of the Argentine *pueblo*. The family table was a privileged site in *costumbrista* theatre of the early twentieth century, which sought to represent the lifestyle of those Argentines belonging to a particular social

class, profession, or immigrant population. While works such as *Al campo* (1902) by Nicolás Granada and *Así es la vida* (1934) de Arnaldo Malfatti y de las Llanderas used the image of the table to explore the daily vicissitudes of the family, overall they offered a benign treatment of the domestic space. The same image reappeared in the 1960s and 1970s in works dealing with the frustrations and disappointments of the middle class, such as *Nuestro fin de semana* (1964) by Roberto Cossa. In this way, the table and the domestic space surrounding it became sites characterized by questioning and psychological analysis (Mazzioti 92-93). In *De a uno*, the table serves as the central point in the illusion of familial safety and morality. Rather than represent the strength of a unified family, it is in fact the rotten center, the weak point around which the family allows its own destruction. In a similar manner, the tablecloth, ordinarily associated with beauty and elegance, is immense and oppressive and literally becomes tainted with death (the initial stage directions indicate that the blue tablecloth may gradually become stained red by the play's end [57]).

The *criollo* waltz that periodically erupts into the mimetic space of the kitchen also has its origins in *costumbrista* theatre. Painting an idyllic world involving the figures of the ideal mother and saintly girlfriend, the barrio and the friendships forged therein, this music with its

accompanying sentimental lyrics was typically reserved for the celebration of special occasions such as weddings, *quinceañeras* and anniversaries (Mazzioti 94). In *De a uno*, however, Bortnik deforms both the music and its meaning. As it rises and falls, distorted, like an animal's cry, it ceases to allude to an ideal world and instead points to the ineluctable violence and death that spread throughout the kitchen.

Before the appearance of *De a uno* in the 1983 cycle of Teatro Abierto, Bortnik, born in Buenos Aires to Ukrainian immigrants, had already received recognition for her work in theatre, film and television. Her first theatrical work, *Soldados y soldaditos*, premiered in 1972, followed by *Tres por Chéjov* (1974) and *Dale nomás* (1975). Her play *Papá querido* premiered as part of the 1981 cycle of Teatro Abierto, followed that same year by *Domesticados*, for which she was awarded the Premio Argentores. *Primaveras,* from 1984, rounds out her dramatic production. Among the many movie scripts she has written is the well known *La historia oficial* (1985, directed by Luis Puenzo).

The use of the family as a means of examining Argentina's history and the role of the individual in these events is present as well in some of Bortnik's other dramatic pieces and movie scripts. In *Papá querido*, four children of a deceased revolutionary meet each other for the first time and confront

not only their perceptions of their father but also of themselves and who they have become as adults. While their father's legacy may be the utopian ideals he struggled to instill in them, the actual inheritance he leaves for his offspring consists of the letters each wrote to him. As each middle age protagonist reads his or her letters, he or she must come to terms with having fallen short of fulfilling youthful plans and dreams. As the play ends, the four children, now together, now individually, recite one of these letters:

> [Q]ue cada uno es responsable por toda la libertad, por toda la solidaridad, por toda la dignidad, por toda la justicia y por todo el amor en el mundo. Y que a esta responsabilidad no se puede renunciar . . . y que nadie puede cargarla por nosotros si queremos ser libres . . . voy a ser capaz de recordar todo esto hasta que me muera y que nunca, nunca voy a traicionarte o traicionarme . . . Lo único que quiero es crecer, crecer rápido, para convertirme en el ser humano que vos me enseñaste a ser . . en alguien como vos, Papá querido . . . (26)

The protagonists' ineffectiveness lies not only in failing to live up to their father's social ideals, but also in denying themselves the role of active subjects in their own history. By conflating their absent father with his ideals, they are unable to internalize his values and achieve self-

actualization (Graham-Jones, *Exorcising History* 110). By using the family as a metaphor for the Argentine *pueblo*, the work suggests the need not only for individual self-criticism but also for a collective self-analysis in light of the Proceso (Graham-Jones, "Decir 'no'" 195).

If *Papá querido* suggests the need for personal and collective self-criticism in history, then *De a uno* carries this analysis one step further, indicting the Argentine middle class for its collective complicity in the violence of the Proceso. While the protagonists of *Papá querido* must confront their failure to fulfill their own ambitions, those of *De a uno* are faced with the consequences for others and for themselves of their actions or failure to act (Graham-Jones, *Exorcising History* 108).

Bortnik's subsequent work *Primaveras* (1984) touches as well on the themes of familial relations and the passage of time. By dividing the dramatic action into three distinct springtime cuts (1958, 1973, and 1983) that span a twenty-five-year period, Bortnik is able not only to examine the changing values of each character over the course of time, but also to present various visions of how time passes, according to the perceptions of each protagonist. Like *Papá querido* and *De a uno*, *Primaveras* establishes the need for self-analysis in relation to the country's history, and as such serves as a

mirror in which the audience is obliged to assess its role in these events.

Bortnik carried this theme over to film in *La historia oficial* (1985), in which the principal protagonist struggles to come to terms with her adopted daughter's identity as the child of young *desaparecidos*. No longer willing to ignore the reality that she previously blocked out, this mother is forced to admit her earlier complicity in the Dirty War. As she begins to investigate her daughter's past, her home and family become entirely alien to her. The man she perceived as a loving husband in fact has ties to the repressive state apparatus. When she finally confronts him regarding the origin of their daughter, he does not hesitate to crush her hand in a door. His facility in inflicting physical punishment on her suggests that he has performed such violent acts before on other victims, pointing to his involvement with the military. In this way, the comfort and seeming isolation of the protagonist's upper class lifestyle give way to the violent reality of the public sphere. As in *De a uno*, *La historia oficial* portrays the contamination of the private, domestic sphere by the violent events of the political realm. In both cases, however, the violence springs from the heart of the family itself. While in the play the rotten core of the family is represented by the sinister space under the kitchen

table, in the film it is the husband who embodies this corruption.

Both *La nona* and *De a uno* use the space of the kitchen and its related activities to implicate those members of the middle class who opted for omission, silence, and complicity with the discourse and actions of the dictatorship. In both works the supposedly isolated private sphere represented by the family kitchen, long the favored site in *costumbrista* and neo-realist theatre, comes to be characterized by death despite the protagonists' efforts to displace this destruction onto what they perceive to be an entirely separate, public sphere. In *La nona*, any efforts by the characters to contain the threat of destruction in La nona's cave or displace it onto the rest of society fail, as the real threat is posed by their own willful blindness and corruption, and as such originates in the kitchen, which represents the heart of the family. In *De a uno*, this public sphere is actually subsumed within the intimacy of the family kitchen, both contaminating it and in turn feeding off the denial and passivity of the protagonists.

The violent nature of the culinary that permeates the domestic space of the kitchen in these two plays becomes even more marked in the works created after the demise of the dictatorship. In these later plays, the sinister act of feeding that appears in *La nona* and *De a uno* is replaced with

the violent consumption and implicit disappearance of the female body.

Chapter 3:

Consuming Violence and the Female Body

> *What a refined expression of love, Saint Francis of Sales says, would we see in the act of a prince who, seated at his table, sent a portion of his meal to a pauper? And what if he sent him his entire meal? And what if he sent him his own arm to eat? In the Holy Communion, Jesus not only gives us part of his meal to eat, or part of his body, but his entire body.*
>
> -Bishop of Saint Agata dei Goti[7]

Of the six dramatic works discussed in this dissertation, the two plays explored in this chapter offer the most chilling vision of the way in which the violence of the Argentine military dictatorship was played out on the human--in this case female--body. *Carne* by Eduardo Rovner (Argentina, 1985) and *Cocinando con Elisa* by Lucía Laragione (Argentina, 1993) draw on the images of eating and cooking to foreground the violent treatment of the female body in the military's discourse as well as in the practice of torture during the Dirty War. Subverting the traditional connotations of the Eucharist and *haute cuisine* as sublime expressions of advanced civilization, *Carne* and *Cocinando con Elisa*, respectively, reveal the violent and exploitative undercurrents present in each of these acts.

Like Griselda Gambaro's *Puesta en claro*, Rovner's work collapses issues of power, violence, and gender by presenting

a heterosexual couple, yet in this later work the suggestion of agency is replaced by total subjugation. In an attempt to satisfy the insatiable appetite of her lover and preserve his love, the female protagonist of *Carne* permits him to consume her breast. In this way the work conflates the act of eating with the literal consumption, and thus disappearance, of a woman's body, pointing to the discursive representation of the female body and its manifestation as the torture of the junta's feminized enemy during the Dirty War. Furthermore, by collapsing the models of incorporation embodied in eating, taking communion, cannibalism, and sexual intercourse, *Carne* underscores the paradoxical nature of these acts, thus foregrounding the problematic relation of power between the male consumer and the consumed female body.

As in *Carne, Cocinando con Elisa* represents the feminine body as a site of power and violence, resulting in the mutilation and implicit disappearance of the woman, yet it does so by foregrounding the parallel nature of cooking and birth as potential means of exploiting women. In *Cocinando con Elisa,* Laragione challenges the isolated and almost idyllic world of the kitchen, as it was created in *Como agua para chocolate*, for example, replacing it with a representation of the kitchen as torture chamber. Here the transmission of recipes, far from perpetuating a matrilinear oral tradition, echoes the verbal violence inflicted on

torture victims during interrogation. In their revalorization of the act of cooking, some scholars have emphasized the creative aspect inherent in both cooking and reproduction. While Laragione's work explores the similarities between these two processes, it does so not to elevate them but rather to expose their potentially sinister undercurrents. Within the domestic space of the kitchen, which mirrors the public sphere, the act of cooking becomes the vicious and violent hunt of one woman by another. In a visceral act echoing the technique used to cultivate veal, the middle-aged cook removes a baby directly from her apprentice's womb. While this "new European technique" may produce a delicacy of *haute cuisine*, here it is no more than a violent act that converts the mother into a piece of meat to be sacrificed so that others may have her baby.

Indeed, the violence of the Dirty War played itself out on the feminine body on both a figurative/discursive and literal/physical level. In her study of the intimate links between nationalism and gender identity during the Proceso, Diana Taylor posits that the discourse of nationalism espoused by the military during the dictatorship was elaborated as a battle among men, played out on the feminine body. The metaphorical representation of the feminine body as weak and diseased and the rhetorical convention that feminized the enemy had their physical corollary in the disappearances and

torture of actual bodies, both masculine and feminine. In *Carne* and *Cocinando con Elisa* this nationalistic battle is played out in the kitchen or around the table, and in both cases the feminine body is served up in violent processes of exploitation framed as cooking, eating, coitus, and birth, resulting in the disappearance of the woman herself.

The human body possesses a long history as a surface that lends itself readily to the inscription of various discourses. In addition to its physical nature, the body can symbolize an abstract phenomenon such as power or a larger organization of individual parts such as the *social body* of a nation. While the material nature of the body is indisputable, even our knowledge of this physicality is framed by one or more discourses. The very perspective from which we undertake an investigation of the nature of the body makes it impossible to arrive at a pure, unmediated vision of it *a priori* to interpretation (Suleiman 2).

To study the human body is thus to investigate not its various conceptualizations so much as its constructions (Feher 11). Rather than peel back layers of representation finally to discover at their core an essence of the body, all we can hope for is to study the way in which the various approaches to studying the body have in fact determined our knowledge of it. The body as we know it, created by our gaze, can reflect several working models of how the epistemological process

functions. Furthermore, because the various discourses that inform the constructions of the body are all in some way caught up with relations of power, the body we have created reflects a model of how those who exercise power over other individuals and/or the social body of a nation seek to justify their actions.

For Michel Feher, there exist three dominant approaches to the body that determine its various constructions. The first, the vertical model, explores the human body's relationship to the divine, on one hand, and to animals and machines, on the other. The second, psychosomatic approach is concerned with the relationship between what is inside the body and what is outside. Finally, the third model investigates the relationship between parts of a whole. This approach uses the function of certain organs or bodily substances as metaphors for human society. At the same time, it confers on particular bodies a special significance based on their position *vis-à-vis* the larger social body (15). Such conceptualizations of the body are far from being mutually exclusive. Just as the significance of the body is never fixed and univocal, so too the discourses that inform these interpretations are constantly shifting, slipping, often co-existing even as they contradict one another. In fact, the conceptualizations of the body that underpinned the Argentine military junta's discourse originate from all three of the

above approaches. In their critical treatment of the dictatorship, *Carne* and *Cocinando con Elisa* graphically illustrate these models and their bloody consequences.

The diachronic development of both Eduardo Rovner's career and of Argentine theatre illuminates *Carne's* significance for both of these phenomena; for although Rovner's work has contributed its own unique value to the national tradition, it in turn inherited a legacy founded in the 1960s and elaborated in the 1970s. Osvaldo Pellettieri explains that while the Argentine theatre that emerged in the 1960s represented a modernization of the realistic theatre that preceded it, it simultaneously became seminal in the establishment of a new tradition. This abrupt change manifested itself in two initially distinct theatrical veins: *nuevo realismo* or *realismo reflexivo* and *neovanguardismo*. The former, practiced by Ricardo Halac, Roberto Cossa, Carlos Somigliana, and Germán Rozenmacher, adopted a reflexive or critical gaze in its representation of the middle class. While the previous realistic tradition painted the middle class in broad *costumbrista* strokes, thereby glossing over the social and economic frustrations and disappointments faced by this sector, those who practiced *realismo reflexivo* inserted their work squarely into what they perceived as the national reality of the moment (Pellettieri 11-12; Ordaz 42).

Like the *nuevos realistas*, *neovanguardistas* such as Griselda Gambaro and Eduardo Pavlovsky criticized the alienating aspect of Argentine society that precluded the possibility of an individual's self-realization through participation in a larger, communal project of solidarity. However, while their ideological stance was similar to that of the *nuevos realistas*, the *neovanguardistas* drew on the European and North American avant-garde theatre of the 1950s such as theatre of the absurd, epic theatre, and theatre of cruelty as a means of conveying their message (Rovner, "Relaciones" 23). Through such techniques and the distorted images they created, these artists attempted to elicit a socially critical reaction from the spectators.

The decade of the 1970s witnessed an exchange of elements between these two previously distinct tendencies. On one hand, the somewhat strict adherence to realism practiced by the proponents of *realismo reflexivo* gave way to experimentation with new theatrical languages. On the other, the avant-garde approach of the *neovanguardistas* was attenuated by the appearance of a realistic thesis, albeit one elaborated through *vanguardista* techniques, as in the case of *El avión negro*: " . . . a pesar de seguir siendo un texto realista, de tener un desarrollo dramático destinado a probar una determinada tesis social, lo hace con artificios teatralistas--provenientes del sainete, el grotesco criollo,

el absurdo y el expresionismo" (Pellettieri 13). The reappearance of the *sainete* and the *grotesco criollo* in the late 1960s was a further harbinger of the shape that Argentine theatre would take on in the following decade (as evidenced by the appearance of Cossa's *La nona* in 1977). As Argentina's political and social crisis intensified in the late 1970s, this theatre (characterized by *realismo reflexivo*, *lo absurdo*, and the intertext of the *sainete* and *grotesco criollo*) sharpened its already socially critical approach, this time to denounce authoritarianism (Pellettieri 12).

Since the appearance of his first play (*Una pareja*) in 1976, Eduardo Rovner's work has displayed all these tendencies at one point or another. Osvaldo Pellettieri has observed that Rovner's pieces fall under three classifications that are an outgrowth of the theatrical system established in the 1960s: works that continue the poetics of *realismo reflexivo*; plays that can be best described as *absurdo satírico*; and pieces (in fact only one) that can be included under the category *neosainete* or *tragicomedia del autoengaño* (22). These categorical divisions in Rovner's creative corpus closely correspond to the chronological development of his career. Yet although his career displays overall a progressive shift away from traditional realism, for Pellettieri there exists a realistic premise common to his body of work as a whole (21).

Carne (1985), like two of the other *"obras negras"* written by Rovner during and after the Proceso (*¿Una foto . . . ?* [1977]; *Concierto de aniversario* [Teatro Abierto 1983]), falls under the second category of *absurdo satírico*. While all three works employ elements of the absurd, they maintain an essentially realistic thesis in their satirical and critical treatment of the unchecked violence that permeated Argentina under the military dictatorship. In each of these works, Rovner plays with a realistic situation, gradually exaggerating it to such a degree that the spectators, even though they have witnessed (and are therefore complicit with) the development of the dramatic action, are entirely shocked and horrified by the final outcome.

¿Una foto . . . ?, written at the beginning of the dictatorship, adheres most closely to the tenets of the theatre of illusion by creating characters and a setting clearly referential for the public and by setting in motion a linear plot with a clear causality of events (Pellettieri 27). This one-act play follows two proud parents, Luis and Alicia, as they attempt to take a photograph of their baby. Yet events conspire against them: the camera is lacking film, the flash refuses to function correctly, and the baby is not inclined to smile. Giving up on capturing a perfect smile on film, the parents decide to settle for a grimace, and therefore begin to twist the baby's foot a little to evoke a

reaction. Luis, finally desperate with frustration, kicks the carriage over, thereby eliciting the baby's long-awaited, picture-perfect smile.

The work's exaggerated, and therefore unreal outcome, does not preclude its ideological reception on a social or political level. At present the piece is studied by Argentine students as a metaphor for the parent/child dynamic, particularly as an example of the extreme acts that parents will commit in order to influence the actions of their children (Rovner, Interview). However, when studied in the context of its creation and in relation to subsequent *obras negras*, its message becomes undeniably a denunciation of dictatorship. Luis, then, passes from representing the figure of a tyrannical father to representing a dictator (Pellettieri 28; Dauster xi).

The plurality of meanings that have been assigned to *¿Una foto . . . ?* and to the other two *obras negras* discussed in this chapter is a product of Rovner's creative point of departure, which is often a particular image that he then develops into an entire work. As he explains, these images tend to take on metaphorical meanings of which even he as the playwright was not initially conscious:

> De esta manera, la obra de arte es, por un lado, la concretización del proceso creador, la forma en la que se plasman esas imágenes e ideas y el vehículo a través del

> cual el autor se encuentra con el contemplador. Pero, por otro, posee, en sí misma, una potencia metafórica e imaginante, que la hace autónoma, trascendente y decodificable no sólo en función de su creación, sino también para él, potencia imaginante y metafórica. Y es así, entonces, como al cruzar esas imágenes con las suyas propias, su historia y pensamientos, genera sus propias imágenes y reflexiones. (Rovner, "Relaciones" 28)

Nevertheless, this openness in Rovner's work is tempered by his use of realism in establishing and developing the dramatic action.

Like *¿Una foto . . . ?* before it, *Concierto de aniversario* displays a metaphorical openness that lends itself to a political statement. Similar to the other works created for the 1983 cycle of Teatro Abierto, *Concierto de aniversario* questions the double discourse of authoritarianism in which the words used by the military junta directly opposed its actions. In fact, Rovner has described Teatro Abierto as a veritable "festival de metáforas sobre el autoritarismo y el terror" ("Relaciones" 28). While in *¿Una foto . . . ?* Luis and Alicia destroy their own baby in the name of love, the protagonists of *Concierto de aniversario* ignore and cause human suffering in the name of art. The four protagonists prepare to rehearse a Beethoven piece for a concert to celebrate the anniversary of their quartet. Their efforts to

abandon themselves to the beauty of the piece, however, are continually frustrated by the interruptions of Anselmo's wife Zulema, who is gravely ill. Refusing to succumb to such distractions, they cut the phone line, forcibly remove Zulema from their rehearsal space, and beat her in the face until she relinquishes the bell she uses to call for assistance. When Anselmo's son demands to know who has victimized his ailing mother, one of the artists impales him with the sharpened end of his bow as the others, including Anselmo, look on passively. In this way the four musicians are willing to act against the very principles of liberty, peace, and happiness that they see embodied in Beethoven's music, all in the name of these very principles.

As in *¿Una foto . . . ?* and *Concierto de aniversario*, *Carne* builds on a realistic situation and carries it to an extreme and horrific outcome. The work's minimal dramatic action centers on a table, at which are seated the two protagonists, Gordo and María. Next to the former lies a stack of dirty plates, yet Gordo continues to clutch his fork and knife, hungry for the next course. María insists that he has eaten everything, and that there is no money left to buy more food. With the little she had left from the previous day's purchases she has invested in a bustier, which she models for Gordo with great pride, pointing out the way in which it lifts and separates her abundant breasts. Gordo

becomes excited and begins to kiss her breasts and lick his lips, hungrily murmuring the word "carne." María, interpreting his enthusiasm as sexual arousal, encourages him to bite and nuzzle her breasts. Gordo finally succeeds in explaining to her that he really wants to *consume* one of her breasts in order to satiate at last his enormous appetite. Despite her initial repulsion, María eventually concedes to his desire for fear of losing his love. She removes one of her breasts from the bustier and rests it on a clean plate, and the curtain falls as Gordo sprinkles salt over his next meal.

The conflation of eroticism and violence in *Carne* is initially shocking, yet the two phenomena are intimately linked. As Georges Bataille asserts, "What does physical eroticism signify if not a violation of the very being of its practitioners?--a violation bordering on death, bordering on murder" (17). For Bataille, living beings exist as separate, self-contained entities, discontinuous from each other. Continuity can only be achieved through eroticism and death, which succeed in dissolving the physical borders separating one being from another. Although eroticism may suggest either a union and/or reproduction and thus the promise of life, it simultaneously indicates the end of the participants as they previously existed. As such, the violence of death is inherent in eroticism. According to Bataille, erotic desire

actually springs from the horror and repugnance originating in the fear of death (59). This anguish heightens sensuality and while it does not of itself create pleasure, it makes it more deeply felt (105). While Bataille describes the act of intercourse as a fusion and mingling of the participants, in his model it is the passive female who ceases to exist as a self-contained entity (17). In this scenario, the passive woman is ravished by the active male who himself remains intact, just as María is dismembered and consumed by Gordo, who will ingest her and will not himself suffer physical violence.

While *Carne* suggests the intimate link between eroticism and violence, Rovner's original stated intention in writing this work, which he prefers to call a "juguete teatral negro," was to play with the idea of eating as a metaphor for sexual intercourse. The audience, familiar with this metaphor, may follow María in mistakenly interpreting Gordo's actions as sexual advances. And, like María, as they begin to understand that what he really wants is to *consume* Maria's breast ("*comer de comer*") their reaction is likely to be one of disbelief: "Es una técnica muy interesante la de la obra, porque la obra plantea, de entrada, algo que se piensa que no puede ser" (Rovner, Interview). Ultimately what is so shocking and unbelievable to the public is that such a savage act could be veiled behind an amorous discourse. In this fashion the work

takes on a politically critical dimension, addressing the double discourse in which Argentina permits itself to be devoured by the military dictatorship in the name of love.

The violence unleashed on María in Rovner's work recalls that inflicted on victims of torture during Argentina's Dirty War. As Diana Taylor explains in her study of gender and nationalism during the Proceso, the rhetoric of the dictatorship feminized the enemy on a metaphoric level, portraying any elements of opposition as female, weak, and in need of being controlled by the healthy, male military (*Disappearing Acts* 66-67). Far from existing on a merely discursive level, such metaphors laid the ground for the physical torture of *any body* perceived as feminine, whether male or female. In the case of the latter, Taylor argues, the systematic assault on the organs of reproduction underscored the military's belief that the female body represented a threat to the military model of masculine strength and control (*Disappearing Acts* 83-84). In *Carne*, Gordo's violation of María by consuming her breast echoes the pummeling of breasts described in accounts of torture. In the play, however, María's breast becomes a synecdoche for her body as a whole, and as such Gordo's desire to swallow and contain a part of her suggests her *disappearance*, echoing the kidnapping, torture, and assassinations carried out under the Proceso. María herself describes Gordo's desire as the wish to make her

disappear: "¡Sí, claro! (*Hablando hacia arriba, irónica*) ¡Me adora! ¡Quiere hacerme desaparecer por su garganta y dice que me adora!" (209). In addition to referring to the Proceso, María's words reveal that she knows all too well that the fulfillment of Gordo's fantasy implies her annihilation.

The treatment of the female body in *Carne* echoes the military's representation of the nation as a feminine body, yet Rovner's work inverts the traditional association between the concepts of disease and the feminine. For Taylor, the basis for the military's violent discourse and the acts it sought to rationalize lay in the depiction of the nation as a female body. The junta's rhetoric represented the *patria* and the Argentine population as a sick female body, incapable of producing a healthy national being. As such, the country needed the aid of the masculine military junta in order to regain its health (*Disappearing Acts* 66-67). While in *Carne* María indeed represents the *patria,* here it is the male military, incarnated in Gordo, that is infirm. María cautions him against eating more, fearful that his overindulgence will aggravate his high blood pressure, diabetes, and liver ailments. Similar to Cossa's *La nona*, Gordo serves as a metaphor for the "insatiable fascism" of the dictatorship. As Roberto Previdi Froelich says of *La nona*:

> En última instancia, el discurso gastronómico de la nona tiene implicaciones políticas también. Es precisamente

> un tipo de discurso totalitario que exige constante obsequiosidad y solicitud. Tal como el fascismo se alimenta de la energía masiva, la nona pide incesantemente alimentación para nutrir la destrucción que deja en sus huellas. Es más, tanto el fascismo como la nona son insaciables y tomarán (comerán) todo lo que se les conceda. (136)

Just as *La nona* is never satisfied, Gordo will not rest until he has consumed his victim, reducing her to raw meat and in effect annihilating her identity as a separate, independent being. The representation of *La nona* and Gordo is similar in that they are metaphors for hunger rather than psychologically complex characters. Indeed, Gordo is depicted as an animal, constantly licking his lips, purring, salivating, and scratching the tabletop with his fingernails (206).

At the same time, the representation of María in *Carne* recalls not only the military's model of the nation as a feminine body, but also its discourse on women and motherhood. While Gordo is defined by his hunger, María's most prominent feature is her breasts, as indicated in the initial stage notes: "María posee abundantes pechos que pueden apreciarse en su generoso escote y tiene apoyados los mismos sobre la mesa" (203). In addition to marking María as a sexual object, her breasts identify her as a mother figure capable of nurturing a child. In fact, before mistakenly believing that Gordo is

sexually aroused, María comforts him as she would a child, trying to nourish him and anticipate his needs:

(*Gordo eructa*)

MARÍA: Salud, mi amor. (*Gordo ronronea*) ¿Ya está? . . (*Gordo hace un gesto de duda. María se sorprende*) No me digas que todavía . . . (*Gordo hace otro gesto de duda*) Pero . . . ¡Te comiste todo!

GORDO: ¿No hay nada más?

MARÍA: No . . .

GORDO: ¿Nada?

MARÍA: Pero, mi vida . . . ¡Si hasta te comiste . . . las arvejas y las papas crudas! . . . (*Gordo ronronea*) . . .

MARÍA: ¿Qué, mi amor? (203-204)

This exchange reveals María's maternal attitude towards Gordo and her preoccupation with his satisfaction.

As in the patriarchal discourse on motherhood espoused by the military junta, María concerns herself overall with looking after her "child" and feeding others. It is no coincidence that her name alludes to the self-abnegating mother *por excelencia*, the Virgin Mary. Margaret Miles indicates that the popularity of the image of the Virgin nursing the infant Christ in Tuscan Early Renaissance culture may have had its origins in the chronic malnutrition and shrinking food supply of that period. Within such a context,

viewers possibly received the image of the Virgin's one exposed breast as a symbol of nourishment (198). Although the contexts are markedly distinct, María's exposed breast in *Carne* could represent a symbolic panacea to Argentina's economic crisis under the military dictatorship. In both cases, the patriarchal order in power at the time manipulated the image of the Virgin Mary in an attempt to control women. In the fourteenth century, the representation of Mary as submissive, humble, and obedient was presented as a model for actual women (Miles 200). In a similar manner, the military discourse of the Proceso presented the image of the Virgin Mary as an example for female citizens, and especially mothers. In both cases, however, a complete association with Mary was blocked by official discourse that emphasized the impossibility of emulating her virtue. Under the Proceso, this tension between associating with the figure of the ideal woman and being reminded of never reaching that ideal manifested itself on an extreme, violent, and literal level. While on the one hand women were converted into dispensable bodies devoid of personal identity, on the other the image of Woman was elevated to a symbolic and sublime level: "In the concentration camp known as Olimpo (Olympus), the distinction between embodied and disembodied 'womanhood' (women/Woman) was made brutally evident as military soldiers tortured female prisoners in front of the image of the Virgin Mary" (Taylor,

Disappearing Acts 83-84). Thus, the patriarchal systems in Early Renaissance Tuscany and Argentina during the Proceso manipulated the image of the Virgin by presenting actual women with a model of submissiveness to follow yet simultaneously using that image to keep women in their traditional role as abnegated mothers and obedient, unquestioning citizens.

The religious significance of María in *Carne* goes beyond her representation as the Virgin Mary suckling the baby Jesus to allude to the Eucharist, the symbolic consumption of Christ's flesh and blood. The power of María's breast to ensure Gordo's survival recalls Piero Camporesi's characterization of the divine flesh as a superhuman nourishment capable of providing health and salvation (221). Gordo himself expresses the religious undertones in his hunger:

> GORDO (*gritando*): ¡¡Quiero comerme una teta!! . . .
>
> (*Mirando hacia arriba, como clamándole al cielo*) ¡Sí, señor! ¡Una teta! ¿Por qué no? . . . (*Cae al piso de rodillas y se toma las manos en actitud de rezo*) ¡Por favor! ¡Nunca te pedí nada!
>
> . . .
>
> ¿O es mucho pedir para un cordero de Dios? (208-209)

Like the Host, which Camporesi describes as "a mysterious food whose sweetness makes all creatures lose their appetite,"

María's breast promises to sate Gordo's hunger once and for all (222):

> GORDO: Todo lo que como . . . es para no comerme tu teta.
>
> MARÍA: ¿Cómo?
>
> GORDO (*asiente*): Si me la como, se me iría la desesperación por comer . . . y no tendríamos más problemas . . . (210)

If Gordo represents the ailing military dictatorship, then María's flesh, with its power to cure hunger and physical ills, becomes tantamount to a national solution.

Thus, while María's representation as the Virgin signifies her submissiveness, it also indicates her power to nourish and even provide salvation. In this way, the image of the nursing Virgin is dangerous for those wanting to perpetuate the control of women in a patriarchal order. As Margaret Miles indicates, "If the Virgin gained cosmic power by nursing her son, what was to prevent actual women from recognizing their power, derived from the same source, and irresistible to their adult sons?" (205). Fourteenth-century religious discourse, threatened by the power suggested in the vision of the nurturing Virgin Mary, was quick to emphasize the "unbridgeable chasm between the ideal Virgin and actual women" in an effort to block women's identification with the Virgin (206).

Carne attempts to resolve this tension between the image of woman as on the one hand powerful and on the other submissive, by depicting María's suffering as masochistic. Because she concedes to Gordo's desire to eat her breast, the work suggests that she derives real pleasure from fulfilling his wishes, even if his pleasure implies her own destruction. From the outset, however, it is clear that her own desire is merely an extension of his own, as in the case of the bustier: "Me lo compré para vos . . . Lo único que quiero es que te guste a vos" (205). Even this piece of clothing, the one item she bought that he has not consumed, is really intended for him. As María indicates in the following exchange, she values Gordo's wishes over her own, and would give her own life for him:

GORDO: ¿Mucho me querés?

MARÍA: ¡Seguro! Si sos todo para mí . . . No podría vivir sin vos.

GORDO: ¿Cuánto?

MARÍA: ¿Cuánto qué?

GORDO: ¿Cuánto me querés?

MARÍA: Más de lo que te podés imaginar . . . ¿Querés que te diga? ¡Más que a mí misma!

GORDO: ¿Y qué darías por mí?

MARÍA: No sé . . . ¿Qué querés de mí?

GORDO: No . . . Diceme vos, por favor te pido . . . ¿Qué darías por mí?

MARÍA (*muy sensual*): Lo que vos quieras.

GORDO: ¿Darías . . . tu vida por mí?

MARÍA: Claro, mi loquito.

(Pausa)

GORDO: ¿Y un pecho? (206-207)

Gordo's insistence that María *offer* her breast to him, rather than simply agreeing to his wishes, underscores his need to see her surrender as the fulfillment of her own erotic desire rather than a capitulation to his own.

The relation between Gordo and María in *Carne* alludes to the often autoerotic experience of the Argentine torturer. In this merging of the carnal act with violence, the aggressor achieved autoarousal through the exploitation and domination of his objectified victim. Critical to the torturer's experience was the coerced participation of the victim, which in effect placed "her" (the feminized enemy) in the position of a partner ("a partner-object, a subject objectified"). Although the process may appear to be reciprocal, it is in fact reflexive for the perpetrator, who directs his actions towards himself (Graziano 156-57).

Rather than indicate his wish for a mutual exchange, Gordo's need to hear his own desires voiced by María signifies the autoerotic nature of his relation to her. Yet because her

wishes are contingent on his, she is incapable of voicing her desire unless he has first stated his. Following Gordo's lead in what she mistakenly interprets as foreplay, María's reaction suggests that she experiences pleasure from suffering:

GORDO (*tímidamente*): Me los quiero comer.

MARÍA (*muy sensual*): Sí, claro que sí . . . Comételos, mi dulce . . .

GORDO: Comer . . . de comer.

MARÍA (pasándoselos por la cara): ¡Sí, sí! ¡Mastícamelos, papito!

GORDO: Te va a doler . . .

MARÍA: ¡Sí! ¡Quiero que me duela! ¡Matame! (207)

María's insistence that Gordo hurt and even kill her serves to dilute the power she has as nurturer and even savior. In this way, Rovner's work echoes the junta's discourse described by Taylor in which the feminized population wanted and needed to be dominated by the masculine military (6). When she finally understands that Gordo wants to ingest her breast, María expresses disgust and horror. She acquiesces only when he explains that if he swallows a piece of her, she will no longer have to worry that he will leave her, as she will always be with him (210). Her submission, then, is born of fear, rather than an active voicing of her own desire.

María's self-sacrifice in the name of love--or fear of losing love--recalls Camporesi's description of the Eucharist as a sacrifice in which the Omnipotent gives Himself as food (225). However, while the Eucharist connotes a bloodless sacrifice on a purely abstract level, the consumption of María's breast implies her total annihilation, echoing the violent nature of eroticism. Bataille describes the violence underlying both the concept of sacrifice and that of the erotic:

> The act of violence that deprives the creature of its limited particularity and bestows on it the limitless, infinite nature of sacred things is with its profound logic an intentional one. It is intentional like the act of the man who lays bare, desires and wants to penetrate his victim. The lover strips the beloved of her identity no less than the blood-stained priest his human or animal victim. The woman in the hands of her assailant is despoiled of her being. With her modesty she loses the firm barrier that once separated her from others and made her impenetrable. She is brusquely laid open to the violence of the sexual urges set loose in the organs of reproduction; she is laid open to the impersonal violence that overwhelms her from without. (90)

The vision of María as sexual, desiring brutal treatment is in fact not alien to that of her as maternal, surrendering her

flesh for the health of her child/*patria*, because in both representations she is violently divested of her very identity as an individual.

Even the power that María has as representative of the Host is tempered by the violence enacted (or suggested) on her body. In the Eucharist, the individual who receives the Host is spiritually transformed by it, and becomes one with it (Camporesi 230). Indeed, in *Carne*, Gordo explains that he wants to consume María's flesh in order to carry her within him:

> GORDO: Pero, mi amor . . . Te quiero mucho . . .
>
> MARÍA: ¡Dejame! Lo único que querés . . . es comerme.
>
> GORDO: Quiero tenerte . . . (*Pausa*) dentro mío . . . ¿No es una prueba de amor? (210)

Despite--or due to--the power of María's flesh to enact changes on its consumer, that is, Gordo, the latter's desire to carry her inside of him expresses his need to control and contain her. This image of dominating the feminine body was central to the military junta's rhetoric during the Dirty War:

> The corrupt and insidious feminine body needed to be contained and controlled. She could not be allowed to roam free. The female threat had to be eliminated in order to protect "women and children" and other good citizens who obediently conformed to patriarchal roles. (Taylor, *Disappearing Acts* 75)

Despite the religious image of the Eucharist and Gordo's argument that carrying her inside him is a test of his love, the final image of María about to be dismembered calls into question her supposed power in the situation. Like the torture of women prisoners in front of the image of the Virgin Mary described by Taylor, *Carne* performs the misogynist violence of the junta's discourse enacted on the physical as well as symbolic level (*Disappearing Acts* 4).

If in *Carne* María is sacrificed to save the ailing *patria* (Gordo), then what is the role of the work's spectators? Bataille explains that those witnessing a sacrifice share in the mystery revealed by the victim's death and are redeemed by watching his or her destruction (22). *Carne* constructs a spectator who can benefit from María's victimization only by being complicit in the work's violence. By suggesting that María wants and enjoys being dismembered and literally consumed by Gordo, the play perpetuates the idea that women's desire is always contingent on that of men. Furthermore, the work acts out the junta's rhetorical image of sacrificing Woman/women for the good of the *patria*.

And yet, as spectators we witness María's capitulation to Gordo's desire. Although it is clear that she acquiesces out of fear--fear of losing Gordo's love--she is instrumental in her own destruction. If María represents the *patria* and Gordo the Argentine military, then as members of the public we watch

passively as the nation allows itself to be eaten alive by the military dictatorship, all in the name of love. Rovner explains that the figure of María represents certain sectors of Argentine society, namely those who wanted the military coup and those *guerrilleras* who collaborated with the military, denouncing their comrades in arms, in exchange for their own protection (Interview).

María's self-sacrifice at the hands of Gordo recalls the ultimately self-destructive obedience treated in Griselda Gambaro's work *Decir sí*. Written for the 1981 cycle of Teatro Abierto, Gambaro's short piece uses the metaphor of shaving to represent the bloody consequences of surrendering to dictatorial power. In the work, a subservient client capitulates to his barber's every whim until the latter sinks a rusty razor into his chest. While the customer in *Decir sí* permits himself to be killed out of a fear of power, María in *Carne* allows her own destruction in the name of love. As Rovner explains, "María se somete a un sí absurdamente violento por amor. Por amor no puede decir que no, y es consumida. Por decir sí, por el amor, termina aceptando cualquier vejámen" (Interview). In this way, *Carne* forces us as spectators to examine our own resistance (or lack thereof) to dictatorial discourses and practice.

As in *¿Una foto . . . ?* and *Concierto de aniversario*, *Carne* utilizes metaphorical representation to question the

double discourse in which the military, in the name of love for the nation or other similar values (peace, liberty, and happiness), brutally and indiscriminately victimized the Argentine people. Nevertheless, although this later work has an initially lighter, comic tone, its final image of Gordo preparing to feast on María's body is even more explicitly horrific than the death of the baby in *¿Una foto . . . ?* and that of the ailing Zulema and her son in *Concierto de aniversario*. This shift towards a more explicit representation of violence inflicted on the human body becomes logical given the context of *Carne*'s creation. Unlike *¿Una foto . . . ?* and *Concierto de aniversario*, *Carne* was written after the 1984 publication of *Nunca Más*, the report by the National Commission on the Disappearances (CONADEP). The report, with its inclusion of detailed testimonies given by survivors, quickly became a national bestseller. In its graphic representation of the carnage enacted on the human body, *Carne* manifests this national atmosphere of "opening up," of bringing to light the aspects of the Dirty War that were until then uncommented.

While in *Carne* the single female protagonist consents to her own victimization, in the later work, *Cocinando con Elisa,* women act as both victims and victimizers. Laragione's work deconstructs the traditional meanings associated with the domestic sphere and the role that women are assigned within

this space, reinterpreting it as a site of dictatorial power and torture.

The overwhelmingly favorable reception of *Cocinando con Elisa* is even more impressive given that it is Laragione's first theatrical work. Laragione, already a well-known author of works for children (*La bicicleta voladora* [1984], *El pirata y la luna* [1991], *El mar en piedra* [1993], *Amores que matan* [1997], and *Tratado universal de monstruos* [1999]) and of two collections of poetry for adults (*Poemas angelicales* [1973] and *La rosa inexistente* [1979]), had always been involved with the theatre. Until she enrolled in Mauricio Kartun's creative workshop in 1992, however, she had never tried her hand at writing a dramatic playscript. *Cocinando con Elisa*, written in 1993 as a project for the workshop, went on to win the 1994 Premio María Teresa León awarded by the Association of Spanish Stage Directors. It was staged in Madrid in 1995 and in Buenos Aires in 1997 (Dubatti n.p.).

In its oblique allusion to the horror of Argentina's military dictatorship, Laragione's kitchen contrasts with its portrayal as a more creative, benign space that we find in the well-known Mexican work *Como agua para chocolate*. Laura Esquivel's popular novel (and subsequent filmscript) revalorizes the space of the kitchen and the tasks carried out there, ultimately inverting the traditional view of this site as one of enclosure, limitation, and manual labor. By

organizing her narrative exposition as a cookbook, Esquivel privileges the traditionally feminine discourse of cooking and elevates it to a literary level. Thematically, within the narrative, the kitchen is reinterpreted as a magical space in which social and racial barriers are eliminated to create a community of women. Through the act of cooking these women influence the world that surrounds them, gaining a certain measure of agency.

While *Como agua para chocolate* represents recipes as literature, cooking as a creative act and the kitchen as a space of sisterhood, *Cocinando con Elisa* employs the kitchen as a metaphor for Argentina under the Proceso and the act of cooking as a representation of the torture and murder committed during the Dirty War. The fact that the protagonists of *Cocinando con Elisa* are unable to escape to an isolated domestic sphere underscores the undeniable connection between the often dismissed quotidian space of the kitchen and the position of women *vis-à-vis* the broader public sphere. In the social system represented by these two spheres, women participate both as victims and victimizers, thus problematizing the idealized image created by Esquivel and pointing to the treatment of gender in the military's discourse.

The cruelty, violence, and exploitation underlying the play's seemingly prosaic dramatic action attest to the work's

deeper political implications. Nicole, a *criolla* who speaks with a ridiculously exaggerated French accent, instructs her uneducated and naive apprentice Elisa in the art of *cuisine a l'ancienne*. Rather than yield a fine delicacy, however, the process results in the absolute destruction of the pregnant Elisa at the hands of Nicole. Through brilliant dialogues that reach an almost unbearable tension as the work progresses, the refined sounds of the French recipes give way to a ruthless, visceral and scatological language, foreshadowing Elisa's death as Nicole literally removes the baby from the young girl's womb.

The representation of a domestic space as torture chamber in *Cocinando con Elisa* calls attention to the way in which even the most benign space is redefined by the violence carried out within it. In normal contexts, a room connotes shelter and, although limited in scope, serves as a microcosm of civilization as a whole, as it suggests a more expansive world beyond its boundaries. In the case of the torture chamber, however, a single room signifies the reduction and gradual disappearance of the prisoner's world. Rather than represent at once shelter and limited contact with civilization, in torture the room itself and everything in it becomes a weapon used against the prisoner. Walls, ceilings, doors, windows, chairs, bathtubs, and refrigerators all lose their original meaning as they are used in the annihilation of

the prisoner (Scarry 38-41). In *Cocinando con Elisa* the space of the kitchen, the tasks typically carried out there, and the tools used for this purpose are recast in a sinister light given the specific historical referent of the Dirty War.

The representation of the kitchen as torture chamber in Laragione's work inversely echoes the convention in torture of ironically naming the torture chamber for spaces that represent the safety and civility of the larger world. In Argentina, for example, detention centers were named for recuperative, recreational, and educational sites or institutions. Among these were La Casona, El Motel, Sheraton, La Casita, El Refugio, El Jardín, La Huerta, El Descanso, Sala de Felicidad, and El Chalecito (Graziano 88). By alluding to the greater world beyond the prisoner's reach, the torturer cruelly and perversely announces this world's imminent annihilation (Scarry 40). The language of torture is thus pivotal in signaling the destruction of the world that gives birth to this language in the first place.

In addition to naming the site of torture after spaces that are normally welcoming, a vocabulary of torture draws on cultural practices such as medicine or cooking. Thus interrogation becomes a *tea party*, a *dinner party*, or a *dance* (Crelinsten 39; Scarry 44). As Ronald Crelinsten elaborates, "Using metaphors of cooking we find, for instance, in Zaire that a torture session begins with *le petit déjeuner* (the

breakfast)(the prisoner has to drink his own urine), to be followed by *le déjeuner* (the lunch) (he is beaten systematically on his shoulders)" (40). The ironic practice of using terminology normally reserved for the healing and nourishment of the human body to refer to its destruction renders meaningless not only language itself, but also the cultural practices to which it refers.

In seeking to dismantle civilization, the practice of torture uses this very civilization as a framing device. It usurps civilization's spaces, its practices, its contents, and then redefines them as weapons used for the destruction of prisoners. As a theatrical work, *Cocinando con Elisa* also stages this unmaking of the world--to borrow Elaine Scarry's terminology. By using the kitchen to frame the violence of the Dirty War, the work changes the very meaning of this space and its contents.

From the outset, the kitchen in *Cocinando con Elisa* is represented as a site characterized by violence and power rather than sisterhood and camaraderie. While this violence initially manifests itself on a verbal level, it gradually increases in intensity and eventually extends to body language, gesture, and movement, manifesting the parameters outlined by Severino Albuquerque in his study of violence in Latin American theatre. From the beginning of the work, the issue of language reveals Nicole's need to distinguish herself

from her young apprentice, as suggested in the stage notes: " . . . cuando nombra los platos en francés, pronuncia exageradamente, como alguien que repite una lección" (15). Although her real name is Nicolasa, the older cook insists on referring to herself with the French version of her name, thereby emphasizing her formal culinary education and supposed superiority over Elisa. She bombards Elisa with a series of French terms and exact measures, which the illiterate girl does not understand and is unable to record. As she distances herself from Elisa, Nicole simultaneously ingratiates herself with the aristocratic couple for whom she works, referring to them as "Monsieur" and "Madame."

The importance of language in establishing the work's themes of power and violence reflects the pivotal role of interrogation in torture. The information sought in interrogation is frequently cited as the motive for torture. In fact, however, the verbal aspect of torture serves merely as a pretext with which the aggressors rationalize their excessive and cruel treatment of their victims. At the same time, language becomes a weapon used to confuse and thus dominate the victim (Scarry 28, 36).

Nicole's use of a specialized vocabulary unknown to Elisa echoes the often-coded language used by torturers when referring to subversive operations. The use of such terms contributed to the already arbitrary and excessive nature of

the Dirty War, as torture victims who were not even familiar with the terminology were unable to understand the questions asked of them, much less respond (*Nunca Más* 35). As one testimony relates, the purpose of such sessions was to destroy the prisoner's psychological resistance, leaving him or her at the mercy of the interrogator and thus obtaining whatever answer the latter desired, even if it was absolutely absurd. Even after they elicited the desired response, the torturers insisted that the prisoner was lying, until the latter was no longer sure of even his or her own ability to distinguish fact from fiction (*Nunca Más* 47). The way in which Nicole uses language to manipulate and disorient Elisa becomes obvious as the two women search for a thrush they are preparing to cook:

ELISA: ¡Aquí está! ¿Quién pudo haberlo puesto?

NICOLE: Usted, naturalmente.

ELISA: No, no fui yo.

NICOLE: ¿Insinúa que lo hice yo?

ELISA: No dije eso.

NICOLE: ¿Y qué dijo?

ELISA: Que yo no lo puse ahí.

NICOLE: Si no fue usted, fui yo. Aquí no hay nadie más.

ELISA: ¿Usted?

NICOLE: Eso dice.

ELISA: Yo digo . . . Ya no sé lo que digo. (17)

Elisa's confusion and the ensuing silence enacts another aspect of the question and answer session, which, while ostensibly seeking the voice or confession of the victim, has as its ultimate goal his/her destruction, and therefore, silencing. In the process leading up to the confession, and later death, of the prisoner, the torturer gradually usurps the latter's voice altogether. The steadily shrinking verbal ground of the victim signifies the disappearance of his/her world as he/she once knew it (Scarry 36).

In addition to disorienting and dominating Elisa through language, Nicole repeatedly attacks the young girl for her supposedly impure racial background. Once she learns that Elisa is pregnant, Nicole begins to refer to the baby as the *guacho* or *negrito*, and implies that the father is *negro*, that is, of indigenous blood. Furthermore, she calls attention to the extension of land owned by her employers, suggesting that their economic dominance has its basis in racial factors: "El bisabuelo de Monsieur, que era un feroz cazador, ganó la tierra a los indios" (19).

This concept of a pure race was central to the Argentine military's nationalistic discourse, both before and during the Dirty War. Beginning in the nineteenth century, racial purity was held as a cornerstone of national greatness, thereby justifying the control of women and their reproductive role (Taylor, *Disappearing Acts* 41). In addition to the related

discourse on the role of women and mothers in society, the military developed metaphors for nation-building that further attempted to control and appropriate the reproductive power of women. As Taylor elaborates, "According to this discourse (or incest narrative), the military man (who embodies the state) engenders and copulates with the feminine Patria, giving birth to civilization. In this scenario the military male embodies masculine subjectivity while the feminine is reduced to the material territory, the body to be penetrated and defended. Insofar as 'she' is inanimate, the military male claims sole responsibility for the creative process" (*Disappearing Acts* 78). Thus reproduction, whether on a literal or metaphorical level, becomes a site of power in the nationalistic project, and as such is hardly limited to the private sphere. During the Dirty War, the junta equated the nation to a sick body in need of a generative process that would bring about a new "national being." This desperate attempt to restore the health of the nation required aggressive measures, namely the evisceration of the social body and the removal of all hidden and transgressive ills (Taylor, *Disappearing Acts* 66-67). As seen in the military's use of widespread and systematic torture, this struggle for power was played out on the human body not only metaphorically, but also literally, as military discourse justified torture as a means of at once curing a diseased nation and giving birth to a new national epoch.

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The power inherent in sexuality, reproduction, and birth is a central theme in *Cocinando con Elisa*, and is played out in both the public and private spheres represented in the work. In the former, represented by the patrons' land, Monsieur and Señor Medina y Olivares engage in a hunting competition. Although their rivalry ostensibly centers on the pursuit of a boar, this is merely a socially acceptable convention for masking the real issue, namely the affair between Madame and señor Medina y Olivares. While the men pursue the boar, they are in fact competing not so much for the animal's "magnificent defenses" as for Madame as a trophy. In his attempt to reclaim his masculinity inside as well as outside the house, Monsieur's own defenses ultimately fail him:

> NICOLE: ¡Lo ensartó, Elisa! ¡El alunado lo ensartó! ¡Le hundió en los huevos sus magníficas defensas y se lo llevó montado en una carrera desbocada. El pobre Monsieur fue dejando en las zarzas y los espinos girones sanguinolentos mientras la jauría corría enloquecida detrás del alunado (*Se tienta de risa*) y de su involuntado jinete. ¿Se lo imagina, Elisa? Iba montado al revés, capado y agarrado con uñas y dientes al culo de la bestia. Cuando el cuerpo cayó, por fin, a tierra, los perros furiosos se lanzaron sobre él y lo destrozaron. (45)

With this description of events, Nicole appropriates images and language typically used to signify male sexual prowess, such as impalement, bleeding caused by a torn hymen, mounting, and pursuit--not to mention the above mentioned "magnificent defenses"--and inverts their traditional meaning, using them instead to describe Monsieur's impotence. In addition to Monsieur's sexual impotence, the fact that he and Madame are childless also suggests that he is infertile. Herein lies Elisa's power, as Madame becomes overjoyed at the news that Elisa is pregnant and refuses to replace her with another apprentice, even at the behest of Nicole who attests to Elisa's ineptitude for cooking.

While the contest of male virility drives the diegetic, or offstage, action of the public sphere, the issue of reproduction is central as well to the struggle that ensues inside the kitchen, in which a hunt of a more brutal nature begins to take shape.[8] The first such allusion to a hunt is at the very opening of the work, in which Elisa is horrified to find herself standing under a hare being bled. The blood that falls on Elisa's face marks her as a future victim. This fate becomes even more evident when a jar of blood spills (with the help of Nicole) on Elisa's new white dress. While the kitchen provides Nicole with a certain power, it is the power to destroy rather than to nurture. She describes her culinary skills: "Aprender, aprender . . . Como si fuera tan fácil.

Años y años de trabajo. Desplumando, vaciando, embridando, flameando, escaldando, albardando, deshuesando, capando" (17-18). Furthermore, Nicole repeatedly declares that in order to cook as well as to hunt one needs a good sense of smell. Far from representing refinement, this ability so innate in Nicole indicates her predatory nature.

The heightened awareness of which Nicole boasts became survival skills for prisoners during the Dirty War. The practice of *tabicamiento* or hooding of victims served several purposes. First, if they should happen be released, they would be unable to give the exact location of the CCD or Centro Clandestino de Detención where they were imprisoned. Second, keeping their heads covered disoriented the victims and thus broke down their psychological defenses. Unable to rely on their sight, prisoners became acutely aware of their surroundings through other senses: "La víctima podía ser agredida en cualquier momento sin posibilidad alguna de defenderse. Debía aprender un nuevo código de señales, ruidos y olores para adivinar si estaba en peligro o si la situación se distendía" (*Nunca Más* 59). Thus, confined to Nicole's kitchen and finding herself entirely at the older cook's mercy, Elisa must rely on a sharp sense of smell to protect her from her tormentor.

Throughout the work, the references made to trapped or consumed animals also come to suggest Elisa's future, in

effect reducing her to the equivalent of raw meat and echoing the brutality practiced by the military in their torture of female prisoners. The rat that invades Nicole's kitchen serves as an obvious metaphor for the young apprentice. Nicole initially expresses her anger in elevated, culinary terms, swearing to convert the rat into something refined, that is, paté (26). Her cruelty becomes more brazen when she manages to trap the animal. She comments to Elisa, "Vamos . . . ¿Qué le pasa? No es más que una rata. Y está bien muerta. Fíjese en la panza. Mire qué hinchada está. ¿Será del veneno o estará preñada?" (39). The direct reference to the rat's possible pregnancy suggests that Elisa, also pregnant, is in danger of being victimized.

The tension between the two women reaches its climax with the discussion of preparing veal. As Nicole explains, the process involves feeding a pregnant cow only cereals so that the meat of her calf will be tender and white, and then removing the calf directly from the uterus of the mother:

NICOLE: . . . Es una nueva técnica que Madame está probando.

ELISA: ¿Para qué?

NICOLE: Hasta donde yo sé se separa a los terneros de las madres, se los alimenta exclusivamente con cereales y se los vuelve anémicos con ciertas drogas. Se

consigue una carne muy blanca y muy tierna, como la de un polillo.

ELISA: ¿Y?

NICOLE: Digo que si las cosas funcionan, hasta podremos blanquearlo . . . a su bebé . . . .

ELISA: ¿Qué?

NICOLE: Sí, Elisa. Volverlo blanco.

ELISA: ¡¿Por qué no se deja de joder, eh?¡

NICOLE: Bueno, no se lo tome así . . . Era una broma. Lo que pasa es que como el padre debe ser medio negro . . . (41-42)

Again, reproduction is represented as a means of achieving racial purity. As indicated by the meaning of the word *blanquear*, or to whiten, Nicole uses it to refer not only to the culinary process but also to the racial provenance of Elisa's baby. As cooking here becomes a means of refining the autochthonous and converting it into a product supposedly worthy of the upper class, so torture became justified in the militaristic discourse as a means of birthing a new, healthy national being. In this discourse, as in Nicole's loaded speech, it is the mother (cow/Elisa) who is sacrificed for the sake of the nation.

NICOLE: Sabe que van a carnearla. Los animales saben . . Debe mirarlo a Funes con esa mirada de tristeza. Pero Funes tiene el corazón duro como una piedra.

No se va a conmover porque la vaca esté preñada. (*Pausa*) ¿Oye?

ELISA: No.

NICOLE: ¿No oye el silencio? ¡Ya está! ¡Se terminaron los mugidos! Debe estar tendida, con los ojos abiertos de espanto, clavados en Funes. Y él, ¡zás! (*hace un gesto como de manejar un cuchillo*). Ya le debe haber abierto la panza de un solo tajo . . . (*Pausa*) ¿Nunca comió nonato, querida? Es un manjar. Una verdadera delikatessen. Una carne blanca y tierna que se deshace en la boca. (35-36)

The implied threat by Nicole that she will kill Elisa to consume her baby later becomes blatant, suggesting the complete conflation of cooking, birth, and feeding as violent acts: "Y yo le voy a arrancar las negras entrañas con bastardo y todo y se las voy a hacer comer en pedacitos" (42).

Nicole's chilling description of the disembowelment of the cow suggests the military's repeated assault on the reproductive organs of female prisoners. In addition to being systematically raped, women were literally ripped apart from the vagina, anus, womb, buttocks, and mouth. Confessions have revealed that women who were thrown out of airplanes into the sea were slashed open at the abdomen so that they would sink faster (Taylor, *Disappearing Acts* 83-84).

In addition to echoing the metaphors utilized in the military's narrative, the action in Laragione's work makes undeniable reference to the torture of pregnant women. Among the 30,000 people "disappeared" by the military, 30% of them were women, and 10% of these (3% of the total victims) were pregnant (*Nunca Más* 294). Often they were abducted, raped, and tortured simply because they were pregnant (Taylor, *Disappearing Acts* 83). As treated in the film *La historia oficial* (Luis Puenzo, 1985), these women were fed and kept alive until their babies were born. Testimonies relate that once the child was born, the mother was "invited" to write a letter to the family members who would supposedly adopt the baby. Rather than willingly relinquish their children, however, the mothers were most often murdered, and their babies given to wealthy families. The naval hospital, for example, maintained a list of military couples who were unable to have children and were interested in adopting children of disappeared women (*Nunca Más* 303). Needless to say, these families chose not to question the source of their adopted children.

At the end of *Cocinando con Elisa*, the violence that emanates from the kitchen reflects the action in the park, eliminating the supposed division between the domestic feminine sphere and the competitive masculine one. Seeing that Nicole no longer requires her assistance, Elisa decides

to return home. Nicole becomes infuriated. As the young apprentice prepares to go, however, Nicole gives her a dessert called "bridges of love," advising her to carry it with care. The final scene makes complete the conflation between public and private. Nicole, covered with blood, has just finished beheading the boar when a baby begins to cry. Rushing to feed it, she narrates the scene of its "birth":

> Desde que naciste, supe que tendrías buen apetito. Apenas te vi, allí, en medio del camino donde el hojaldre crocante, deshecho de "los puentes del amor" se mezclaba con la tierra, se pegoteaba a tu pelito mojado. Le había dicho a ella que tuviera cuidado. Le había dicho: "los puentes de amor son frágiles." Pero no quiso oírme. "Fíjese que Funes no se desvíe del camino," le había dicho . . . Funes tiene el corazón duro como una piedra. No se iba a conmover porque ella estuviera . . . Madame se lo pidió. Madame se lo pidió a Funes que la . . . llevara. Cuando te vi, ella ya había dejado de gritar y tenía la mirada clavada en Funes. La misma mirada de la vaca . . . (51)

While not directly stated, Nicole's speech suggests the exploitation of Elisa in order to "harvest" her baby. The decapitation of the boar and the presence of the child indicate that the exterior hunt, as well as its parallel inside the kitchen, has been successful.

In *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory*, Carol J. Adams suggests that the consumption of meat is parallel to the traditional representation of women in narrative. In the two processes the animal/woman is converted into an object and consumed by the subject: "Our story ends when the male-defined consumer eats the female-defined body. The animals' role in meat eating is parallel to the woman's role in narrative: we would have neither meat nor story without them. They are objects to others who act as subjects" (94). Nicole's statement that "Monsieur likes fresh meat" (22), although referring to the sexual appetite of her employer, could easily extend to other forms of physical exploitation. In Laragione's work, as in the narrative represented by the military's discourse, the female body is offered up as sacrifice, as the object of consumption.

Yet the figure of Nicole problematizes this treatment of the woman in the play and, by extension, in the military discourse. Although female, Nicole represents and perpetuates this patriarchal order responsible for the exploitation of women. The specific historical context aside, her problematic position and complicity signal the way in which the figure of the maid often serves as a buffer for an employer who wants to enjoy the advantages of her social class while still identifying herself as a feminist (Castillo 12). While the public directly witnesses the cruelty of the cook, the image

of the employer conveyed through the dialogue is that of a lonely, childless woman who awaits with anticipation the birth of Elisa's baby. Despite the fact that the employer's role in Elisa's death remains unclear, it is obvious that Nicole serves as an intermediary in a corrupt system.

Nicole's situation again highlights the issue of reproduction and its importance in Latin American society as well as in the nationalistic, military discourse. Debra Castillo explains that the most highly valued female virtue in Latin American culture continues to be that of the abnegated mother:

> Even the ostentatiously chaste rebel suffers gravely for her sins against the established order, which prizes long-suffering motherhood as the only valid female virtue. Condemned by her infractions to remain single and lacking the excuse of duty to aging parents to justify her sacrifice of the joys of marriage and motherhood, la solterona slips from harmlessly eccentric into the odd single woman ostracized by her peers. (17)

While Nicole would initially appear to have unlimited power in the kitchen, her infertility in fact makes her subordinate to Elisa. Nicole's use of the derogatory label "sucia vaca asquerosa" (43) in effect converts Elisa into meat to be exploited. It is important to note, however, that Nicole herself does not enjoy the lifestyle of a cow, which needs air

to produce milk for the patrons. In spite of her ability to reproduce a recipe perfectly, the older cook is incapable of procreating on a biological level. Incapable of producing children or milk, Nicole has little material value within the social system and is thus exiled to the basement. In spite of her culinary training, Nicole is incapable of distancing herself from her own humble origins, the illegitimate child of a ranch cook who was, according to Elisa, "knocked up and abandoned" (42). An object of ridicule, Nicole is far from being accepted by her employers as a member of or even a candidate for the aristocratic life. In the end, all of the cook's efforts to distance herself from Elisa and gain favored status with her employers fail, given the pregnancy of the young apprentice. Her only value, in fact, lies in her role as intermediary between the childless Madame and Elisa. In the specific context of the Dirty War, Nicole would seem to represent the individual members of the military who exploited their position of power over prisoners and who simultaneously were exploited by the greater system of the dictatorship.

In addition to her inability to procreate, Nicole's sexuality itself is problematized. On one hand, her ridicule of Elisa appears to be motivated by both sexual and reproductive jealousy:

NICOLE: . . . Bueno, Elisa . . . Siempre sospeché que algo se traía bajo el poncho. Pero no me imaginé que fuera tan gordo.

ELISA: Yo no estaba ocultando nada . . .

NICOLE: ¿Ah no? Si Madame lo sabía, a mí no me avisó que usted venía con regalo . . . (*Pausa*) Tengo que admitir que logró cambiarle el ánimo a Madame . . . Ya ni se acuerda de Medina y Olivares. Ahora sólo piensa en su guacho, querida . . .

ELISA: ¡Mi hijo no es ningún guacho! ¡Tiene padre y madre para que sepa!

NICOLE: ¿Ah, sí? ¿Y se puede saber, entonces, quién . . la llenó?

ELISA: (*Pausa*) ¿Qué importa quién? Lo que importa es que muchos tenían ganas . . . Con usted . . . ¿alguien tuvo ganas?

NICOLE: (*Interrumpiéndola, tira violentamente un pato sobre la mesada*). ¡Desplúmelo! (34-35)

Nicole also manifests envy and bitterness toward any interaction between Elisa and Funes, a worker on the ranch, although she attempts to mask her jealousy by feigning complete disdain for the ranch hand. Again, the issues of sexuality and reproductive ability become obvious when señor Medina y Olivares is unceremoniously expelled from the property by Monsieur, causing Madame to become ill over her

lover's absence. Recognizing her own lack of sexual and reproductive power, Nicole laments that she cannot provide what Madame needs (32).

The situation of Nicole, an infertile woman who becomes complicit in the destruction of another woman, serves to problematize the military discourse on gender during the Dirty War. As Diana Taylor explains, this discourse not only drew on a well-established tradition of equating the *patria* to a woman, but also feminized the enemy. Thus, the junta represented itself as male, virile, and in control, while painting all opposition as weak, hysterical, and calling out to be dominated (66). The military carried out this feminization regardless of the gender of their victims. This feminization was also facilitated by the historical gender divide in Argentina, which bases itself not so much on the difference between sexual organs, but rather on that between insertive and receptive sexual positions. While the active or insertive position has traditionally represented the male, the passive or receptive one has signified female (Salessi 239).

In addition to her infertility, Nicole appears to fall into the male gender category. As she prepares the boar's head for mounting, she explains to Elisa the process of cleaning the ears and nose with a red-hot poker:

ELISA: Los pelos son alambre.

NICOLE: Claro. Por eso, antes de cocinar la cabeza, hay

> que flamearla para que no quede ni uno sólo. Otra cosa. Fíjese en esto ahora. *(Tomando una tenaza con la que sostiene un hierro corto y fino)*. Este hierro, calentado al rojo vivo, se introduce en las orejas para limpiar las suciedades. Así . . . ¿entiende? *(Insinúa introducirlo en la oreja de ELISA)*. No se asuste, Elisa. (*Pausa*). Tome, sosténgalo. (38)

This device recalls the *picana*, an electric cattle prod used systematically to torture prisoners, while the reference to cleaning out orifices recalls the military's discourse on turning the body of the nation inside-out in order to eliminate all social ills. Brandishing the poker and threatening to insert it into Elisa's ear, Nicole more closely resembles the aggressive, military male than the diseased and vulnerable female body set up as the enemy in the junta's discourse. Nicole's power, however, is clearly not her own; on one hand, it is conferred on her by her employers, and on the other, it is usurped from Elisa, just as the latter's baby is snatched from her womb.

Despite the political implications of Laragione's work, on the surface *Cocinando con Elisa* resembles the *costumbrista* rural dramas characteristic of early twentieth-century Argentine theatre. The initial stage notes describe the scene as a realistic representation of a typical country manor

kitchen. While Nicole's exaggerated French mannerisms are absurd given her true social standing, she remains a realistic character. And despite the growing violence characterizing the dialogue, the work's language maintains its referential quality. In fact, even Elisa's death at the hands of Nicole or Funes for the purpose of harvesting her baby is in the end merely suggested. This ellipsis permits the work's reception on a literal level as a somewhat dark version of the typical *costumbrista* drama. However, the ambiguity surrounding Elisa's death creates a vacuum of causality that is ultimately unsettling to the public:

> Nunca quedará claro al lector el porqué de la muerte de Elisa, y especialmente la relación entre su asesinato y el robo de su hijo recién nacido. Laragione sabe que esa actitud multiplicadora, no conductista de la interpretación del texto, lo vuelve mucho más perturbador y efectivo para la recepción actual. (Dubatti n.p.)

Just as Argentine citizens during the Dirty War could choose not to see the violence surrounding them, so too the spectators of *Cocinando con Elisa* must decide for themselves what they have witnessed.

In addressing the torture and murder committed under the military dictatorship, both *Carne* and *Cocinando con Elisa* represent the violent dismemberment, disembowelment, and consumption of the female body. In this way, both works

reflect the three approaches to constructing the body--vertical, psychosomatic, and metonymic--that were echoed as well in the military's nationalistic discourse. The most evident approach in both works is the vertical model, which explores the hierarchy between the divine, the human, and the animal world. Both pieces illustrate the reduction of the female body to the status of meat for consumption, thereby conflating the human and animal spheres.

The treatment of the female body in both works reflects as well the tension between interior/exterior central to the psychosomatic model, yet the works manifest this dynamic in opposing ways. *Carne* represents the centripetal force on the feminine body as it is absorbed by and into another body, thereby ceasing to exist as a whole, separate identity. In *Cocinando con Elisa* the impulse to control the female body results in an opposite, centrifugal violence that brings to light (literally *dar a luz*) what was previously inside the body with the removal of the baby from the mother's womb.

In *Carne,* the presence of the deviant, feminine Other is resolved by incorporating and assimilating her (it?) into the center. According to Derrida, the division between what is inside and what is outside is the basis for all other binary oppositions, such as self/Other and masculine/feminine (cited in Kilgour 4). The attempt to subsume what is outside, what is alien, expresses a nostalgia for a mythical unity in which

there existed no destabilizing other to threaten inner stability (5). In the series of metaphors for this process of incorporation outlined by Maggie Kilgour, the most basic model is the act of eating, and food comes to represent all other external substances that are absorbed. Furthermore, the paradoxical nature of eating is inherent in all other forms of incorporation. While eating implies the absorption of an element by another, more powerful, body, the body is dependent on what is outside it for its survival (6). Furthermore, the consumption of one body by another results in the dissolution of boundaries between the two, making it difficult to determine whether one has control over the other. While they might appear at first glance to be diametrically opposed, the act of taking communion and cannibalism are also models of incorporation that share the ambivalence characteristic in eating. A less extreme model for incorporation is sexual intercourse (7). Rovner's *Carne* collapses the act of eating, the Eucharist, cannibalism, and sexual aggression, foregrounding the ambivalent nature of each and thus problematizing the relation of power between the male consumer and the consumed feminine body.

While *Carne* illustrates control over the feminine body as an absorption of its power, Laragione's work represents this control as a violent rendering that exposes what was inside so that it can be appropriated by those in power. The discourse

underpinning the centrifugal evisceration represented in Laragione's work is rooted in the nationalistic rhetoric employed by the military during the Dirty War. This discourse belonged to a long tradition of, on the one hand, conceptualizing the nation as a feminine body and, on the other, of associating the feminine with disease and deviancy. In the military junta's rhetoric, the nation became equated with a diseased female body that required the aggressive removal of all hidden (i.e. interior), transgressive elements (Taylor, *Disappearing Acts* 66-67). In addition to this model for curing the nation, the nationalist discourse espoused by the military represented the sick, feminine nation as incapable of producing a healthy citizen. The figure of the military male thereby usurped feminine reproductive powers, stepping in where the nation had failed and generating a new, national being (Taylor, *Disappearing Acts* 78). As seen in the military's use of widespread and systematic torture, this struggle for power was played out on the human body not only metaphorically, but also literally, as military discourse justified torture as a means of at once curing a diseased nation and giving birth to a new national epoch. *Cocinando con Elisa* addresses the bloody consequences of this nationalistic drama by conflating birth (of the new citizen) with death (of the mother).

The assignation of special significance to a certain body within society that characterizes the third model can also be said to inform the treatment of the feminine body in *Carne* and *Cocinando con Elisa*. The image of the nation as woman espoused by the military junta in its rhetoric made the feminine body pivotal for the country's future. Rather than confer this body with power, however, such a discourse justified its domination by the military. In turning the social body inside out in order to eradicate any "ailing" or subversive elements, the military victimized and disappeared individual bodies. Even the mother's body, powerful for its ability to give birth to a new citizen, was metaphorically and literally stripped of its reproductive power. The metaphorical and actual destruction of the feminine body was thus justified as a sacrifice necessary for the recuperation of the nation's health, following the model described by Elisabeth Bronfen:

> The construction of Woman-as-Other serves rhetorically to dynamise a social order, while her death marks the end of this period of change. Over her dead body, cultural norms are reconfirmed or secured, whether because the sacrifice of the virtuous, innocent woman serves a social critique and transformation or because a sacrifice of the dangerous woman reestablishes an order that was momentarily suspended due to her presence. (181)

Again, the treatment of the female body as pivotal to the health of the larger, social body, far from assigning it a privileged place in the national psyche, laid the basis for its actual mutilation and disappearance.

In their critical treatment of the human carnage carried out under the military dictatorship, *Carne* by Eduardo Rovner and *Cocinando con Elisa* by Lucía Laragione draw on the acts of giving birth, cooking, eating, and sexual intercourse as metaphors for violent exploitation. In both works this violence is inflicted on the female body, pointing to the rhetorical convention in the military's discourse of representing the *patria* and any enemy as a weak and diseased feminine body requiring violent domination. The two works implicate not only the military, however, but also those who capitulated to this dictatorial power, allowing themselves or others to be eaten alive.

Conclusion

Just as domestic food preparation has been traditionally characterized within patriarchal systems as a rote, manual task devoid of power or imagination, the kitchen, as the site of this prosaic activity, has signified a private, insignificant space entirely removed from the events of the public sphere. In Latin American literature, however, there have existed alternative discourses that reconfigure the act of cooking as one of experimentation through which women negotiate and contest their assigned roles as passive objects. In this feminist project, Latin American women writers have resemanticized the culturally assigned space of the kitchen, recasting it as a utopian place of liberation "where a woman is able to reclaim her body, her identity, and her memories of a collective past" (André 17).

For its part, theatre of the Southern Cone has used the space of the kitchen and the acts of cooking, feeding, and eating to explore another "collective past," namely the military dictatorships in Argentina (1976-1983) and Chile (1973-1990). In part due to the repressive censorship that prevailed during the military regimes, theatre practitioners veiled their socially critical stance toward these governments with metaphorical representation. Yet well after the demise of the dictatorships, the kitchen and its related acts

continue to be salient vehicles for responding to the power and violence that marked these regimes.

While the kitchen initially appears to be an unlikely framing device for the political sphere, in fact the domestic trope lends itself to the non-mimetic representation of violence and power. Prior to theatre's use of the kitchen as a means of responding to the events of the dictatorships, the military regimes in Argentina and Chile veiled their political projects in metaphors of domesticity, discursively conflating the private and public realms. Although the Argentine junta's rhetoric defined the family as a refuge and the site of the country's moral recuperation, in fact the private realm, like the entire social body, was violently turned inside out in the campaign to rid the nation of "diseased" (i.e. subversive) elements. In a similar manner, the Chilean junta drew on domestic metaphors as it painted the image of the "gran familia chilena." In this discursive model, women would give birth to a new nation and then hand it over to the army, which represented the strict yet understanding father who would watch over the nascent state and ensure its protection (Munizaga, et al. 98). In this way, the discursive practices of both regimes laid the basis for the violent politicization and militarization of all social institutions, including the family and the spaces it inhabited. The authoritarian regimes of both Argentina and Chile thus deemed the private sphere as

pivotal for their nationalistic projects, in effect conferring power, even if only discursive, on the domestic realm.

Given the importance of the private sphere in the events of the military dictatorships of the Southern Cone, the use of the kitchen as a theatrical framing device is not surprising. While the works examined in this dissertation draw on similar domestic images, their responses to the regimes differ according to the time they were written. The plays written relatively early on in the dictatorships that form the focus of chapter one portray the possibility of resisting systems of domination. Chapter two treats the plays written further into the Argentine military regime. At this stage, the space of the kitchen and its related acts become tools for examining the issue of complicity with the brutal repression of the dictatorship. Finally, the works written after the demise of the regime in Argentina represent the kitchen as a site of violent exploitation of the female body.

Because these works examine the discursive and literal interplay between the public and private spheres during the dictatorships, their treatment in this dissertation is guided by Michael Issacharoff's distinction between mimetic and diegetic space, as well as by current theories on social space such as Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopias. Michel de Certeau's concept of the tactic, or working against those in power from the very site of their domination, sets the stage

for the resistance portrayed in the works of chapter one and their reinterpretation of the private and public spheres as possible sites of agency. De Certeau's description of cooking as a tactic in which the weak make use of the strong echoes the feminist revalorization of this quotidian act and its representation in the works from the early stages of the dictatorships. Finally, Diana Taylor's study on the intimate links between gender identity and nationalism during the Dirty War help illuminate the works in chapter three, which represent the violent consumption and destruction of the female body.

Puesta en claro by Griselda Gambaro takes as its point of departure the potential power of the private realm, and specifically of the kitchen. By portraying the downfall of the authoritarian family and the regime it represents through the act of cooking and serving (poisoned) food, the play enacts the feminist reinterpretation of the kitchen as a site of agency. Rather than signifying the mechanical reproduction of a strictly defined recipe, cooking in this play becomes a creative act (for the woman) that has destructive consequences (for the male consumer). Although the female protagonist is ostensibly blind, she is able to perceive what her male oppressors do not: the undercurrent of power in cooking and serving food. The idea that cooking and serving are always equivalent to blind obedience is a fatal assumption on the

part of those who dominate, and leads to the complete inversion of the power relations in the work.

Lo crudo, lo cocido y lo podrido by Marco Antonio de la Parra explores a similar dynamic of resistance to systems of oppression, but frames its dramatic action with a restaurant that represents an army barracks or Chile under the Pinochet dictatorship. As in *Puesta en claro*, the act of serving food in de la Parra's play creates room for maneuver, masking power with seemingly subservient behavior. Yet although the waiters in the work deftly navigate the political structure that is in place, they do not attempt to overthrow this system. Thus, while the act of serving food gleans power from those who dominate, it is not a means of subverting the system as a whole. Rather, in this play it is the *refusal to serve* that contributes to the collapse of the restaurant and the authoritarian government it represents. In addition to reconfiguring food service as an act of agency, *Puesta en claro* and *Lo crudo, lo cocido y lo podrido* represent the opening up of the previously closed-off space--kitchen or restaurant--that represents the authoritarian state. Thus, the conflation of the public and the private spheres created in the military discourse and its enactment in the plays discussed makes possible the simultaneous transformation of both these spaces.

While the Gambaro and de la Parra pieces portray resistance on the part of the oppressed and the reconfiguration of the private sphere as a site of liberation, *La nona* by Roberto Cossa and *De a uno* by Aída Bortnik suggest a complex and dynamic interplay between the private and public spheres as they explore the issue of complicity of seemingly innocent citizens in the state-sponsored violence of the Dirty War. In both works the act of feeding one's family only brings about the death and disappearance of the protagonists and their loved ones. In this way cooking and feeding, far from being benign acts of nourishment, actually fuel destruction. Thus, the violence that is triggered and perpetuated through these acts does not belong solely to the public realm, but rather bleeds into and even originates in the private space of the family kitchen. With the ravage of the Spadone's apartment in *La nona* and the ever-growing population under the kitchen table in *De a uno,* these works dramatize the consequences of turning a blind eye to the events of the public sphere, and in doing so both pieces implicate those members of the middle class who opted for omission, silence, and complicity with the discourse and actions of the dictatorship.

Like the works by Gambaro and de la Parra, *Carne* by Eduardo Rovner and *Cocinando con Elisa* by Lucía Laragione illustrate the complete conflation of the public and private

spheres. However, rather than positing resistance to and escape from systems of domination, these later plays offer images of the human carnage wrought during the Argentine military dictatorship. By foregrounding the undercurrent of potential violence in cooking, eating, birth, and coitus, these pieces recast the domestic realm and its related acts in a sinister light. The consumption and implicit disappearance of the female protagonists in *Carne* and *Cocinando con Elisa* point to the violent treatment of the female body in the military's discourse as well as in the practice of torture during the Dirty War. As the military's nationalistic battleground, the kitchen in these plays thus represents a site of exploitation, torture, and death.

By drawing on the acts of cooking, feeding, and eating as framing devices for the military dictatorships in Argentina and Chile, the six works discussed here foreground the power underlying these seemingly prosaic functions--whether it is the power to resist, to assist, or to destroy. Furthermore, the complex relation of the domestic and political spaces in these plays underscores the undeniable connection between the often-dismissed quotidian space of the kitchen and the broader public sphere. Given the representation of the domestic sphere in these works, the kitchen must be reconsidered not as a space far removed from the public sphere, but rather as a

site that manifests and even shapes the events of the political realm.

Notes

[1] The National Commission on the Disappearances (Comisión Nacional Sobre la Desaparición de Personas--CONADEP) estimates the number of disappeared at 8,961 based on the number of official accusations lodged against the armed forces. However, the Commission recognizes that many disappearances were not reported, either because the victim lacked family members, or because these relatives were either too far removed from urban setting to lodge a complaint, or too terrified of suffering retaliation at the hands of the death squads (*Nunca Más* 10; 293). The families of the victims estimate the number at 30,000.

[2] The 1984 cycle of Teatro Abierto was ultimately canceled due to confusion over the designated theme, which was to be freedom. Many of the participating playwrights approached the topic of liberty through a treatment of oppression, and finally it was apparent that this confusion had resulted in only incomplete texts. (Graham-Jones, *Exorcising History* 97).

[3] Although other playwrights of the so-called *Generación de 1950*, such as Sergio Vodanovic, Egon Wolff, Luis Alberto Heiremans, María Asunción Requena, Nené Aguirre, and Alejandro Sieveking, experimented with non-realistic representation, they eventually returned to more conventional dramatic methods (Piña 8-14).

[4] While the government occasionally closed a theatre, banned a work, or issued anonymous death threats to members of the theatre world, in general it relied on indirect censorship exercised through

economic channels. For example, the independent theatres were taxed 20% of every ticket sale for any work not considered "cultural" by the government authorities. Since there existed no established criteria for determining if a work was cultural, the theatres were at the mercy of the government's whim (Epstein, et al. 89).

[5] "Army Commander's 'Dirty War' Admission Ungags Argentines," *New York Times*, April 27, 1995. As cited in Taylor, *Disappearing Acts* 257.

[6] Among the theorists who have contributed to this field are Fredric Jameson, Michel Foucault, Henri Lefebvre, Michel de Certeau, Edward Soja and Walter Benjamin.

[7] From Francis de Sales, *Lettere spirituali*, p. 177, as cited in Camporesi p. 234.

[8] As discussed in chapter two, Michael Issacharoff divides dramatic space into mimetic and diegetic space. While the former remains on stage and is visible to the audience through sight and dialogue, diegetic space is offstage and as such can be represented only through verbal channels. In *Cocinando con Elisa*, the mimetic space consists of the kitchen while the diegetic is characterized as the land surrounding the ranch.

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