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Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

No Place Like Home: Trauma and the Moral Subject in Contemporary Argentine Cinema

Thesis Presented by
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For the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

University College Cork, Ireland
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Declaration

This is to certify that the work I am submitting is my own and has not been submitted for another degree, either at University College Cork or elsewhere. All external references and sources are clearly acknowledged and identified within the contents. I have read and understood the regulations of University College Cork concerning plagiarism.

Signed……

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INTRODUCTION

Beyond New Argentine Cinema: Placing Albertina Carri, Lucrecia Martel and Pablo Trapero in Context

This thesis investigates the representation of trauma in a group of Argentine films – by Albertina Carri, Lucrecia Martel and Pablo Trapero – produced in the first decade of the twenty-first century, during a new wave of Argentine cinema that began in the mid-1990s. This in-depth exploration builds on extant criticism of these films, which tends to focus on the broader (socio-)political contexts. Although these readings are pertinent, given Argentina's history of dictatorship and political violence, particularly in the 1970s, and the hardening of neoliberalization and associated crisis in the 1990s and early 2000s, this thesis argues that the kinds of allegorical readings that have previously been favoured in post-dictatorship cinema are insufficient. Placing six recent Argentine films in comparative perspective, the thesis establishes an original framework for exploring trauma, offering a nuanced approach to the myriad ways in which trauma is presented in cinematic production. Indeed, each film was chosen for this study precisely because of the way it powerfully captures, in different ways, the complex dynamics of physical and psychological trauma, and demonstrates that trauma is more than a psychic phenomenon or a physical wound – it is also a social construct. In them, shocking events, such as brutal sexual violence and car crashes, implicate not only the body and psyche, but profound moral dilemmas and ethical complexities. A mute, autistic child, who witnesses her mother engaging in acts of sexual depravity and violence, can only process her horror through somatic symptoms and non-verbal self-expression in Albertina Carri's *La rabia* (2008). The shock of a car accident shakes a woman out of the comfort of all that she knows in Lucrecia Martel's *La mujer sin cabeza* (2008), and sends a father to the literal ends of the earth, the frozen wastelands of Patagonia, in search of his identity in Pablo Trapero's *Nacido y criado* (2006). Such shocks are multiple in Trapero's *Carancho* (2010), in which car crashes function as a form of currency for a society that feeds on flesh and blood. The way trauma inhabits the interstices between physical and psychological, individual and collective, and

private and public in these films makes clear that a new, more inclusive framework is needed for understanding the nuances of these multifarious representations of trauma. Therefore my analysis seeks to interrogate how trauma is transmitted from body to body at the level of biochemistry and neurological systems. Indeed, it is not only evident that conceptions of trauma that insist on its unrepresentability need revising in order to read these films; they also reveal much about how trauma affects the interconnections between seemingly discrete phenomena. Thus, they point to structure, not only of the individual body and psyche, but one that must incorporate analysis of the broader global surroundings and environment. In applying a structural approach to trauma to the work of these three directors, whose films all engage with permutations of trauma in distinct ways, this thesis also moves away from the typically post-Holocaust notion of trauma as 'unrepresentable' (Luckhurst 2008: 5), which calls to mind the impossibility of cultural representation.[1] Although the representation of trauma in the selected corpus of films is complex and problematic, all three directors approach trauma through diverse cinematic and thematic strategies.

When thinking about trauma, it is helpful to turn to the term's opposite, or antithesis, as a starting point; several images can be viewed as antithetical to trauma. Psychological terms that relate to mental health, or more abstract ideas, such as 'wellbeing' or 'wholeness', perhaps come to mind, but none of these is sufficiently nuanced. In contemplating this thesis I have sought a philosophical category or tangible metaphor that most fully captures the condition, or mode of being, that is the antithesis of trauma presented in these films. That metaphor is 'home'. 'To be at home means to be embedded in a dense pattern of relationships to people and place which gives rise to an inherently meaningful experience of the world', Paul O'Connor writes (2016: 1).[2] In these films, trauma is not merely a psychological condition, nor a physiological condition – although this thesis asserts that it is both these things – nor even a social or political condition. It is homelessness. To be fully 'at home' in one's own skin, body, mind, in the house where one lives, one's family, one's country – that is the antithesis of trauma as

[1] Theodor Adorno's oft-cited dictum that 'to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric' (1981: 34) perhaps best exemplifies this standpoint.

[2] Philosophers and theologians might describe the desire for 'home' as the desire for 'perfect and unconditional being', in the sense that human beings 'not only want to be at home in a particular environment; they want to be at home with the totality, at home in the cosmos' (Spitzer 2011: 137).

it is presented in the group of films that comprise the corpus of this thesis. As the chapters that follow will elucidate, what unites this diverse set of narratives is not so much trauma as it is an absence of 'home', in this broad, metaphorical sense – these films portray what it is to be not at home in oneself, to be dispossessed of oneself, one's body, one's surroundings, one's life. All of these films portray lives that evoke homelessness in this sense, and the theme of family, as both a structure of transmission and a source of trauma, unifies this corpus of work. These films help us to think about trauma, the concept of which is discussed in detail in Chapter One; thinking about trauma also helps us to consider the wider issues that are often attendant upon it, such as moral and ethical dilemmas, as well as different ways of being in the world. Although, as I argue below, much has been written about trauma in Argentina and in Argentine cinema, few, if any, have defined or sought to rework our understandings of trauma and engage in a nuanced discussion of it. This thesis does that; first, by reconceptualizing the term trauma and, then, by adopting a comparative approach to six contemporary Argentine films.

This introduction begins by situating these directors' work within what has come to be known as 'New Argentine Cinema', the boom in cinematic production which has been accompanied by a growing body of scholarly work on Argentine cinema. I argue that this term requires re-evaluation. The second part of the introduction will revisit the literature on trauma in recent Argentine cinema, in order to situate the original theoretical approach taken in this thesis within the existing scholarship, identifying both the continuities and departures of my approach. The final section will set out a synopsis of the thesis, giving a brief overview of the chapters and films that will be discussed and providing the rationale for choosing these films.

On the Question of 'New Argentine Cinema'

There is no doubt that, over the past two decades, cinematic production from Argentina has been enjoying increased commercial success and critical acclaim on both the national and international film scenes. This is, in part, the result of changes in film industry legislation in the mid-1990s that opened new avenues

and increased access to funding for film production.[3] Coinciding with this, a number of film schools and academic film journals, such as *Haciendo cine* and *El amante cine*, were established, and an annual independent film festival, the BAFICI [Buenos Aires Festival Internacional de Cine Independiente/Buenos Aires International Independent Film Festival], was inaugurated, showcasing a selection of independent Argentine films. I contend that it is not only timely, but also appropriate, to look at these films beyond the temporal and thematic confines of the critical category of 'New Argentine Cinema'; indeed, one of the aims of this thesis is to open up the work of these directors to a wider field of analysis. To that end, this part of the Introduction contextualises the films discussed in this thesis within that broader body of work, but also demonstrates that New Argentine Cinema presents an eclectic and complex constellation of films. Indeed, Argentine cinematic production since the turn of the millennium has also encompassed trends that have not been associated with the more auteur filmmaking characteristic of New Argentine Cinema. Examples of these more genre or 'blockbuster' productions include Juan José Campanella's *El secreto de sus ojos* (2009) and Fabián Bielinsky's *Nueve reinas* (2000), both of which achieved significant global success. It is noteworthy that Trapero's *Carancho*, discussed in Chapter Four, has more in common aesthetically with these types of productions than with the more arthouse style associated with New Argentine Cinema.

Carri, Martel and Trapero are among the most iconic filmmakers to be associated with New Argentine Cinema. As such, their work has been extensively analysed alongside that of other prominent directors, including Lisandro Alonso (*La libertad* 2001, *Los muertos* 2004, *Fantasma* 2006), Daniel Burak (*Bar El Chino* 2003), Adrián Caetano (*Bolivia* 2001), Martín Rejtman (*Los guantes mágicos* 2003), Daniel Burman (*El abrazo partido* 2003) and Lucía Puenzo (*XXY* 2007, *El niño pez* 2009). Although the work of all of these directors has been framed in terms of New Argentine Cinema – a critical category generally accepted to have emerged with the awarding of the Special Jury Prize of the Mar del Plata Film Festival to *Pizza, birra, faso* (1997) directed

[3] Falicov (2007) provides an excellent overview of the circumstances and debates surrounding the 1994 '*Ley de cine*' (Cinema Law), and how it led to the growth of film production and paved the way for the rise of a young generation of talented filmmakers breaking onto the film scene in subsequent years.

by Adrián Caetano and Bruno Stagnaro – the question of defining and, indeed, justifying the use of the contentious term is worth addressing briefly. This will also serve as a means of situating the directors under consideration within this phenomenon.

Although the films share a number of commonalities, discussed below, I agree with Andermann that what they represent is essentially a 'contradictory and multilayered landscape' of Argentine filmmaking (2012: xiii). This section attempts to sketch out this landscape in order to help situate the films, but to also demonstrate the contentious nature of the term 'New Argentine Cinema'. In *New Argentine Film: Other Worlds* (2011), Aguilar is quick to confront the problem often encountered by critics in identifying a common aesthetic vision or unity among filmmakers whose work is associated with the term; a problem which, he insists, 'lies in considering the unity of the corpus in terms of a generational programme, shared aesthetic project, or series of stylistic features that the directors would more or less subscribe to' (2011: 16). While no such unity can be strictly said to exist, Aguilar points out that 'a relatively unified corpus emerges if these aesthetic problems are considered as epochal features that can be read, with different configurations, in the diverse films of the period' (2011: 16). Such epochal features include a break with the political and identitarian imperatives of the cinema of the 1980s, the eschewal of allegorical stories (although some, such as Martel's *La ciénaga* (2001), have still been read in this way), the absence of an embodied point of view with which the spectator may identify, amorphous narrative constructions, marginalized characters, and realism (2011: 18-31). These are also features of the films discussed in this thesis, as Chapters Two-Four will elucidate.

Aguilar offers a critical response to the transformations taking place in Argentine society, and indeed, throughout the world, during the 1990s and into the new millennium. This arises from his belief that the new cinema coming out of Argentina could in a way help to formulate reflections and make sense of what was becoming, in many ways, a new world (2011: 1). These transformations include

> the emergence of unprecedented jobs, new urban trajectories, a near-permanent link to computer networks, the intensification of consumption

> as a form of individual or group identity, the omnipresence of audiovisual media, mutations in the manifestation of sexuality, the incorporation of economic exclusion as something familiar and irrevocable in the social imagination, and the alteration of traditional political practices. (2011: 1)

His book is based largely around thematic analyses and he takes a deliberately sociological approach to the subject matter, for the reason that 'a sociological gaze helps to construct larger corpuses […] by departing from an analysis restricted to authors or movies and thinking the status of the image and of narration by images in society' (2011: 3). In other words, the new Argentine cinema, not only the films themselves, but everything associated with the industry as a whole, can be used as a tool to investigate the transformations taking place in the 1990s and early years of the new millennium (2011: 3).

The entire first chapter of *New Argentine Cinema: Other Worlds*, entitled "On the Existence of the New Argentine Cinema," is devoted to a detailed and highly comprehensive evaluation of what constitutes New Argentine Cinema, giving due attention to the correlations between production and aesthetics, the changes that took place in artistic production in the mid-1990s and, perhaps most importantly, the new aesthetic pathways taken by the latest generation of filmmakers. Aguilar emphasizes that the idea of a New Argentine Cinema should not be 'considered in strictly aesthetic terms'; rather, what makes the existence of such a phenomenon unquestionable is, he insists, the 'continuity in the production of movies [and] these movies' success outside of Argentina' (2011: 7). Indeed, it is questionable whether such a diverse body of international scholarship on Argentine cinema as now exists, and to which this thesis contributes, would have come about without the unity provided by such a critical category, around which such work might converge. He moves on to an investigation of film as the narration of a world, analysing such diametric concepts as nomadism and sedentarism, dispersion and fixity, and examining new styles of documentary production, the role of sound in film, the use of genre elements, the role of comedy and the rise of corporatism in new Argentine films. The tension he identifies between the categories of nomadism and sedentarism relates, for example, to Trapero's *Familia rodante* (2004), in which the titular family is moving geographically from the urban centre to the provincial margins

(nomadism), but remains in a tight configuration that is portrayed as stifling (sedentarism). He sees these categories as complementary signs of the transformation of the social fabric related to, in particular, the family (2011: 33-4), which, in this thesis, is considered to be a key locus of trauma in which there is a tension between the family as a source of trauma, but also as a defence against it.

For Page (2009), a feature common to films of New Argentine Cinema is a 'minimalism and naturalism' of style (2009: 4), and she notes that these films 'often resis[t] symbolic or allegorical interpretations: there is no attempt to produce a totalizing vision but, instead, a series of micronarratives, snapshots of everyday lives' (2009: 26). The readings offered in this thesis remain true to this aspect of the films, by recognizing their multivalent qualities, beyond the socio-political contexts in which they have been produced. More notable, however, is Page's inclination towards characterizing New Argentine Cinema in terms of its sharp contrasts with the production modes, styles and aesthetics of the filmmaking that preceded it in the 1980s and 90s; she points out that contemporary Argentine films have more in common with the radical Latin American cinema of the 1960s, or with European movements, such as Italian neo-realism, than with their closer Argentine contemporaries of the 1980s and early to mid-90s. This contrast applies to formal and aesthetic features as well as production choices: Page states that after 1995, Argentine films 'reject both the explicit political agendas of [Fernando] Solanas' cinema and the magic and universalism of [Eliseo] Subiela's in favour of a more austere and sombre representation of the everyday,' and that '[i]n production terms, too, the auteur tradition of relatively high budget films […] gave way to a plethora of independent, collaborative projects on shoestring budgets, again harking back to the ad-hoc filmmaking practices of the 1960s' (2009: 32-3). This echoes Aguilar's observation that 'these new directors […] refuse to reproduce the procedures and schemas of the Argentine cinema that preceded them' (2011: 15).

In her chapter on the production of social knowledge in the same monograph, Page further elaborates on her earlier comparisons between New Argentine Cinema and Italian neo-realism; comparisons which can be made with regard to form and aesthetics, as well as thematic concerns. She notes that the stripped-back mode of filmmaking favoured by the young Argentines cannot

strictly be called innovative, since it had already been done in the 1940s and 50s in Italy; rather, it is what she refers to as a 'conscious harking-back' (2009: 35). In other words, what is being re-created in Argentine cinema is the sociological role of film as a 'tool ideally suited to the construction of social knowledge' (2009: 36). She argues, however, that in New Argentine Cinema there is a deliberate failure to deliver the social knowledge that this realist style promises, and this failure comprises a refusal on the part of these filmmakers to 'present themselves as authentic, "insider," interpreters of their own culture'; a refusal which amounts to 'a poignant expression of the crisis of social knowledge, on a local level, and, on a global one, an act of resistance toward First World inscriptions of other cultures, embedded in the imperial collusion of visibility, knowledge, and power' (2009: 56).

Page's discussion on post-dictatorship memory is particularly insightful and nuanced. She challenges common accusations against Carri's *Los rubios* (2003), that the film trivialises and depoliticises the violence waged by the military regime in the 1970s, and that Carri's film shows indifference towards the political motives of her parents (2009: 177). Page contends that personal testimonies, such as that of Carri in *Los rubios*, rather than depoliticizing the events of history, 'bear witness to the omissions and the falsities created by memory itself and the work of excavation always necessary to penetrate at least some of the layers of discourse that mediate historical truth, as well as present identity' (2009: 176-7). Carri's testimony, for Page, acts as a reminder for us of the 'persistent psychological legacies of the political violence of the 1970s, and the complex ethical questions raised by shifting conceptions of the relationship between the personal and the political' (2009: 177). I return to the question of testimony in relation to another of Carri's films, *La rabia*, in Chapter Two.

Andermann, in his book *New Argentine Cinema* (2012), acknowledges the advantage of hindsight afforded by his privileged vantage point on Argentine cinema, compared with that of previous critics; a hindsight which, he insists, obliges him to 'adopt a different, more "anthological" stance' (2012: xiii). My thesis also benefits from such an advantage. While he does not deny that the filmmakers of the mid-1990s revolutionized film practice in Argentina, it is from his somewhat more advanced chronological perspective that Andermann suggests the time may have come to look 'at new Argentine cinema without the

capital letters'; that is, beyond 'the uncertain boundaries of an "independent" generational project'; a critical narrative which, he asserts, 'missed […] the wider, more contradictory and multilayered landscape of film-making [sic] in Argentina' (2012: xii-xiii). In this respect, my thesis is also timely. Andermann is concerned largely with the idea of crisis and how cinema, because of its own vulnerability to economic change, offers particularly useful investigative tools in this area. Like Aguilar and Page, he seeks to elucidate the ways in which New Argentine Cinema differs markedly from that which went before, both in terms of aesthetics and production processes. He begins with a discussion on changes to film funding and production in the 1990s. He makes a connection between changes to how filmmaking was funded and how film aesthetics began to change as a result, noting that filmmakers during this time incorporated the financial austerity experienced by the film industry into the very aesthetics of the films themselves, rather than being merely the subject matter. He goes on to examine in turn the treatment of urban and rural spaces, citing the urban, and in particular the gritty outskirts of Buenos Aires, as the locus of crisis in Argentina. He notes how contemporary Argentine cinema 'at times locates crisis in the fabric of the real, working with non-professional actors and shooting in real-life worlds; at others, it seeks out critical locations allowing for a more detached, reflexive approach both to the social present and to its filmic representation' (2012: 29-30). Andermann's examination of the treatment of genre forms pays particular attention to the role of actors and actoral performance in shaping the development of genre films in New Argentine Cinema.

Given that the films pertaining to New Argentine Cinema are a wide and varied collection of work, it is doubtful that the term fully captures the complexity of the films analysed in this thesis. However, as the discussion above shows, many of the films do share some commonalities and can be viewed together. Moreover, given that all of the films discussed in this thesis were made since the turn of the millennium, and that 'New Argentine Cinema' first emerged in the 1990s, I employ the term 'contemporary' rather than 'new'. The term 'contemporary' also reflects a confluence of theme and aesthetic between these films and work that is being produced currently, by these and other Argentine directors. Three very recent films come to mind in this regard: *Casa Coraggio* (2017) by Baltazar Tokman, a blend of documentary and fiction that was

screened at the BAFICI in 2017; *El rey del Once* (2016) by Daniel Burman; and Pablo Trapero's *El clan* (2015), based on the infamous true story of the Puccio family in Buenos Aires that amassed a fortune through kidnapping and ransom following the demise of the last dictatorship. All of these represent the family as a powerful ontological anchor that shapes the lives of its members, either for better (in the case of the former two films) or for worse (in the latter), a theme that resonates strongly with the readings that are put forward in this thesis.

Trauma in Contemporary Argentine Cinema: A Review of the Literature

The literature review that follows is arranged thematically in terms of the main scholarly approaches to trauma in contemporary Argentine cinema, in order to set out the framework for my original approach to the filmic analysis. I have identified two main strands of critical approach, which are presented in two main sections below. The first addresses how scholarly readings have framed Argentine cinematic representations of trauma in terms of their connection with the last military dictatorship (1976-83), either directly or indirectly. I have highlighted two distinct yet interconnected strands within this group of scholarly literature: one concerns human rights and memory, the other addresses economic issues, such as the 2001 Crisis and economic disparity. The second section deals with literature that addresses manifestations of trauma pertaining to the marginalized, including children and racial minorities. As will be seen, my thesis presents an approach to trauma that both differs from and complements these readings. Although this literature deals loosely with trauma, these writers do not engage critically with the term, nor develop a working concept of it with which to analyse the films. My thesis fills this gap in the literature by developing a detailed and complex theoretical framework of trauma (see Chapter One) and applying it to these films in Chapters Two (on Albertina Carri's *La rabia*), Chapter Three (on Lucrecia Martel's Salta trilogy) and Chapter Four (on Pablo Trapero's *Carancho* and *Nacido y criado*), in order to offer close readings of these films that identify new ways of understanding and analysing both trauma and the films themselves.

The dictatorship and its legacies

Argentine cinema of the first decade of the twenty-first century (in particular, that associated with what has been outlined above as New Argentine Cinema) has largely been viewed in the academic literature in terms of its engagement with the social present of a nation deeply marked by decades of trauma, violence and crisis that are traceable, either directly or indirectly, to political sources or events. Indeed, it is seemingly impossible to approach the subject of trauma in Argentine cultural production of the past several decades without reference to the last military dictatorship of 1976-83. On 24 March 1976, a right-wing military junta seized power, bringing an end to the increasingly volatile presidency of María Estela 'Isabelita' Perón. The military junta's self-proclaimed *Proceso de Reorganización Nacional* [National Reorganization Process], geared towards grand-scale cultural, political and economic reprogramming, was designed to eliminate not only the armed sections of the militant left (such as the Montoneros), but all elements of society that were deemed to be 'subversive': intellectuals, writers and journalists, trade unionists and social workers were particular targets (Feitlowitz 1998: 7). Whilst the regime's official discourse framed the *Proceso* as a 'sacred responsibility' and a fight for 'Western, Christian civilization' (1998: 7), behind the scenes, an extensive network of clandestine detention centres and concentration camps was established, through which thousands of those deemed to be 'subversive' were forcibly 'disappeared': abducted, chained and imprisoned, tortured physically and psychologically and, in many cases, drugged, stripped and dropped from military planes into the Río de la Plata or the South Atlantic.[4] Most were never seen again.[5]

The legacy of state repression has marked the post-dictatorship period. Indeed, as Deborah Martin has noted, trauma has been one of the central themes of post-dictatorship Argentine culture (2016: 80). Cinema, like other forms of

[4] The report published by the National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons (CONADEP), entitled *Nunca Más* (Never Again), lists approximately 8,900 cases of forced disappearance; human rights groups have estimated the number to be as high as 30,000.

[5] It is not my intention here to offer an exhaustive overview of the background to dictatorship and violence inflicted therein as this has been adequately covered by a number of other scholars, nor is it the focus of the readings of the films undertaken in this thesis. However, it is important to mention. For more detailed accounts on the violence executed during the dictatorship, see Wright (2007), Suárez-Orozco (1991) and Corradi (1997, 1982).

cultural production, has engaged with this traumatic political legacy directly as well as in an oblique manner. Nevertheless, it is the political in general, and the dictatorship more specifically, that has dominated the frameworks within which trauma in Argentine cinema has been addressed in academic scholarship on the subject since at least the mid-1990s. Much of this concerns issues of trauma related directly to the dictatorship, such as human rights struggles and post-dictatorship memory (discussed in the next subsection), but the economic consequences of the dictatorship have also been central to many of the theoretical approaches to Argentine cinema (discussed in the subsection that follows the next). My thesis offers something different: I develop an in-depth theoretical framework of trauma in Chapter One, which considers trauma in a nuanced and holistic way. This framework brings together psychological, biological and social elements to understand how they work together in trauma, in order to offer valuable insights into the films. Furthermore, my analyses focus mainly on manifestations of trauma in the private and domestic spheres, of which the family is a central feature.

Human rights, memory and the transmission of trauma

As noted, a significant strand of the literature is concerned with the trauma pertaining to the violence and human rights abuses perpetrated under the military junta and subsequent struggles for justice and accountability by human rights groups, and the 'struggles for memory' (Jelin 2003) as an attempt to process that trauma, often conceived in collective terms. That attempt has taken various forms, involving both collective and individual struggles. For instance, a number of Argentine film scholars have read films as contributing to the construction of memory surrounding the recent traumatic past and the violence done to the individual by the state (Nouzeilles [2005], Moraña [2011] and Tandeciarz [2012]). Nouzeilles, for instance, discusses intergenerational transmission in Albertina's Carri's *Los rubios* through an engagement with Marianne Hirsch's notion of 'postmemory', that is, a form of memory whose 'connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation' (Hirsch 1997: 22, cited by Nouzeilles 2005: 265). Tandeciarz looks at post-dictatorship memory in Juan José Campanella's 2009 film *El secreto de sus ojos* in relation to the memory boom market, and Moraña

reads Campanella's film comparatively with Lucrecia Martel's *La mujer sin cabeza* in terms of the tensions created by impunity laws[6] which had, until more recently, blocked judicial attempts to hold the perpetrators of human rights violations to account. Cinema has played an important role in relation to traumatic memory in general,[7] and films associated with New Argentine Cinema, in particular, have engaged with post-dictatorship memory.[8] In recent years, memory has emerged as a counterpoint to history, concerned with new representations and reworkings of the past in the present (Levey 2016). As Uruguayan sociologist Gabriel Gatti has warned, we should not confuse memory and truth, but rather understand memory as holding out possibilities for thinking about and engaging with the past in new ways (2014: 35). In this sense, memory is tied to the present, and is influenced in and by the cultural, social and economic contexts it inhabits. Memory has a particular relationship to trauma theory at a transnational level; for example, Cathy Caruth's seminal *Unclaimed Experience* (1996) and her edited volume *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995) have been key points of departure in trauma theory in the humanities, as discussed in Chapter One. Argentine cinema has both addressed the notion of memory and contributed to the construction of collective memory; that is, memory has been a theme as well as a mode of transmission.[9] The task of reimagining and rebuilding community, on the national level and otherwise, in the wake of trauma is also taken up in discourses relating to memory and human rights; Page pays particular attention to the potential role that cinema might play

[6] The Due Obedience (1986) and Full Stop (1987) laws were passed by the first democratic government of Raúl Alfonsín (1983-1989). The first restricted the possibility of trials to a small number of perpetrators based on the fact that they were following orders and the second put in place a final deadline for cases brought against perpetrators of human rights violations. These judicial measures were followed up by presidential pardons for those military officers convicted in the 1984 Trial of the Junta, offered by the administration of Carlos Menem (1989-1999) to those military officers convicted in the 1985 trial against the former junta members. However, following a convoluted process of judicial challenges at domestic and international level, the Argentine Congress repealed the Laws of Due Obedience and Full Stop in 2005, paving the way for more significant legal action. For more on post-dictatorship truth and justice proceedings, see: Lessa (2013), Abregú (2000), Barahona de Brito (1997) and Barahona de Brito, González Enríquez and Aguilar (2001).

[7] The cinematic flashback, for instance, is a much-used means of conveying the effects of traumatic memory, as exemplified by films such as Alain Resnais's *Hiroshima mon amour* (1957).

[8] Nicolás Prividera's documentary film *M* (2007) is a notable example.

[9] This is particularly true in relation to documentary film, which has been critically analysed extensively. Notable examples include Carri's *Los rubios* (2003) and María Inés Roqué's *Papá Iván* (2000).

in ‘rebuilding national identity in the absence of a functioning state’ (2009: 111). Emphasis is placed on this process being an intergenerational project, in other words, of transmitting memory to those who did not necessarily live through dictatorship-era repression.

In the Argentine context, human rights and memory discourses are entangled with family relationships, ideas surrounding kinship, and the intergenerational transmission of memory, because families were a direct target of the dictatorship violence and repression, outlined above. As Jean Franco notes, ‘[d]espite the fact that the military appealed to family values – the family being one of the central concepts in their ideology – the holy war was carried out as an act of destruction against families’ (1992: 112). In this regard, one of the strategies was that women who were pregnant at the time of their abduction were kept alive until they gave birth; an estimated 500 babies were then kidnapped and handed over to couples who were deemed by the military to be of an appropriate ideological persuasion, a point to which I return in Chapter Three. Thus, the children of the disappeared were, in effect, raised in families that were sympathetic to or, in some cases, directly involved in the disappearance, torture and murder of their biological parents, as part of the dictatorial regime’s determination to ‘wipe out the historical memory that allowed the idea of resistance to be passed from generation to generation’ (112). The human rights organization Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo [Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo] was formed in 1977 in an effort to trace these children; this, and other questions regarding family and biological kinship, will be further explored in chapters Three and Four of the thesis, in discussion of Martel’s and Trapero’s films respectively.

A number of scholars who address Argentine cinema as part of a broader discussion on cultural production take this familial aspect of the dictatorship and its legacy as their starting points. In her book *The Post-Dictatorship Generation in Argentina, Chile and Uruguay* (2012), Ros is specifically concerned with post-dictatorship memory and the intergenerational transmission of trauma, as represented in films that deal explicitly with the immediate consequences of the dictatorship. Her work aims to create what she terms ‘active transmission’ – an intergenerational dialogic process that involves ‘an opening of the past to those who did not experience it personally’ (9). A similar task is taken up by Sosa in

Queering Acts of Mourning in the Aftermath of Argentina's Dictatorship (2014), which draws on queer theory and performance studies to investigate non-normative acts of intergenerational mourning, often in connection with the reformulation of the traditional family, in the wake of dictatorship violence. Both Ros and Sosa were born during, and grew up in the immediate aftermath of, the dictatorships in their respective countries (Uruguay and Argentina). Their perspectives are deeply informed both by this close positioning and by their generational distancing; in this way, their works are themselves illustrative of the phenomenon of postmemory.

As I have outlined, the main framework within which human rights, memory and the intergenerational transmission of trauma in Argentine cinema have been theorized is political, closely connected to trauma as intrinsic to Argentina's recent history, while the focus on what might be called private is, in a sense, secondary, or at least tangential, to the political context, although they are undoubtedly connected. My thesis looks at the intergenerational transmission of trauma more generally, not necessarily as it relates to the specific political or socioeconomic context. To illustrate how this relates to other scholarly perspectives, Ros, for instance, contrasts her idea of active transmission with a less overt mode of intergenerational transmission, which she terms 'passive'. Passive transmission happens when survivors of trauma cannot express their experience in words, so instead of dialogue there are 'silences, voids, and symptoms', and the effects of trauma 'seep into everyday life' in ways that communicate suffering, but never explain it (2012: 10). In other words, when there is no public space for acknowledging suffering, it tends to inhabit the private sphere; my thesis does not suggest that the public is inconsequential, but is specifically interested in interrogating the private (domestic, family) sphere, rather than public attempts to address trauma. While Ros's theory of passive transmission is concerned with memory connected to the dictatorship, it is clearly applicable to a wide range of scenarios in the private and intimate domain as well, such as domestic violence, rape, adult victims of child sexual abuse, and even experiences such as miscarriage or abortion. All of these are also connected with the body, a key focus in my readings of films that portray some of these experiences of trauma. I expand such frameworks by providing a new framework for trauma that emphasizes its characteristic structure. In the expanded discussion

in Chapter One, I conceptualize trauma not just as the result of uncontrollable state actions but as the defining condition of modern life itself, as demonstrated in these films. This, at the same time, breeds the conditions for unprecedented suffering, totalitarianism and the danger posed by extremes of both chaos and order in the sociocultural and political spheres experienced beyond Argentina.

This study takes a different approach to that of much scholarship to date on Argentine cinema, in that the private, intimate context forms the main field of analysis on which my contextual framework is built, with the political context as another layer to this. My focus is on trauma primarily as a phenomenological experience of individuals and communities as lived from within, rather than as an external phenomenon imposed on subjectivities and collectivities that are defined chiefly in terms of the sociopolitical context in which they are situated. I do not argue that the films' focus on the private and domestic, or their eschewal of explicitly political narratives, mean that the films are *apolitical*, or that trauma connected to political violence is less important than other manifestations. Neither do I attempt to produce reductive readings of the films that simply ignore the sociopolitical contexts. Rather, I read private trauma in a multivalent and nuanced way, which strengthens our understanding of its nature and impact on the individual. I explore the interpretive possibilities, political or otherwise, offered by reading the films within an alternative framework to those that have dominated the academic discourse on Argentine cinema thus far. By so doing I contribute to a deepening of our understanding of trauma, one which considers the ways it is processed in and by the body and mind, and engages with the multiple ways in which it is transmitted.

Economic legacies of the dictatorship: the Crisis and beyond

Much of the scholarship on trauma in Argentine cinema has focused on the trauma associated with political and/or economic factors stemming from the neoliberal economic regime inaugurated during the dictatorship.[10] These came to a head in the economic crisis of 2001, the fallout of which is still being played out in the socioeconomic problems that endure in the present. This line of narrative, mentioned in more detail below, holds that the political violence of the

[10] See Levey, Ozarow and Wylde (2014).

past persists in the present, in the form of social and economic inequalities, unemployment, poverty and social exclusion. This argument is important because it addresses the ways in which cinema can raise awareness of the extent to which the past lives on in the present. Films can bring to light the mechanisms by which the more silent or less visible forms of violence and injustice can be at work under the radar, so to speak, bringing about the conditions in which full-blown traumatic forces can suddenly erupt.

Several major monographs on contemporary Argentine cinema have taken the broadly political and/or economic context of post-dictatorship, post-Crisis Argentina as their main points of departure, and their analysis of how cinematic production has engaged with trauma is carried out within that overall framework. Despite Argentina's transition to democracy in 1983, the legacy of the dictatorship era lingered throughout the 1980s and 1990s with the continuation of neoliberal economic policies introduced during the regime, deepened during the presidency of Carlos Menem (1989-99). The policy of *Convertibilidad* [Convertibility], introduced in 1991, by which the Argentine peso was pegged to the US dollar, gave rise to 'an air of perceived enrichment', as luxury imported goods suddenly became affordable. However, 'the social consequences of creeping unemployment, poverty and exclusion, and underlying economic problems […] remained obscured by the veil of this consumerist paradise' (Levey, Ozarow and Wylde 2014: 3). The effects of two decades of neoliberalism and political corruption came to a head in December 2001, marking the beginning of the most severe crisis in Argentina's history:

> In the space of one month, the country saw four presidents come and go, the largest debt default in international history (at the time), the […] devaluation of the peso, […] a general strike, major lootings, as well as the *Corralito* – a government decree that froze savers' deposits in order to prevent capital flight and a run on the banks. (2014: 5)

A national 'State of Siege' was declared on 19 December 2001, in response to the widespread rioting and looting sparked by the economic crisis (2014: 5). The subsequent spontaneous protests of Argentine citizens, who spilled out onto the streets of Buenos Aires, banging pots and collectively demanding '*¡Que se vayan*

todos!' ['They all must go!'] were met with violent repression by police, who opened fire on protesters, killing approximately 30 people (2014: 6).

Page's *Crisis and Capitalism in Contemporary Argentine Cinema* (2009), Aguilar's *New Argentine Cinema: Other Worlds* (2011) and Andermann's *New Argentine Cinema* (2012), for instance, take the overarching theme of crisis as the starting point of their respective analyses. For Page and Andermann, this mainly pertains to the economic and social crisis of 2001, while Aguilar frames the discussion in terms of the social transformations that took place during the 1990s. In addition, each of these scholars also addresses issues of a tangential nature, such as national identity and marginalized subjectivities, which I discuss in relation to identity politics below. These works cover a wide range of films from diverse theoretical perspectives, thus making vital contributions to scholarship on Argentine cinema; however, the scope of their analysis does not allow for more detailed comparative readings, which this thesis does. I also expand the notion of crisis beyond the economic context to include a more general sense of crisis in relation to identity – a theme which runs through my filmic analyses. These works explore numerous ways in which the films they discuss engage with the effects of capitalism and neoliberalism, the economic models that were adopted during and after the dictatorship and further intensified during the 1990s.[11] They examine how Argentine films chart the rise of social inequality and exclusion, and how economic factors, along with creeping globalization (in both its economic and cultural manifestations), have helped to shape new, particularly marginalized, forms of subjectivities. The scope of these scholars' respective analyses is broad, both thematically and in terms of the variety of films and directors they discuss. My thesis represents a significant departure in both these respects: first, the theoretical focus of my thesis is on a clearly-defined and specific understanding of trauma, as will be outlined in detail in Chapter One. Second, the scope of my film analysis is narrowed to a carefully selected corpus of work by three significant directors. This focused and selective approach enables me to mine the films more exhaustively, offer close comparison to their synergies and differences, and develop and deepen our

[11] For an overview of the crisis and causes, see Levey, Ozarow and Wylde (2014). For more detail on its roots and effects, see Epstein and Pion-Berlin (2016), Fiorucci and Klein (2004) and Galiani, Heymann and Tommasi (2003).

understanding of trauma and its representation, than the more sweeping approaches adopted by other scholars.

Page addresses how films chart the social consequences of economic decline (2009: 3) and reads the 'turning inwards' of films that focus on the private sphere, domestic settings and family life, as related to symptoms of the increasing segregation of society along class lines (2009: 180). The decrease in mobility associated with the rise in crime and consequent retreat to the safety of the home leads to diminished access to culture, and cultural impoverishment in turn leads to greater social segregation (180). Page reads the focus on the private sphere in the films of Carri and Martel, in particular, not as an eschewal of politics but as a revision of the critical categories of the political (182). Andermann (2012) also focuses on the way in which New Argentine Cinema has engaged with crisis, in both its literal and thematic manifestations. The bulk of Andermann's analysis is concerned with the 'critical transformations of the nation's social geography under the impact of crisis and its effects on cinematic tropes, settings and landscapes' (2012: xiv). He focuses on the city as the main locus of crisis, examining cinematic engagement with how crisis is lived and experienced in formal and thematic aspects and addressing a diverse range of films, including work by Trapero, Sandra Gugliotta, Mariano Donoso and Lisandro Alonso. Whilst my thesis also examines the cinematic portrayal of landscape as a means of representing trauma, my analyses focus mainly on rural locations. Aguilar's approach is also arranged thematically; his treatment is of how the films associated with New Argentine Cinema engage with the social landscape that characterized the 1990s and early 2000s and he addresses a wide array of films and directors. While these works contribute to knowledge on how films have engaged with the main themes and repercussions of the 2001 Crisis, what they lack is a focus on the 'micro', or personal, level; for instance, how issues related to the blurring of the boundaries between private and public have played out on interpersonal relationships, family structures and the body. These works deal with the notion of crisis in a narrow sense of the socio-political and economic, but not in the broader sense of the familial, which this thesis addresses, making an important contribution to knowledge in these areas.

Several peer-reviewed articles also take the economic consequences of the dictatorship as the main point of departure for their analysis. For instance,

Copertari, in no uncertain terms, connects the experience of loss articulated by films associated with New Argentine Cinema to 'a very concrete process: the virtual vanishing of the state as a product of the neo-liberal [sic] policies that transformed Argentina during the 1990s and the correlated erosion of the national community' (2005: 279). Sosa (2009) and Martin (2013) both read Martel's *La mujer sin cabeza* in terms of post-dictatorship trauma, drawing parallels between the thousands of citizens forcibly disappeared during the dictatorship and the new, economic "victims" of social exclusion along class and race lines, which spiked throughout the neoliberal 1990s under the presidency of Carlos Menem (1989-1999). Losada's (2010) reading of the film as engaging in cinematic free indirect discourse, a theory which concerns the way in which one's social class affects the way one sees the world, places his analysis on similar economic and social class lines as those of Sosa and Martin. Losada's reading draws a parallel between the protagonist's psychological crisis and her social status as a member of the privileged white upper class, a perspective which is largely in line with how Martel's Salta trilogy as a whole has been interpreted by other scholars, including Sosa (2009), Martin (2013) and Lund and Reber (2012). These scholars thus read the films in terms of the political and economic context. My analysis, on the other hand, locates that crisis on the personal and philosophical, rather than political and economic, planes, not only in relation to Martel's work but also in my analysis of the other directors' films. Extant approaches tend to emphasize exogenous factors and socio-economic structures, rather than the individual, even when it is the individual that is the main focus of the film. What they are lacking is a focus on the individual, which is addressed by my close readings of the films. This study departs from the premise that systems, whether economic, political or social, are always made up of individuals; therefore, if change is to be effected in the system, it has to begin at the level of the individual. This is where the question of moral subjectivity that I further in the theoretical framework in Chapter One is fundamental in putting forward an original reading of the collection of films specifically and to contemporary Argentine film in general. Systems cannot be held accountable in the same way that individuals can, therefore blaming the system tends to sideline the importance not only of individual moral responsibility and accountability, but of individual agency.

Marginalized Identities

Notable efforts have been made, particularly in more recent literature on Argentine films, discussed below, to extend the frames of reference beyond the political and economic sphere and its corollaries, and expand the field of analysis to include trauma that is not directly related to the dictatorship and the economic policies it set in motion. In this vein, much attention has been given to issues surrounding the trauma that stems from power structures along identity lines. This school of thought considers, for instance, children as marginalized, powerless subjectivities (Rocha & Seminet 2014; Dufays 2014; Josiowicz 2014; Martin 2011, 2013, 2016), and racial minorities and women as subordinated to the European, bourgeois, patriarchal ruling class in an unequal power relation (Forcinito 2006; Rangil 2007; Losada 2010; Selimovic 2015). Such writing draws on sociological, cultural studies, and feminist frameworks; the latter in particular address issues related to the family and tend to focus almost exclusively on patriarchal systems as the main problematic. Carri's and Martel's films, in particular, which I discuss in Chapters Two and Three respectively, have been read within these types of frameworks. My approach expands these frameworks to also consider such factors as the role of biological processes and the failure of individual and collective responsibility in the transmission of trauma.

A noteworthy approach is one that considers the child on screen and the child's perspective as marginalized subject; Rocha and Seminet's edited volume *Screening Minors in Latin American Cinema* (2014) offers insightful contributions that analyse the representation of children's subjectivity and agency in recent Latin American films in the use of film techniques such as the child's gaze and voice. In their respective chapters in that volume, Dufays and Jociowicz engage productively with Karen Lury's work on representations of the child, *The Child in Film: Tears, Fears and Fairytales* (2010). Dufays reads the transmission of trauma across generations in Carri's *La rabia* in terms of a melancholy narrative, a reading I engage with in Chapter Two in discussion of that film. This echoes Ros's (2012) theory of passive transmission, in which the silences and gaps convey what is too painful to utter. Josiowicz examines gender violence in *La rabia* in terms of the development of children's agency through

"coming to voice", an engagement with Lisa Cartwright's *Moral Spectatorship* (2008). Selimovic (2015) also reads *La rabia* in terms of patriarchal power structures and discusses the autistic child as a marginalised figure.[12] What this thesis adds to these readings is a focus on the body and how trauma is intersubjectively transmitted in ways other than through narrative. My analysis innovatively explores its transmission from body to body at the level of biochemistry and neurological systems, as well as considering the social and surrounding environments.

In her analysis of Martel's films, Martin engages with feminist and psychoanalytic theories that focus on marginalized subjectivities in the form of the ghostly or spectral (2011, 2013, 2016). Forcinito (2006) discusses the cinematic gaze in Martel's work in terms of gender, through engagement with a feminist theoretical framework. Slobodian (2012) also offers a feminist perspective on the female gaze in Martel's films. Both Sosa (2009) and Martin (2013) address an ethical dimension of *La mujer sin cabeza* in terms of the film's treatment of social stratifications along race, class and gender lines, which I discuss in more detail in Chapter Three on Martel's work. Martin engages with Giorgio Agamben's (1998) theory of bare life to posit the child as a liminal remnant, or 'in-between', while Sosa engages with Judith Butler's (2004) concept of the 'faceless' – those whose lives are not grieveable – in relation to how the film presents the racial underclass. Thus both Sosa and Martin ultimately link their analysis of the film back to the dictatorship era and the neoliberal restructuring that was put in place during the 1970s. Beyond the scope of their analyses is a more nuanced focus on the domestic sphere itself and familial relationships as both a source of trauma and crisis as well as being the space that provides a sense of meaning, interconnectedness and 'home' in the broad sense identified at the outset of this introduction.

Aims of the Thesis

The thesis will examine contemporary Argentine cinema, with a particular focus on the works of Martel, Carri and Trapero, as a comparable set of films

[12] Selimovic's forthcoming monograph, *Affective Moments in the Films of Martel, Carri and Puenzo* (2018), examines affect and emotions as terrains of sociopolitical significance in these directors' films.

belonging to a broadly conceivable cinematic movement, yet acknowledging their differences. Whilst contrasting in aesthetics, films by these directors, including Martel's *La mujer sin cabeza* (2008), Carri's *La rabia* (2008) and Trapero's *Nacido y criado* (2006), display comparable narrative approaches to trauma, whereby pivotal, shocking events, such as car crashes and witnessing violent and humiliating sexual acts, are intensely personalized by the protagonist. Thus external, bodily shock is converted into internal, psychological trauma, something that has not been analysed previously in connection to these films. I contend that Argentina's filmic representations of trauma go beyond the political to the very heart of the human condition. In this way, they occupy the opaque, ambiguous spaces between the private and political, the individual and collective, and the national and global. Therefore, I argue that a new analytical framework for Argentine cinema is required: one which views the human subject, in all of his or her moral complexity, within a global culture. I argue that, viewed thus, Argentine films, many of which engage with violence and trauma in different ways, offer unique insights into how the individual negotiates the moral and ethical ambiguities associated with trauma in the globalized age.

The thesis considers three key facets of trauma: the bodily, the psychological and the social. The former addresses the cinematic representation of bodies, and the way in which trauma is transmitted in and by the body, in order to scrutinize the link between trauma and corporality. The latter two examine the psychological dimensions of trauma, and explore how the aftermath and ongoing fallout of traumatic experiences are represented in films by engaging with a structural theory of trauma and a phenomenological approach to the human person, which I develop in detail in Chapter One of the thesis. Drawing on the Edith Stein's underexplored phenomenology (1989, 2000) as a means of negotiating the physical, psychological and social spheres, I assert that the way in which these three dimensions of trauma are interconnected elucidates the variety of ways in which violence remains present in society and continues to proliferate in subtle forms.

By interrogating the ambiguous spaces between the physical and psychological, the individual and collective, and the private and political, I argue that these films offer insights into the relationship between physical and psychological trauma. Moreover, I propose that Argentine cinema can illustrate

more about the relationship between physical and psychological trauma and thus engage with the subtle ways in which violence permeates the globalized world. In so doing, the thesis highlights Argentina's exceptional contribution to contemporary cinema as a creative didactic force within a precarious national and global culture.

Outline of the Thesis

In Chapter One of the thesis, I set out the epistemological and theoretical framework that informs my analysis of the films in the chapters that follow. In that chapter, I develop a detailed working definition of trauma, based on a structural approach developed by psychiatrists in response to what they have perceived to be a dilution of the term 'trauma', through which the term has lost its experiential emphasis. The aim of the chapter is to argue that trauma is not merely a psychic construct or a physical construct, it is also a social construct. I make the case for a definition of trauma as a boundary phenomenon that spans and transcends the oppositional categories of psychological and physical, individual and collective, and private and public, thus developing a more holistic vision of what trauma is and does than one which, for instance, emphasizes the nature of events themselves as 'traumatic'. I engage with the phenomenology of Edith Stein (1891-1942), whose theory focuses on the nature of the human person with an emphasis on lived bodily experience, sense perception and empathy, in order to demonstrate the interconnectedness of the body, the mind, the individual and the collective, that will set the scene for the filmic analyses that follow in the remaining chapters. Central to Stein's theory is the concept that valuing is an inherent human activity that is closely related to identity and meaning. Her theory is significant when applied to trauma because, contrary to post-Holocaust approaches that tend to suggest the impossibility of representing trauma, her thought demonstrates how trauma can be represented in the body itself, and not only through narrative.[13] That opens the chapter to a discussion of morality as inherent to identity, which I discuss through drawing on the moral philosophy of Charles Taylor and the sociological approach of Anthony Giddens.

[13] As a thinker whose work pre-dates the Holocaust (indeed, she was condemned to death at Auschwitz, as noted in Chapter One) Stein's theory has not been influenced by the kinds of post-Holocaust thinking which have given rise to the notion that trauma cannot be represented.

The final section of the chapter examines Roberto Esposito's biopolitical theory of immunity and community, in order to offer a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between private and public. This theory closely resembles the dynamic of the traumatic encounter as characterized in the structural approach at the outset of the chapter, and therefore elucidates why and how trauma proliferates in the globalized age. This first chapter establishes an epistemological framework for the chapters that follow; it provides a holistic vision of the structures of human experience that are at stake in the traumatic experience: the body, interpersonal relationships, language, identity, the moral life and our social bonds. In a sense, the chapter offers a picture of what it is to be whole and, as such, illustrates what occurs in the fragmentation of traumatic experience – the condition which each of the films discussed in the individual chapters portrays in a diversity of ways.

Chapter Two of the thesis examines the work of Albertina Carri (1973-), who is perhaps best known for her first feature film, *Los rubios* [*The Blondes*] (2003), and for being the daughter of parents who were disappeared during the last dictatorship. Following a general overview of Carri's cinematic and political project, the chapter focuses on her third feature-length film, *La rabia* [*Anger*] (2008), a dark, raw tale of parochial violence, and emotional and sexual brutality, as seen through the eyes of a mute and autistic young girl. The chapter examines bodily and psychological trauma at something of a micro level, as portrayed mainly through the mother-child relationship of the two female protagonists. The analysis engages with attachment theories that draw on neuroscience and biochemistry, in order to trace how trauma is intersubjectively transmitted at both the corporal and the psychic levels. The chapter also examines the relationship between human and animal as presented in the film, to show how the trauma in the film involves the separation of 'the body' from 'the person' through a process of violent dehumanization that is reminiscent of torture.

The third chapter looks at the first three feature-length films by Lucrecia Martel (1966-), whose films are among a number of recent works directed by women which, in the words of one critic, 'operate according to their own stubbornly private rules, logic, timing, sense of space' (Jones 2005). Such a description would seem to befit the female characters that inhabit Martel's on-screen world as much as the films themselves, a characteristic her work shares

with that of Carri. Monolithic matriarchal figures, whose quirks, faults and failings reverberate through the generations, loom large in Martel's work. Yet, her style of filmmaking immerses the viewer in a distinctly childlike and fluid experience of being in the world, by eschewing establishing shots and other such orientating devices, and privileging the non-visual and off-screen space. This chapter will consider motherhood in crisis in Martel's *La ciénaga* [*The Swamp*] (2001), *La niña santa* [*The Holy Girl*] (2004) and *La mujer sin cabeza* [*The Headless Woman*] (2008), known as the Salta trilogy for their common geographic setting and semi-autobiographical concerns (Jubis 2009). Whilst motherhood is the main thematic focus of the chapter, it is analysed largely in relation to adolescence, a time of identity formation and an opening up to the world. This chapter plays close attention to how Martel uses cinematic techniques, such as the tight framing of bodies and the use of asynchronized sound, to vividly portray the interconnections between the body and the world external to it, mainly through sense perception. Focusing on the portrayal of motherhood and the maternal as highly ambivalent in these films, the chapter then addresses questions related to a breakdown of ethical care and motherliness that ruptures the boundaries between private and public.

The fourth and final chapter turns to the work of Pablo Trapero (1971-) and explores the representation of physical and psychological trauma in *Nacido y criado* [*Born and Bred*] (2006) and *Carancho* [*The Vulture*] (2010) in order to identify ways in which, in the globalized age, trauma is perpetuated in cycles of violence and re-traumatization, in both the public and private spheres, and how this process might be counteracted. Whilst traffic accidents provide the pivotal, shocking events from which both films' traumatic trajectories evolve, the films differ significantly in their respective treatment of the subject matter, as well as in their aesthetics. *Nacido y criado* provides a stark portrait of psychological shock, with its characteristic fragmentation, within the intimate family sphere, as with the films of Carri and Martel. In *Carancho*, the focus shifts from the private to the public arena, as trauma is placed within the dual loci of flesh and marketplace. Here, the moral and ethical tensions between public and private space are thrown into relief, thereby giving rise to questions surrounding the exploitation of personal (bodily) shock and trauma, in the precarious socio-economic context of a globalized society. This comparative reading of *Nacido y*

criado and *Carancho* employs a structural approach to trauma, in order to demonstrate the ways in which the fundamental structure shared by psychological trauma, violence and physical pain, and exacerbated by increasing globalization, allows trauma to proliferate in ever-shifting manifestations.

The thesis concludes by placing the six films in dialogue with one another. The main locus of traumatic experience in the films discussed in Chapters Two, Three and Four is the domestic sphere. In this sense, the films depict, in different ways, the process of identity formation, which begins with the body and gradually opens out to the world, since the family or home is usually the setting in which the 'self' is formed in relation to others and in negotiation with the background of values that are available from the surrounding culture. In all of the films, the symbolic support that the family would ideally provide is either fragmented or missing; either the family itself is seen as a source of trauma, or the disintegration of the family is the result of uncontrollable circumstances which leave the protagonists traumatized.

The order of the chapters of the thesis loosely reflects the progression of a human being from infancy, through childhood and adolescent awakening, and into adult life. Thus, taken together, the chapters present different manifestations of trauma appropriate to these stages of life, development and sociality. Chapter Two, on Albertina Carri's *La rabia*, addresses the way the infant comes to know the world through its first points of contact – the mother or primary caregiver, the immediate family, and relatives, friends and neighbours – as well as what can happen when this primary setup is far from optimal. My discussion of Lucrecia Martel's trilogy in Chapter Three is based around motherhood, but largely in connection with adolescence, a time of life when the person is coming of age and attempting to form an identity from what they encounter in their environs and in the broader world; an opening up of horizons and coming to know oneself in relation to the world and others. Through its relationship to the overarching crisis of the maternal, this process is also in crisis in these films. The trauma associated with these crises is ultimately seen to have a strong moral and ethical component. The two films by Pablo Trapero that I discuss in Chapter Four deal with the adult world, both private and public: parents with a young child starting out as a family, who experience a traumatic loss in *Nacido y criado*; and in *Carancho*, a man and a woman who are both somewhat lost and alienated, looking for some

form of meaningfulness and anchorage through their love for each other, in a society that feeds off the flesh of its people instead of feeding their souls. In this way, the order of the chapters also loosely follows the pattern of progression from subject to intersubjectivity (in Chapter Two), from the individual to the collective, in an opening up to the wider world (in Chapter Three), and private and public, where the family and the socio-political context are seen to be in conflict, in a world that appears beyond their control due to a crisis of public and political leadership (in Chapter Four). Finally, connecting all of these films is an emphasis on the body and its centrality in traumatic experience, in that it both transmits and metabolizes trauma. The next chapter sets out in detail the theoretical framework that brings all of these elements together in the readings of the films in the chapters that follow.

CHAPTER ONE

Blurred Boundaries: Towards a New Understanding of Trauma

Introduction

This thesis is concerned with trauma primarily as a boundary phenomenon, that is, one that inhabits the interstices between the oppositional categories of psychological and physical, individual and collective, and private and public. A key aim of this chapter is to set out my structural approach to trauma, which foregrounds the underlying structure – the sameness – that permeates the multiplicity of traumatic experiences, and to show how this structure spans and transcends the divisions between the binary concepts mentioned above. Trauma is experienced as a breach or collapse of the boundary that separates these spheres, and as such it inhabits this borderland area. This theoretical approach guides analysis of the selected films. The phenomenon that we call trauma has been approached from diverse perspectives and undergone multiple revisions in humanities scholarship over the last several decades (Luckhurst 2008; Kaplan 2005). It affects individuals and collectivities by attacking their symbolic framework, including language, sense of self, and identity.

When thinking about trauma it is helpful to briefly map out the main thematic areas that trauma has traversed, in order to establish a sense of the various ways in which it has been characterized. Derived from the Greek word denoting a physical wound, the use of the term "trauma" has been subjected to reworking and rearticulation over time. The first transmutation of the concept was from the medical to the mental realm in the late nineteenth century, when "trauma" began to be used metaphorically to describe a condition of the nervous system, 'that interstitial locale somewhere between the body and mind' (Luckhurst 2008: 2-3). This transition is largely associated with modernity, as traditional ways of life were becoming displaced by new configurations in social relations and relationships with the surrounding environment, resulting in a sense of both physical and ontological dislocation. Industrialization also led to transformations in the legal sphere, with the introduction of insurance and other forms of protection against accidents. In this sense, trauma became implicated in

the phenomenon Giddens refers to as the 'sequestration of experience' – discussed in more detail below – as well as subsumed into the realm of biopolitics, a point I also return to below. The effects of industrialization also coincide with trauma being incorporated into the field of Freudian psychoanalysis, an area that has informed multiple approaches in trauma theory, in particular the theories on memory and narrative put forward by Cathy Caruth and Dori Laub. These scholars tend to treat trauma as an 'aporia of representation', an idea which emphasizes the ways in which trauma resists representation in language and narrative and has had a major influence on trauma studies in the areas of cultural production and aesthetic theory in the humanities. This approach was influenced in part by Adorno's thinking in relation to the traumatic fallout of Nazism, summarized in the statement, cited previously, that 'to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric' (1981: 34).[14] Yet, the filmic analyses throughout this thesis illustrate, rather, that trauma *is* representable, and that film offers a particularly fascinating, indeed *transformative*, medium for its representation. The films under consideration in this thesis are selected precisely because they reveal contrasting and complex ways in which trauma is represented on screen. Robert Jay Lifton's work in the area of Holocaust studies was a major influence in the integration of trauma into the field of identity politics. In particular, his introduction of the notion of the trauma 'survivor', following psychological analysis of the effects of the bombing of Hiroshima during World War II, was a point of departure for a number of politically disenfranchised groups to integrate the concept of trauma survival into their agendas. Laura Brown's seminal essay, "Not Outside the Range: One Feminist Perspective on Psychic Trauma", for instance, integrated the notion of trauma survival into feminist theory, by contesting the contention held at the time of writing that, for events to qualify as traumatic, they must fall outside the range of normal experience (1995).

What these diverse approaches, understandings and responses to trauma invariably suggest or indicate is that trauma results from the collapse of various forms of structure: the physical integrity of the body, or bodily tissues, or functions; the psychological structure that allows one to have a coherent sense of

[14] Giorgio Agamben, discussed in Chapters Two and Three, also appears to take his cue from Adorno, citing Auschwitz as 'the very aporia of historical knowledge' (1999: 12).

self; the psycho-social structure that enables one to form a sense of personal identity and make sense of the surrounding world; the collective structures that make possible the formation of group identities; the language and narrative structures that enable the creation of individual and collective meaning. Departing from this premise, this chapter argues that this structural aspect – the fact that trauma functions at the level of structure – is what makes it such a multifaceted and transmissible phenomenon. One of the aims of this chapter, and of this thesis more broadly, is 'to look closely and more carefully not simply at the trauma, but at the structure of experience within which trauma is made manifest' (Eaglestone 2014: 18). I begin with a detailed structural analysis of trauma, in order to provide the framework for the theoretical approach adopted throughout the thesis. However, the main focus of this thesis is not trauma in the strictly *clinical* sense; I propose, rather, that trauma encompasses a broad spectrum of phenomena, including shock, crisis and violence. Furthermore, I argue that the effects associated with trauma, such as the fragmentation of the self and loss of meaning, as well as its moral and ethical dimensions, point not only to our rights, but also to our obligations towards one another.

Viewing trauma in terms of structure reveals that there are two interconnected underlying factors at stake, around which the question of trauma revolves. One is *identity*, in the fundamental sense of 'the most basic ontological unit, the most primitive thing in existence, the individual substance' (Lewis 2015: 214). In this chapter, I propose that the identity we speak of in relation to trauma must not be understood as a purely psychic construct; rather, it is a psycho-social construct. The other factor at stake in the question of trauma is *meaning*. Traumatic experience revolves around meaning and the structures that create the contexts in which meaning can be made. The age we currently inhabit is one in which meaning itself is continually called into question and destabilized by the very conditions we live in, from the ontological, to the social, to the political. Even the geophysical and cosmic conditions surrounding us are seen as increasingly unstable, as advances in technology reveal to us the fragility and vulnerability of our existence, whilst at the same time offering both possibilities of protection and the potential for destruction. It would seem that any human phenomenon that requires or relies upon structure of some kind for its continued functioning or existence is susceptible to some form of trauma. The second and

third sections of this chapter look more closely at concepts of the self, identity and meaning in order to tease out the underlying structures that inform these concepts and obtain a clearer picture of what is meant by categories such as physical and psychological, individual and collective, private and public, and how these categories actually appear in lived experience. These sections address the structures of our individual and collective life from a phenomenological perspective, one which also emphasizes experience.

I propose that the films discussed in this thesis can help us to better understand all of the interconnections within the structure of trauma. Engaging with film narratives offers a valuable way of exploring questions surrounding trauma, because it allows us, in a way that is both immediate and emotionally gripping, to vicariously experience what we might otherwise overlook. Looking at these films in terms of trauma as a structure offers a more universal understanding of subjects or ideas that are often viewed specifically in political or sociological terms. This chapter advances the conceptual framework necessary for reading these films in this more nuanced way.

In brief, I begin with a detailed structural analysis of trauma, which enables an identification of the underlying framework that permeates traumatic experience and assists in identifying the commonalities and consistencies that occur in a variety of manifestations of trauma, thus facilitating a holistic and universal working definition of trauma. In the second section, I engage with the phenomenology pioneered by the underexplored scholar, Edith Stein, in order to uncover what is meant by a 'self', how it comes to be experienced as such through its bodily, psychic and social capacities, and how these capacities are related to one another in lived experience. In the third section, I then examine what were seen to be the central factors at stake in the experience of trauma: identity and meaning. I make the case that many societies today are experiencing an identity crisis that stems from a crisis of meaning and morality. Having delineated the relationships within two of the three oppositional pairings I set out to examine in order to define trauma as a boundary phenomenon (physical and psychological, and individual and collective), the final section seeks to explore the third of these pairings: private and public. To do so, I engage with Roberto Esposito's biopolitical theory of immunity and community, an analogy which

closely resembles the structure of trauma itself as defined throughout this chapter and which informs the filmic analysis undertaken in the following chapters.

A Structural Analysis of Trauma

The structural analysis of trauma presented here is based on a clinical and highly conceptualized theory that was developed by a group of Israeli psychiatrists, Mordechai Benyakar, Ilan Kutz, Haim Dasberg and Max J. Stern (1989), in response to what they perceived as an over-emphasis on symptomatology in the clinical diagnosis of trauma. They argue that an emphasis on symptoms alone has resulted in the loss of trauma's original connotations of disruption and discontinuity, to the extent of the term becoming synonymous with 'any terrible situation' (Benyakar et al. 1989: 432). In recognition of this, I make the case for re-examining trauma, in order to establish a more precise working definition. I present this conceptualized approach in detail here for three reasons. First, it provides an accurate indication of the conditions under which the full manifestation of trauma is likely to occur, and will assist in identifying ways in which trauma and its associated phenomena might be averted or prevented. In other words, this approach allows for a consideration of 'the myriad, potential, human transformative manoeuvres aimed at avoiding structural collapse' (447), and my analysis of the films later in the thesis expands on and illustrates these conditions. In doing so, I advocate a deeper understanding of the human condition. Second, this approach facilitates an identification of the sameness – that is, the underlying structure – that permeates the multiplicity of traumatic experiences, elucidating how mechanisms of trauma can be reiterated and perpetuated through time and across a variety of spheres. The films discussed in this thesis depict a cyclical characteristic of trauma, and the structural approach illuminates why that is so. Finally, it will assist in identifying the commonalities and consistencies between manifestations of trauma in the binary realms mentioned at the outset, for 'by virtue of its inherent global nature' (433), a structural approach 'can explain how such disparate events as a heart attack, car accidents, rape, war or concentration camp experiences, or, in fact, any psychosocial change may be traumatogenic' (447). The films analysed in this thesis all deal with these types of universal traumas; car accidents are a particularly strong motif, since they are the main source of trauma in both of

Trapero's films discussed in Chapter Four, as well as in Martel's *La mujer sin cabeza* in Chapter Three. It is worth noting, for example, that in the structural approach the term "threat" replaces the more commonly-used diagnostic term "stressor" because, whilst it retains the notion of pressure and disruption, "threat" 'also indicates the existence of a subjective assessment of imminent pain, harm, or danger' (438). This differs significantly from theories of trauma that emphasize the nature of events themselves, rather than the way in which they are experienced. In the structural approach, 'threats [cannot] be defined solely by the inherent nature of the event, but only retrospectively by the event/response relationship' (438).

In brief, the premise of the structural approach is that all trauma involves the collapse of a structure or system, which is essentially an identity or autonomy (this is true of all systems, whether they are biological, psychological or social) (434). In humans, autonomy is 'the capacity to have a sense of identity, continuity and internal consistency in the face of relentless external and internal pressure' (437). When a traumatic experience occurs, it 'cannot be integrated into the structure of self and meaning' (437); hence, autonomy is (at least temporarily) lost. The traumatic experience, however, is 'always followed by a reorganizatory attempt' and this is defined as the 'post-traumatic state' (443). This post-traumatic state is the condition in which the protagonists of the films analysed in this thesis are presented, as they struggle to regain their identity and sense of self, and retake possession of their lives.

Benyakar et al. define psychic trauma as

> the collapse of the structure of self along all four referential planes resulting from an encounter of a catastrophic threat and chaotic response, [occurring] at a discrete point in time and result[ing] in the experience of loss of autonomy [that] is incompatible with former recognized relationships that define the sense of self. (437)

A systematic unpacking of this definition will be helpful in order to explicate the structural approach to trauma that is employed in the filmic analysis presented in this thesis. A 'structure' in general can be defined as 'a system of transformations […] that involve laws […] which never yield results external to the system nor employ elements that are external to it' (Piaget 1971, cited by

Benyakar et al. 1989: 433). A structure, be it a simple biological system, a psychological structure or a social system or structure, comprises three key principles: *wholeness*, *transformation* and *self-regulation* (1989: 433-4). The principle of *wholeness* is synonymous with autonomy in humans in so far as it relates to the 'capacity to have a sense of identity, continuity, and internal consistency in the face of a relentless internal and external pressure', as cited previously. This implies that the self, like any structure, is endowed with a certain capacity for adaptability to its environment. The principle of *transformation* is related to this capacity for adaptability. It implies the rearrangement of equilibrium according to mechanisms that continuously accommodate to internal and external forces and require the capacity to form boundaries that enable a shift between 'open' and 'closed' states, that is, transitional states that allow either a merging with or disconnection from the external environment (more will be said about these states in the section on traumatic experience) (Durkin 1981, cited by Benyakar et al. 434). The notion of transformation is significant for the films that are discussed in this thesis. All of these films present protagonists that are engaged in a struggle to adapt to the challenges and demands of the environments in which they find themselves, be they familial, social, political, or geographic, and this struggle is seen as both a source of trauma and as an attempt to overcome it. *Self-regulation* is required in order for transformation (or 'the capacity for forming flexible configurations') to occur whilst maintaining wholeness (1989: 434). It implies the ability to recognize internal and external changes in order to either initiate or terminate 'adaptational operations', such as switching from open to closed states. Self-regulation therefore presupposes a capacity for self-reference or self-knowledge (434).

Referential planes: the fabric of the self

The psychological system maintains its balance and coherence by 'relating its representational schemes of self and reality to several planes of reference and to dimensions of time and space' (435). 'Referential planes' are basically descriptive analytical tools that facilitate the study of the events and processes within the structure of the self; the four distinct referential planes represent 'cross sections of schemes of the self' (446). It should be noted that, whilst each plane

(artificially) isolates and highlights a particular dimension of the system, events in fact occur simultaneously along all four planes. The planes are divided into structural and functional; the structural are concerned with the relationships between elements in the psychological structure, while functional denotes the action that occurs between those elements. The structural and functional planes are subdivided into 'psycho-' and 'socio-' categories: the 'psycho-' planes refer to elements within the psychic structure, while the 'socio-' planes are concerned with representations of the self and its social surrounding, or the 'environmental superstructure' (435). Thus the four referential planes are termed *psychostructural*, *sociostructural*, *psychofunctional* and *sociofunctional*.

The *psychostructural* plane is concerned mainly with intrapsychic elements, such as the id, ego and superego, while the *sociostructural* is concerned with 'relationships between members of a given social unit' (436), such as a couple, family or professional group. Power balances within social or familial groups would be described within this category; similarly, marital breakdown, the persecution of a community, or the severing of links within an extended family might constitute threats along this plane. Again, this is significant for the films discussed in the following chapters, as they are narratives that revolve predominantly around family, and the traumas they present in some way affect and are affected by family and familial relationships. The *psychofunctional* plane refers to 'the products of actions of specific psychic mechanisms like anxiety, anger, or apathy' (436). Threats along this plane might include forbidden feelings, or the eruption of intense or unexpected emotions. The *sociofunctional* plane includes 'those types of prevailing moods or behaviors that express the interactions within a given social frame' (437). These include, for instance, power struggles based on gender or social factors, angry silences in family relationships, or low morale in professional groups. Problems along this plane might include the 'inability to speak freely', resulting in 'a threat to the healthy cohesiveness of the group' (437). This is particularly germane to Carri's film (see Chapter Two), in which silence and violence are intimately intertwined. When change or restructuring occurs on one or more planes, it is important that at least one plane (or part of it) remain stable. For example,

> newly-arrived immigrants are threatened on the sociostructural and sociofunctional planes. If their psychostructural and psychofunctional planes are stable they are able to withstand the abrupt change. The more threatened they feel on the "psycho" planes, the more they tend to hold on to old habits and customs […] until enough stability is maintained on the psychostructural and psychofunctional planes to enable gradual inevitable changes along the "socio" planes. (437)

Thus it might be said, in a figurative sense, that the referential planes resemble interwoven fibres that, together, form the fabric of the self. Damage to some of the fibres might weaken the fabric, but the overall structure remains intact; however, if all the fibres at a specific point become damaged, the structure of the fabric is breached, resulting in a tear or hole. This notion of a breach will be returned to in Chapter Four in relation to Trapero's films, building on Esposito's theory on immunity and community, as set out below.

Traumatic experience: threats and responses

A 'threat' constitutes a compromise in the balance and coherence of the psychological structure along one or more of the referential planes. A threat is defined in terms of its traumatogenicity, or traumatic potential; it is *stressogenic* when reorganisation is disrupted on one or more planes, but not all four at once, and *catastrophic* when all four planes are overwhelmed at once. Whether a threat is stressogenic or catastrophic can only be identified within the realm of experience, not by the nature of the event itself. Criteria that are required to determine the traumatogenicity of a threat include *loss*, *unpredictability*, *proximity to the self* and *suddenness*. Of these, *loss* is the only mandatory criterion, because 'it always threatens the integrity of the structure by virtue of annihilating elements or functions without which the structure cannot retain its functional wholeness' (439). Loss may be related to either the physical or the symbolic representations of the self; thus, a threat against one's belief system may be just as traumatogenic as a threat to one's physical integrity, since both 'physical and mental integrity are but instances of the self-structure, which includes its transformational operations and its capacity to self-regulate its integrative processes' (437-8). Physical loss might include the loss of a loved one

or a significant object, whilst the loss of one's way of life or the integrity of an idea are examples of psychological or symbolic loss (439). The films discussed in this thesis present many contrasting examples of loss, from the straightforward to the more complex; for example, the loss of a child is presented in the form of a tragic death, as a missing body, as well as in relation to the difficulty of grieving an unborn child. There is also the loss of the sense of self due to catastrophic moral failure. In this way, the thesis is concerned with both corporal and psychological responses to these various categories of threat. While loss relates to the principle of wholeness, *unpredictability* relates to those of transformation and self-regulation, because

> when events lose their lawfulness [in the sense of predictability], faith in one's self-regulating capacity is diminished or lost completely, hopelessness and helplessness prevail, and one resigns, not only to the events but also to the loss of one's former capacity and identity. (439)

Suddenness is related to unpredictability but is a temporal limitation that disrupts the capacity to adapt (which requires time). *Proximity to the self* is idiosyncratic and contextual; it may include collective or individual, direct or indirect, physical or psychological threats.

The two categories of threat each have a corresponding type of 'response', that is, 'the specific adaptational activit[y] performed by the system as a result of the impingement of the threat' (439). Stressogenic threats entail a *reorganizing* response, while catastrophic threats involve a *chaotic* response. A reorganizing response can be understood in the context of growth and development; in it, the system maintains its structural integrity by accommodating its boundaries and assimilating the threat into the meaning-system (440). A chaotic response, on the other hand, involves 'a breakdown of the relationship of the elements composing the structure' (440). In this response, 'the structure does not succeed in its attempts to secure even one referential plane, which would support its former, familiar, identifying relationships' (440). The stressogenic threat and reorganizing response pairing is one of adaptation, growth and development, whereas the catastrophic threat coupled with a chaotic response involves a state so disorganized that it lacks 'the relationship that defined it as a structure' (440).

The ‘experience of loss of autonomy’ is the essence of trauma, for it is through experience, ‘the very substance of subjectivity’, that the ‘structuralization of meaning and reality proceeds’ (440), and it is likewise through experience that the structure becomes aware of its collapse and inability to continue as an autonomous system (440). A variety of metaphors have been used to describe the traumatic experience and these invariably express some degree of structural collapse. Sigmund Freud (1922), for instance, refers to the breaking of a ‘protective shield’, and Lifton (1979) to an ‘envelope of invulnerability’ (both cited by Benyakar et al. 441). Roger Luckhurst describes trauma as a ‘piercing breach of a border’ and notes that trauma ‘violently opens passageways between systems that were once discrete’ (2008: 3). Kai Erikson speaks of ‘a blow to the psyche that breaks through one’s defenses so suddenly and with such brutal force that one cannot react to it effectively’ (1976: 153). These types of trauma metaphor will be discussed further in Chapter Four, where they are illustrated in relation to Trapero’s films. What all of these metaphors indicate, in addition to the structural, or rather *destructive*, nature of trauma, is the notion of a protective border, or ‘boundarying operation’: ‘an essential function of the living system’s autonomous mechanisms’, by which the structure ‘opens’ and ‘closes’ itself (Durkin 1981, cited by Benyakar et al. 441). The initial stage of the traumatic experience might thus be described as a ‘forced open state’ (441).

Open and closed states, and the ability to shift between them at will, are part of the ‘self-regulatory functions that define autonomy’ (442). The open state, similar to the merging that takes place in situations of intense intimacy, is ‘a temporary, partial, and usually self-regulated semi-permeability or full abolition of the boundaries, for a brief amount of time’ (441). It is an unstable state, followed by the closing of the boundaries (or ‘closed’ state), to allow the self-structure to process and assimilate the information acquired during the open state, ‘so that a sense of coherent wholeness prevails’ (442). A forced opening of the boundaries and the inability to terminate the open state, as happens in trauma, is accompanied by intense emotions, such as fear of death, but also ‘the horror that the self and the world will never be the same again’ (442). In situations involving massive threats, such as war or natural disaster, the temporal, social or environmental supports that are usually available to the sociofunctional and

sociostructural planes may also have become unstable or destructured. Even when they are available, however, they might not be made use of by the trauma victim once destructuralization has begun, 'because of the compromised functional capacity that manifests itself in the inability to identify or recruit the surrounding socioenvironment' (442). The perception of being no longer able to perform 'the essential autonomous functions that define the human system', and that 'the rules that define the individual's identity and reality are not operational any more', are at the core of the traumatic experience (442).[15]

Destructuralization after a chaotic response is always followed by an attempt to restore autonomy, and this reorganizatory attempt is defined as the post-traumatic state (443). "Encapsulation" of the traumatic experience involves the isolation and repression of the unstructured experience so that it never becomes an integral part of the system (443). Post-traumatic states 'reflect repeated attempts at overcoming inner experiences that can be encapsulated but never assimilated'; thus they are qualitatively different from other stress-induced states involving reorganizatory attempts (443-4). The full-blown clinical manifestation of the post-traumatic state, involving a display of symptoms of a reorganizatory attempt of this type, is known as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (444). It seems appropriate to end this structural analysis of trauma with PTSD because, despite its undeniable usefulness as a diagnostic tool (or perhaps *because* of this), it is a concept that has also been seen as problematic by clinical therapists and trauma theorists alike, for reasons that will be explored in the next section.

Self, Intersubjectivity and Meaning: A Phenomenological Approach

Having set out the basic structure of psychic trauma, I now outline the case for viewing trauma as a boundary phenomenon that both spans and transcends the oppositional notions of physical and psychological, individual and collective, and private and public. The films that are discussed in Chapters Two, Three and Four

[15] Ronnie Janoff-Bulman treats of this aspect of traumatic experience at length in her book *Shattered Assumptions: Towards a New Psychology of Trauma* (1992), in which she describes traumatic experiences as the shattering of our 'fundamental assumptions', that is, 'a conceptual system, developed over time, that provided us with expectations about the world and ourselves [that is] best represented by a set of assumptions or internal representations that reflect and guide our interactions in the world and generally enable us to function effectively' (Janoff-Bulman 1992: 5, also cited by Bracken 2002).

present examples of trauma that inhabits these grey zones; therefore, this theoretical analysis is fundamental to the way in which I analyse the films. Two significant aspects of trauma that have already been touched upon in the description of the structural approach will be explored in greater depth in this section, but from a different, though complementary, perspective. One is the human capacity and need for meaning that the structural approach implicitly recognizes; the other is that this capacity and need for meaning has an essential social element that cannot be satisfied at an individual level. Before elaborating on these aspects, however, it is worth pointing out that, both in clinical treatment and in scholarship on trauma theory in the humanities, certain conceptions of trauma (including that which characterizes the diagnosis of PTSD) have been seen as insufficient, and even problematic. Stef Craps notes, for instance, that 'in collective societies individualistic approaches may be at odds with the local culture. Moreover, by narrowly focusing on the individual psyche, one tends to leave unquestioned the conditions that enabled the traumatic abuse' (2014: 50). Patrick Bracken, a psychiatrist who worked with victims of torture under violent political regimes in Uganda, is similarly dissatisfied with paradigms of trauma management that focus on the intrapsychic worlds of individuals, because 'the meaningfulness of the worlds of those whom [Bracken and his colleagues] were working with turned out to be primarily interpersonal rather than intrapsychic, and social rather than individual' (2002: viii). What Craps and Bracken highlight is that there is no one-size-fits-all axiom for trauma and that it involves a social element related to processes of meaning-making, as will be elaborated further below.

To further understanding of trauma in individual and structural/social terms, I adopt a phenomenological approach to the issues of the self and intersubjectivity, before going on to examine trauma in terms of a crisis of meaning in the contemporary world. For the former, I engage with the work of Edith Stein, a one-time student of the founder of phenomenology, Edmund Husserl, and a contemporary of Martin Heidegger, to whom Bracken turns in his book *Trauma: Culture, Meaning and Philosophy* (2002). Stein's philosophy, drawing as it does on phenomenology, psychology, philosophy of mind and sociology, is complementary to the nature of the discussion on trauma thus far, in that it uncovers 'our shared structure as human persons' and demonstrates 'that

our lived experience of the social world is dependent upon the nature of our social psychology as well as our phenomenological experience of certain social bonds' (Antonio Calcagno 2014: xiv). Unique to Stein's thought is the distinction she draws between 'psyche' and 'spirit' (not in the religious sense, but rather corresponding to the German *Geist*, meaning something closer to 'mind', but also understood by Stein as akin to motivation). Indeed, Stein appears to be the only phenomenologist to have elaborated on this distinction (Mette Lebech 2010: 142) and her understanding of spirit as 'motivatedness' is what enabled her to develop a comprehensive theory of the discrete objectives proper to the humanities (in German, *Geisteswissenshaften*, or 'sciences of the spirit') and psychology (2010: 140). Given the peculiar positioning of trauma as straddling the disciplines of psychology (in terms of its presentation) and the humanities (in terms of its representation), I contend that Stein's phenomenology offers a layer of analysis that is unique and highly applicable to trauma. My thesis is also innovative from this perspective, since it is the first scholarly application of Stein's philosophy to trauma, as well as to cultural production, in this case a selection of films that reveal the different structural transmissions of trauma and its effects on the individual, and the connection between body and mind.

Before elaborating on her thought, it is pertinent to point out that Stein occupies a peculiar position within philosophy in general, and phenomenology in particular. Her relative marginalization from the academic milieu of her time (and also, to an extent, *our* time), might be partly ascribed to three of her central attributes: she was Jewish by birth, Roman Catholic by conviction, and a woman. Her ethnicity, religion and sex were certainly obstacles to her academic career, as well as being contributing factors in the distancing between herself, Husserl and Heidegger (see Calcagno 2014: 5-7).[16] Her break with Husserl was soon followed by her conversion from atheism (she was raised in a Jewish family but

[16] Calcagno notes that '[b]oth Heidegger and Husserl regarded Stein not only as a secretarial assistant but also as a religious thinker, establishing a persistent philosophical stereotype of Stein that endures today' (2014: 6).

rejected the faith) to Catholicism, and she is now, to some extent, more renowned as a Christian philosopher than as a phenomenologist.[17]

Stein's overall philosophical project was largely a phenomenological one, particularly in the early years of her career, but she was also influenced by the then-nascent disciplines of psychology (which she had studied prior to joining Husserl) and the social sciences. Her early view of phenomenology was 'as a synthesis of both the logical […] and even transcendental structures of the mind […] that make knowledge possible, […] as well as the object investigated by the very knowledge in question', that is, 'the nature of the human person in general, or the knowing subject' (Calcagno 2014: 11). As a student, assistant and collaborator of Husserl she was profoundly influenced by him, as well as by other phenomenologists, in particular Adolf Reinach and Max Scheler, but she was never strictly their disciple; 'she had her own unique phenomenological voice' (11). Unlike Husserl, for instance, 'Stein believed that the foundation of all science lay not only in the logical or ideal, transcendental structures of the mind [as Husserl argued], but in a phenomenology that also studies the natural aspects of the psychic' (11-12), as well as 'the complex life of persons, as they experience and live themselves, either as individuals or as collectivities in communities or societies' (13). Following Scheler, Stein 'accepted the fundamental role of the human person as a central structure in phenomenology' (13); particular to Stein's method, however, was an understanding of empathy, not only as enabling an awareness of the minds of others, but as a means of self-knowledge. In this, she argued that 'the person and his or her individual and collective life provide the grounds for all philosophical and scientific inquiry, thereby attacking both a psychologistic and positivist approach to science and philosophy' (13-14). In addition, she agreed with Husserl that, 'if one is to undertake any rigorous philosophical inquiry, including inquiry into the structure of consciousness, the centrality of the I, meaning, and the possibility of understanding what is represented in the mind', then 'one must understand certain basic starting points' (12). It is these starting points, and the particular way in which Stein develops them, that will now be discussed.

[17] Stein in fact went on to become a Discalced Carmelite nun. She was arrested by the Nazis and went to her death in Auschwitz in 1942. She was later canonized a saint by the Catholic Church under her taken religious name, Teresa Benedicta of the Cross.

In her doctoral dissertation, *On the Problem of Empathy* (1989, first published in 1917), Stein, adhering to the phenomenological method she learned from Husserl and Scheler, uncovers a general structure of what she calls 'person', which is an early phenomenological perspective that 'yields a picture of what it is to be a person, or subject, in general' (Calcagno 2014: 11). This general structure then provides the starting point for her *Philosophy of Psychology and the Humanities* (2000, first published in 1922), which comprises two treatises: the first discusses the psyche and the law that governs it (that is, psychic, or sentient, causality) in relation to the natural and social worlds, and the second concerns the mind, or spirit, and the law that governs it (that is, motivation) in relation to the life of individual and communal experiences (Lebech 2004: 1). The two treatises were intended to delineate the disciplines of psychology and the humanities respectively: the realm of psyche, and that of meaning and the capacity for meaning-making. I argue that, for this reason, Stein's work is particularly applicable to trauma, since trauma is deeply connected to both of these areas, psyche and meaning, as the structural approach demonstrates. Applying these theoretical concepts to my analysis of the films enables a deeper, more holistic understanding of the films and the way that they engage with trauma.

The self: an embodied psycho-physical unity

Returning momentarily to the central aspect of the structural approach to trauma, the collapse of the structure of the self, recall that this approach delineates four referential planes, or 'schemes of the self', two of which concern the psychic, and two the social aspects of the self. These were described as merely analytical tools and, as such, they offer no indication or description of how the self comes to be experienced as a 'self' in its psychic and social capacities, or how its inner (psychic) and outer (social) relationships are constructed. What will be proposed here, through an engagement with Stein's phenomenological analysis, is what this 'structure of the self' consists of (or, in phenomenological terms, how it is *constituted*), how it comes to be experienced as such by the human person, and

how 'selves' come to be intersubjectively constituted (or socially constructed).[18] This will assist towards building a clearer picture of what is meant by the assertion that trauma occupies the interface between individual and collective, physical and psychological, and private and public. This, in turn, will facilitate an analysis of the films from this perspective in the chapters that follow, by providing the appropriate framework and rationale.

For Stein, the 'self' is 'an embodied psycho-physical unity' (Calcagno 2014: 31). In *On the Problem of Empathy*, she provides a meticulously detailed phenomenological analysis of how an individual "I" is constituted in experience. Her own summary of that analysis is worth quoting in full:

> [An individual "I"] is a unified object inseparably joining together the conscious unity of an "I" and a physical body in such a way that each of them takes on a new character. The physical body occurs as a living body; consciousness occurs as the soul of the unified individual.[19] This unity is documented by the fact that the specific events are given as belonging to the living body and to the soul at the same time: sensations, general feelings.[20] The causal tie between physical and psychic events and the resulting mediated causal relationship between the soul and the real outer world further document this unity. The psycho-physical individual as a whole belongs to the order of nature.[21] The living body in contrast with the physical body is characterized by having fields of sensation, being located at the zero point of orientation of the spatial world, moving voluntarily and being constructed of moving organs, being

[18] Constitutional analysis, a central aspect of the phenomenological method, is 'an analysis of how something is brought together or coming together, how it is identified in experience from various elements or sources' (Lebech 2008: 17).

[19] In this early work Stein does not understand the soul in the religious sense but in a more classical sense, as both a unifier and a retainer, or conveyer, of experience (Calcagno 2014: 55).

[20] This claim warrants further elucidation. Stein demonstrates that sensations (or sensual feelings) and general feelings both have a hybrid position, in that they are 'there' but also 'in me' and issue from the "I": 'The pleasantness of a savoury dish, the agony of a sensual pain, the comfort of a soft garment are noticed where the food is tasted, where the pain pierces, where the garment clings to the body's surface' (48-9). In a similar way, '[e]very mental act, every joy, every pain, every activity of thought, together with every bodily action, every movement I make, is sluggish and colorless when "I" feel sluggish' (49). Stein refers to this phenomenon as 'fusion' (45), a term she borrows from the discipline of psychology.

[21] That is not to say, however, that the human being is merely a "piece of nature", as the empirical view current in Stein's day would maintain, and which she explicitly rejects (Stein 2000: 305). Rather, her philosophy reveals the individual (as well as the community) to be 'deeply personal and spiritual' (Calcagno 2014: 156).

> the field of expression of the experiences of its "I" and the instrument of the "I's" will. (Stein 1989: 56-7)

Aspects of this analysis that are particularly noteworthy are that the self is constituted concurrently *as* and *through* the lived body, and the emphasis on the *unity* of body, psyche and soul (since the soul, for Stein, is the 'substantial unity' of all our experiences, and therefore 'always necessarily a soul in a body' [40-1]). Stein first describes how 'the living body is constituted in a two-fold manner' – that is, in acts of both outer perception and inner perception – 'as a sensed (bodily perceived) living body and as an outwardly perceived physical body of the outer world' (43), and how 'in this doubled givenness it is experienced as the same [body]' (43).[22] She illustrates how this is so:

> I not only see my hand and bodily perceive it as sensing, but I also "see" its fields of sensation constituted for me in bodily perception. On the other hand, if I consciously emphasize certain parts of my living body, I have an "image" of this part of the physical body. The one is given with the other, though they are not perceived together. This is exactly analogous to the province of outer perception. We not only see the table and feel its hardness, but we also "see" its hardness. (44)

Thus the body does not merely remind us that it can be the scene of myriad sensations, nor is it merely a physical thing that occupies the same space as the sensitive body in bodily perception; rather, '[i]t is given as a sensing, living body' (45). This aspect of bodily perception is particularly germane to the discussion of Lucrecia Martel's films in Chapter Three of the thesis; indeed, this phenomenological aspect of bodily perception informs Martel's entire cinematic aesthetic, as will be discussed in that chapter. One indication of this 'special givenness' of the body is the 'impossibility of being rid of' it: '[t]his union [of the "I" and the perceiving body] cannot be shaken; the bonds tying us to our bodies are indissoluble' (46).[23] Viewed in the context of trauma, the body-self

[22] To emphasize this two-fold manner of perception, Stein observes that '[a] living body (*Lieb*) only perceived outwardly would always be only a particularly disposed, actually unique, physical body, but never "my living body"' (1989: 42).

[23] Stein allows, however, that the faculty of imagination, or fantasy, does permit a certain liberty from the body: 'even though the real "I" cannot be released from its body, there is at least the possibility of "slipping out of one's skin" in fantasy' (Stein 1989: 47).

relationship outlined by Stein has particularly stark implications. One is reminded, for instance, of Elaine Scarry's work on the body in pain, which illustrates how the relationship between body and self comes pressingly to the fore in the experience of torture: 'what the process of torture does is to split the human being into two, to make emphatic the ever present but, except in the extremity of sickness and death, only latent distinction between a self and a body, between a "me" and "my body"' (Scarry 1985: 48).

In addition to bodily sensations and feelings (including sensual feelings, general feelings, such as vigour and sluggishness, and moods, such as cheerfulness and melancholy, which Stein describes as non-somatic general feelings [1985: 49]), psychic (or sentient) causality makes evident the psychic and spiritual aspects of the self (Calcagno 2014: 62). Psychic causality can be understood in terms of causality in general, as an "if…then" relationship (62).[24] Stein begins with examples of psycho-physical causality, in which psychic experience affects body functions: '"Our heart stops beating" for joy; we "wince" in pain; our pulse races in alarm; and we are breathless' (Stein 1989: 50). She notes, however, that in these instances, '[w]hen we think the living body away, these phenomena disappear, though the spiritual act remains' (50). Thus she concludes that 'feelings can be comprehended in their purity, and this appearance of accompaniment is experienced exactly as such, as neither a feeling nor a component of one' (50). In other words, as Calcagno helpfully explains,

> awareness of the "if…then" [aspect of causality] is not strictly localized in the living body, but, according to Stein, it is evidence of what she understands as the psychic realm, which allows one to unify or synthesize the sense of what is experienced and how it is experienced (i.e., feelings or sensations and their accompanying acts of awareness) with the lived experience of causality itself. (2014: 63)

Psychic causality is therefore distinct from physical causality (the law of the natural sciences), as the law that governs the realm of the psyche.

[24] On a related note, psychic causality as a fundamental aspect of the capacity for meaning-making is also affected by traumatic experience. Janoff-Bulman notes, for instance, that 'we generally believe in an action-outcome contingency, that we can control what happens to us, and such a belief provides us with one means of maintaining a view of the world as a meaningful place' (1992: 10).

In addition to feelings, expression and acts of will offer further evidence of psycho-physical unity: '[t]he body articulates not only what it senses and undergoes, but what the psyche and spirit experience and live through as well' (64). Staying with the notion of causality, Stein states that '[f]eeling in its pure essence is not something complete in itself. As it were, it is loaded with an energy which must be unloaded. […] By nature, it must always motivate something, must always be "expressed"' (Stein 1989: 51-2). Bodily expression is not the only form of expression possible, however; Stein again nods to the capacity for imagination or fantasy: '[t]he creation of another world where I can do what is forbidden to me here is itself a form of expression' (52). In addition, reflection is another way in which feeling can be objectified or "unloaded": '[f]eeling can release an act of reflection that makes the feeling itself objective. The experience "terminates" in this act of reflection just as in a volition or bodily expression' (53). Although 'feeling by its nature demands expression', the relationship between feeling and expression is not necessarily causal, but rather, the two 'are related by nature and meaning' (53). She explains:

> I not only feel how feeling is poured into expression and "unloaded" in it, but at the same time I have this expression given in bodily perception. The smile in which my pleasure is experientially externalized is at the same time given to me as a stretching of my lips. (53)

Thus bodily perception separates the unity between experience and expression, exemplified by the possibility of simulating a smile by a voluntary stretching of the mouth (53).

Finally, Stein considers experiences of the will in the constitution of the psycho-physical individual. These are important not only because of their 'accompanying physical manifestations (sensations of tension, etc.)' (54), similar to the experience of feelings already discussed, but also in the way that, like feelings, experiences of the will externalize themselves in action: 'To act is always to produce what is not present' (55). In other words, '[t]he will employs a psycho-physical mechanism to fulfill itself, to realize what is willed, just as feeling uses a mechanism to realize its expression' (55). Just as willing and striving may oppose each other in the physical domain (Stein gives the example of willing to climb a mountain, then becoming tired half way up and striving to

make the feet overcome their resistance to the will), the same applies in the purely psychic domains, whereby mental acts must overcome resistance by acts of volition (she gives an example of the resistance that may be involved in preparing for an examination) (55). 'The will', Stein concludes, 'is thus master of the soul as of the living body' (55). While causality can be involved in the creation of what is not, 'the true intervention of the will is not experienced as causal but as a special effect' (56). In other words, whilst willing and striving both *make use* of causality, 'it can only be said that the willing "I" is the master of the living body' (52). It is worth adding here that, as Calcagno points out, 'this creative aspect of willing is traditionally identified as one of the greatest aspects of spirit: it can create new, spontaneous realities through its capacity for willing and the thinking and decision-making that willing requires' (2014: 67).

Intersubjectivity, empathy and value

Stein's treatment of the psycho-physical individual thus establishes that 'the first layer of the sense of "my own" is constituted at the level of the lived body' (Calcagno 2014: 61),[25] which is crucial in relation to the film analyses that follow in the chapters of the thesis, which focus heavily on the body as an integral element of traumatic experience. However, the lived body also reveals that we are 'differentiated as human beings': it 'permits one to distinguish oneself from another at a fundamental level' (60-1). Calcagno notes that 'the distinction or difference between self and other is not deduced or inferred; rather, it is given at the very fundamental level of sensate, feeling embodiment and is perceived both from within and from without' (62).

Empathy is of the utmost centrality for Stein. It is through empathy that the foreign individual is constituted, but empathy is also essential for self-knowledge. The most basic form of empathy, 'sensual empathy', is the first step towards intersubjectivity because it enables the subject to comprehend the other

[25] I suggest that one indication of how this 'first layer' begins to give way to the possibility of intersubjectivity appears in the way in which the body can be made to become an agent against the self at this very level of lived embodiment. I refer again to Scarry's example of torture: 'the prisoner's body – in its physical strengths, in it sensory powers, in its needs and wants, in its ways of self-delight, and finally even […] in its small and moving gestures of friendship toward itself – is […] made a weapon against him, made to betray him on behalf of the enemy, made to be the enemy' (1985: 48).

not as an object but as another subject, since the other is understood to be a living body, just like oneself. Sensual empathy is the entryway for foreign consciousness into one's own field of experience and Stein's account of its role in the constitution of the other follows the same structure as her analysis of the constitution of the self (Burns, *From I to You to We*: 9-10). Through sensual empathy, one understands the other's body to be *their* zero point of orientation in the same manner as one's *own* body is one's zero point of orientation. Thus one can no longer consider one's own point of orientation as the *only* one (Stein 1989: 63). Furthermore, as Burns notes, '[a]mong the experiences belonging to the other that open to my acts of empathy are experiences *of myself*' (*From I to You to We*: 11) (original emphasis). This is the beginning of a richer level of empathy which Stein calls 'reiterated empathy' and which makes self-knowledge possible in the fullest sense: 'I again interpret this physical body as a living body, and so it is that I first am given to myself as a psycho-physical individual in the full sense' (Stein 1989: 63). In other words, 'I am not fully constituted as an individual until I am able to constitute the other as an individual who also experiences me' (Burns, *From I to You to We*: 12). This in turn promotes reflection:

> Reiterated empathy may allow a person to disabuse herself of the notion that she is kind, generous, and loved by all, or it may permit her to realize that she is respected and admired as a valued member of a team. Empathically grasping one's own psychic life via reiterated empathy first allows this external perspective on one's character and psychic individuality. (13)

Access to the experience of another, arrived at by means of empathy, is what allows us to identify the world of values (Lebech 2010: 145) and in her analysis of empathy, Stein pays particular attention to the role of affective acts, through which values (and their hierarchy) are given to us (Vendrell Ferran 2015: 489). Her analysis places a strong emphasis on the epistemic function of emotions, as Vendrell Ferran notes:

> [For Stein,] emotions are world-directed phenomena that give us a particular sort of information about the environment, of others and of

> ourselves. They are not mere subjective states of mind: they grasp and disclose values. (495)

Stein concurs with other phenomenologists of her day, most notably Scheler, in holding that affective acts alone, and not reason, give access to values (495); however, she develops her own original account of affective intentionality which differs from that of Scheler, in that, for Stein, '"feeling" as an act whose function is to disclose values, and "the feelings" as those emotional responses that may arise once a value is grasped in an act of feeling' are not differentiated but are, rather, like two sides of the same coin (495). She develops this argument using the analogy between emotions and perception: 'For, as physical nature is constituted in perceptual acts, so a new object realm is constituted in feeling. This is the world of values' (Stein 1989: 92). Whilst affective acts alone give access to values, feelings must first be given in theoretical acts:

> the structure of all feelings requires theoretical acts. When I am joyful over a good deed, this is how the deed's goodness or its positive value faces me. But I must know about the deed in order to be joyful over it – knowledge is fundamental to joy. (101)

The knowledge out of which the feeling arises has no "I" depth; the feeling itself, however, 'always reaches into the "I's" stability and is experienced as issuing out of it' (101). This is where a hierarchy of values begins to come into view:

> Anger over the loss of a piece of jewelry comes from a more superficial level or does not penetrate as deeply as losing the same object as the souvenir of a loved one. Furthermore, pain over the loss of this person himself would be even deeper. This discloses essential relationships among the hierarchy of felt values, the depth classification of value feelings, and the level classification of the person exposed in these feelings. Accordingly, every time we advance in the value realm, we also make acquisitions in the realm of our own personality. (101)

This notion of the hierarchy of values is particularly relevant to my analysis of Martel's film, *La mujer sin cabeza*, in Chapter Three, in which the hierarchy of values applies to the value of human life itself; this is also seen in Trapero's

films. Values are the objects of motivation and the formation of the 'we' arises from the sharing of motivational energy, which gives rise to communal experience (Lebech 2010: 145). Thus, values have a community-forming ability, and different forms of communality depend upon the varying depths of value response on the part of the individuals who make up the collective (146). The example cited above regarding loss also relates back to what was seen as a mandatory criterion of the traumatogenicity of a threat in the structural approach to trauma. It was said that such loss could be either physical or symbolic; Stein's account suggests that loss can be both, depending on the depth of value response vested in the object. These ideas regarding values as community-forming, and the symbolic aspect of loss, are particularly relevant to the discussion of Trapero's film *Nacido y criado*, which will be discussed in Chapter Four.

The three forms of collectivity, or ways of being together, that Stein investigates are mass, association and community. She treats these in depth, but for the purpose at hand they will be sketched briefly within the overall context of Stein's value theory (in the next section, community, the highest form of social bond, will be discussed in greater depth). To this end, the three forms of collectivity will be described in terms of the motivation of the individuals involved. In the mass, the motivation is sentient (psychic) contagion, whereby mental energy 'is transmitted directly from one psyche to the other, without intentionality involving value-response on the part of the contaminated one' (Lebech 2010: 149). The individual is non-intentionally motivated, that is, acting on the motivation without being aware of the source of it, thus there is no value response to speak of in the mass collectivity (149). Psychic contagion will be discussed further in relation to the type of trauma that is represented in Albertina Carri's film *La rabia* in Chapter Two.

In association, the motivation involved is a kind of commitment, whereby 'individuals are open to one another on the basis of their mutual agreement and to the extent that they desire the end that they pursue together' (Burns, *From I to You to We*: 14). The value response involved here is decided on by an act of the will, and while in principle this involves at least some knowledge of the values to which the commitment is being made, this may not necessarily reflect the personal value response of the individual (Lebech 2010: 149). An association is non-organic; rather, it resembles 'a machine that's "invented" for a certain

purpose' (Stein 2000: 256). Whilst the individuals joined together in association consider one another as objects rather than subjects, the association as a whole 'comports itself like an individual subject in the service of its purpose' (256). The relationship of co-motivatedness into which values draw individuals is experienced subjectively as a unity, and this unity is the basis for community (Lebech 2010: 148). Thus, in community, the motivation is a personal value response:

> Community arises from the experience of being already organized by one's subjective initiative and personal creativity (i.e. by one's personality)[26] into larger overlapping realities of 'likeminded' people, i.e. of people engaged in realizing the same values as oneself. (148)

In contrast to association, community is 'the natural, organic union of individuals' in which 'a subject accepts the other as a subject' and in which 'solidarity prevails' (Stein 2000: 130). The solidarity that marks the life of the community is rooted in the body and its sensations, as well as in the life of psyche and spirit, 'for [Stein] sees human beings as unities of body, psyche and spirit' (Calcagno 2014: 129). Whilst the difference between mass, association and community appear sharply defined in analysis, the distinction is somewhat artificial, since 'in reality, they almost never appear in pure form'; rather, mixed types of unions develop out of one another, depending on 'how broadly and how deeply [their] commonality pervades the personal structuration' (Stein 2000: 283). Both mass and association can become bases for communal life (239), and a purely associational relationship between persons, that is, one that does not also contain elements of community to some degree, is impossible (Burns 2015: 535).

Community and communal lived experience

It is pertinent to point out here the originality of Stein's thought with regard to community and communal lived experience, which 'elevates Husserlian phenomenology to a new realm' (Calcagno 2014: 144). Calcagno states that Stein's 'phenomenology of the communal consciousness of lived experience is unique within the field of phenomenology because it systematically attempts to

[26] Personality is understood here as 'the specificity of the person determined or stamped by its character' (Lebech 2010: 147-8).

lay the philosophical groundwork for an understanding of the psychology of community in its elemental form' (144). What is noteworthy in Stein's analysis of community is the characterization of the community as analogous to the individual person. This underscores the fluidity and plasticity of the relation between individuals and the community of individuals (155). This fluidity 'guarantees that the individual is not reducible to the community, and vice versa'; indeed, 'the logic of analogy serves as a prophylactic against the possible absolutization or mutual exclusivity of the individual or the community' (155).

Understanding the way in which Stein theorizes the community as analogous to the individual person has important implications for trauma theory, since it demonstrates how a collective experience of trauma is possible. This helps to elucidate my claim that the globalized age is characterized by trauma, and has a bearing on my analysis of Trapero's films in Chapter Four. Firstly, Stein establishes that 'there is no communal consciousness apart from the ego' (Calcagno 2014: 130): 'What flows out of *one* ego belongs to *one* current of consciousness, which is isolated unto itself and walled off from every other, just like the ego is' (Stein 2000: 133). Therefore '[a] community-subject, as analog to the pure ego, does not exist' (135) (original emphasis). However, it is possible for an individual to 'enter into a *community of life* with other subjects [to become] a member of a super-individual subject'; and moreover, 'a super-individual current of experience is constituted in the active living of such a community-subject' (133) (original emphasis). Thus Stein holds that 'individuals are not the only kinds of subjects. Groups of people can constitute communal subjects that have currents of experience and some form of intentional, conscious life' (Burns 2015: 536).

A communal subject is also analogous to the individual with regard having a character, or 'personality', as 'the constituted unity of personal properties' (Stein 2000: 135):

> corresponding to the individual personality, which is constituted in the individual experiences and out of which in turn the individual experiences are to be understood, there could very well be a *collective personality* as that whose experiences the communal experiences are to be regarded as. (135, original emphasis)

In other words, 'an experience that includes more than one's own subjectivity – an experience in which one is present and that lives within one as a "we"' (Calcagno 2014: 130)[27] is possible. This is because 'we all share a basic psychic and logical structure' (131). All social relations – mass, association and community – require certain psychic and logical structures that are shared by all individuals and that 'permit or condition communal consciousness' (130). These include the capacity for sensation, 'one of the basic psycho-bodily elements shared by all human beings' (131); intentionality, the 'essential structure of human consciousness [which] all individuals are capable of understanding' (134); categorical acts, which reveal the ego's 'pre-given capacity […] to understand certain logical concepts' (135); and dispositional, or affective, acts, such as feelings and emotions: 'the universal capacity as a human being to experience such dispositional acts serves as a bridge between the individual incarnation of such a capacity in the ego and dispositional acts as communal lived experiences' (136). Thus 'intentionality, sensation, and categorical and dispositional acts are understood as capacities, logical and psychic, that facilitate higher acts of communalization or solidarity' (138).

Stein indicates four connections, or ways in which lived experiences are connected, that occur in the individual which also recur in the life of the community: association, motivation, causality, and efficacy of the will (Stein 2000: 167). While association and causality belong to the psychic realm, motivation and will belong to the life of the spirit, and this is what is of interest here (Calcagno 2014: 138). Motivation was already touched upon briefly in the discussion of value response in the three forms of collectivity. Suffice it to add that motivation can be for either practical or theoretical interests; the former strives toward more pragmatic goods, while the latter 'strives for truth in intellectual activities' (139) and is 'marked by an understanding of a certain state of affairs and the response of one individual to another' (140-1). In considering activity of the will as a way in which lived experiences are connected, we move into a discussion of the concepts of freedom and responsibility, morality and

[27] It is worth noting here, by way of connecting back to what was previously discussed, that it is empathy that makes communal experience possible, since 'without it there would be no *we*, only competing I's' (Burns, *From I to You to We*: 24), and it is empathy that also makes communal experience *meaningful*, because empathy is 'the primary experience whereby we share rationally motivated sense content' (Burns 24).

ethics. The central idea here is that 'individuals have the freedom to will certain acts, and these acts connect them to, or affect, others', be they individuals or the community at large (142). While *individual* responsibility as a corollary of freedom and acts of the will is a given, the question remains as to whether there exists such a thing as *communal* responsibility. Stein affirms that there does, since there exists a lived experience of co-responsibility (142). In addition, 'solidarity implies an intimate sharing not only of goods, but of fault, errors, and other negative things' (143). Indeed, solidarity, which 'typifies the relations (i.e. "we") of community members is directly connected to the bearing out of responsibility' (143). Thus freedom and responsibility as communal lived experiences reveal 'the inherent link between the individual and the superindividual; the freedom and responsibility of the former implies the freedom and responsibility of the latter, and vice versa' (143).

Lifepower as a fundamental feature of community

The fundamental features of community are revealed through an analogy between the individual and the community, beginning with what Stein calls 'lifepower',[28] that is, 'our finite but renewable capability for living, that is, for having live experiences of various kinds' (Stein 2000: xviii). The individual psyche is rooted in lifepower, 'which manifests itself in the fluctuation of the life feelings and in the course of experience fluctuating along with them' (198). The same is true for the community. Stein gives the example of the life of a nation:

> There are times of an overwhelming abundance of power, which expresses itself in a multiform zest for action […]. And there are periods of exhaustion in which all activeness falters and the nation seems to be "slumbering". (201)

Individuals contribute their lifepower to the lifepower of the community only 'insofar as they are living *as* members of the community', and the lifepower of the community derives from and depends upon that of its individuals (203), although individuals from outside of the community, or indeed other

[28] Marianne Sawicki, the editor of Stein's *Philosophy of Psychology and the Humanities*, explains that lifepower should not be understood as a type of physical energy; rather the term is used metaphorically as 'both the analog and the extension, in the sensate realm, of the energy at work in the physical realm' (2000: xviii).

communities, can also have a positive or negative impact on the lifepower of a community. When this happens, 'they don't overtake the community independently of the individuals that belong to it, but [...] the individuals are affected and *in* them the whole' (207). Individuals can also have a mediating role between two unrelated communities when they belong to both. Social attitudes, such as love, hate and trust, have an impact on the lifepower of the individual and the community, which is usually experienced in either positive or negative terms:

> The love which I meet with strengthens and invigorates me and grants me the power for unexpected achievements. The distrust that I run into disables my creative power. Other people's attitudes encroach directly upon my inner life and control its course – unless I "lock myself up" against them, which is possible here as with all causal influences. (212)

Both positive and negative attitudes require considerable expenditure of lifepower, yet 'he who loves me doesn't lose power proportionately with how he enlivens me' (212):

> love operates within the one who loves as an invigorating force that might even develop more powers within him than experiencing it costs him. […] Thus, love and the positive attitudes in general don't feed upon themselves; rather, they are a font from which I can nourish others without impoverishing myself. (212)

This brings us again to the idea of values; they are what enkindles the attitudes and they are 'inseparably bound up with the being of the person. As I take a positive or a negative stance toward a person, she stands before my eyes as valued or as disvalued' (212). Values are "life-contributing" insofar as they induce attitudes 'whose contents convey new propellant powers to our mental life' (213). Solidarity between individuals is community-forming in the highest degree:

> Where the individuals are "open" to one another, where the attitudes of one don't bounce off of the other but rather penetrate him and deploy their efficacy, there a communal life subsists, there the two are members

> of one whole; and without such a reciprocal relationship community isn't possible. (214, original emphasis)

The final sources of lifepower Stein discusses are objective sources: material and personal values (216). Works of art, literature, architecture, as well as landscape, physical conditions and everything that pertains to meaning (including meaninglessness) are sources of lifepower for the mental life of a civilization (Lebech 2004: 18):

> [C]ontents such as vigor, liveliness, and the like emerge not merely as experienced states but also in lifeless objects. We encounter them as "dispositions" in the landscape, in the weather, in melodies, and so forth, and these dispositions operate no less contagiously than other people's living states do. Who is unfamiliar with the depressing, paralyzing influence of a drab rainy day? Who hasn't noticed how a bright blue sky lets the life in him flow along more briskly and easily? (Stein 2000: 217)

The idea of landscape, in particular, as a source of lifepower is significant in relation to the films that will be analysed in the chapters that follow. Landscape will be shown to be deeply connected with the films' portrayal of psychological trauma in the work of all three of the directors, demonstrating how Stein's theory helps us to rethink representations of trauma.

Thus far we have looked at lifepower in a variety of forms as one of the things that makes the individual analogous to the community. If the community is powered by lifepower in the same manner as the individual psyche is, then there must be something in the community that is comparable to the psyche of the individual (Lebech 2004: 18). This brings us on to consider the sentient abilities and character of the community, vis-à-vis the individual. Sensory abilities are ruled out here since, even though the community is founded on individuals who possess sensory abilities, the psyche of the community has no sense of sight or touch, etc., in the way an individual does (18). Intellectual abilities, on the other hand, are shared in a more radical way; for example, to say 'French thought' or 'American thought' is to speak of 'differences in the philosophical methods of the nation' (Stein 2000: 226), and such characterizations say something about the psyche of that community (Lebech

2004: 18). To speak of "character" implies a value response, which is the 'most natural' behaviour of the person; indeed, Stein describes the person as a 'value-tropic being' (Stein 2000: 227). The soul is the individuality of the person, 'the center of and subject for mental activity' (Lebech 2004: 18), and it has various depths depending upon the value-response of the person: 'How you pick up values and how you behave toward them, how you enjoy things, how you make yourself happy, how you grieve and how you suffer: that all depends on the quality of the soul' (Stein 2000: 228). That we can identify that a community can possess a *character* in the same way as an individual does suggests the possibility of a community having a *soul* as well. We saw earlier that personal value response was the motivation for community, and it is the soul, as the subject for value response, that 'reaches out beyond the individual to allow for community formation' (Lebech 2004: 20). The character of the community is grounded in the distinctiveness of its members, in particular 'those who are particularly "prominent personalities" and devote themselves to the community with their essential soul' (Stein 2000: 283).

To summarize, what Stein's phenomenology has shown is that *relationality* is a defining feature of the human person. The person is both constituted within and functions within a network of relations with the world outside of herself, in all of her bodily, psychic and spiritual capacities. What Stein's work suggests is that the body, with all of its members and faculties, not least its sentient capacities, manifests both inwardly and outwardly that it is *for* the material world and it is *for* other persons; that is, that it does not simply happen to be suited to the world outside itself, but rather it is *made for* relationships of reciprocity and exchange. This means that the body is not only involved in the process of meaning-making, but that it is, in itself, essentially *meaningful*. This is also true of the spiritual aspects of the person, which can be seen, for instance, in the way that individuals contribute their lifepower to the community and draw upon the communal lifepower to energize them and in order to see their lives as meaningful. For this reason it is impossible to consider the self in isolation; it must always be seen as part of a broader context of the world around it and other persons, as will be seen throughout the films that are discussed in the other chapters. This relationality to a broader context is part of what it means to have an identity, as I will discuss now.

Identity and the Moral Subject

In the structural approach to trauma, we saw that trauma is defined, in part, as the 'experience of loss of autonomy […] incompatible with former recognized relationships that define the sense of self', whereby 'autonomy' is, in part, 'the capacity to have a sense of identity' (Benyakar et al. 1989: 437). This section will make a closer examination of the notion of identity, from the position that it is essentially what is at stake in the traumatic encounter. The aim here is to show that the 'identity' we speak of in relation to trauma must not be understood as a purely psychic construct, but rather as a psycho-social construct, and that it also does not only pertain to the individual subject since, as Stein has demonstrated, there is also the possibility of a collective subject, and thus some level of collective identity. If individual trauma involves the collapse of the individual's sense of identity, then it is reasonable to also assume that collective trauma, to the extent that it is the collapse of a communal sense of identity, is also possible on some level analogous to the trauma experienced by an individual subject.

I begin with the notion of the self and how it is connected with the idea of identity, that is, what it means to have a sense of self and a sense of identity. Stein has provided some of the essential background to this discussion. Identity is the boundary between what pertains to the self and what is other. To have an identity, or multiple identities (such as mother, daughter, scholar, friend) entails staking out one's territory for oneself, so to speak. This requires making use of certain criteria, which involves making decisions based on one's own value responses. Valuing is central to the task of identity formation and valuing is always carried out against a background, or framework, of potential values, which can be drawn from other individuals and from the culture in which one lives, including all of its social, religious, political, national, sexual and moral elements. To be an autonomous agent involves drawing the distinction, or boundary, between oneself and the background of potential values, in order to build one's own framework of values, through a continual process of negotiation and value relations.

In his book *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (1989), Charles Taylor picks up several of the ideas and themes that are also present in Stein's phenomenology, and develops them in a more contemporary

context. His insights are illuminating with regard to identity and its inherent connection with morality, a connection that is at least implicit in Stein's value theory. Taylor claims that contemporary moral philosophy tends to take too narrow an interpretation of morality, as that which concerns what is the *right thing to do*, rather than what it is *good to be*; that is, it is more concerned with 'defining the content of obligation rather than the nature of the good life' (1989: 3). It is only when viewed in the latter sense that morality is understood as being deeply intertwined with identity. Taylor points out that, at the most basic level, being a self involves the capacity to 'steer one's action strategically in the light of certain factors, including one's own desires, capacities, etc.' and to have a capacity for reflective awareness (33). However, this basic level of selfhood is insufficient for the formation of an identity. Taylor posits that 'we are selves only in that certain issues matter for us. What I am as a self, my identity, is essentially defined by the way things have significance for me' (34). A crucial feature of human agency is that 'we cannot do without some orientation to the good, that we each essentially are (i.e., define ourselves at least inter alia by) where we stand on this' (33).

In other words, the need to be connected with what one sees as 'good, or of crucial importance, or of fundamental value' (42), is an essential factor in identity formation, and one which, Taylor asserts, receives too little attention in contemporary fields of enquiry into the areas of selfhood and identity, including psychology, sociology, and some branches of philosophy, because they are largely rooted in a value-free, positivist or empiricist epistemology (33-34). Human beings tend to express this fundamental orientation in terms of *who they are*, and the ability to answer the question "who am I?" implies that one knows what one's orientation is, that is, that one has an identity in this sense (29). In order to be able to map out the space of who we are, our identity, we make evaluations and qualitative distinctions based on the frameworks that we develop in answer to the question "who am I?". Such frameworks provide 'the horizon within which we know where we stand, and what meanings things have for us' (29). Since it 'belongs to human agency to exist in a space of questions about strongly valued goods', an agent lacking such frameworks would be, 'a person in the grip of an appalling identity crisis' (31), an experience he describes as

> an acute form of disorientation which people often express in terms of not knowing who they are, but which also can be seen as a radical uncertainty of where they stand. They lack a frame or horizon within which things can take on a stable significance, within which some life possibilities can be seen as good or meaningful, others as bad or trivial. […] This is a painful and frightening experience. (27-8)

What is striking about this observation is how closely Taylor's 'identity crisis' resembles the experience of trauma.

Following on from the question of who we are is the question of voice: the role and function of language is central in the capacities for human agency, meaning-making and, by extension, the formation of communal life. On this note, Taylor says

> I define who I am by defining where I speak from, in the family tree, in social space, in the geography of social statuses and functions, in my intimate relations to the ones I love, and also crucially in the space of moral and spiritual orientation within which my most important defining relations are lived out. (35)

Through conversation, we make things objects not for ourselves as individuals, but 'for us' (35). Related to this is the way in which, in order to make sense of ourselves, 'we grasp our lives in a narrative'; because of the temporal structure of human experience, our lives always have a degree of narrative understanding (47). This concept of voice, and its relationship to agency and meaning-making, is central to my analysis of Carri's film, *La rabia*, in Chapter Two, which presents a traumatized child who is mute. In my analysis of Martel's *La mujer sin cabeza* in Chapter Three, voice and agency are also seen to be connected to morality and ethics.

To sum up these points that draw on Taylor's insights, selfhood and identity are not value-free concepts. On the contrary, they are deeply embedded in and dependent upon our capacity to make qualitative distinctions and value-based judgements (including moral judgements) in order to map our horizons and form the frameworks within which we define ourselves in relation to the world around us and to others, that is, our cultural background and the society in which

we live. Furthermore, selfhood and identity do not belong exclusively to the individual psyche, rather they are psycho-socially constituted. Identity, insofar as it is deeply bound up with morality, and to the extent that it therefore concerns questions of freedom and responsibility, is at the boundary between private and public. This point will be taken up in the final section of the chapter, which deals with Trauma and Biopolitics, in which I elucidate the biopolitical concept of immunity and its connection to identity. Before doing so, however, it is necessary to examine the crisis of meaning in the contemporary world.

The crisis of meaning

To what extent is the contemporary world, in capitalist, materialist societies at least, experiencing an identity crisis? In all cultures and civilizations throughout history there have been frameworks of meaning that people could draw from which enabled them to have what only in contemporary (modern) times we would call an 'identity', in the sense in which it has been outlined so far (Taylor 1989: 28). In pre-modern times, religion, or some form of faith, usually provided the ultimate source of meaning, as well as being virtually uncontested as *the* authority on issues pertaining to morality, even for those individuals who may not have considered themselves 'religious', in the sense of being pious or devout. Very few people questioned or seriously doubted the existence of at least some higher form of spiritual life (which I will call God), or whether such a thing as morality could even exist in separation from the context of a belief in God (310). On the natural (as opposed to the supernatural or spiritual) level, what could be called 'traditional' institutions and structures, such as the family and local community life, were the basic sources of meaning for individuals and collectives alike. Tensions surrounding the loss of traditional frameworks, in particular religion and the family, as sources of meaning and morality is an important theme throughout this thesis. It is particularly relevant to Martel's films, which will be discussed in Chapter Three. *La mujer sin cabeza* engages with this theme in a nuanced way through the female protagonist, a woman suffering a profound and disturbing moral and identity crisis. The theme is also central to the narrative of *La niña santa*, in which an adolescent girl struggles to come to terms with religious ideals that no longer seem to resonate. Loss

associated with the family and the identity connected with it is also explored in Chapter Four in relation to Trapero's films.

Coinciding with the onset of modernity, there has been a significant transformation with regard to traditional frameworks and their significance in our lives, in terms of the extent to which they can now be considered as sources of meaning for us. Among other contemporary cultural critics, film scholars have commented pointedly on the crisis of meaning occasioned by modernity. For instance, referencing the proliferation of what he calls the 'ruins of modernity' (either the literal ruins of buildings or car wrecks, or figurative ones such as broken bodies) in recent Argentine cinema, Aguilar asks:

> How can we construct an experience if modernity has swept away traditions but can no longer sustain itself as permanent renovation and provider of meaning? How can we create experiences from variability, precariousness, and accidents? […] There is no longer a prior narration that would indicate which paths to follow. (2011: 41-2)

Indeed, it has been pointed out by many scholars that the experience of modernity is *traumatic*, as E. Ann Kaplan and Ban Wang's sweeping indictment of modern history attests:

> […] it is modern history, with its secular dethroning of the sacred and the absolute, its aggressive technology and military conflicts, its destructive ideological movements of fascism, totalitarianism, and other fundamentalisms, its expansive world markets, its imperialist conquest and colonization of indigenous peoples, its hubris in the conquest of nature, and its epidemic of homelessness and migration, that has shattered the ontological anchorage, the inherited ground of experience, and the intimate cultural networks of support and trust that humans hitherto relied on for a sense of security and meaningful life. (2008: 16)

Various causes are cited for the crisis of meaning that modernity has occasioned. One is the advance of science and scientific methodologies, to the extent that it is nowadays broadly assumed that faith and science are incompatible, if not categorically antithetical fields of knowledge and enquiry. Industrialization, technology and education are also put forward as further factors contributing to

the eclipse of traditional ways of life and of religious and spiritual beliefs, as are the concentration and mobility of populations (Taylor 1989: 310). With the opening up of alternative moral sources, 'people no longer feel […] that the spiritual dimension of their lives [is] incomprehensible if one supposed there was no God' (310). In other words, the 'disengaged subject' of post-Enlightenment thinking, whose own powers of rational order and control, expression and articulation afford him a sense of his own dignity as a rational moral agent, now takes the place of God (314-5).

One result of this process has been that our moral sources are now diverse and subjective; most people do not see the need to look towards objective standards for their sense of morality or their orientation towards the good, with the result that it has become difficult, if not impossible, to collectively agree on what is good, or on what course of action should be taken. For some, this is perceived as a form of liberation from oppressive and unreasonable moral and existential demands, and the institutional systems that stem from them (for example, the Church). But Taylor makes a salient observation; he notes that the sense of existential crisis experienced by the modern subject is utterly different and altogether opposite to the kind experienced in previous cultures, those dominated by unchallengeable traditional frameworks of religion, codes of honour, or natural law. Whereas in traditional cultures, the potential existential danger might have consisted in 'the prospect of irretrievable condemnation or exile, of being marked down in obloquy forever, or being sent to damnation irrevocably, or being relegated to a lower order through countless future lives', the existential threat faced by the modern subject is that 'the world loses altogether its spiritual contour, nothing is worth doing, the fear is of a terrifying emptiness, a kind of vertigo, or even a fracturing of our world and body-space' (Taylor 1989: 18). In other words, the greatest existential threat faced by the modern self is the loss of meaning. While the point is not whether the latter is a qualitatively better or worse situation, what this does indicate is why the human condition in the present age is characterized by trauma, a preoccupation that is revealed by the films that are discussed in this thesis.

The situation in contemporary capitalist cultures and societies at least, is that traditional frameworks of meaning are either missing entirely or are so fragmented as to be of no use in any robust sense. When meanings can be

assigned based solely upon arbitrary or purely subjective criteria, with no need for any objective reality or standard by which to measure them, there inevitably comes a point at which it seems that nothing means anything. What has taken the place of traditional frameworks in modern life? Sociologist Anthony Giddens writes about the modern self as a reflexive project that operates within an internally referential system of knowledge and power (1991: 144). This has resulted in a phenomenon of modern life that he refers to as 'the sequestration of experience', that is, 'the establishing of large tracts of relative security in day-to-day life', the (unintended) effect of which is 'to repress a cluster of basic moral and existential components of human life that are, as it were, squeezed to the sidelines' (167). At an institutional level, the process of sequestration has the effect of 'removing basic aspects of life experience, including especially moral crises, from the regularities of day-to-day life established by the abstract systems of modernity' (156). These aspects include such phenomena as insanity, criminality, sickness and death, sexuality, and nature (156).

It will be helpful to explore here the implications of the sequestration of experience on the ontological security of the self, in particular with regard to meaning and meaninglessness. Giddens notes that '[m]odernity is inherently prone to crisis, on many levels. A "crisis" exists whenever activities concerned with important goals in the life of an individual or a collectivity suddenly appear inadequate' (184). This propensity for crisis generates a climate of uncertainty which the individual finds difficult to ignore or put aside (184); it also 'exposes everyone to a diversity of crisis situations […] which may sometimes threaten the very core of self-identity' (184-5). Thus there is a double effect of the sequestration of experience. On the one hand, it helps to shield individuals from many things that might threaten ontological security, as existential questions are 'institutionally "put aside" rather than handled within the personality of the individual' (185). The reverse side of this, however, is that 'whenever fateful moments intervene or other kinds of personal crises occur, the sense of ontological security is likely to come under immediate strain' (185). This is partly to do with issues surrounding trust in the type of abstract system in which the reflexive self operates: 'Abstract systems help to foster day-to-day security, but trust vested in such systems […] carries little psychological reward for the

individual; trust brackets out ignorance, but does not provide the moral satisfactions that trust in persons can offer' (185).

As has been noted, in traditional societies, individuals had clear narratives to follow, however demanding or restrictive such narratives were, or might appear to the modern subject to have been. Whilst modernity has brought a great increase of personal freedom, in terms of liberation from more fixed and prescriptive life narratives, this freedom has not come without a price. It has brought unprecedented challenges and difficulties, as Giddens notes:

> In the reflexive project of the self, the narrative of self identity is inherently fragile. The task of forging a distinct identity may be able to deliver distinct psychological gains, but it is clearly also a burden. A self-identity has to be created and more or less continually reordered against a backdrop of shifting experiences of day-to-day life and the fragmenting tendencies of modern institutions. (186)

In modernity, the prescriptive narratives of tradition are replaced by reflexive processes of self-actualization. However,

> as long as these possibilities are understood largely as a matter of the extension of the control systems of modernity to the self, they lack moral meaning. "Authenticity" becomes both a pre-eminent value and a framework for self-actualisation, but represents a morally stunted process. (9)

Giddens's discussion of personal meaninglessness, or 'the feeling that life has nothing worthwhile to offer' (9), in modernity echoes the position expressed by Taylor with respect to morality in the broad sense of 'the good life'. Giddens says that the phenomenon of personal meaninglessness should be understood 'in terms of a repression of moral questions which day-to-day life poses, but which are denied answers' (9). The pervasiveness of abstract systems and the calculability of everyday life provide stable social environments that keep existential questions at bay, but they also engender 'chronic reflexivity whereby individuals organize their own relations to the encompassing social world' (202). Such frameworks rely on basic trust to sustain a sense of meaningfulness in personal and social activities; but while this type of framework may prevent

feelings of dread from surfacing in certain situations, it is brittle to say the least (202). In fact, as Giddens explains, 'the more open and general the reflexive project of the self, as further fragments of tradition are stripped away, the more there is likely to be a return of the repressed at the very heart of modern institutions' (202). The notion of the return of the repressed has particular implications in terms of trauma, for reasons that will be discussed now.

The return of the repressed referenced by Giddens does not concern the Freudian notion of psychologically repressed guilt. Rather, it occurs when institutional repression causes mechanisms of shame to come to the fore, and forms of counter-reaction to appear at an institutional level as the negative consequences of systems of instrumental control become increasingly exposed (1991: 9). The return of the repressed can be traced in areas such as sexuality, religious belief, and in the rise of social movements, which 'mark an attempt at a collective reappropriation of institutionally repressed areas of life' (207). A situation in which the return of the repressed is likely to appear, according to Giddens, is when 'fateful moments' occur; this might be understood to include any or all of the full range of traumatic experiences. Giddens cites birth and death as 'fateful' events that have particularly existential implications. Whereas in pre-modern cultures, birth and death

> took place in group or family contexts and were closely integrated with traditional practices, as well as with cosmic interpretations, […] today [they] happen in the sequestered milieu of the hospital and are there treated as discrete phenomena, having no distinctive connection with either the cycle of the generations or with broader moral issues concerning the relation between human beings and inorganic nature. (203)

Fateful moments disturb the smooth order of routine in reflexively ordered abstract systems, such as those we live in today. When such events occur, 'they cannot easily be dealt with without reference to moral/existential criteria' (203). I suggest that if such criteria are not accessible within the broader framework of meaning shared within a community or social group, but are present in only a brittle, fragmentary or subjective condition, such as exists for the reflexive

modern self, full-blown trauma of the type outlined in the structural approach discussed previously is more likely to occur.

Trauma, Biopolitics and the Structure of Traumatic Experience

Thus far we have looked at, first, the divide between the physical and the psychological, through an engagement with Stein's phenomenology of the human person. We saw how the body and the self are constituted concurrently and there is thus less of a divide and more of a continuum between the physical and psychological, an argument that will become clearer through discussion of the films in the chapters that follow. We then looked at the relation between individual and collective, and how individual selves are intersubjectively constituted through their lived bodies as well as through their meaning-making capacities, in a relation that can also be seen as something of a continuum, rather than a divide. This was particularly evident in the notion of the individual current of experience and the communal currents of experience that Stein describes. We then looked more closely at the areas of identity and meaning through an engagement with the work of Taylor and Giddens, as two central areas that are at stake in the traumatic encounter, in order to extract their underlying characteristics and structures and to examine how these areas might be seen as being in crisis in the modern world. The final binary, or oppositional pairing, which I proposed to examine at the outset was between private and public, and I will examine this area from a biopolitical perspective. This is intuitive when we consider that "biopolitics" is where biological life and political life meet and cross over, where they exert influence on one another, for better or for worse. In other words, the conflation of private and public is located on the biopolitical horizon.

There are two distinct patterns of thinking – paradigms perhaps – that are becoming increasingly at odds with one another in the world today. I do not refer to them as ideologies because I wish to isolate, rather, the principles that inform ideologies. These principles can be articulated in terms of *openness* and *closure*. The former is inclined towards destructuration, fluidity and inclusion, an (often indiscriminate) opening of borders and boundaries of every kind, from national, to sexual, to geopolitical, to gender; and the counter movement is towards isolation, impermeability, exclusion and absolute control, and it manifests itself

in many of the same spheres as the former tendency. The most obvious display of the tension between these two currents of thought in a sociopolitical context is transpiring, at the time of writing, in the situation in the United States and Europe, in response to the crisis of refugees fleeing persecution in Syria and other parts of the Middle East, coupled with heightened concern about terrorist attacks by ideological extremists. However, these paradigms are also evident in more benign manifestations in other spheres. Arguably, neither of these tendencies offer long-term viability for the wellbeing of humanity. Looking at trauma – and what it reveals about structure, identity and meaning – from a biopolitical perspective offers an insight into why neither of these tendencies can work.

Biopolitics is a difficult concept to define, since it inevitably evokes 'plural and divergent meanings' (Lemke 2011: 2). Lemke helpfully navigates these meanings by observing that

> life is not only the object of politics and external to political decision-making; it affects the core of politics – the political subject. Biopolitics is not the expression of a sovereign will but aims at the administration and regulation of life processes on the level of populations. It focuses on living beings rather than on legal subjects – or, to be more precise, it deals with legal subjects that are at the same time living beings. (4)

Lemke also nods towards the thinking of Michel Foucault, who was among the first to develop a theory of biopolitics: 'According to Foucault, life denotes neither the basis nor the object of politics. Instead, it presents a border to politics – a border that should be simultaneously respected and overcome, one that seems to be both natural and given but also artificial and transformable' (2011: 4-5). This borderland area is what the field of biopolitics negotiates.

Following Pieter Vermeulen, I turn to Roberto Esposito's biopolitical theory as an approach that is particularly appropriate to the discussion of trauma, and, therefore, to my analyses of the films, since Esposito 'grafts his account of biopolitics […] into a dynamic […] that is structured very much like the scenario of traumatic encounter' (Vermeulen 2014: 149), as will be demonstrated below. Esposito's theory of biopolitics takes up where Foucault's leaves off, in that, in Esposito's view, Foucault never quite manages to account for how it is possible

that 'a power of life is exercised against life itself' (Esposito 2008: 39, also cited by Vermeulen); in other words, how a politics of life becomes a politics of death. That explanation is at the core of Esposito's task. To begin with, I briefly sketch Esposito's broader political project, in order to provide the context for how his theory applies to my argument that trauma spans and transcends the divide between private and public. This theory will then be further illustrated in Chapter Four in my analysis of Trapero's films.

Esposito's main concern is that the idea of community that holds sway in the political philosophy of today is based on an erroneous interpretation of the original meaning of 'community' (*communitas*), such that

> [m]odern individuals truly become that, the perfectly individual, the "absolute" individual, bordered in such a way that they are isolated and protected, but only if they are freed in advance from the "debt" that binds them one to the other; if they are released from, exonerated, or relieved of that contact, which threatens their identity, exposing them to possible conflict with their neighbor, exposing them to the contagion of the relation with others. (Esposito 2010: 13)

Immunity is the process that 'de-activates the mutual obligation that characterizes *communitas*' (Vermeulen 2014: 148): 'if community is so threatening to the individual integrity of the subjects that it puts into relation, nothing else remains for us except to "immunize us" beforehand and, in so doing, to negate the very same foundations of community' (Esposito 2010: 13).[29] The political, legal and social mechanisms that have been installed based on this particular (and, in Esposito's view, *defective*) understanding of community have resulted in the immunitary predicament in which we find ourselves today. Or, as Bird and Short have put it, 'the dominant Western philosophical-political idealization of an immunized and proper community is becoming increasingly untenable in our current geo-political circumstances' (2013: 2). As cited above, the refugee-immigration crisis unfolding in the United States and Europe at present can be seen as one example of this.

[29] Immunization in this sense might be seen as another articulation of what Giddens describes as 'the sequestration of experience' (cited previously).

In order to explicate how this situation has come about, Esposito returns to the etymology of the term community, to the Latin concept of *communitas*, and focuses on the root of the word, *munus*, which means 'gift', but a particular kind of gift, one that when given carries with it the obligation to reciprocate on the part of the receiver. It is this reciprocal understanding, which is at the heart of *communitas*, that is missing in our current understanding of community as it applies in the areas of politics, law and social relations, with the result that an immunitary paradigm has become entrenched in our political, legal and social institutions. In other words, the defective logic that has been applied is that

> if community breaks down the barriers of individual identity, immunity is the way to rebuild them, in defensive and offensive forms, against any external element that threatens it. […] Hence the double bind implicit in immunitary dynamics – typical of modernity and increasingly widespread today in all spheres of individual and collective experience, both real and imaginary. (Esposito 2013: 85)

Esposito therefore engages with the central concept of *immunitas*, as that which is the counterpoint of *communitas*, in order to re-think the possiblilities of community. Esposito's treatment of the concept of immunity oscillates between, on the one hand, a legal concept of immunity and, on the other, an analogy with the biological immune system. The former is that which holds sway in our current situation; the latter is that which Esposito proposes in order to work towards, if not a solution, then at least a re-thinking of the current political categories. [30] This analogy of biological immunity offers a compelling articulation of how the principles of 'openness' and 'closure', cited above, function, and why neither one is ultimately viable.

The central question for Esposito, therefore, is how to restore the originary sense of reciprocal obligation inhering in *communitas* to the modern understanding of community and, particularly in light of the contemporary global immunitary crisis, to 'think again what the basis of community might be' (Esposito 2008: xli). What is needed in order to do this is to

[30] Although Esposito offers a compelling deconstruction of 'the core categories in modern political thought', such as those of community and immunity, he has been taken to task for neglecting to offer any solutions in the way of prescriptive action (see Bird and Short 2013: 2).

> overturn […] the balance of power between "common" and "immune"; […] to conceptualize the function of immune systems in a different way, making them into relational filters between inside and outside instead of exclusionary barriers. (Esposito 2013: 88)

He does this by adoping the analogy of the biological immune system, 'according to which natural or induced immunization implies the ability of the body, by means of its own antibodies, to resist an infection caused by an external virus' (2013: 84-5). This is the positive, but there is also a negative aspect, by which immunity, 'if assumed in a form that is exclusive and exclusionary toward all other human and environmental alterities, ends up counteracting its own development' (86). In other words, in biological immunity, the proper functioning of the boundary that separates inside from outside depends on its being porous, rather than impermeable. For Esposito, this paradigm of immunization supplies the constitutive nexus at the core of biopolitics which so eluded Foucault, and provides the hermeneutic key to understanding how a politics of life becomes a politics of death (86).

We can already see from this analogy the inherent resemblance to what was described in the structural approach to trauma, the boundary that allows open and closed states and that is self regulating. It is this boundary that collapses in the traumatic encounter, resulting in a 'forced open state' that the self cannot overcome through its ordinary regulatory mechanisms, and which results in the situation that Scarry describes: the 'dissolution of the boundary between inside and outside gives rise to [the experience of] an almost obscene conflation of private and public' (1985: 53). Scarry's description, in reference to the experience of pain, looks very much like Esposito's articulation of the immunitary crisis of the modern, and in particular the *globalized* age, since the phenomenon of globalization has brought the "crisis" character of modernity, and thus the tension between community and immunity, to the next level. For as Bird and Short indicate,

> [i]n the globalized world, everything is inevitably brought into proximity and correlation, be it wars, natural disasters, climatic upheaval, or political and economic turmoil. […] In this light, the globalized world appears as the sustained crisis of the proper and simultaneously as the

> endgame of the project of modernization as manifested in ever more intensified, crisis-ridden forms. (2013: 1)

Where does Stein's theory of community stand in relation to the concept at which Esposito aims his critique, given that community is central to the theory of both philosophers? It would appear that the understanding of community Esposito criticises is not the same concept as that described by Stein. In his critique of certain philosphies of community, Esposito exempts a small group of thinkers who do not conceive of community in the *substantialist* sense he condemns, that is, 'as a substance that connected certain individuals to each other through the sharing of a common identity' (Esposito 2013: 83). Rather, for these other thinkers, 'community was not conceived as that which puts certain individuals into relationship, but rather as the *very being* of that relationship' (84) (my emphasis). He names Heidegger as one of these, and I would argue that Stein also belongs in this category, since her account of community is built on the same phenomenological foundation as that of Heidegger, that is, the school of Husserl's phenomenology. Stein conceives of community not as a substantial structure "imposed", as it were, on the individual; rather, it arises out of a 'current of experience' of individuals: 'what an individual experiences as a member of the community forms the material out of which the communal experiences coalesce' (Stein 2000: 141). Calcagno notes that, for Stein, 'community arises naturally because relations among people cause a wider and deeper reciprocal exchange to occur on a more personal level' (2014: 153). More importantly, however, 'the origin of a community must be principally rooted in freedom – the freedom to be open to others and to open oneself, one to the other and vice versa' (153). This does not, however, as stated previously, involve the conflation of individual and community. On the contrary, 'in this seizing of one another in each other's personhood, there is […] no loss of individual identity in a communal fusion. Rather, there is a communal living of each other in the other within each person's individuality' (153-4). Thus the openness and reciprocality that characterize Stein's community might not be far off that of the *communitas* Esposito envisages.

We saw from Stein's account of community that the individual was analogous to the community in several regards. Looking at Esposito's description

of the immunitary crisis of the present age, and the biopolitical dynamic that he outlines, it might be said that the crisis of community is analogous to the individual experience of trauma. Or rather, that individual trauma is analogous to the crisis of community that Esposito's biopolitical theory of immunity and community articulates. In this respect, it seems fair to suggest that the crisis of community Esposito addresses is nothing other than the individual experience of trauma writ large, the experience of the (traumatic) conflation of private and public. This idea will be explored further in Chapter Four of this thesis, as part of the analysis of Trapero's films, *Nacido y criado* and *Carancho*.

Conclusion

In summary, I have argued in this chapter that trauma is a boundary phenomenon that inhabits the interface between physical and psychological, individual and collective, and private and public. The structural approach that I adopt places equal emphasis on these three areas, or sets of oppositions. Through an engagement with Stein's phenomenology, I demonstrated the close interconnection between the elements of these three oppositional pairings. Her theory shows that the body and psyche, along with values and meaning, are overlaid with one another in a complex network of relations between body, individual and community, that is negotiated through empathy. Unique to Stein's theory is the clear distinction she draws between the law of the psyche and the law of the spirit; trauma is subject to the laws of both of these realms, therefore it straddles them, making it a boundary phenomenon. Most significantly, Stein's answer to the traumatic experience of life is built into the structure of the human person, from which the moral life takes its cue: valuing of the higher values also involves a disengagement from the negative values of life and a deepening of the soul by living from within, motivated by the higher values. The deepening of relations to others involves accepting responsibility for them, which institutes community. For this not to be in itself traumatic, however, (for example, in the case where the other is violent, as is the case in Carri's *La rabia*, discussed in the next chapter), one must completely cordon oneself off from psychic contagion.[31]

[31] I am indebted to Mette Lebech (NUI Maynooth) for these insights into Stein's thought in relation to trauma.

One notable problem in trauma theory has revolved around the identification of trauma as either a physiological/neurological *or* a psychological problem. The structural approach demonstrates that ultimately trauma is a problem concerning meaning and identity, and I argued that identity is also deeply interconnected with the moral life. The final binary I examined was that of private and public, for which I turned to Esposito's theory of biopolitics, which was seen to be compatible with the structure of trauma as a breach of the boundary that separates 'inside' from 'outside', as identified at the outset of the chapter, a point I further in Chapter Four. This framework provides the epistemological and structural basis for the readings of the films that form the main corpus of the thesis. The connections between the oppositional pairings, identity and morality will be further developed in the individual chapters of the thesis, where they become clearer through discussion of the films.

CHAPTER TWO

Written in the Body: Violence, Silence and Contagion in Albertina Carri's *La rabia*

This chapter examines the representation of trauma in Albertina Carri's third feature-length film, *La rabia* (2008), with a particular focus on the interconnections between the bodily, the psychological and the social aspects of trauma that the film demonstrates. *La rabia* is an emotionally dark and brutally realist film, set in the present-day Argentine pampas.[32] The narrative revolves around the domestic lives of two peasant families: Alejandra (Analía Couceyro), Poldo (Víctor Hugo Carrizo) and their young daughter Nati (Nazarena Duarte), who is mute; and their neighbours, Pichón (Javier Lorenzo) and his adolescent son, Ladeado (Gonzalo Pérez), who is lame. The film's primary point of view is that of Nati, a disturbed child who is witness to two distinct violent relationships in the family domain: the physical and emotional abuse of her mother at the hands of her father; and acts of brutal sadomasochistic sex between her mother and their neighbour, Pichón. The trauma Nati experiences is made manifest by way of three main behaviours, or 'symptoms', which, although not directly acknowledged as such within the film, have been interepreted by some scholars as falling within the spectrum of autism (Tompkins 2012; Josiowicz 2014): a compulsion to remove her clothes; a tendency to emit a high-pitched, inarticulate scream when she is distressed; and the ability to express her disturbing memories, emotions and imagination through the visual medium of drawings and sketches.[33] These sketches are figuratively brought to life as animated scenes, which are interwoven into the 'real' elements of the film; they represent Nati's imagination expressed in images, since speech is not available to her. In this

[32] Although the film is ostensibly set in the present, there are few temporal markers that tie it to a particular historical timeframe, as Selimovic also notes (2015: 531). As with Martel's *La mujer sin cabeza*, discussed in the next chapter, there are visual nods to the 1970s and 80s, which suggest a connection between the violence of this film and that of the dictatorship era. One of these is the sweater worn by Alejandra in the pig slaughtering scene, which bears the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) "Save the Pandas" logo, featuring the iconic giant panda. Since the WWF changed its name to the World Wide Fund For Nature in 1986, the sweater harks back to a timeframe prior to that (in addition to the irony of its placement in this particular scene).

[33] Although the film never explicitly attributes autism to Nati, Carri has acknowledged that she researched autism in preparation for the film and that she deliberately endowed the character of Nati with 'ciertos rasgos autisticas' [certain autistic traits] (Pinto Veas 2008).

sense Nati both embodies and subverts the post-Holocaust notion of trauma as unspeakable and unrepresentable, in that she cannot speak, yet finds a way of articulating trauma. Her drawings also function as plot devices that help to bring the narrative to its climax, since her father interprets their sexually explicit content as evidence that she has been abused by Pichón, and then attempts to kill him, but is himself killed in the process.

As has been noted in scholarly literature on the film, *La rabia* offers a representation of childhood that differs significantly to the approach that has been taken in other Latin American films made since the 1960s, identified by Dufays as 'a nostalgic perspective' (2014: 19), in which the child's viewpoint is 'used as a vehicle, often allegorical, to question history' (Rocha and Seminet 2014: xi) and to transmit memory. Examples of the figure of the child being employed in this way in recent Argentine films include Benjamín Ávila's *Infancia clandestina* (2011) and Marcelo Piñeyro's *Kamchatka* (2002), which both address dictatorship-era violence. In *La rabia*, by contrast, the child is presented as a witness to trauma and violence within the family and social sphere, rather than to political or historical violence. Referring to the tendency of films associated with the New Argentine Cinema to resist allegorical readings and interpretations, as noted, for example, by Page (2009: 26) and Aguilar (2011: 16), Dufays proposes the term 'melancholic' to describe the conception of childhood that is presented in *La rabia*:[34]

> Rather than offering a nostalgic view of childhood based on transmission, [*La rabia*] give[s] us a melancholic conception that stresses the failure of communication and language. […] The portrayal of [the child's] perception is […] part of a melancholic conception of human existence in which time is cyclical, life ends in ruin and death, and language fails to interlink the generations. (2014: 20)

This chapter engages with this notion of melancholy, but seeks to develop it in a new direction by considering the physiological and psychological (in addition to interpersonal and symbolic) bases for such a melancholic perception in the film. Insofar as the notion of melancholy concerns silences and gaps in narrative and

[34] Dufays applies the term 'melancholic' to both *La rabia* and Lucrecia Martel's *La ciénaga* (2001), but my analysis here relates only to *La rabia*.

voice, the way in which trauma is transmitted in this film is only intelligible through the framework established in Chapter One, particularly the construction of identity, discussed in relation to Taylor's moral philosophy. Autism, a form of extreme self-absorption, or an isolated self, is a central theme in *La rabia*, conveyed mainly through the autistic-like behaviour displayed by Nati, but not confined to it.[35] Indeed, as Selimovic indicates, 'non-verbal autistic behaviour permeates the film as a form of communication' (2015: 520). Thus the notion of autism not only relates to the child's symptoms within the narrative, but also to the form and aesthetic of the narrative as well. As stated in the conclusion to Chapter One, this chapter considers the child protagonist and the constitution of the self in the earliest stages of life, in contrast to the other chapters, which draw attention to adolescence, motherhood and fatherhood.

The first section contextualizes *La rabia* in relation to Carri's overall cinematic project, in particular her first feature-length film, *Los rubios* (2003), which made Carri an iconic voice within Argentine cinema. This establishes the ways in which the film is connected to wider political or contextual readings of Carri's work, before moving on to examine the more private, individual manifestations of trauma in the film. The second section focuses on the way in which trauma can be 'written' in the body through interpersonal relations, which will be examined in light of developmental theories on attachment relationships between parents and children. For this I engage with the work of Sue Gerhardt, whose theory, informed as it is by research in the areas of neuroscience, developmental psychology, psychotherapy and biochemistry, puts forward a complex, dialectical understanding of the physiological and intersocial worlds of mother and child. This theory expands on my existing theoretical framework, specifically Stein's phenomenology, outlined in the previous chapter, by addressing the body at the biological and neurological, or 'micro', level, at a stage of development prior to the existence of a 'self' or a fully-fledged identity. The second section of the chapter, therefore, considers the role of language acquisition in emotional development, including the capacity to process and overcome trauma, in order to establish how emotional development and language

[35] The term 'autism' originated with the Swiss psychiatrist Paul Bleuler in 1912, who coined the German term *Autismus*, which combines the Greek *autos* (self) with the suffix *–ismos* (of action or of state).

acquisition – not merely as a mechanical process, but in the symbolic sense of 'coming to voice' – are intersubjective processes that have a strong *physiological*, as well as symbolic, component.[36]

The third section builds upon the arguments made in the previous section, in order to develop a clearer picture of how interpersonal relations operate in *La rabia*. I argue that, stripped of what is uniquely *human* about human interactions and interpersonal relationships, the behaviour and relations that predominate in *La rabia* are characterized by psychic contagion, which opens the way for multiple forms of violence and trauma. As was outlined in Chapter One, psychic contagion is a form of interpersonal relation whereby mental energy is transmitted between psyches without the intervention of intentionality or an individual's value response, a common example of which is what we refer to as a 'herd mentality'. While this type of contagion affects all of the characters in the film to some degree, it is the children who are most vulnerable to, and most negatively impacted by, psychic contagion; however, it is also the children who are ultimately the most successful in confronting and counteracting it, which may also be read in relation to Carri's critical distancing from the armed struggles of the past, discussed below. In the final section, I argue that, in *La rabia*, Carri as director speaks on behalf of the child, and that the film is a moral and ethical response to the violence, abuse, disability and voicelessness that children experience. For this, I engage with Karen Lury's (2010) work on the screening of children in war films – an appropriate theoretical approach, given that Carri herself has enthusiastically agreed with one critic's observation that *La rabia* is comparable to a war movie (Pinto Veas 2008).

The Cinematic Voice of Albertina Carri

Carri, one of the most distinguished directors to have emerged on the contemporary film scene in Argentina, is intimately connected with the struggle for human rights and justice that has been ongoing in Argentina since the end of the last military dictatorship of 1976-83. Her parents were intellectuals and active members of the Montoneros, the Movimiento Peronista Montonero

[36] As Lisa Cartwright points out, the figure of speech "coming to voice" is used in connection with various political movements to connote 'the achievement of agency, usually belatedly or through a political struggle before which the individual or collective subject who speaks is understood to have been "silent" or "invisible"' (2008: 6).

[Montonero Peronist Movement] – an armed left-wing revolutionary group which had its roots in the Peronist Party, when in the late 1960s, former president Juan Perón (1946-55), then in exile, called on his left-wing followers to take up arms against the Onganía regime. Organizations like the Montoneros and other revolutionary groups were subjected to inordinate repression. In response, the left stepped up its operations with bombings, kidnappings and a number of high-profile assassinations, although it is worth noting that these were low in comparison to the violence inflicted by the state.[37] Repression against the left was well underway when Perón died in 1974, soon after returning to Argentina. However, under his widow 'Isabelita' Perón, who assumed the presidency in July that year, the situation would escalate, with the founding of the Triple A, the Alianza Anticomunista Argentina [Argentine Anti-Communist Alliance] who extended repression to anyone deemed to pose ideological or political opposition. As well as executions committed in broad daylight, aimed at frightening or traumatizing the wider population, state repression was also clandestine in nature.[38] Although many were already illegally detained, or had been murdered or disappeared, when Isabelita Perón was overthrown by the Argentine armed forces on 24 March 1976, the coup installed a considerably more repressive regime than those that came before it.[39] The regime's self-proclaimed Proceso de Reorganización Nacional [National Reorganization Process] would lead to the banning of political parties and the suspension of union activity, and would expand the scope of terror to the wider population, as well as continuing their quest to wipe out the revolutionary left (including the Montoneros).

Within this context, Carri's parents were forcibly disappeared by the state in 1977, when she was just three years old. Her controversial full-length debut, *Los rubios* (2003), has become canonical in debates surrounding historical memory and representation vis-à-vis the dictatorship, with one critic even comparing its impact within the field of political cinema to that of Octavio Getino and Fernando Solanas' groundbreaking *La hora de los hornos* (see Andermann 2012: 107).[40] *Los rubios* has also been central to the question of

[37] See Levey (2014) for full details.
[38] See Suárez-Orozco (1991: 481).
[39] See Corradi (1982: 65).
[40] *La hora de los hornos* (1968) is emblematic of political 'liberation' cinema, and sought to reflect the social realities of Latin America, in contrast to the Hollywood and European arthouse

postmemory in Argentina, in terms of the transmission of dictatorship trauma to the next generation. Insofar as both films are concerned with intergenerational trauma and testimony, the reading of *La rabia* presented here will benefit from an overview of the political and creative project that informed *Los rubios*. *La rabia* has received significantly less scholarly attention than Carri's debut work and, although it has been read comparatively with her second feature-length film, *Géminis* (2005),[41] *La rabia* has not as yet been analysed extensively in connection with *Los rubios*.[42]

Los rubios is a reflexive piece: a documentary that also self-consciously documents its own making, thereby placing its supposed primary object of investigation always beyond reach and frustrating the viewer's desire to know more. It ostensibly investigates the disappearance of Carri's parents and their lives as political activists, but subverts its own agenda in order to reflect upon the uncertain nature of memory itself and the impact of her familial background on the shaping of Carri's own identity as a filmmaker. The film received mixed reactions at the time of its much-anticipated release, with some critics accusing the director of trivializing the political activism of her parents and giving frivolous treatment to the military violence of the dictatorship era.[43] The brunt of this criticism centres on the use of stop-motion animation sequences, in which children's plastic Playmobil figures are used to represent key memories and past events: Carri's home, her family and the abduction of her parents.[44] However, more nuanced critiques of *Los rubios* are offered by, for example, Aguilar (2011), Page (2009) and Andermann (2012), in their respective monographs on contemporary Argentine cinema. In addition, Carri's own attitude towards the film's subject matter has evolved over time, as she has related in a recent interview. Speaking about her parents, she remarks: "Yo ya tengo más años que ellos cuando fueron secuestrados, así que los veo diferentes. Cuando hice *Los*

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cinemas that were dominant at the time. The film appeared at a time when authoritarianism was on the rise, so is a specific response to left-wing intellectuals' fears for the region.

[41] See Josiowicz, Alejandra. "Scribbles from a Little Girl: Violence and the Politics of Girlhood in Albertina Carri's *Géminis* and *La rabia*" (2014).

[42] Whilst an extensive comparative analysis of the two films is beyond the scope of this thesis, it offers potential for further comparative investigation, as this chapter will indicate.

[43] See Kohan (2004: 47-48) and Sarlo (2005).

[44] This can also be understood in terms of the generational distancing of the second-generation, who, as has been argued, show approximation with the traumatic legacy of the past, but adopt a critical distance, thus engaging with the past without replicating their parents' struggles. This is sometimes done playfully, as in Carri's case, as is argued by Jordana Blejmar (2016).

rubios los miraba un poco como una niña y les hacía unos cuantos reproches; ahora ya los veo como una adulta y me conmueve muchísimo todo lo que hicieron esos jóvenes revolucionarios. Ya no hay reclamo" [I'm older than they were when they were abducted, so I view them differently now. When I made *Los rubios* I was looking at them more like a child and I reproached them to an extent; now I look at them as an adult and I'm very moved by everything those young revolutionaries did. There is no more reproach] (Lingenti, *La Nación* 2017). Regarding the director's use of Playmobil sequences, Aguilar, for example, astutely points out that

> [w]e cannot speak in this case of a reliable testimony, but we can speak of a strange, invented world that children enter into. Through these testimonies, the movie shows the nature of a perception and the modes of imagining that could have been the director's when her own parents were taken from her (2011: 165).

In *Los rubios*, Carri takes to task – in an oblique way, for the most part, but at times, directly – her parents' unreserved commitment to the political project which led, ultimately, to Carri's loss of them and her growing up as an orphan from the age of three. The film also raises questions about the construction of memory of the dictatorship and Argentina's violent past more generally. It does this, in part, by exposing the constructed nature of testimonial forms, such as documentary, and the unreliability of memory. In one scene, for example, Carri (played by actress Analía Couceyro, who also plays the role of Alejandra in *La rabia*) writes in her diary, "Tengo que pensar en algo, algo que sea película. Lo único que tengo es mi recuerdo difuso y contaminado por todas estas versiones" [I have to think of something, something that could be a film. All I have is a memory that's scattered and contaminated by all these other versions]. Carri resists taking on the identities that have been assigned to her by political and human rights narratives. Instead, the film articulates her personal sense of loss and abandonment, against the current of political expectations of her as a daughter of disappeared activists, and the process of finding her own voice within the discourse relating to political violence and the dictatorship.

La rabia is set in an isolated rural location, similar to that in which Carri was raised by her aunt and uncle after the disappearance of her parents. Indeed,

the scenery and landscape in the opening scene of *La rabia* is almost identical to that of *Los rubios*, several scenes of which were shot in the countryside of Carri's childhood, suggesting parallels between the two films, a point I return to below. Scholarship on *La rabia* has drawn attention to possible political influences in the film, such as the state terror of the last dictatorship. In this regard, Selimovic makes the salient observation that

> the subjects in the film are brutally beaten, harshly penetrated, tied up, physically and verbally abused, silenced, and in some cases killed either arbitrarily, wrongfully, or for having challenged repressive orders. (2015: 531)

Andermann reads the film within the contemporary political context of marginalization in a neoliberal capitalist climate (2012: 84). Carri has stated that her primary intention with the film, however, was to examine the naturalization of violence, that is, 'como es que somos capaces de naturalizar la violencia en su máxima expresión' [how it is that we are able to naturalize the most extreme expressions of violence] (Pinto Veas 2008), and the idea of "*la rabia*" [rabies] as a pestilence, with its connotations of contagion. This can be read within the wider context of the kind of dehumanization associated with authoritarian systems and state repression; however, in this film, the violence stems from within the domestic sphere, rather than from without. In this way, the film draws attention to the way trauma not only affects those who experience it directly, but is also transmitted to future generations and those who witness violence and dehumanization, thus dovetailing with *Los rubios*. Significantly, the Pampa is also, of course, an archetypal space in the Argentine national imaginary, characterized in terms of barbarism by Diego Faustino Sarmiento in *Facundo* (1845); Nouzeilles notes that 'in the nineteenth century, the idea of the desert was applied to the large expanse of the pampas, meaning that it was an uncivilized and open space' (2009: 47). In this way, the film has parallels with Trapero's *Nacido y criado*, discussed in Chapter Four, which is set in Patagonia (another such archetypal space), in terms of the links between landscape and the representation of trauma.

Mother, Child and the Nature-Nurture Question

This section examines the relationship between the two female protagonists in *La rabia* – the child, Nati, and her mother, Alejandra – a relationship which demonstrates the interpersonal transmissibility of trauma in the context of a violent social and domestic setting. There are parallels in this regard with the chapters on Martel and Trapero, which also address familial interpersonal relationships in the context of trauma and crisis. This mother-child relationship draws on recent work in the area of developmental psychology that examines attachment relationships between parent and child by bringing together research from such disciplines as neuroscience, psychology, psychotherapy and biochemistry. Sue Gerhardt's book *Why Love Matters: How Affection Shapes a Baby's Brain* (2004) emphasizes how the quality of the relationship between a mother and her baby affects the child's ability to develop a healthy emotional life in later years. An aspect of *La rabia* that is worthy of closer critical attention than has previously been paid is the profound lack of love in the relationships between the characters in the film and, in particular, towards the children. The children are growing up in an atmosphere in which there is a tangible absence of love. They receive almost no affirmative attention from adults and a minimum of affectionate physical contact. Rather, the relationships that they experience with adults, and witness between adults, are characterized by animosity, anger and violence, ostensibly stemming from a male-dominated social structure in which the negative values of a pathological authoritarianism (which reflects that of the wider social context) appear to dominate all aspects of social and domestic life. Stein has elaborated how social attitudes such as love impact the lifepower of both the individual and the community, as noted in Chapter One:

> The love which I meet with strengthens and invigorates me and grants me the power for unexpected achievements. […] Thus, love and the positive attitudes in general don't feed upon themselves; rather, they are a font from which I can nourish others without impoverishing myself. (Stein 2000: 212)

For Stein, this disposition is connected to empathy for 'the other', and violence occurs when that empathy is lost or when members of the community are viewed as objects, rather than other subjects. In *La rabia*, the absence of the humanizing

influence of love colours the way the children view everything in life, from themselves to the interactions between the adults they witness, and reduces human relationships to animal – or, more precisely, *bestial* (as will later be suggested) – relations.

In approaching the topic of motherhood and mothering there is a necessity, indeed a *duty*, to avoid the extreme positions of either idealizing motherhood or demonizing mothers by loading the burden of blame exclusively upon them for the difficulties their children experience, as will also be seen in the chapter on Martel. Holloway and Featherstone, in the introduction to their edited volume *Mothering and Ambivalence*, draw attention to the need for a balanced and realistic approach to the subject of mothering:

> The idea of mothering in particular arouses anxieties which may be managed through defenses which, reproduced at a cultural level, are manifested in the idealisation and denigration of mothers – neither set of images faithful to reality. (Featherstone 1997: 1)

This is a difficulty that feminism, in particular, has faced, and which must be negotiated with care, as Featherstone elaborates:

> The danger is that feminism will concentrate so fixedly on opposing [the] backlash [against any alternatives to the traditional nuclear family] that we will not address the widespread anxieties about what happens to children when parental care fails. (1997: 1-2)

Featherstone further suggests that certain theoretical and clinical approaches to parenting and motherhood are often disbarred by differing accounts:

> Those using feminist psychoanalytic perspectives would all share the view that the quality of emotional care offered to children in their early years has consequences for later development. Some of the more sociologically inclined feminist work ducks this issue by exploring how such developmental theories have been used to oppress women and impose normative constraints on them. (1997: 10)

The critique of the mother-child relationship in *La rabia* that is put forward here negotiates this difficult terrain. There is no question that the sociopolitical

conditions that prevail in the film – including poverty, rural isolation, and the prevalence of a particularly harsh brand of masculinity that engenders the violent domination of women and the entire domestic sphere – are significant causal factors in the poor quality of care that Alejandra provides for her daughter. These important aspects of the film have received due scholarly attention elsewhere;[45] however, there are other perspectives that are also worthy of consideration, and that provide further evidence of the ways in which trauma can be transmitted intersubjectively within the family domain, not only through narrative avenues but also through the body. Whilst the sociopolitical considerations are undoubtedly relevant, this chapter focuses more on the personal and psychological aspects of the film that can be better understood by drawing on the theoretical approach established in Chapter One.

When Nati first appears on screen she is pictured alone in the outdoors, surrounded by nature, and is herself presented as a phenomenon of nature (Dufays 2014: 21). Her gestures reflect this naturalism: she picks flowers that are growing wild in the pampas grass and she squats to urinate after carefully pulling down her tights. These establishing sequences are bathed in early-morning light and the soundtrack, whilst hyper-real (in the sense that sounds are exaggerated, as opposed to natural), is also that of nature – animals and birds stirring to life in the early morning and Nati's own unselfconscious breathing. However, any pastoral impressions these opening scenes may suggest are quickly dissolved, as life in this isolated *estancia* is revealed to be far from idyllic.[46] Within the domestic setting, Nati's mother, while not *physically* abusive towards her, is verbally harsh, emotionally absent and, apart from one scene in which she allows the little girl to comfort her following a violent confrontation with her husband, shows a general lack of affection or empathy for her troubled child. At times, indeed, she is openly critical of Nati because of her inability to speak and, in

[45] Selimovic (2015) offers a particularly insightful analysis of the sociocultural and patriarchal structures of domination in the film. Andermann (2012), Josiowicz (2014) and Dufays (2014) also address these issues.

[46] As Selimovic notes, the term *estancia* 'linguistically indicates […] the potentially stagnating trait of this space' (2015: 618). In this regard, there is a parallel with the image of the swamp in Martel's *La ciénaga*, as will be seen in the next chapter, with its connotations of stagnancy and decay. Selimovic connects the idea of stagnancy suggested by the *estancia* in *La rabia* with patriarchal ways of life (618); whereas, in *La ciénaga*, the swamp is associated with a crisis of the maternal. Both images contrast with Trapero's treatment of landscape, which has a more life-giving connotation, but all instances relate to what Stein has noted about landscape as a material source of lifepower, which can have positive or negative implications.

front of the child, expresses shame at her daughter's lack of social conformity. Alejandra's shame stems from Nati's propensity to emit a prolonged, high-pitched scream when she is upset, which, on the occasion that Pichón insults the girl and her father angrily defends her, leads Alejandra to exclaim, "¿Qué esperás que diga la gente si esta no habla y grita como un chancho? ¡Eso no es normal!" [What do you expect people to say if the girl doesn't talk and screeches like a pig? That is not normal!].

Alejandra's life outside of the home is even more problematic, particularly since she neglects to take measures to prevent her daughter from witnessing the brutal, sadomasochistic sex she regularly engages in with Pichón. Indeed, by insisting, against Poldo's wishes, that Nati continue to be allowed to play in Pichón and Ladeado's yard (thereby facilitating the continuity of her sexual liaisons with Pichón), she also inadvertently occasions Nati's exposure to the spectacle of their frequent, crude copulations. Despite being authoritarian and aggressive, Poldo at least appears to have good intentions with regard to the wellbeing of his daughter. In one scene, he brings her with him to tend the animals, putting her on a pony and carefully leading her, showing her how to apply ointment to a cow's ulcerated udder and offering gentle encouragement at her childlike efforts. As Dufays points out, 'he tells her a story, defends her against Pichón, but he cannot overcome the negative influence of his wife, the mother' (2014: 27). Whilst Nati's autistic-like condition makes it difficult to discern the extent to which her symptoms stem from nature or nurture, she certainly shows signs of emotional neglect. On the one hand, her interaction with others is hampered by her symptoms – her lack of sociability, intolerance of physical contact, and absence of verbal ability. On the other hand, the challenges posed by her condition are not being met, worked on or overcome, through the kind of loving, persevering intervention that might offer possibilities for growth and development.[47] Rather, an already vulnerable child is exposed to domestic abuse and the (literally) unspeakable spectacle of her mother's sexual deviancy. As Selimovic has noted, in *La rabia*,

[47] For instance, recent research suggests that early parent-mediated intervention 'can produce sustained improvement in child autism symptoms and social communication', with potentially long-term benefits (Pickles et al. 2016: 2502).

> the frequent inter-subjective acts of violence and emotional angst the film's central characters endure ultimately demonstrate the ways violence becomes quite literally instilled and transmitted from one generation to another, especially through the children's assaulted psyches. (2015: 518)

I want to explore in more detail this 'literal' way in which physical and emotional trauma (through violence in multiple forms) is transmitted from parent to child, through an engagement with Gerhardt's interdisciplinary work on the development of the brain and the emotional capacities of babies and young children. Gerhardt posits that the confluence of research in the areas of biochemistry, neuroscience, psychology and psychotherapy offers 'a deeper understanding of how human beings become fully human and how they learn to relate emotionally to others' (2004: 2). My aim in engaging with this theory is twofold: to examine the interface between the bodily, psychological and social aspects of our emotional lives at something of a micro level, and to thus illustrate the ways in which trauma is transmitted within the family domain, building on the theoretical framework established in Chapter One. In terms of the structural approach to trauma outlined in that chapter, the domestic setting of *La rabia* is one in which some family members, and particularly Nati, live with continuous psychological threat on the sociofunctional plane, including angry silences and the inability to speak freely. *La rabia* clearly hints at the factors that enable the transmission of trauma, but I propose that a closer examination of the underlying structure can assist the film spectator in reaching a more deeply empathic relationship with the film's characters and their situations. Viewing the film from this perspective thus offers a rich insight into what it is to be human, and an appreciation of the human condition as it is lived by such characters as the film depicts in their specific socio-geographic context. This reading of the family as a source of trauma also presents a point of contrast with the way in which family is portrayed in Trapero's films. In *Nacido y criado*, as will be seen in Chapter Four, the non-conventional family is seen as a source of healing in the wake of trauma.

The research Gerhardt draws upon demonstrates that the nature of the interaction between babies and their parents in the early days of life has a direct influence on the way in which the brain develops, which in turn directly affects the ability to manage one's feelings and emotions, have a sense of self, and relate

to other people later on in life. Gerhardt explains how it is in the womb and in the first two years of an individual's life that the 'social brain' develops – that is, 'the part of the brain which learns how to manage feelings in line with other people' (2004: 3). This includes stress responses and coping mechanisms – in short, 'socially and culturally influenced programmes' (3) – that affect a person's emotional make-up for the rest of their life. It is, therefore, unsurprising that

> when these influences are less than benign, the groundwork is laid for a variety of later social and emotional difficulties […] that may lead to particular conditions such as anorexia, psychosomatic illness, addiction, antisocial behaviour, personality disorder, or depression. (3)

Gerhardt highlights the importance of the regulatory aspects of the mother-child relationship, especially in the early stages. In the first few months of a baby's life, when they have not yet developed the capacity to self-regulate their body processes, babies remain highly dependent on their mother's body, and not only for nourishment: her touch regulates the baby's heart rate, blood pressure, muscular activity, growth hormone levels, and disperses the stress hormones (22). Gerhardt describes the everyday, intuitive ways in which a mother uses her face, voice and touch to 'enter into' the baby's feelings, in order to regulate them and re-establish equilibrium:

> She soothes her baby's loud crying and over-arousal by entering the baby's state with him, engaging him with a loud mirroring voice, gradually leading the way towards calm by toning her voice down and taking him with her to a calmer state. Or she soothes a tense baby by holding him and rocking him. Or she stimulates a lackluster baby back into a happier state with her smiling face and dilated sparkly eyes. By all sorts of non-verbal means, she gets the baby back to his set points where he feels comfortable again. (23)

What appears to be perfectly natural, instinctive, 'motherly' behaviour, however, cannot be taken for granted as such; a mother, or caregiver, who has difficulty identifying and regulating their own feelings (in short, one who has not learned to do so from their own upbringing) will have difficulty regulating those of a baby, or teaching the baby how to adjust their emotional states for themselves, in

the way that a well-adjusted caregiver intuitively does.[48] Thus the regulatory problem is passed on from one generation to the next (23-4). This is particularly true when it comes to negative feelings, such as anger and hostility, as Gerhardt points out:

> If a caregiver hasn't learnt how to manage such feelings comfortably, then she will find them very hard to bear in her children; she might feel very distressed and uncomfortable and urgently want to push them away. (25)

This underscores why blaming parents, and mothers in particular, for shortcomings in their children's upbringing can be deeply unfair and damaging, and why support from a wider community, either in the form of extended family or a social community, is of immense importance. Isolation and lack of support are not only harmful to the wellbeing of a mother as an individual, they also create the conditions for the 'depression and resentment that are so problematic for babies' development' (22).

It would be useful at this point to briefly outline some of the key elements of brain development and function that are relevant to this discussion, in order to better understand how these processes work, as well as what can happen when they go wrong, which is depicted in *La rabia*. Babies are born with a basic, or primitive, brain; the areas that are most active at the early stage are also those that are the 'oldest' in evolutionary terms, whose function is to ensure the internal regulation of body systems (33). The basic survival response systems, such as fear and self-defence, are based in the amygdala, one of the first parts of the brain to mature (33). The 'social' brain develops later, both in evolutionary and in individual terms. The prefrontal area of the cortex 'links the sensory areas of the cortex with the emotional and survival-oriented subcortex' (35). The orbitofrontal part is the first to develop. This plays a key role in emotional life: the ability to relate to others, manage our emotional behaviours, and respond to the emotional cues of others; indeed, 'the capacity to empathise […] requires a developed orbitofrontal cortex' (36), and difficulty in experiencing empathy is

[48] This also raises important questions regarding the absent mother and the repercussions for the child, a theme that is dealt with in Martel's work, discussed in Chapter Three, but one that is also more widely connected to the disappearance of parents; for example, those of Carri.

one of the notable features of autism, the developmental condition that affects Nati. The orbitofrontal cortex can activate or inhibit the deeper layers of the brain, such as the amygdala and hypothalamus, in which intense social emotions are generated, acting as a kind of control centre: 'when someone feels strong rage or fear or sexual desire, it is the orbitofrontal cortex which notices whether a behaviour is currently socially acceptable' (37). Again, this is an area in which Nati is seen to have difficulty, as exemplified by her uncontrollable outbursts of rage and habit of spontaneously undressing at inappropriate times.

In the early stages of development the social brain is highly plastic and the way in which it develops is entirely dependent upon the kinds of interpersonal experiences the baby has. The orbitofrontal cortex cannot develop by itself; 'it depends on the relationships with other people that are available' (39).[49] Such development is based on biochemical processes. It is evident that an emphasis on the face is hard-wired in the brains of primates, and for human babies, faces also play an important role in early brain development. Research suggests that 'it is positive looks which are the most vital stimulus to the growth of the social, emotionally intelligent brain' (41). The baby responds to the arousal he or she reads in the dilated pupils of the parent's eyes, which triggers a biochemical response in the baby's own nervous system by which beta-endorphin is released, mainly into the orbitofrontal region of the brain; such endorphins assist in the growth of neurons, in addition to bringing about feelings of pleasure (41). Dopamine is also released, which, on reaching the prefrontal cortex, enhances the uptake of glucose, thereby assisting in the growth of prefrontal brain tissue and also giving rise to pleasure (42). The loving exchange of looks that takes place so spontaneously between parents and babies thus, in fact, facilitates the very growth of the social brain itself (42). Indeed, child psychologist Jerome Bruner has noted that 'the establishment of sustained eye-to-eye contact […] is the point when the mother often reports that her child has become a "real human being"' (1983: 70).

Faces, however, can also have a powerful negative impact: the perception of a parent's disapproving or angry face will trigger the release of stress

[49] Notably, babies in Romanian orphanages who were abandoned and deprived of bonding relationships with adults were shown to have an undeveloped orbitofrontal cortex (Gerhardt 2004: 38).

hormones, such as cortisol, which, if present in high levels during infancy, 'can also affect the development of other neurotransmitter systems whose pathways are still being established', potentially making it more difficult for the child to regulate their stress responses later in life (Gerhardt 2004: 65). Faces that express fear or anger will be registered in the amygdala, provoking an automatic fear response and,

> when there is a chronic lack of positive social interaction with others, the capacity to override such primitive responses may not develop. Post-natally formed links between the prefrontal cortex and amygdala may be pruned because they are […] too weak to inhibit the amygdala's fearful responses […] leaving the individual prone to anxieties and fears. (45)

Excessive cortisol also affects the development of the hippocampus, the part of the brain that organizes memory (139). The hippocampus, which develops at around the age of three,[50] is 'a key part of verbal memory and enables a person to categorize experience, situate it within a context and to thoughtfully integrate it into a conscious personal history' (139). It is also thought to play an important role in recovering from stress and, for these reasons, the hippocampus plays an essential role in the ability to process trauma (139). Research on PTSD suggests a connection between the size of the hippocampus and the ability to recover from trauma: people who have a smaller, less-developed hippocampus appear to be more predisposed to PTSD (140). Gerhardt explains that,

> through its links with the orbitofrontal cortex, the hippocampus can evaluate situations and anticipate their outcomes. But this is a process that constantly needs to be updated, as does our verbal narrative of who we are in relation to others. By storing key current experiences, the hippocampus is altering our memories and enabling our sense of self to move on with us. But in PTSD that isn't happening. Those who experience it do seem to have a problem with integrating their traumatic experience into verbal memory. (141)

[50] On a related note, this is precisely the age that Carri was when her parents were abducted. This research might therefore shed light on why Carri would choose a less verbal, more visual and tactile medium, such as the Playmobil toys, to represent her parents' abduction in *Los rubios*.

This perspective of trauma is closely connected to my findings in Chapter One, that trauma is essentially a structural experience and that it strongly affects a coherent sense of self.

The 'verbal self' is the final stage of early emotional development, which comes about when the right and left sides of the orbitofrontal cortex begin working together, forming links between the expression and management of feelings (50). Until now, the right brain, which grasps information intuitively and as a whole, has been dominant; but now, the left brain, which operates sequentially and verbally, begins to become more ascendant (50). New areas of the brain also begin to develop: the anterior cingulate, which brings an increased awareness of feelings and interior states, and the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex, which enables the capacity to retain memories and reflect on them (50-1). Both of these areas are involved in speech production and, as they develop, emotions begin to be communicated *verbally*, in addition to gesturally and through body language (51). Together with the hippocampus, these areas 'play a major role in the development of a social self who has an autobiography and who communicates with others verbally to sustain this sense of self' (53). Crucially, it is 'the process of putting feelings into words that enables the left and right brains to become integrated', and the success of this process depends on 'whether adult caregivers have facilitated [these connections] by responding and talking to their child in a way that enables his emotions to be integrated into higher functioning' (55). When a person's regulatory capacities are not well developed and, in particular, when they lack the words to identify their feelings, 'they cannot express their distress verbally, so find themselves giving distress signals at a pre-symbolic level, through the body' (95). This is one level at which Nati expresses and communicates her feelings, through inarticulate screams and the removal of her clothing.

Gerhardt points out that high levels of the stress hormone cortisol are associated with a highly active right brain and an underactive left brain; this is significant, since 'an active left brain is linked to positive feelings, cheerfulness and a willingness to approach others with a kind of extroverted outlook' (121), characteristics which are the very antithesis of the dispositions that predominate in *La rabia*. Babies of mothers who suffer from depression lack the left-brain predominance that other babies have; they are also 'less affectionate and less

likely to approach their mother whilst playing' (124). There is a clear link between poverty and social isolation (the prevailing conditions of life in *La rabia*), and depression, but Gerhardt points to research which suggests that it is not poverty *per se* that is the cause of depression among women and mothers. Rather, the problem should be understood 'in the context of a life history of poor regulation, rooted in their own childhood experiences' (125). It would seem that, with regard to the causes of depression, the quality of the relationship a woman has had with her own mother is a stronger determining factor than her economic situation (125);[51] thus there is both a wider, socio-political root and one more connected with the familial or private sphere. People who grow up with stress that they have not learned to regulate through interaction with their parents tend to resort to a more primitive, 'fight or flight', mechanism because they lack

> the more complex regulatory strategies that are associated with prefrontal development. Instead of actively solving problems with other people, talking things through, confident that some solution can be found, they tend either to withdraw from people or attack them aggressively (130).

This is the modus operandi for interpersonal relations in *La rabia*, where the mentality of the gaucho, the 'silent, authoritarian, macho men of the Pampas' (Dufays 2014: 27), predominates. It is also what leads to the cycles of violence and death that are seemingly inescapable (as demonstrated by the melancholic circularity of the narrative), and which the children also witness and participate in. The suggestion is that without some sort of intervention the cycle of melancholy will remain unbroken. In this way, violence and trauma are quite literally transferred from one person to another, by means of what was described in Chapter One of this thesis as psychic contagion. It is as though negative emotions are being passed from one generation to the next at the primitive levels of the brain, such as the amygdala, without being incorporated into the higher, verbal processes. Verbal memory, which involves the hippocampus, is much more flexible and 'open to change than the visceral reactions of the amygdala' (Gerhardt 2004: 141). Research has shown that traumatic memories activate 'the global, sensory, emotional right brain but decreas[e] activity in the verbal left

[51] The research cited is by Lyons-Ruth (1992: 131-71).

brain', such that the left brain is unable to make sense of the highly aroused areas of the right brain by putting those experiences into verbal form (142). 'This', Gerhardt notes, 'may account for the phenomenon of speechless terror':

> without the verbalizing activities of the left frontal brain, Broca's area and hippocampus, it is difficult to process and evaluate feelings normally. These left brain activities would normally put experiences into a context and a time sequence. But without their full participation, feelings never get into the past and can't be put behind you. (142)

This idea of speechless terror has a strong connotation in relation to dictatorial violence, whereby people saw, but were unable to speak because of a culture of fear (see Feitlowitz 1998; Corradi 1997). In Carri's own case its implications are even more stark, in that she witnessed her parents' abduction but was likely unable to verbalize its effect on her. A vivid image that encapsulates this idea of speechless terror appears on the promotional artwork for *La rabia*, which I now discuss in relation to contagion.

Traumatic Dehumanization and Psychic Contagion

The idea of contagion permeates *La rabia*, as the very title of the film suggests, denoting at once the strong emotions of anger or rage, and the contagious (and fatal) viral disease associated with wild animals – a nuance which the film's official English title, *Anger*, regrettably fails to capture. The promotional graphic artwork for the film, however, is more effective in conveying this doubled meaning: it features a large close-up of Nati's face, contorted with rage, her eyes closed and mouth wide open in one of her infamous screams. The words of the film's title are positioned in white typeface inside her mouth, the letters spread out below her top lip, the credit titles in smaller typeface appearing to drip from the main title, like threads of saliva that fill the entire space of her gaping mouth. The graphic vividly captures and conveys the idea of the child's rage as both pathology and protest, and of the film itself as her testimony, ideas which will be taken up again in the final section. This section further explores this idea of contagion, beginning with the way the film negotiates the boundary between human and animal.

Animality features prominently in *La rabia*; the sounds of both wild and domesticated creatures permeate the soundtrack and the children, in particular, are frequently seen interacting with weasels, dogs, hens, sheep and pigs. The film forecloses any expectations of sentimentality with regard to its portrayal of animals with a disclosure statement immediately following the opening titles. An ironic take on the usual ethical statement that accompanies productions featuring animals, promising that no harm has come to them in the filming process, *La rabia*'s disclosure notice states 'los animales que aparecen en esta película vivieron y murieron de acuerdo a su hábitat' [the animals that appear in this film lived and died in accordance with their habitat]. The implications of this unsettling disclosure become apparent as early as the second sequence, in which an adolescent boy (Ladeado) is seen swinging a canvas sack against a tree trunk before flinging it into the water. The internal movements perceivable in a close-up shot of the sinking sack suggest his efforts to kill whatever was inside it have not been entirely successful. Figuratively, this shot also offers early indications that, like the young animals contained within that canvas, the children in *La rabia* also possess the spirit of survival, despite the odds that are stacked against them.

The film establishes a strong association between animality and sexuality through related images that recur in a number of key scenes, and this association is characterized by suffering and violence. In one of these scenes, Alejandra and Pichón are in the bedroom of the old farmhouse, the homestead of the (notably absent) landowners of the area, which Alejandra is also employed to clean. She opens the door of the wardrobe and begins to remove and examine various garments, some of which she tries on, while Pichón nods and grins encouragement. He then also removes items from the wardrobe: a polo shirt and riding helmet, which he puts on, and a riding crop, which he tests on Alejandra's behind, eliciting a small cry from her. The camera then cuts to Nati outside in the garden, and she is removing her dress. The sound of a gunshot coming from the farmhouse startles her and she moves, naked from the waist up, towards the open window of the bedroom, staying close to the wall in order to remain out of sight. Pichón, also shirtless, is standing at the open window, holding a rifle, and Alejandra is behind him, wearing only underwear. Nati runs away. At home that evening, her father tells her a story, designed to frighten her, about her maternal

grandaunt, whose habit of taking off her clothes in public (like Nati does) caused her brother to go mad and get himself murdered. His spirit sometimes returns, Poldo warns, in order to hunt down little girls who undress in public: he covers them with his cape, then eats them alive. Soon after this scene, following an altercation between Poldo and Pichón over the latter's dog having killed one of Poldo's sheep, Alejandra and Pichón are shown having what appears to be rough, anal sex in the farmhouse, their bodies tethered together by a leather equestrian halter which Pichón has fastened around both their necks. Although Alejandra twice utters "*pará*" [stop], the sex continues and it is unclear to what extent it remains consensual throughout, thus connoting a sense of powerlessness and paralysis. Ending with an overhead shot of Alejandra's face, contorted in what could equally be pleasure or pain, the scene jump cuts to the outdoors, where a hare is being persued relentlessly by a pack of dogs. Just as they begin to tear it apart, however, Ladeado intervenes and carries the dead hare away in his arms.

In a scene shortly subsequent, Nati again approaches the window of the farmhouse and peers inside. Her mother is lying naked and front down on the bed, looking up at Pichón who is standing over her; he is also naked and has a visible erection. As he climbs on top of her, the shot cuts to Nati's gaze, and only the sound of the couple's breathing is heard. Nati's inability to process what she is witnessing is then expressed filmically by means of a semi-abstract animated sequence representing her disturbed imagination, in which imagery of Poldo's ghost story, Pichón's erection (conflated now with the rifle he was seen holding earlier), and her mother's ambiguous cries are mingled and interwoven.

The (mis)understanding of sexuality, animality and violence that appears to be crystallizing in Nati's imagination becomes solidified and externalized in the subsequent, visceral scene. The neighbours have gathered to slaughter a pig, a process which is presented with detached, unapologetic realism. Nati and Alejandra watch as the men truss up the legs of the screaming animal, before a knife is plunged into the loose flesh of its throat. As the animal noticeably weakens, and its blood gushes into a basin, its cries fade and its body becomes still. The head and trotters having been removed, the animal is then hoisted into a hanging position and its belly is cut open, the immense innards spilling out in an obscene profusion. As Nati assists her mother in cleaning out the carcass, she utters little porcine squeals, like cries of empathy. As the men begin to butcher

the meat and prepare the grill, Nati settles down at a table to draw, with Pichón looking over her shoulder, observing what she is sketching. When he realizes her drawing is a semi-erotic depiction of himself, he slams his hand down on the page, violently crumples the drawing and walks away with it, at which Nati begins to shriek uncontrollably and tear off her clothes.

In summary, the sexual relations Nati witnesses between her mother and Pichón thus impress upon her imagination the idea of sexuality as an inherently violent phenomenon which causes female suffering. This is brought about by its association with, on the one hand, weapons (in particular guns, by which both Poldo and Pichón will both die), which also function as phallic images, and, on the other, the suffering, death and evisceration of animals, with whom Nati has clearly learned to identify herself and understand her own potential fate. The blurred distinctions between these phenomena are depicted in the semi-abstract animated sequences that punctuate and temporarily suspend the narrative of the film. Like the slaughtered pig (to which her mother explicitly compares her), Nati perceives her very existence as threatened by the violence and annihilation she witnesses around her. One of her only forms of agency is her ability to draw, and this being taken from her is experienced as a form of annihilation and violation, like that she witnesses happening to her mother. This is at least reminiscent of Carri's own experience and her cinematic project in *Los rubios* and, in a more oblique manner, *La rabia*: she establishes her voice and agency, in a sense, through her ability for artistic expression.

Carri says of the explicit sex scenes in the film: 'No es un sexo habitual del cine. Es un cierto contagio animal. Me interesaba la idea. Es una peli cruda en todos los sentidos' [It's not the kind of sex that is usually seen in cinema. It's a sort of animal contagion. That idea interested me. It's a crude film, in every sense of the word.] (Carri, in interview with Pinto Veas, 2008). What the film presents is, in a sense, a dehumanized sex, which, on losing its human element, becomes not merely animal, but what might be better understood in Carri's choice of term – *bestial*: when what is uniquely human is removed from the 'human animal', what remains is not an animal of the natural order, but rather something of an entirely different order, a kind of dehumanized perversion. Yet, there remains a sense that the human element can never be fully removed, which arises from the performative nature of some of the sexual scenes, particularly the

first one, in which Alejandra and Pichón experiment with props. The performativity of this scene is suggested by the way in which, when Alejandra first opens the door of the wardrobe, Pichón comes into view only as a reflection in the mirror on the back of the wardrobe door. It is reasonable to imagine the possibility of these scenes, therefore, as being seen through Nati's eyes, as bestial behaviour devoid of human tenderness or love; merely as acts of dehumanization, violence and humiliation. One is reminded here of Agamben's theory of 'bare life', the reduction of human life to its purely biological form in relation to sovereign power, which is engaged with in more detail in Chapter Three, in analysis of Martel's film, *La mujer sin cabeza*; Agamben states that '[s]adomasochism is precisely the technique of sexuality by which the bare life of a sexual partner is brought to light' (1998: 134). The film's sex scenes become progressively more brutal and ugly. In one scene, Pichón stuffs Alejandra's underwear into her mouth so that she almost gags, then puts them over her head, covering her eyes and face so that, while *he* is aware that Nati and Ladeado are now standing at the bedroom doorway, watching this spectacle in confusion and horror, Alejandra remains unaware of the children's presence. Ultimately, the separation of 'the person' from 'the body' is the essence of the experience of torture, as Scarry (1985) has shown and as noted in Chapter One, and this 'hooding' of Alejandra calls to mind that employed during state-sponsored disappearance in dictatorship-era Argentina. It might be said that language and sexuality are two of the main areas in which humans are most markedly distinguished from animals, and that distinction is blurred in both of these areas in *La rabia*, a blurring that is presented as inherently traumatic.

Nati's undressing on witnessing her mother and Pichón is seen by Dufays as her 'identify[ing] with her mother and experienc[ing] this "spectacle" as rape' (2014: 28). It is insightful, furthermore, to consider this experience in terms of mimesis, as what Mark Selzer refers to as a 'hypnotic mimetic identification' that he sees as a crucial element of trauma. Selzer states that

> [t]rauma is, at least in part, an extreme expression of the mimetic compulsion – a photography at the level of the subject, but in this mimetic compulsion […] one detects a minimalist mode of sociality (the mimetic contagion of self and other as the basis of the social bond). One

> detects the model of a sociality bound to pathology. In short, the opening of relation to others (the 'sympathetic' social bond) is at the same time the traumatic collapse of boundaries between self and other (a yielding to identification). In this way, the opening of a possibility of relation to others also opens the possibility of violence: the mimetic identification at the expense of the subject and a violence in the name of a violated singularity and self-difference. The opening toward others is drawn to the collective spectacle of torn and open bodies and persons: a wounding and gaping toward others […]. (1997: 9)

This idea recalls the phenomenon of psychic contagion, as elaborated by Stein and problematized in Chapter One. Psychic contagion characterizes relations between persons in the mass form of collectivity, as differentiated from association and community, and is 'structured by a general typology of involuntary or instinctual imitation' (Calcagno 2014: 113). In psychic contagion

> [t]he unity between individuals […] is a basic psychic unity in which exchange is characterized by stimulus and response […]. Only basic affectivity and response, not spirituality, are assumed in such a basic structure. Because of the basic psychic mechanism of stimulus and response, one can easily understand how psychic *Ansteckung* [infection or contagion] occurs, especially in the case of herd mentality. (151)

In a stable person of normal development, the inner defences against psychic contagion stem chiefly from the values that one has adopted and which pertain to one's identity. In a vulnerable person, with a tentative sense of identity and limited agency, particularly a child such as Nati, such defences are too weak and precarious to protect the psyche from such a powerful visual onslaught, and so what Nati witnesses happening to her mother is experienced as though happening directly to herself. Considered in terms of a concept such as postmemory, the film portrays a much more complex and corporal form of transmission than *Los rubios*; rather than engaging with memory, *La rabia* conveys a highly visceral experience of trauma.

The Wordless Testimony of a Neglected Child

Gerhardt points out that 'living with any mother who isn't emotionally available, for whatever reason, has much the same effect on the baby's brain as do more obvious deprivations such as complete isolation' (2004: 126). I propose that, beyond her autistic condition, the behaviour and symptoms that Nati displays are comparable, in many respects, to a child who has been raised in conditions of extreme isolation and neglect. There are some striking comparisons between Nati and the infamous case of Genie, a girl born in the United States who suffered chronic neglect and was kept in isolation for the first 13 years of her life, and whose tragic condition was later mined as a linguistic case study by numerous researchers in the 1970s and 80s, as described by Russ Rymer in *Genie: A Scientific Tragedy* (1993). Whenever Genie expressed her needs vocally, her father, who was intolerant of noise, would growl and bark like a dog outside the door of the bedroom in which she was kept, or beat her with a stick, in order to silence her. Thus, she learned to suppress all emotional self-expression out of fear (Gerhardt 2004: 39). Psychological tests later in her life revealed that Genie's left frontal cortex was relatively undeveloped; she was unable to complete any left-brain tasks, and had great difficulty mastering speech. However, 'her right brain was a remarkable non-verbal communicator. She could grasp the "gestalt" of a situation in an "uncanny" way. She could draw what she could not say' (54). Indeed, Rymer notes that, like Nati, Genie's 'drawings seemed actually to be part of her lexicon – a compensatory, self-taught speech' (1993: 127). Also like Nati, Genie's sketches depicted more than just objects; through drawing she was able to convey her thoughts and desires (128).

Nati bears testimony to her isolation, and to the violence she is exposed to throughout the ordinary course of her life, not with words, but by means of the three symptoms outlined in the introduction of this chapter. Of these three, drawing is that which most displays her attempts at sovereignty over herself and her surroundings, and her developing capacity for agency, or 'coming to voice', as Lisa Cartwright puts it. Like Genie, Nati draws what she is unable to say, but this alone is not unusual for children, as is borne out by multiple examples of sexually abused children exposing their abuse and identifying their abusers through drawings, role-play, and other non-verbal forms of communication. Selimovic has rightly pointed out that

> [w]hen juxtaposed with the majority of mainstream cinematic depictions of autistic subjectivities, the autistic character in Carri's fictitious world, in fact, appears moderately participatory and socially transgressive: she is an autistic ethnographer who draws or screams her impressions and observations. (2015: 521)

Nati screams her protest but she is, at the same time, screaming her *needs*. What her protest asserts is that she needs to be heard, listened to, seen, spoken to, loved and cared for, and not exposed to violence and brutality. She needs to be treated as human and she demands a response to her human needs. Thus there arises here an ethical tension between considering Nati's behaviours as, on the one hand, symptoms of autism combined with abusive neglect and, on the other, as non-verbal forms of communication or self-expression. This tension is similar to that of a cry for help or distress signal, actions which have both negative and positive connotations – negative in that they are a sign that something has gone seriously wrong, but positive in that they open up the possibility for intervention. The film, of course, is never simply Nati's testimony, however; it is, at the same time, an intervention by the director; it is Carri's representation, in the sense of speaking for, or on behalf of, the neglected child. Furthermore, one might assume that this speaking-for is ultimately connected to Carri's own childhood experience of trauma, vicariously experiencing the violence done to her parents, and the inability, due to her age limitation, to verbalize or process that trauma.

By narrativizing Nati's traumatic experiences (thus serving the same function as verbalizing them, in purpose if not in form), her three key behaviours – symptoms of both her autistic-like condition and of the violence and emotional neglect she experiences – can be viewed as forms of self-expression or testimony, and the film itself as a type of witnessing. The seeming incongruence of non-verbal symptoms comprising a form of testimony stems from the somewhat paradoxical nature of testimony itself as, in Lury's terms, the way in which 'the unspeakable […] is vocalized' (Lury 2010: 124).[52] In this sense, this form of testimony challenges common post-Holocaust characterizations of

[52] Lury's statement here is in reference to Agamben's politics of witnessing. In Agamben's words, 'testimony is the disjunction between two impossibilities of bearing witness; it means that language, in order to bear witness, must give way to a non-language in order to show the impossibility of bearing witness' (1999: 39).

trauma as unspeakable and unrepresentable, as discussed previously. Nati's behaviours are signs of distress, signs that something has gone wrong somewhere along the course of her early development. As forms of expression, her symptoms can be reinterpreted as cries for help or distress signals, and as such they are signs of Nati's developing subjectivity – her agency – which, at the same time, manifest her strong moral sensitivity. The film transforms this witnessing into an intersubjective process, facilitated by the filmmaker, between the child on screen and the spectator: the one testifying and the one(s) witnessing the testimony. The ethical tension that arises from this process, therefore, becomes productive rather than being contradictory.

That the film privileges the child's perception is emphasized by the frequent tight framing of Nati's face, drawing the spectator's attention to her wordless facial expressions and, in particular, her intense gaze. As Rocha and Seminet have noted,

> [w]hen filmmakers 'reverse the gaze,' and children become the locus of 'looking', the symbolism becomes more relational, and rather than have children as the object of the gaze, their 'looking' engages the viewer in an intersubjective process. (2014: xiii)[53]

Nati's muteness and propensity to scream might also be read as a figurative contestation of the old dictum that children should be seen and not heard; thus, Nati becomes, as Selimovic has noted, the 'catalyst for exposing and weakening the isolating restrictions that keep the other characters in social chains' (Selimovic 2015: 521). Nati's three main actions – muteness and screaming, taking off her clothes, and drawing – move beyond being symptoms, to become the very means of her self-expression, as Josiowicz has noted:

> Nati reacts [to trauma] with a set of symptoms that turn her into a visionary […]. She is the subject of a hallucinatory, nonfigurative, animated discourse. She is the aesthetic creator of a vision representing that which cannot be represented: the furious, painful perception of an abused little girl. (2014: 41)

[53] The child's ownership of the gaze is also seen in Martel's *La niña santa*, in relation to the adolescent Amalia's burgeoning agency, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

Nati's symptoms might be described as non-verbal forms of discourse: one is vocal (but not linguistic), one is haptic and the other is visual, but they can all be seen in some way as *narrative* in function. Narrative serves, on one level, to extract meaning from (or to impose meaning upon) experience and to enable participation in collective processes of meaning-making, as discussed in Chapter One. However, this is not exclusively dependent upon speech or language: while verbalization may signify a crucial step in emotional development, as Gerhardt has outlined, verbalizing is merely one (albeit the most culturally privileged) form of narrativity, that is, of meaning-making. Indeed, Bruner suggests that the need to construct meaning is what fuels speech development in children in the first instance; speech ability does not come first, but rather grows out of the need to participate in meaning-making (1990: 89).

Dufays' observation regarding the 'failure of language to interlink the generations' in *La rabia* was noted in the introduction, and a concrete example of this occurs in the scene in which Poldo tells Nati the frightening story about her grandaunt who used to undress in public, as discussed previously. This story-telling incident can be read in terms of Bruner's notion of folk psychology; that is, as a story that is designed to impart a sense of normativity with regard to acceptable social behaviour (1990: 47). Poldo's telling of the story sparks off a flurry of narrative activity in Nati's imagination, which is represented in the form of an animated sequence that both adds to and suspends the film narrative – a sort of narrative intervention at both the intradiegetic and extradiegetic levels. Bruner states that '[w]hen there is a breakdown in a culture (or even within a microculture like the family) it can usually be traced to one of several things', one of which concerns 'the rhetorical overspecialization of narrative' – that is, 'when stories become so ideologically or self-servingly motivated that distrust displaces interpretation, and "what happened" is discounted as fabrication' (96). I suggest that something similar to this occurs in the telling of the story designed to frighten Nati into ceasing her socially transgressive behaviour of undressing in public. Nati recognizes the 'rhetorical overspecialization' in Poldo's telling of the story, and her consequent flurry of narrative activity is a response to that – a contestation of what she recognizes as a story that is self-serving and essentially unjust. In Poldo's story, the woman who undresses in public is the cause of her own downfall; her tragic fate is a result of her transgressive behaviour. Nati's

narrative intervention tells a different story, however. In the animated sequence that represents her imagination, while she is drawing in response to Poldo's story, the woman is seen purely as a victim. She is pursued by a man holding a rifle (ostensibly Pichón), who is naked like she is – and is thus equally guilty of social transgression – as well as by the headless, caped phantom of Poldo's story. In Nati's narrative, the caped phantom kills both the woman *and* the man. Thus, Nati's version is an empathic and moral intervention into Poldo's story.

In her book *The Child in Film*, Lury explores 'how the child's experience of war is articulated in ways other than speech' (2010: 125). In light of the director's acknowledgement that *La rabia* resembles a war film, Lury's theory is particularly relevant to Carri's film. Lury notes the way in which

> the materiality of bodily experience […] reveals how the presence of the child allows for a sensual impression and response that takes the viewer beyond meaningful/meaningless silence to a more visceral or haptic confrontation with the violence of the war-time environment. (125)

La rabia's resemblance to a war film, therefore, has less to do with the socio-political backdrop that characterizes classical war films, and more to do with a bodily confrontation with violence, with which the spectator can empathize. This idea is taken up again in the next chapter in relation to haptic visuality in Martel's films. While Nati's propensity to remove her clothes relates, on one level, to her autistic condition, and the tactile intolerance associated with it, it also has the effect of making her highly exposed and vulnerable on the screen, as an extension of her extreme vulnerability within the film's narrative. Indeed, Nati's naked body juxtaposed with the sexually charged nudity of Alejandra and Pichón is a source of discomfort for the spectator that is communicated at a haptic level. As Josiowicz notes, Nati's 'ability to communicate through the three sets of symptoms […] engages the spectator in a way that no other character does' (2014: 42). Moreover, the visceral way in which the spectator feels *with* the child is more than pity, it is an ethical response (Lury 2010: 134), thus underscoring my assertion that the films discussed in this thesis help us to engage more deeply with the moral and ethical complexities that are attendant to trauma.

It is important to note also that there is a distinction between the animated sequences that punctuate the film narrative, and Nati's own drawings. While both are part of the fictional film narrative, and are thus inventions of the director, they are distinct in both form and function. While the latter are the crude and childish drawings of a young girl, comprising little more than figurative scribbles, the former are artistically sophisticated animations whose relation to the diegesis is somewhat ambiguous. I suggest that the animated sequences are more than representations of the child's imagination; they indicate the director speaking on behalf of – *representing* – the voiceless child. This type of symbolic representation is the only one possible in light of Nati's inability to speak, her only way of entering into the symbolic order, into which she is incorporated by the director. Carri has stated that, as far as she is concerned, the animations are purely the imagination and fantasies of the child and not narrative interventions (Pinto Veas 2008). However, the loud, electric guitar music that accompanies them is the only music – indeed, it is the only extra-diegetic sound at all – on the soundtrack, which is strongly suggestive of an interruption, a distinct narrative intervention by the director.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined Carri's portrayal of trauma through the eyes of a child protagonist suffering from autism. My analysis has focused on the way in which trauma is transmitted interpersonally through the body, beginning at what was described as the 'micro' level, that is, the level of biochemistry and brain development, and traced the evidence provided by the film for what happens when this process goes wrong. In this sense, the film represents trauma differently to other, more allegorical, post-dictatorship cinematic productions, which focus on the transmission of memory, and ways of articulating a new relationship to the past. Reading the film in terms of my theoretical framework highlights the transmission process itself, at the bodily level. I have explored the film's portrayal of dehumanization through its engagement with animals and animality, in the blurring of boundaries between 'human' and 'animal', particularly in relation to sexuality. In this way, the trauma experienced by Nati is seen to be transmitted by way of psychic contagion. I argue that Nati's symptoms – screaming, removing her clothes and drawing graphic, violent

pictures – comprise a form of wordless testimony expressed at the level of the body. These are seen as non-verbal forms of discourse, through which Nati is able to acquire some level of agency in the only way possible for her. The development of Nati's agency and sense of identity co-incide with her moral development, reaffirming the argument made in Chapter One, through an engagement with Taylor's moral philosophy, regarding the link between identity and the moral life. I propose that, by assigning agency to Nati by means of animated sequences that suspend the film narrative, Carri makes a narrative intervention of testimony on behalf of the abused child. Considered in these terms, and in light of Carri's overall project to establish her own voice as a filmmaker, which began with *Los rubios*, it would seem reasonable to conclude that Carri's project in *La rabia* is essentially equivalent to that of *Los rubios* – that is, to give a voice to the traumatized and neglected child who has no means to speak other than through her own abilities of artistic expression. Whilst *La rabia* can be read in this wider context in relation to Carri's own life experiences, in the film she shows the dynamics of traumatic experience and its transmission in a highly visceral way, thus elucidating these processes for the spectator.

The exploration of the mother-child relationship in this chapter will be further developed in the next chapter, on Martel's Salta trilogy, but with a different focus. Martel's films also focus heavily on the body and its role in both the transmission and manifestation of trauma. As in *La rabia*, in Martel's films this process is also seen to be in a state of crisis related to the maternal, thus offering further confirmation of Gerhardt's theory about relationships, attachment and the regulation of emotions. Whilst silence is a pervasive theme in *La rabia*, Martel's films emphasize sound, and in particular sound as a bridge between the body and the ethereal. The ethical considerations of Carri's work are also taken up again in relation to Martel, and there is a similarity in terms of the director acting as a witness on behalf of the voiceless. Finally, the focus continues to be on the domestic, private sphere, in an effort to show how trauma is transmitted across generations in and through the body.

CHAPTER THREE

Motherhood in Crisis in Lucrecia Martel's Salta Trilogy

This chapter examines the representation of motherhood in Lucrecia Martel's first three feature-length films, *La ciénaga* (2001), *La niña santa* (2004) and *La mujer sin cabeza* (2008), arguing that the depictions of motherhood in crisis in these films can help us to reconsider trauma in two important ways: on the one hand, they demonstrate how trauma is processed and metabolized in and by the body. On the other, they indicate that trauma is ultimately a psycho-social construct that concerns identity and meaning. Matriarchal figures whose quirks, faults and failings reverberate throughout the generations loom large in these films: in *La ciénaga*, Mecha (Graciela Borges) drinks herself into oblivion while her teenage children and servants assume the responsibilities of running their decrepit rural homestead. While she frets and fusses over her lacerated chest, an injury caused by falling on broken wine glasses by the poolside one stifling afternoon, the children drive cars without licenses, hunt using guns and machetes, and flirt with one another incestuously. Installed in her bed, Mecha shouts orders and insults at the children and servants in turn, while lamenting her ruined cleavage. Her greatest fear is that she will end up like her mother, who took to her bed one day and refused to leave it again until the day they buried her. Both her youngest daughter, Momi (Sofia Bertolotto), and cousin, Tali (Mercedes Morán), affirm that Mecha is surely destined for a similar fate.

In *La niña santa*, Helena (Mercedes Morán) is struggling to come to terms with the news that her ex-husband and his new wife are expecting twins. Added to the pressures of managing and attending to the staff and guests in the hotel which she and her brother Freddy (Alejandro Urdapilleta) own and live in, this new crisis forms the backdrop to Helena's unwitting involvement in an ill-fated love triangle of sorts: Dr Jano (Carlos Belloso), a specialist in hearing disorders, who is participating in a medical conference at the hotel, has molested Helena's adolescent daughter, Amalia (María Alche). Amalia, in turn, has become secretly infatuated with Jano, whom she believes it is her divinely-inspired mission to save. Meanwhile, Helena and Jano have developed a mutual attraction that can only end in the humiliation of both of them, as Jano's perverse advances on Amalia inevitably come to light.

Vero (María Onetto), the protagonist of *La mujer sin cabeza*, is perhaps the most enigmatic and ambiguous of all Martel's female characters. Disorientated and withdrawn after committing a hit-and-run accident on a remote road, Vero struggles to reinsert herself back into her normal life, before eventually confessing to her husband that she thinks she has killed someone. Her confession sets into action the mysterious mechanisms by which all traces of her accident are erased, one by one, even as it emerges that the body of an indigenous boy has been discovered in the roadside canal where the accident took place. Whilst Vero's daughters are mentioned in conversation, their existence is notably absent and vague; thus, apart from her interactions with the children of friends and relatives, and those she treats in a professional capacity as a dentist, Vero's motherly nature is most notable by its absence.

Thus all three films, to greater or lesser degrees, foreground motherly figures; yet, Martel's distinctive style of filmmaking immerses the viewer in a palpably child-like and fluid experience of being in the world, by eschewing establishing shots and other such orientating devices, and privileging the non-visual and off-screen space. In this way, the mother-child relationship is imbued with an overwhelming sense of ambivalence. This child-like perspective is in contrast to Carri's film, which, as we saw in the last chapter, employs the point of view of a child. Like the other chapters, albeit in a different way, this chapter moves away from purely psychological understandings of trauma to also address how it is processed through the body. For this, Stein's phenomenology, discussed in Chapter One, is central; the focus Stein's theory places on bodily perception, in particular, is key to the filmic analysis of this chapter. In the case of Martel's work, as we see, this phenomenological aesthetic is markedly different to how Carri and Trapero portray traumatic experience. The chapter also moves away from strictly political readings to look at more universal themes.

In this chapter, I consider the notion of motherhood both in the biological sense of being a mother, as well as in a broad and general sense of the maternal as presented in Martel's films, which includes mothers, grandmothers and aunts, or women, young or old, who care for others (who may or may not be their own children or even *children*) in some capacity, be it domestic or professional. I also understand it in relation to the specific socio-geographic context of the film, as the domain of the feminine in a patriarchal, conservative, upper-middle class society of

European descent in the northern Argentine province of Salta, where deep social class and racial divisions are naturalized in the domestic and social spheres. Motherhood has been a significant feature of the social and cultural imaginary of Argentina since at least the time of the last military dictatorship (1976–1983), a key trope of which can be seen in the public performance of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo, mothers of the disappeared women and men who were kidnapped and murdered by the state during the dictatorship. The Madres' struggle to find their missing children placed them at the vanguard of the human rights movement in Argentina; however, using their maternity itself as the vehicle for their political struggle has also connected them to ambiguous questions related to motherhood and the blurring of the boundaries between private and political. For example, their political struggle meant that the Madres were moving maternity into the public sphere; at the same time, this foray into the public sphere was conceived in terms of traditional notions of motherhood, as evinced, for example, in the aesthetic of their white headscarves.[54] Martel's depiction of motherhood differs from more overtly political Argentine films, such as Luis Puenzo's *La historia oficial* (1985), which addresses the case of the babies (estimated at around 500) that were kidnapped and illegally adopted during the last dictatorship and pre-dates New Argentine Cinema. Many of these children (now adults) are unaware of their true identity and, at the time of writing, 127 had been reunited with their biological families.[55] That is not to say, however, that her films are apolitical; I argue, rather, that their 'turning-in' towards the private and domestic sphere is done, as Page notes, 'in order to explore the boundaries between public and private' (2009: 181). For this reason, they offer insights into how trauma inhabits these boundaries, and its effects in these interstitial spaces.

In the first section of the chapter, I contextualize my reading of Martel's films within the existing scholarship, in order to frame my analysis within the

[54] For example, see Taylor (1997: 205) and Guzman Bouvard (1994: 184). Some of the vast literature on the Madres de Plaza de Mayo also includes Malin (1993: 187-213), Mellibovsky (1997), Bejarano (2002: 126-50) and Bosco (2006: 342-65).

[55] The human rights organization Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo [Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo] emerged in 1977 from the Madres movement. Although many of them are mothers of Argentina's disappeared, the formation of the new organization marked a concerted effort to find the children born to the many pregnant women who had given birth whilst detained in clandestine detention centres. Again, as the name and constitution of Madres foregrounds the maternal role of its members in the struggle for human rights, so does Abuelas. For more on the debate surrounding the Abuelas, biological families and identity, see Gandsman (2009: 441-65).

literature. The second section closely examines Martel's cinematic technique, particularly in terms of how motherhood and adolescence are portrayed. This demonstrates that her depiction of the relationship between mothers and children is characterized by ambivalence and, at the same time, her particular style of filmmaking immerses the spectator in a child-like experience. I then turn to close analysis of the use of sound throughout the trilogy, in order to argue that, through sound, Martel provides a bridge between the corporal and the ethereal, as well as between the spectator and the on-screen world. I argue that this has the effect of creating something of a womb-like atmosphere in the films' soundscape. Shifting the focus to the way in which sound is used as a narrative motif throughout the films, I then examine how the maternal is connected with a crisis of faith in Martel's films, and I illustrate how this crisis is transmitted throughout the generations. Finally, I engage with ethical readings of *La mujer sin cabeza*, to argue that, through maternal trauma, the film invites a debate about what kind of lives are grievable and forces the spectator to question the very way in which human life is (or is not) valued.

Of Mothers and the Maternal: The Cinema of Lucrecia Martel

As noted in the introduction to this thesis, there has been significant scholarly interest in Martel's work from Argentine and international scholars alike. It is noteworthy that, whilst scholars, particularly Martin (2016), Aguilar (2011) and Rangil (2007), have regularly noted the ubiquitous presence of women – particularly women who are mothers or maternal figures – throughout Martel's trilogy,[56] to date there has been no significant scholarly investigation devoted to the representation of motherhood per se in these films. Furthermore, whilst the notions of trauma and crisis – the pervasive themes of the contemporary Argentine cultural imaginary – have been addressed in relation to Martel's work in other contexts, they have not been examined specifically in relation to motherhood to any significant degree. Although the theme of familial crisis has been framed broadly in connection with the demise of the bourgeois middle class and patriarchal domestic and social structures (Losada 2010; Martin 2011, 2013, 2016),[57] as well as the erosion of the boundaries between the private and the political (Page 2009; Aguilar 2011), none of these

[56] See, for instance, Rangil (2007), Page (2009), Jubis (2010), Aguilar (2011) and Martin (2011, 2013, 2016).

[57] Losada (2010), Aguilar (2011) and Rangil (2007) all address the demise of middle class and patriarchal structures in relation to Martel's films.

scholars interrogates the crises and traumas associated specifically with motherhood, in particular those that pertain to the maternal body. In the first instance, this chapter addresses such gaps in the academic literature by bringing together diverse critical approaches to the films, including feminist, phenomenological and political readings, and offering a more holistic reading of the crises and traumas that pertain to motherhood and the body in the trilogy, in line with the original theoretical approach to trauma set out in Chapter One.

Along with other scholars of Argentine cinema (Rangil 2007; Page 2009; Aguilar 2011), this chapter views familial trauma as being problematized within a broader crisis of faith that is referenced throughout Martel's films.[58] However, whilst these theorists address the subject of religion and loss of faith in Martel's films, they do not frame this as a crisis of motherhood. They make the connection between the questions surrounding perception (what is seen or heard and what is not seen or not heard), and the loss of faith; what is lacking is an exploration of perception vis-à-vis motherhood and the mother-child relationship specifically, a gap that is addressed in and by this thesis. Furthermore, they do not frame the epistemological crisis of women and children in the trilogy in the context of identity as being closely intertwined with trauma, as set out in my theoretical framework. The crisis of faith, like that of motherhood, is deeply ambivalent in Martel's films; there is both a rejection of the religious framework as inadequate, but, at the same time, a desire for the security and meaning it provides. Page notes something similar: 'Her characters are tragically cut loose from anything that might lend transcendence to the petty selfishness of their existence' (2009: 191), which Page sees as a type of nostalgia for a 'signifying structure that could lend a degree of protection against the banality and futility of individual lives' (191).[59] This ambivalence regarding faith, and the structure it provides, is reflected in Martel's treatment of motherhood as ambivalent from the perspectives of both mother and child.

Although intrinsic to the trilogy as a whole, *La mujer sin cabeza* has elicited a distinct type of scholarly response – in particular, ethical and political readings of the cover-up of the boy that is killed – in comparison to the other two films. This chapter reads these issues within the context of a crisis of the maternal that pervades

[58] This aspect of her work may be seen as somewhat autobiographical, since Martel has publicly discussed her own loss of faith. See Page (2009: 191) and Rangil (2005: 99; 2007: 209).
[59] In line with the theoretical framework of this thesis, this sense of nostalgia for signifying structures is also strongly present in Trapero's films, as I argue in the next chapter.

the trilogy as a whole, and as a broader crisis of identity linked to a common moral framework, as explored in Chapter One. Martin (2013) and Sosa (2009) both focus on the figure of the lost or missing child as a metaphor for exclusion: Martin's reading focuses on the categories of childhood and youth, which she reads as 'liminal states that function as metaphors for social and political exclusion' (2013: 144). She engages with Agamben's theory of homo sacer and bare life to situate the child: 'Occupying an intermediary zone between life and death, *and* between political and natural life (an image reinforced by his constant confusion with a dog), *La mujer sin cabeza*'s ghost-child hovers at the edges of socio-political borders past and present' (150). Thus, her analysis focuses on childhood and the figure of the child, but not on the child's connection with the mother or her maternal body. Agamben's theory of bare life can also be read in terms of unborn life, and reading it in this way connects it to the woman's body which opens up a whole field of questions regarding the status of the unborn – moral, existential, ontological and legal/political – which are mostly beyond the scope of this thesis for reasons of space and time, but which offer interesting potential avenues for further scholarly investigation.[60]

Sosa (2009, 2014) reads *La mujer sin cabeza* within the framework of post-dictatorship memory, as a counter-narrative of mourning. She thus considers the film within the specific national context of Argentina, in order to examine Martel's portrayal of those whose lives do not count as human (the 'faceless'), and those whose lives are not grievable. In terms of motherhood, Sosa's reading that connects the missing body to dictatorship violence calls to mind the struggle of the Madres as maternal figures, referenced above, to find their missing children, or at least demand their return, even if seemingly unlikely, given the nature and context of their disappearances. My reading contributes a complementary layer of analysis regarding the absent child and maternal responsibility. In terms of the relationship between mother and child, I argue that the ungrievable and faceless lives can also be connected to the maternal as unborn life, such as babies lost through miscarriage; lives that are sometimes difficult or impossible to grieve, like the disappeared, where

[60] Melinda Cooper argues for this reading of Agamben, stating that he 'consistently and inexplicably eludes the one figure of contemporary political life that would seem to illustrate most fully his philosophical conception of bare life. This is the figure of the "unborn" – a purely potential life which, according to some, has become dangerously exposed to the sovereign violence of women, the state and science' (2009: 142).

there is no burial. This reading concerning ambiguous lives and their connection to motherhood is a point of departure in this chapter to help us think about absence. Indeed, Martin and Sosa's analyses consider the child figure and the missing person and the missing body, but these questions conclude in terms of class distinctions, race distinctions, social inequality and economic disparity. I argue that there is a much broader ethical debate within these frameworks, one which concerns the value of human life and maternal responsibility. This applies not only to one's biological children, but in general terms, as a maternal ethic of care, the trauma associated with and processed through the body and, most importantly, where the spectator is situated in relation to these ethical questions, which in Martel's work is central because of the positioning of the spectator as bodily present within the film. These are moral questions that ultimately have a bearing on one's identity, as pointed out in Chapter One, and this chapter considers them in those terms.

Immersive Cinema, the Adolescent Perspective and the Spectator

Martel's work has been described as cinema of the senses (Ríos 2008: 9); that is, cinema in which the visual, traditionally the dominant cinematic sense, is decentralized and destabilized, and greater emphasis is placed on the non-visual senses, particularly those of sound and touch. Her distinctive visual and narrative style, in particular the way she uses off-screen space to create thematic layers within the narrative, can clearly be traced back to her formative years, when she began experimenting with a video camera by filming everyday life in the home of her large, middle-class family:

> When I was filming in my house […] there was always somebody coming or going. [Often] I would stare at one fixed place and simply watch all the characters' movements. But sometimes I would switch to another person, and another, and it would go on building like that. The narrative lines occur in different layers but within the same scene … so the themes are superimposed on each other in layers. (Guest, *The Bomb* 2009)

Although it developed somewhat organically, there is nothing accidental about Martel's filmmaking style; she has stated: "I always try to make the camera see like a ten-year-old child. I do that consciously, because that way I can observe things without prejudgment, with more curiosity" (Guest 2009). One way in which this

child-like perspective is achieved is by an almost total eschewal of establishing shots: "I never take those shots because it's very important to me that the spectator sees that things in the world are not as reason dictates" (Guest 2009). Thus, establishing shots, with their emphasis on rationality, are replaced by their antithesis: the 'breaking up of any and all spaces into their component parts […] so that the geography becomes strictly tied to emotions and inter-psychic connections' (Jones 2005: 24). The absence of establishing shots makes greater demands on the spectator, who must actively participate in the production of meaning; in addition, Martel keeps nondiegetic sound and music to an absolute minimum. This, combined with the absence of orientating shots, results in a heightened sense of being immersed in the filmic world.

In all three films, noise is frequently dislocated from its visual source, and the sounds of nature – birds, rain, and insects – seem to infiltrate indoor spaces in an almost unnatural manner. In the opening sequence of *La ciénaga*, for example, the separate soundtracks of rain, thunder, birds and insects are all presented at equal volume. Similarly, human conversations are almost drowned out by the sounds of nature, in direct opposition to filmic convention, which normally 'make[s] the voice primary by modulating ambient sound' (Russell, *Jump Cut* 2008). The overwhelming presence of nature, combined with close framing of human bodies in indoor locations, has a disorientating, almost suffocating effect, as Dominique Russell notes: 'The visual claustrophobia of the framing is organically reproduced in the soundtrack, where the natural world threatens to close in'. Voices, in particular, are frequently disembodied, with the result that 'words are often "emanation speech" […] and are rendered, in a sense, as noise. Thus the narrative creates an effect of "inside" and "outside" at the same time; the spectator is both immersed and excluded' (Russell, *Jump Cut* 2008). I propose that this blurring of the boundaries between "voice" and "noise" also brings about, at a more general level, a collapse of distinction between the human and the nonhuman, which has a bearing on the moral and ethical considerations of the trilogy, as will be discussed in relation to *La mujer sin cabeza* further on.

Martel's films are also replete with haptic images. There are numerous instances in which the framing isolates hands pressed against panes of glass, moving through hair, hovering over a radiator; or where the camera focuses closely on textures: fabric, skin, hair. 'The haptic image', Laura Marks says, 'force[s] a visceral

and emotional contemplation [and thus] connects directly to sense perception' (2000: 163). Haptic cinema, therefore, 'encourages a bodily relationship between the viewer and the image' (164). Stein's phenomenology elucidates how this haptic perception comes about through the 'doubled givenness' of the lived body, as cited in Chapter One: 'I not only see my hand and bodily perceive it as sensing, but I also "see" its fields of sensation constituted for me in bodily perception. […] We not only see the table and feel its hardness, but we also "see" its hardness' (1989: 44). Hugo Ríos states that 'una de las características principales de este tipo de visión es la sensación de estar observando por primera vez' (2008: 18) [one of the main characteristics of [haptic visuality] is the sensation of seeing something for the first time], and he notes that, in Martel's films, 'escenas como la anterior, cuidadosamente estructuradas para traer a primer plano una epifanía sensorial' [scenes are carefully constructed in order to bring about a sensorial epiphany] (20). This is somewhat akin to the way in which the world is experienced during childhood and adolescence; indeed, Page notes that in *La ciénaga* and *La niña santa*, 'the children carry out a series of experiments with sound and vision' that are designed to bring about just such an epiphany: 'the youngest girls in *La ciénaga* recite words into an electric fan which distorts and fragments the sound of their voices […] [I]n *La niña santa* Josefina and Amalia discover how their eyes readjust to vision after being pressed shut' (2009: 187). The effect on the spectator of this haptic treatment of the image is the sensation of being immersed – not only visually, but bodily – in the filmic world, in which the rational is rendered dubious and untrustworthy, and judgments are based purely on the senses and emotions. Returning to Stein's phenomenology, discussed in detail in Chapter One, the 'self' is constituted as an embodied psycho-physical unity by way of the senses (as well as general feelings), through a causal relationship between the 'inside' and 'outside' worlds; it is this causal relationship that the adolescents in Martel's films are probing and testing, by way of sensory experiments. For Stein, the soul is the substantial unity of all our experiences, bodily or otherwise, and so these sensory experiments might also be seen as the children's attempt to gain access to an understanding of the soul and its embodiment. The films draw attention to the way the person is constituted through phenomenological analysis by, in a sense, *deconstructing* that process for the spectator, helping us to reflect on how we make sense of the world, understand ourselves as 'selves', and construct an identity, through the process of empathy. It is worth noting a further parallel between Martel

and Stein vis-à-vis phenomenology, which is its relationship to religious faith. For Stein, phenomenology played a key role in her religious conversion, her vocation. For Martel, a similar process is at work, only in reverse: a phenomenological approach acts as a bridge between the material and the supernatural or transcendental worlds, a theme that is taken up again below in the discussion of the role of sound in Martel's films; but for her, the movement is *away* from religious faith in any traditional sense.

The mother-child relationship that is presented from this immersive perspective is highly ambivalent; it is often claustrophobic and threatening, but at the same time there is warmth and comfort associated with it. In *La niña santa*, for instance, '[t]he relationship between mother and daughter is […] both homely and unhomely, both "friendlily comfortable" and containing devastating concealments' (Martin 2011: 68). This ambiguity is brought about, in part, by Martel's bringing 'questions of perception to the fore by insisting on the failure or the excess of vision, sound, or touch' (Page 2009: 187). For example, in *La niña santa*, Helena reluctantly undergoes a hearing examination at Jano's request. Wearing headphones in a sound-insulation booth, Helena is instructed to repeat aloud a set of random words that are played to her. While she repeats most words correctly, her mistaking the word *madres* (mothers) for *males* (evils) suggests that, at least subconsciously, she identifies with the 'bad' mother of patriarchal motherhood – that is, she who 'by choice or circumstance [is] not the selfless and tireless nurturer of idealized motherhood' (O'Reilly 2006: 13), an image of motherhood that is, in a sense, embodied in the public image of the Madres, particularly in recent years. Indeed, Helena fits at least two of the criteria that traditionally have qualified women as "bad" mothers: she does not 'live in a "traditional" nuclear family' and she 'could not protect [her child] from harm' (Ladd-Taylor and Umansky 1998: 3). The centrality of sound as a cinematic feature and as a theme throughout the trilogy will be examined in more detail below. To conclude, this immersive aspect of Martel's work not only makes for a rich and rewarding cinematic experience, but also, on a darker note, implicates the spectator in the cinematic world of the protagonists – what they see and refuse to see, and what is covered up. This has particular significance in relation to *La mujer sin cabeza*, as we will see in the final section of this chapter.

Sound as a Bridge between the Corporal and the Ethereal

Technique is a key aspect of Martel's work and is one of the factors that distinguishes her films from those of Carri and Trapero. Perhaps the most distinctive characteristic of Martel's filmmaking is her unique approach to sound. For Martel, sound is given primacy from the very conception of a project: 'Before I start to write, I already know how the film is going to sound. […] In a way, images are what I strictly need to frame the sound', she has stated (Phelps, *Mubi* 2008). Given the sheer corporality that permeates her work (in *La ciénaga*, in particular, the emphasis is placed heavily on flesh), sound functions, on one level, as a bridge between the corporal and the ethereal. In her films, sound is intimately connected with femininity and, in particular, motherhood. Russell notes that aural motifs are associated with several of her female characters, and often these point to a crisis of motherhood: 'Whenever Mecha is on screen, telephones ring. Her inability to deal with the phone […] point[s] to her slipping grasp on the external demands made of her' (*Jump Cut* 2008). Similarly, Mecha's cousin Tali 'is constantly straining to hear above the sounds of the children's shouting. The motif is at once symbolic and realistic: Tali is enveloped in the noise of motherhood and can hardly hear herself think' (*Jump Cut* 2008). These instances, in which sound is readily identifiable and attributable to a concrete source, contribute to the depiction of motherhood as oppressive and claustrophobic; there is, however, another category of sound through which the film engages with a more spiritual concept of mothering, which will now be discussed.

Martel's films are replete with acousmatic sounds; that is, sounds 'with no recognizable visual source' (Aguilar 2011: 90). These are present both in the films' soundtracks – taps drip; old plumbing emits clanks and groans; dogs bark from beyond a neighbour's wall – as well as being thematic features of the narratives. In *La niña santa*, crowds gather in the street to witness a musician playing a theremin, an instrument that works by manipulating invisible electric signals, while indoors, the students are being instructed to listen for the voice of God. There is also an inherent connection between acousmatic sound and nascent motherhood, as Aguilar notes: for the child in the womb, the mother's voice is 'strangely acousmatic' (90). The child's first experience of the world outside the womb comes through sound, primarily that of the mother's voice; and there is a reciprocal quality to this mother-child sound dynamic, since sound is also the vehicle for some of the mother's first experiences of the baby in the womb. The sound of a heartbeat identifies a living

presence, for example, and ultrasound technology uses sound waves in the form of echoes, which are transformed into a visual representation of the baby in the form of a sonogram. There is, therefore, something distinctly womb-like about Martel's acousmatic soundscape, which arises, perhaps, from how she 'plays with the fact of sound's intimacy' in a way that sound is 'not necessarily experienced through the ear, but liminally, on and in the body' (Russell, *Jump Cut* 2008). Acousmatic sound also has a strong significance in relation to motherhood in Catholic belief, since, according to tradition, the Virgin Mary conceived Christ in her womb upon giving her fiat – or assent – at the Annunciation of the angel Gabriel that she was to be the mother of God. This religious belief is referenced, and subverted, in *La niña santa* in relation to the notion of vocation, as will be discussed in relation to what I refer to as 'the call' in the next section.

In the case of *La niña santa*, the primacy of sound is formalized in the film's visual, as well as thematic, elements. The film's narrative crux is the medical conference taking place in the hotel owned and run by Helena and her brother Freddy, himself a medical school dropout. The theme of the conference is the clinical treatment of vestibular disorders, and this narrative thread is also emphasized visually through a deliberate placing of the ear in close-up and centre-frame in numerous shots throughout the film (Page 2009: 187). Martel has remarked that the human ear resembles a shell; thus, it is connected with the symbolism of water, another prominent feminine image in her work (Russell, *Jump Cut* 2008).[61] Bodies of water (a swamp, swimming pools and a canal) are prominent motifs in all three films and, like sound, they are highly ambiguous. In *La ciénaga*, water, with its inherent association with conception and life, has a negative connotation in the stagnancy and putrefaction of the nearby swamp, which both attracts and repulses the children, as well as the dysfunctional swimming pool, in which nobody dares to swim and which is the site of Mecha's bloody fall (Forcinito 2006: 112). In *La mujer sin cabeza*, the rain that accompanies a sudden storm is described as "una bendición" [a blessing]; yet, the flooding of the canal following this downpour fills the air with "un olor inmundo" [a foul stench]. In *La niña santa*, the hotel's thermal pool is

[61] In mythological terms, the vessel is the central archetypal symbol for the feminine, and earth and water are the natural elements essentially connected with this symbolism. According to Erich Neumann, '[t]his containing water is the primordial womb of life, from which in innumerable myths life is born' (1963: 47).

specifically associated with Helena; she once earned renown for her diving skills in its deep waters, but now the same water aggravates her hearing complaint.

Here, I propose that the close visual attention given to the ear in *La niña santa* has further significance in relation to the film's representation of motherhood in crisis. The ear has been said to resemble a small, inverted foetus; indeed, a branch of alternative medicine holds that, in therapeutic terms, the ear represents a microsystem of the entire human body.[62] In *La niña santa*, much attention is given, from the outset, to the presence of the unborn twins of the woman (referred to only as "that woman" or "Miguel's wife") who has usurped Helena's role as wife and, now, mother. These remote twin foetuses have a powerful psychological hold on Helena; they are not only symbolically present in the aural pathology that bothers her throughout the course of the narrative, but are made visible, tangible, and pervasive, by the exaggerated focus that the film's framing places on ears. Thus, the attention that is placed on the ear and, in particular, on the ambiguity of what is or is not heard, symbolically points to a crisis in motherhood. This close framing of the ear is also present in *La mujer sin cabeza*, which has further connotations with regard to the crisis of the maternal, as will be discussed in the final section of the chapter.

'The call' as a crisis of the maternal

The connection between sound and the crisis of motherhood is further developed in what might loosely be referred to as 'the call', a recurring motif throughout Martel's trilogy, which includes both literal calls – the telephone calls that pursue the female protagonists in all three films, which are consistently feared and avoided – as well as a more figurative call, which is closely related to the idea of vocation (or *calling*). As noted, in *La ciénaga*, Mecha's refusal to answer the phone that rings incessantly points towards her inability to cope with the demands of motherhood. In *La mujer sin cabeza*, the ringing of Vero's mobile phone causes her to hit a boy on the road while driving, and this same ringing phone seems to haunt her for the remainder of the film, as if it were the child's call from beyond the grave. Most of the time she ignores it; at other times she answers, then immediately cuts off the call. In *La niña*

[62] Auricular acupuncture, or auriculotherapy, is based on a theory inspired by the foetal shape of the human ear ("History of Ear Reflexology". *iReflexology.com*. 7 March 2016. http://www.ireflexology.com/history-of-ear-reflexology).

santa, Helena receives repeated phone calls from her ex-husband's pregnant wife, which she consistently refuses to answer.

In these instances, the call is associated with fear or denial and is related to a crisis of the maternal intruding, as it does, either upon what are these women's idealized notions of motherhood, or with demands upon their time or emotional resources, to which they are often unable, or unwilling, to respond. The one exception is Amalia, the 'holy girl' of that film's title, who differs from the other female protagonists of the trilogy, in that she is entirely responsive (albeit in an unorthodox manner) to the call. For Amalia, the call is understood in terms of vocation, an idea to which she and her peers are introduced through their formal catechetic instruction, which, true to Catholic tradition, has a particular focus on motherhood. Aguilar reminds us of the primacy of hearing in traditional Christian thought: 'the Church bases its authority on the word, faith is hearing' (2011: 267); Martel is thus reasserting the primacy of this sense here. Amalia believes she has been called by God to save Jano and redeem him. From the moment of their encounter in the street, in which Jano takes advantage of the pressing crowd gathered around the theremin musician to rub himself against Amalia from behind, she sets herself on a bizarre course of seduction tactics in order to bring about his redemption. Unequipped to decipher the *letter* of the law of vocation, Amelia responds, rather, to the *spirit* of the law, as Page also notes (2009: 184). She reinterprets the call from a bodily one, or biological understanding of motherhood, to a more spiritual one which involves an ethical call to motherliness. Amalia's seemingly unorthodox response becomes, in turn, a means of empowerment for her, through which she is able to break free from the negative patterns of crisis that are evident in the motherly figures that surround her, as will be discussed below.

The purity of intention in Amalia's response to the idea of vocation is emphasized by its stark contrast to that of her cousin, Josefina. When the girls' catechetic instructor, Inés (Mía Maestro), attempts to explain the meaning of vocation in Catholic terminology, Josefina's response is a subversion of the Catholic teaching. Like the serpent in the Garden of Eden, Josefina plants doubts in Amalia's ear, whispering that Inés is not as pure as she would have them believe: she has been seen in an amorous embrace with an older man; surely she is having premarital relations with him. Unlike Amalia, Josefina applies a legalistic interpretation of Church teaching, which follows the letter of the law, but pays no homage to the spirit

of it: in the interest of ostensibly maintaining her virginity, Josefina has anal sex with her boyfriend (who is also her cousin) in their grandmother's bed and refuses to turn and face him when he attempts to kiss her, thereby disavowing the intimacy of the act while at the same time partaking in its pleasure. Josefina's preferred positioning invites a comparison to the way in which Amalia responds to Jano's sexual advances; in her second encounter with Jano, she deliberately places herself in front of him, touches his hand, and then turns to look him directly in the eyes, causing him to flee in shame. While her actions are evidence of Amalia's burgeoning autonomy, they also emphasize the essential difference between her response to the call and that of Josefina.

Even though Amalia is confused about the meaning of vocation that is presented to her in terms of Catholic catechesis, her assent to the call is empowering, in that it allows her to move beyond the passive role of the victim to one of active agent: the saviour or heroine; an affirmative, rather than destructive, role. The women that surround her do not display the same power, at once tender and fierce, that is evidenced in Amalia through her ownership of the gaze and her active seizing of what she understands to be her calling. As Forcinito has pointed out, Helena is always represented as the object of Jano's gaze; his eyes linger over her bare back as seen through a bedroom window on his arrival at the hotel, and he watches her sunbathing beside the pool after a swim. Amalia's ownership of the gaze, on the other hand, is evident in the numerous instances in which she gazes and spies upon Jano at the poolside (in direct opposition to the objectification of her mother), in the hotel elevator, and even in his bed while he sleeps, unaware of her presence (2006: 121). Like Helena, the other motherly figures of the trilogy who flee from the call seem locked into this pattern of passivity and ambivalence: Vero's motherhood is marked predominantly by absence – the absence of her natural daughters, who are mentioned, but live some distance away, as well as the absence of responsibility for the boy she has killed; and Mecha is clearly destined to follow the same path as her mother by alienating herself from everyone around her. Yet, it is notable that while this is acknowledged, her family do not help her to avoid this fate. The final scene of *La niña santa* brings together and unifies the three elements of water, the unborn twins and sound; in it, Amalia and Josefina float side-by-side on their backs in the thermal pool, and make echoes with their voices. The scene is a confirmation that

Amalia is equipped to rise above the crises that threaten to overwhelm the other women of the trilogy.

Intergenerational Transmission of Maternal Ambivalence

Martin has noted that Martel, at times, 'departs from orthodox feminism' in her representation of characters, their actions and their desires (2016: 17). In a similar vein, I contend that Martel's work displays a certain distancing from feminist conceptions of motherhood. From a feminist perspective, 'motherhood is […] fundamentally a cultural practice that is continuously redesigned in response to changing economic and societal factors' (O'Reilly 2006: 37). While this may be true, it is important to also recognize the *similarities* that exist in modes of mothering across cultures, social classes and temporalities. These similarities reflect the bonding that takes place between a mother and child, which is deeply rooted in the body, as a somatic experience for both. Martel's films emphasize this bonding through, for example, her immersive use of sound as bodily intimacy. While her films clearly critique 'motherhood' as a patriarchal institution that 'normalizes and naturalizes oppressive motherhood as the best and only way to mother', they do not attempt to present an alternative in the form of 'mothering', that is, a notion of motherhood that 'emphasizes maternal power and ascribes agency to mothers' (O'Reilly 2006: 13–14). What they offer, instead, as I have argued, is a somatic representation of the mother-child relationship that is highly ambivalent. The effects of this motherly ambivalence spread ripple-like through family relationships and beyond; thus, the maternal in crisis puts all the other relationships into crisis and throws the entire economy of familial relations into disorder. For example, the effects of Mecha's dysfunctionality in *La ciénaga*, represented figuratively by the images of the swamp and the putrid swimming pool, manifest themselves in multiple disorderly behaviours among her children. Indeed, this imagery recalls Stein's discussion of objective sources of lifepower for the mental life of a civilization: 'vigor, liveliness, and the like emerge not merely as experienced states, […] [w]e encounter them as "dispositions" in the landscape, in the weather, […] and these dispositions operate no less contagiously than other people's living states do' (2000: 217). Though at times forced to take up the slack of their parents' lack of responsibility, the children are consumed by chronic lethargy and boredom, spending the daylight hours throwing their sweaty bodies from one creaking bed to another.

Two sets of domestic relationships in *La ciénaga* are particularly problematic. First, that between the elder siblings, Verónica (Leonora Balcarce) and José (Juan Cruz Bordeu), contains a strong suggestion of incest. The physical closeness of the pair certainly suggests latent desire, if not actual sexual intimacy; furthermore, Verónica's glare reveals a thinly concealed jealousy when José announces that he is returning to Buenos Aires to his boss and lover, Mercedes (Silvia Baylé) – a woman twice his age, who has previously had an affair with his father, Gregorio (Martín Adjemián). The sexual tension between these siblings reaches breaking point when José enters the bathroom and urinates while Verónica is taking a shower, then teasingly inserts his leg into the running water, while Verónica, wrapping the shower curtain around her naked body, quietly protests and tells him repeatedly to get out. José, for his part, is a sexually fluid character, and Martel's non-judgemental camera often finds him in positions that appear compromising, but which subsequently turn out to be other than they seem. For instance, one scene opens with Mecha and José lying on Mecha's bed; José is leaning over his mother and facing her, the back of his head obscuring her face, so that all that is visible of Mecha is her bare arm and one thinly covered breast. At first glance it looks as though a passionate embrace is taking place between José and Mecha; only as the scene progresses does it become clear that he has, in fact, been putting a fresh bandage on her wounded chest. The naturalization of such instances forces the spectator to question the reliability of what Martel's camera reveals regarding the nature of the familial relationships in this household.

The second problematic relationship in *La ciénaga* is that of Momi and one of the family's indigenous household employees, Isabel (Andrea López). In one of the film's opening scenes, Momi is lying on the bed in a bathing suit next to Isabel, rubbing the latter's sleeve against her nose and lips, and repeatedly whispering gratitude to God for giving her Isabel. Isabel is ambivalent towards Momi's affections, at times friendly and accommodating, even playing a motherly role towards her, but ultimately rejecting her when she discovers she is pregnant and decides to go and live with her boyfriend. It is Momi who suffers the most obvious damage due to motherly neglect (as the rash she contracts from the contaminated swimming pool water figuratively suggests), therefore her infatuation with Isabel might be seen as a response to this neglect – the desire for female intimacy, which takes an erotic turn as she reaches sexual maturity. Momi's queer desire for Isabel,

however, degenerates into an ugly display of class-based power when Isabel does not reciprocate: as Pedro Lange-Churión notes, when Isabel leaves the family, Momi 'utter[s] the same racial slur her mother spewed "*colla carnavalera*"' [Indian slut] (2012: 477). It is only when Isabel has gone that Momi rightfully redirects her anger at Mecha and confronts her with the harsh truth that she will die in bed like her own mother, the very destiny she wishes most to avoid. Thus both of these problematic relationships, while they appear naturalized as one thing, are later revealed to be rooted in a power imbalance that has its source in a breakdown of parental care.

My analysis now turns to what might be seen as Martel's critiquing of a dominant view of motherhood, whereby women who do not conform or live up to a particular vision of what motherhood and womanhood should be have their capacities as a mother called into question by other motherly figures, perhaps also reflecting their own self-doubts. The incident cited previously, in which Helena unwittingly repeats "*males*" instead of "*madres*" during her hearing examination, provides one example of this. In *La mujer sin cabeza*, another example occurs in the scenes in which Vero visits her aunt Lala (María Vaner), who suffers from dementia and, like *La ciénaga*'s Mecha, is confined to her bed, to be waited on by the younger relations and maids. Strong religious references set the tone for the first of these scenes, recalling the catechetic study scenarios of the girls in *La niña santa*, which centred on vocation, with an emphasis on motherhood. In the first visitation scene, Vero and her cousin Josefina (Claudia Cantero) arrive at their aunt Lala's house, where a group of ladies from the church has already gathered. Their cousin announces that they are going to pray the rosary, for which a statue of the Blessed Virgin is carried into the room by a dark-skinned man. The camera closes in on Vero's face, while offscreen a concerned voice is heard saying "Teri, ¿te diste cuenta? ¡La Virgencíta está inmunda! ¡Le manosearon el mantito!" [Teri, have you noticed? The virgin is filthy! They mauled her gown!]. Because the camera is trained on Vero's face, and the speaker of these words is beyond the frame, it is as though this acousmatic revelation relates directly to Vero. As the words are spoken, her eyes widen, as though something beyond the frame has caught her attention, and the music of a church organ is heard. The visual then cuts directly to the source of the music: a grainy home video of Vero's wedding, in which she is seen looking virginal in her white wedding gown. Although some time has elapsed, and we are now in the bedroom of aunt Lala, where she, Vero and Josefina are watching the wedding

video, the sound and visual editing between these two scenes draws a clear association between Vero and the 'stained virgin'. One is reminded of *La niña santa* and Jose's whispered gossip regarding Inés, that she has an older lover and is not as pure as she seems, as well as Vero's more recent adulterous encounter with Juan Manuel (Daniel Genoud), Josefina's husband, on the night of the accident. Lala remarks how beautiful Vero was on the day of her wedding, and how lucky she is that she never had children. Vero appears to be at a loss for words at this comment, as though she is not quite sure whether or not it is true and is questioning her role as a mother. Her confusion is intensified by Josefina's reaction, urging her to respond: "Decile, Vero." [Tell her, Vero.] The tension dissolves when Josefina, impatient, volunteers the information on Vero's behalf, that she *does* have daughters, who are at school in Tucumán, studying law. This scene underlines the scrutiny concerning appropriate and inappropriate expressions of womanhood and motherhood that women exert upon one another throughout the trilogy. In the following section, we will see how that scrutiny takes on a moral and ethical significance.

The 'Hushed Mystery' of *La mujer sin cabeza*

The forms of motherly crisis that are nascent in *La ciénaga* and *La niña santa* come to full maturity, so to speak, in the final film of the trilogy, *La mujer sin cabeza*. The uncanny atmosphere of the film has been commented upon by other scholars. Sosa, for instance, notes that '[t]here is something specifically awkward about the piece, something that does not line up, a feeling of strangeness that perhaps goes beyond any directorial intention and addresses a special discomfort on the part of the viewers' (2009: 252). Indeed, the film seems to be full of secrets and mysteries. It offers the impression, through a mixture of cryptic murmurings and enigmatic exchanges of looks, gestures and dialogue, that some deeply buried secret is always just beyond the reach of the spectator, something unspeakable and profoundly private. As noted at the outset of the chapter, this 'hushed mystery' (253) has been read by other scholars as an allusion to the disappeared of the dictatorship era, as well as to the socially and existentially marginalized subjectivities of the present, which the indigenous boy from the lower classes represents (Sosa 2009; Martin 2013, 2016). The connection to the dictatorship era is suggested, in part, by the mixed temporalities presented in the *mise-en-scène* that reference both the late 1970s and the contemporary era, such as clothing, music, and hairstyles. As noted

previously, this reading is insightful, particularly in terms of the Madres' experience of traumatic loss in relation to their disappeared children. However, I would go further to suggest that the crisis experienced by Vero is essentially an identity crisis related to the maternal, and that the ethical considerations of the film concerning the missing/dead child have broader implications that are closely related to motherhood, such as the status of unborn life, which lives count as valuable, and how to grieve a life that leaves no traces.

From the outset of the film, our attention is repeatedly drawn to Vero's relationship to children. In one of the opening scenes, her admonition to the child who has locked himself inside her car as she is preparing to leave a social gathering sounds like an omen: "abrí, abrí…te vas a quedar sin aire" [open up…you'll suffocate]. Moments later, as she is leaving behind what we can only assume is the body of someone she has hit on the road, faint handprints are visible on the car window next to Vero's face. Doubt arises in the mind of the spectator: these could be the handprints of the boy who was seen running with his dog on this same stretch of road in the opening scene of the film; but surely they belong to the child who was playing inside the car. As Joshua Lund and Dierdra Reber note, however, 'the doubt about this identitary doubling is disingenuous; we know that Vero has killed the boy we have earlier seen with his dog by the side of the road. […] The doubt will allow us to pretend, along with her, that we do not know' (2012: 52), suggesting that the spectator is complicit in Vero's self-delusion. Henceforth, like the twin foetuses whose ethereal presence seems to reside in the persistent ringing of Helena's phone, the child she must pretend never existed haunts Vero with every ring of her mobile phone – a jarring, dissonant tune that ruptures her newly recovered normality as sharply as it cut through the sunny, carefree rhythm coming from her car radio on that fateful day. The shadowy contours of that child take shape in the watery echoes of Martel's soundtrack, 'echoes of Vero's crime: kids playing, ambulance sirens, cell phones chiming, and always water pouring, less cleansing than bringing dirt to the surface' (Phelps, *Mubi* 2008). The presence of children in the clinic is also highlighted: the sound of a crying child seems to hold Vero's attention and disconcert her, and a young girl inexplicably embraces her and shows her a gap where she has lost a tooth (this odd incident becomes more clear when we later discover that Vero is a dentist and treats local children through a school dental program). Furthermore, the rain is 'una bendición' [a blessing] – a description often

made about children before they are born, and one which also echoes Freddy's remark about Amalia in *La niña santa*: 'esa niña es una bendición' [that child is a blessing].

Vero's second visit to her aunt Lala further draws attention to her failure of motherly care in the wake of having abandoned the scene of the accident in which she has quite likely killed someone. Lala reiterates the doubt regarding Vero's voice that she had previously expressed: '¿Quién es? ¡Qué voz rara!' [Who is it? What a strange voice!]. Her comments then become even more cryptic, declaring that the house is full of ghosts and instructing Vero on how to deal with them: 'No lo mires, no lo mires y se van' [Don't look at them, don't look at them and they go], thereby demonstrating the intergenerational transmission of the psychic mechanisms of denial. These comments draw the spectator's attention back to the scene that immediately follows the crash, when Vero adjusts herself and attempts to overcome her shock, but refrains from getting out of the car, or even looking back to find out what it is she has hit. Throughout this scene, the camera is restricted to Vero's profile from the angle of the passenger seat, thereby placing the spectator in the position of accomplice, by denying them the satisfaction of knowing what Vero clearly does not want to know. As the car begins to drive away, the camera offers the briefest backward glimpse, revealing only a dog-like figure on the road, and just as it seems as though the natural movement of the car is about offer a wider view, the car abruptly turns, foreclosing any possibility of further visual confirmation. The action of the camera here implies a firm decision of denial in which the spectator is inadvertently complicit, calling to mind Stein's affirmation that communal responsibility exists as a corollary of individual responsibility, because there exists a lived experience of co-responsibility (Calcagno 2014: 142).

There are other reminders that call into question Vero's maternal empathy, for instance, the lyrics of Julio Iglesias' song 'Mammy Blue' in the closing scene of the film (the only extra-diegetic song on the soundtrack), in particular the line 'I may be your forgotten son', which also plays on the fact that, earlier in the film, Vero quite literally forgot that she had daughters. This scene represents the completion of the erasure of the trail of evidence connecting Vero's car accident to the dead boy: the phone calls to influential contacts, the vanishing of the medical records of her visit to the clinic, the fixing of the car in an out-of-town garage. It is the culmination of the process of denial, 'the moment in which Vero finally forsakes truth and

responsibility' (Martin 2016: 95). Vero is both emotional and, at the same time, coldly resolute in this sequence, which takes place in the same hotel she stayed in on the night of the accident; she cries in the bathroom, and then goes to the front desk to enquire whether there is any record of her stay on that night. Asking the receptionist to check, and then check very carefully again, it is as though she is torn between confirming that the incriminating evidence has been removed, and grasping for any last shred of proof that might validate her experience.

Returning momentarily to the structural approach to trauma set out in Chapter One, it was noted that such seemingly disparate events as car accidents, rape, or even concentration camp experiences, share a sameness in terms of traumatogenicity, due to the underlying structure that permeates the multiplicity of traumatic experiences. Trauma, according to this approach, involves the collapse of a structure, which, in humans, can be defined as an identity. In many ways, therefore, the trauma Vero experiences in the wake of the car accident is comparable, for instance, to that of a woman losing an unborn child, and the moral crisis she experiences in relation to the child she may or may not have killed is comparable to what a woman might experience in relation to an abortion, as an event that is subject to intense political and social debate over when life begins, when it matters and what value is attached to it. This parallel will be explored below in connection with ethical responses to the film put forward by other scholars. Through filmic techniques, such as the use of acousmatic sound that creates a womb-like ambience, the film evokes many of the same bodily and psychic feelings and questions that surround such experiences in connection with motherhood, the maternal body, the loss of a child, and the moral uncertainty involved. In this way, the film forces the spectator to consider what sort of lives matter and how to grieve those that are difficult to grieve. One is particularly reminded of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo and their struggle to obtain justice on behalf of their missing children, who were most likely murdered, but remain disappeared in a limbo-like state, although they are quite different examples of loss. This is analogous to the way in which, when Vero declares what she believes to be true, 'maté a alguien en la ruta…me parece que atropellé a alguien' [I killed someone on the road…I think I ran over someone], her husband, Marcos' (César Bordón) response is nothing short of an endeavour to seize control of her narrative and convince her otherwise. His soothing counter-narrative, as they retrace her journey in the dark, serves the double purpose of infantilizing the woman

and dehumanizing the victim: 'es un perro…te asustaste…no pasó nada…atropellaste un perro' [it's a dog…you got a fright…nothing happened…you ran over a dog]. Other imagery in the trilogy evokes such an analogy in a more oblique way, for example, the presence of the unborn twins that seem to haunt Helena, and the visual centrality of the ear as a quasi-foetal image, which was referenced in *La niña santa*, is also highly pronounced in the case of Vero in *La mujer sin cabeza*. Furthermore, something long buried and mysterious is discovered in Vero's back garden – it appears to be an old fountain or pond that has been covered over – and the roadside canal has suddenly filled up with water due to some blockage (a dead animal, or the missing boy), both images that are aqueous allusions to female fertility.

When one considers the entanglement of physical, emotional, psychological, cultural and moral elements involved, miscarriage and abortion, whilst they are very different kinds of experiences, both have a high potential to be traumatic. Indeed, a study published in the *British Journal of Psychiatry* into the link between abortion and mental health found a 'moderate to highly increased risk of mental health problems after abortion' (Coleman 2011: 180).[63] In addition, there is evidence that miscarriage can trigger PTSD, anxiety and depression (Farren et al. 2016).[64] I suggest that one reason why these pregnancy-related phenomena have a high potential to be traumatic relates to Giddens' notion of the sequestration of experience, which was addressed in Chapter One. As I proposed, this is a process by which certain life events, and thus the moral and existential questions related to them (in particular those surrounding birth and death), are institutionally put aside, with the (unintended) result that, when 'fateful moments' occur, the ontological security of the individual is immediately placed under stress (1991: 185). Compared with former ages, when babies were born at home and there was little to no medical intervention involved, pregnancy is now increasingly dealt with, or 'sequestrated', as a medical issue. This means that being confronted with events such as a miscarriage,

[63] The analysis, comprising a quantitative synthesis of 22 studies carried out in the U.S., where abortion has been legal since 1973, found that women who have undergone an abortion experience an 81% increased risk of subsequent mental health problems, nearly 10% of which is attributable to abortion. The risk increased 'when the outcomes pertained to substance use and suicidal behaviour' (Coleman 2011: 180).

[64] The study, published in *BMJ Open*, concluded that 'a large number of women having experienced a miscarriage or ectopic pregnancy fulfil the diagnostic criteria for probable PTSD. Many suffer from moderate-to-severe anxiety, and a lesser number depression' (Farren et al. 2016: 1).

an unwanted pregnancy or an abortion that have been sequestrated can bring certain moral and existential questions crashing in upon the woman with a force that takes her completely unawares, resulting in a profound crisis of identity. Whilst the *particulars* of the events that are happening to Vero are clearly different, such an experience of identity crisis is comparable to her situation, and this parallel invites debate concerning the difficulty of grieving a life that is not fully acknowledged in the public sphere and the value of unborn human life.

Concerning the broader ethical questions about the hierarchy of values of human life that *La mujer sin cabeza* raises, Martin states that

> Martel's broader ethical project […] is to focus on separations and exclusions and their role in political, social, and psychic structures, as well as to re-direct our attention to the conjoining material or space between binary terms. The child encapsulates both a philosophical preoccupation with the borders of existence, and a political one with what constitutes political life and how socio-political separations are constructed and maintained. (2013: 156)

Martin sees the figures of the child and the spectre in *La mujer sin cabeza* as 'lacunae or gaps which conjoin or separate binary structures, like Agamben's homo sacer' (149). Homo sacer – 'an obscure figure of archaic Roman law' (Agamben 1998: 8) – is a figure whose political life (*bios*) has been forcibly reduced to bare life (*zoe*), and who, therefore, 'cannot be sacrificed and yet may be killed' (82). Martin draws a comparison between this figure and the figure of the missing child in Martel's film:

> Occupying an intermediary zone between life and death, and between political and natural life (an image reinforced by his constant confusion with a dog), *La mujer sin cabeza*'s ghost-child hovers at the edges of socio-political borders past and present. (2013: 150)

For Agamben, bare life is constituted as such in relation to sovereign power, a relation that is characterized by exception:

> The sovereign sphere is the sphere in which it is permitted to kill without committing homicide and without celebrating a sacrifice, and sacred life –

> that is, life that may be killed but not sacrificed – is the life that has been captured in this sphere. (1998: 83)

Bare life is, therefore, included in political life by distinct virtue of its exclusion, and is, thereby, (paradoxically) politicised: 'The first foundation of political life is a life that may be killed, which is politicized through its very capacity to be killed' (89). I propose that, on foot of my analysis, Martin's reading of the film in connection with Agamben's theory of bare life must be reframed in terms of a broader ethical debate – one that is directly related to motherhood – as well as to the boundaries between private and political and the value of human life, themes which I return to in relation to Trapero's films in the next chapter.

Conclusion

Martel's depiction of motherhood in crisis is imbued with an ambivalence that permeates the entire domestic sphere, in particular the relationships between adolescents and mothers. This ambivalence is naturalized through Martel's use of filmic techniques, which immerse the spectator in the filmic world, yet leave unquestioned what appears irrational or even immoral, thereby forcing the viewer to suspend their judgement. The result is a world of interpersonal relationships that are characterized by an extreme fluidity, a sense of being 'at sea' (underscored through aqueous imagery) in the world. On the one hand, this offers an experiential access to the on-screen world; on the other, it imparts a sense of uncertainty which reflects that of the characters that inhabit the films. *La mujer sin cabeza*, in particular, offers a phenomenological representation of the psychological, emotional and moral traces of an experience of profound loss, as well as the ambivalence surrounding motherhood itself – the crisis aspect of it – that inheres throughout the trilogy. For Vero, the possibility that she has killed a boy on the road represents a crisis of motherliness. The moral and existential questions surrounding the status of that child are called into question through the film's play on the unknowability of whether what Vero killed on the road was a child or a dog – human or non-human – or whether it was both. This unknowing, or unwillingness to claim any kind of knowledge at all, to claim 'her truth' (Martin 2016: 98), is the question at the centre of Vero's crisis of identity. Lund and Reber note that, on the film set of *La mujer sin cabeza*, the child-like handprints on the car window next to Vero's face as she drives away from the

scene of the accident were made, not by a child at all, but by Martel, using her own hands, in an act which they interpret as 'a somatic rendering of the problem of voice and representation', in which the director 'makes the print of her hands *for* – in place of – those who have no power of touch, no social agency, no ability to register even in bodily terms the fact of their existence' (2012: 53). If the hand is symbolic, not only of agency, but of 'physical intimacy, of contact with others, of consummate skills in artists' (Dickenson 2008: 149), then perhaps, in a way that is similar to Carri's creative intervention, one might imagine these handprints to be Martel's act of witnessing. The next chapter will further explore issues that have been raised in relation to Martel's work, in a comparative analysis of two films by Trapero which highlight questions surrounding the body, the value of human life and, not only the blurring, but the *rupture and collapse*, of the boundaries between private and public.

CHAPTER FOUR

Flesh and Blood in the Globalized Age: Pablo Trapero's *Nacido y criado* and *Carancho*

This chapter explores the representation of physical and psychological trauma in Pablo Trapero's *Carancho* (2010) and his earlier film *Nacido y criado* (2006), in order to identify ways in which, in the globalized age, trauma is perpetuated in cycles of violence and re-traumatization, in both the public and private spheres, and how, in these films, this process reflects the demise of symbolic frameworks of identity, as set out in Chapter One. Whilst this chapter continues to consider trauma in the family sphere, the focus shifts away from motherhood to consider the male perspective, and the connection between trauma and the body in relation to the father. *Nacido y criado* and *Carancho* are, at first glance, unlikely bedfellows, the former being a meditative, emotionally expressive piece, and the latter a fast-paced thriller in the vein of the action genre. For this reason, it is unsurprising that they have not previously been analysed in connection with one another. Yet, despite (or perhaps because of) their dissimilarity, a comparative reading of these films is particularly instructive for exploring the connections between psychological and physical trauma in relation to the themes of the family and globalization. As established in Chapter One, psychological trauma can be defined as 'the collapse of the structure of the self […] resulting from the encounter of a catastrophic threat and a chaotic response, [which] results in the experience of loss of autonomy' (Benyakar et al. 1989: 437). Throughout this chapter a structural approach to trauma will be employed, whereby 'autonomy' is, in part, the capacity to have an identity, and is defined by principles which are as true for social or psychological structures as they are for simple biological structures (433-4).[65] By establishing a dialogue between *Nacido y criado* and *Carancho*, this chapter will demonstrate the ways in which the fundamental structure shared by psychological trauma, violence and physical pain, intensified

[65] As stated in Chapter One, Benyakar et al. (1989) identify three principles of autonomy in the structural concept of trauma: *wholeness* reflects the 'capacity to have a sense of identity, continuity and internal consistency in the face of relentless internal and external pressure'; *transformation* refers to the capacity for boundary-forming and is closely related to *self-regulation*, which presupposes a degree of self-reference or self-knowledge in the capacity to form flexible configurations while maintaining wholeness (434).

by increasing globalization, allows trauma to proliferate in ever-shifting manifestations. Trapero's films, particularly his earlier work, have been read predominantly in the economic vein, in terms of their social realism, the economic austerity they portray, and the violence related to the precariousness of the social fabric that they depict. Criticism tends to look towards economic reasons for the alienation often depicted in his films. I look to extend that analysis into more existential reasons related to the human condition in general, particularly in modernity, and the loss of ontological anchorage associated with it. In doing so, I advocate a biopolitical reading in order to identify the possibilities suggested by these two films for replacing endless cycles of trauma with the more productive process of 'working through' – not in terms of attaining closure (which, in these films, would seem an impossibility), but in the sense of 'accepting ongoing mourning' (Kaplan 2005: 135).

To begin with, trauma inflicted during Argentina's last military dictatorship of 1976-83 and the economic crisis of 2001 will be presented in relation to the structure of the traumatic encounter, a frame of reference to which I return throughout the chapter, as a means to set the scene for the blurring of boundaries between the private and public spheres. These instances of trauma serve both to trace the historical context of themes that are presented in the two films and to make the case that trauma stems from a variety of different experiences, of which political violence is just one manifestation. I then examine how, in *Nacido y criado*, a symbolic framework built around kinship, landscape and place produces a stark portrait of psychological shock in the intimate family domain. The focus will then shift to the public sphere in *Carancho*, where bodily trauma is situated in the dual loci of flesh and marketplace. Here, the moral and ethical tensions between public and private space are thrown into relief, giving rise to questions surrounding the exploitation of bodily trauma and shock in the precarious socio-economic context of a globalized society.[66] The final section presents the films in connection to biopolitics as a means to engage with loss and trauma.

[66] In the context of this chapter, the distinction between 'private' and 'public' is understood as the boundary 'between the "private" worlds of intimacy and the family and the "public" worlds of sociability or the market economy' (Weintraub and Kumar: 1997: 2).

Trauma and the Symbolic Order: the Argentine Context

In the context of Argentina, the extreme violence perpetrated by the state during the 1976-83 dictatorship and the subsequent economic crisis of 2001, both discussed in the Introduction to this thesis, can help us to understand how psychological trauma and shock function in the blurred boundaries between the private and public spheres. Indeed, the family was affected deeply by the 'new' vision of traditional society that was instated under military rule during the *Proceso*. As Jean Franco notes, '[d]espite the fact that the military appealed to family values – the family being one of the central concepts in their ideology – the holy war was carried out as an act of destruction against families' (1992: 112). As a case in point, women who were pregnant at the time of their abduction were kept alive until they gave birth. As explained in the previous chapter, their babies were kidnapped and then sold or given to either military couples or those who were deemed by regime personnel to be of an appropriate ideological persuasion. Thus, the children of the disappeared were, in effect, raised in families that were sympathetic to or, in some cases, directly involved in the disappearance, torture and murder of their natural parents, as part of the military's determination to 'wipe out the historical memory that allowed the idea of resistance to be passed from generation to generation' (112).

Violent raids on family homes by men in uniform with no discernible insignia, and the abduction of individuals from those homes, served as another method of repression used by the military junta to infiltrate the private sphere. This tactic aimed to destroy the symbolic order: '[t]he abduction of Argentines from their homes and the humiliation of their relatives led to the violation of the physical, psychological, and symbolic safety of the home, the destruction of personal boundaries' (Robben 2005: 209). Robben notes that '[t]he raid was a disturbing intrusion of a threatening outside world and caused lasting damage to the self by the transgression of deep-seated cultural values' (209). This process bears a striking resemblance to the structure of psychological trauma, as discussed in Chapter One of the thesis, characterized as 'a piercing breach that puts inside and outside into a strange communication' (Luckhurst 2008: 3). It is also similar to the effects of physical pain, described by Scarry: '[t]his dissolution of the boundary between inside and outside gives rise to […] an almost obscene conflation of private and public' (1985: 53). The raid might also

be compared to electroshock therapy, in that it shared the same objective and methods – to dismantle and re-programme the subject by administering shock and trauma: '[t]he home's violent invasion was […] a breakdown of people's personal defences to achieve their psychological, social, and cultural dismantlement through torture and traumatization' (Robben 2005: 212).[67] This process left the victims in a state of temporal and emotional paralysis: 'most survivors were emotionally deeply shaken, while an unknown number suffered from acute psychic traumas and post-traumatic disorders' (212). An essential factor in the infliction of trauma in this manner is the absolute destruction of the individual's autonomy, thereby virtually eliminating their capacity for resistance, as Robben explains:

> Psychic and social traumatization are pernicious but highly effective means of repression because the tenacious emotional disturbance may prevent individuals and groups from taking decisive action. They are given over to uncontrollable emotions, may have difficulty in organizing themselves, and may adversely affect the people in their surroundings. (212)

The consequence of this whole process is that once the symbolic order of individuals is destroyed, the destruction of the communal order is essentially a fait accompli.

The testimony of one protestor during the 'State of Siege' that was declared in the social, economic and political implosion of December 2001 makes patently clear the perception that the 'old mechanisms' of state violence were being repeated: 'I lived through the *junta*; […] people saw this as the first step in the return of political repressions […] a reversal of rights that we were not willing to lose' (Onuch 2014: 105). In particular, continuity of state terrorism was scrutinized in the wake of the 30 civilian deaths at the hands of the security forces during those days in December. As this chapter will illustrate, *Nacido y criado* and *Carancho* demonstrate, in an oblique manner, the way in which 'the old mechanisms [of trauma] can be perfectly reiterated in the present time' (Sosa

[67] For a detailed analysis of how the principles of electroshock therapy, shock tactics, traumatization and torture were applied in the context of the Argentine dictatorship of 1976-83, see Naomi Klein's *The Shock Doctrine* (2007).

2009: 255): the former film portrays the effects of trauma on an individual when the symbolic framework of family is ruptured, while the latter depicts a social reality in which the communal order has been destroyed by economic injustice and corruption in the public system, with widespread traumatic consequences. Although the national context outlined here is that of Argentina and the films can, therefore, be read in those terms, what emerges from this reading is that the mechanisms of trauma are increasingly a transnational, indeed a *global*, concern.

Trauma in the Private Sphere: *Nacido y criado*

Trapero's fourth feature-length film, *Nacido y criado*, marks a sharp departure, in terms of aesthetics and subject matter, from the gritty social realism that characterized his earlier work, in particular *Mundo grúa* (1999) and the urban police thriller *El bonaerense* (2002). Whilst his early films secured the director's position among the leading lights of the so-called New Argentine Cinema, this film's shift in style was welcomed by critics as a 'maturing of his previous cinematographic storytelling into a more fully achieved, novelistic expressiveness' (Andermann 2012: 69). The film portrays the fate of Santiago (Guillermo Pfening) and his wife Milli (Martina Gusman), urbanite interior designers whose flawless lifestyle, evidenced by their immaculate home and idyllic domestic life, is shattered when an overnight car journey from Buenos Aires to the countryside takes a tragic turn: distracted by a tantrum from their daughter Josefina (Victoria Vescio), Santiago loses control of the car, sending it tumbling off the road into a ravine. Nothing but the steady drip of leaking petrol is heard until a flame erupts within the overturned car, followed by Santiago's frantic screams. In the next shot, suburban Buenos Aires is replaced with the frozen wilderness of Patagonia, the southernmost extremity of Argentina, where a fragile and shaken Santiago attempts to forge a new existence in this barren, isolated and hostile environment. Santiago's new life comprises manual labour, hunting and drinking with a handful of local characters. The fate of Milli and Josefina is revealed only gradually (the latter is dead but the former has survived the crash), through Santiago's attempts to make telephone contact with them and in the nightmares and flashbacks that torment him. Familial problems – an unwanted pregnancy and a wife's terminal cancer – in the lives of his new friends Robert (Federico Esquerro) and Cacique (Tomás Lipan) combine with

memories of his own tragic past, and Santiago's psychological state spirals towards meltdown. At rock bottom, he is forced to come to terms with his pain and begin to reconstruct his shattered life. The film shares common themes with those of Martel and Carri in this respect, as it deals with familial loss and a car crash involving the death of a child.

The trauma represented in *Nacido y criado* is situated firmly within the contexts of the body, the individual psyche, and the intimate sphere of domestic, family life. This is established as early on as the film's opening titles, in a shot that pans over family portraits of Santiago, Milli and Josefina on the living room wall of their home. The accompanying theme song, Palo Pandolfo's 'Sangre', features the frequent repetition of the word *sangre* [blood], and functions as the leitmotif of the film (Lerer, *Clarín* 2006). In one sense, the word reinforces the notion of family in its most basic and fundamental form: the bond of flesh and blood, which also calls to mind the questions regarding biological family in post-dictatorship debates. In another, the emphasis on blood, and the anguished voice of the singer, augur impending trauma – the car accident that will soon tear this small family apart. The white tone provides the only visual continuity in the film's sudden, disorientating shift in spatial location from interior (the pristine white interior of Santiago's home in Buenos Aires) to exterior (the snow-covered wilderness of Patagonia) following the car crash (Verardi, *Afuera* 2011), figuratively reflecting the 'turning inside out' that is characteristic of trauma and pain. Scarry, for example, has noted the way in which pain 'spills out into the realm beyond the body, takes over all that is inside and outside, makes the two obscenely indistinguishable' (1985: 54).

There is continuity of a more figurative type in the change of physical location from the urban outskirts of Buenos Aires, where Trapero's films are usually set,[68] to the desolation of Patagonia, in that Santiago is displaced from one configuration of family (that of flesh and blood) to an alternative familial scenario, one based on bonds of solidarity and friendship: his feminine, conventional family has been replaced by male counterparts, Robert and Cacique, who correspond, in figurative terms, with the two primary relationships

[68] *El bonaerense* (2002), *Carancho* (2010), *Elefante blanco* (2012) and *El clan* (2015) are set mainly in (Greater) Buenos Aires, while *Mundo grúa* (1999) and *Familia rodante* (2004) portray transition to the geographic and social peripheries.

that have been fractured.[69] To put it another way, these new masculine relationships represent the two roles that are central to Santiago's identity, roles that have been shattered by the accident, namely those of father and husband: Robert is struggling to come to terms with the idea of becoming a father, and Cacique's wife is dying of cancer. Seeing his friends undergo these personal trials impels Santiago to begin working through his own guilt and loss; in this sense, this new-found masculine 'family' acts as a kind of emotional surrogate, assisting him in coming to terms with the loss of his biological family, and in recovering his identity as a father and a husband.

Federico Esquerro, who plays Robert in this film (in addition to being the film's sound designer), is a familiar figure in Trapero's oeuvre, having appeared in the director's previous three films.[70] From the director's point of view, therefore, it could be argued that what Esquerro brings to the character of Robert is a sense of continuity in a fragmented world, by being a point of familiarity for Trapero's audience. Robert and Santiago live together; they work together (as did Santiago and Milli); they argue, bicker and antagonize one another like a couple; and there is even a consummation of sorts of their relationship, when they partake in a threesome with the local barwoman and sometime prostitute, Betti (Fernanda de Almeida). The sexual encounter with Betti, in which Santiago violently pushes her away in an effort to conceal his scars when she attempts to remove his clothes, serves as a counterpoint to the intimate love scene between Santiago and Milli at the start of the film, thereby marking an emotional turning point that is the beginning of Santiago's recovery of his identity as a husband (Verardi 2011). After this encounter, the friendship between Santiago and Robert reaches a new depth, giving way to Santiago's emotional catharsis, when he confesses to Robert that he caused the death of his daughter.

Throughout his self-imposed exile in Patagonia, Santiago displays symptoms that are consistent with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), a condition that was described in Chapter One as the full-blown manifestation of trauma. He refuses to drive and his sleep is regularly interrupted by nightmares about the car accident. In one such instance, he awakens in a panic, violently

[69] The name "Cacique", meaning "leader", is applied to heads of indigenous groups and has significance for this new familial group in that Cacique acts as something of a figurehead, or a fatherly figure, to Santiago and Robert.
[70] Esquerro appeared in *Mundo grúa* (1999), *El bonaerense* (2002), and *Familia rodante* (2004).

slapping his body as though attempting to put out flames. In another scene, he orders Robert to stop the car on their way home one night and begins searching the roadside for someone (perhaps Josefina) whom he believes he has seen. These manifestations are typical of 'hyper-vigilance' as well as of the 'intrusive flashbacks, recurring dreams, or later situations that repeat or echo the original [traumatic event]' which characterize PTSD (Luckhurst 2008: 1). In the film, however, the audience is shown only the behavioural symptoms of Santiago's trauma, not the past events as he is remembering and re-experiencing them. Films that have explored the phenomenon of PTSD, such as *Jacob's Ladder* (1990) and *Hiroshima mon amour* (1959), have done so through various techniques, such as disrupted, non-linear narratives, or flashbacks to the original traumatic event; indeed, such filmic devices are highly effective at 'convey[ing] the experience of traumatized subjectivity' by mimicking the effects of PTSD (2008: 177). In *Nacido y criado*, however, Trapero avoids such devices in favour of a more realist aesthetic, which situates private trauma within the context of social and interpersonal relationships, in the ways described above, rather than presenting it purely as a subjective psychological phenomenon.

Whatever *Nacido y criado* might lose by eschewing a modernist, or postmodern, aesthetic, it recovers by engaging with a more tangible, grounded visual idiom for representing the inexpressibility of trauma; that is, landscape.[71] As was discussed in Chapter One, in Stein's phenomenology, landscape is one of the material sources of lifepower, our finite but renewable capability for living, in which the individual psyche is rooted. Andermann observes that 'landscape in *Nacido y criado* turns from a mere scenic backdrop into an active bearer of meaning' (2012: 69); indeed, it might be said that the film's frigid and hostile landscape represents a sustained state of shock, a condition that is at once an immobilization in the present and a preservation of the past in a kind of frozen memory: 'its wintery stillness actually enshrines […] the moment of violent rupture of the family's car accident' (70). The landscape of Patagonia, a 'primordial, pre-historical space' (Nouzeilles 1999: 36), also reflects Santiago's traumatized psychological condition; his retreat into this white, barren wasteland suggests a return to a primordial or liminal state, a latency that precedes the

[71] Indeed, Diego Braude (2006) describes landscape as 'another protagonist' in *Nacido y criado* (my translation).

symbolic order. There is a notable comparison between this condition and the effect of physical pain, since pain 'bring[s] about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language' (Scarry 1985: 4). In one respect, this condition can be seen as a type of symbolic death, and the landscape a purgatory of sorts, in which Santiago must suffer for causing the death of his daughter.[72] In another sense, this state of mind is an effect of shock itself. Indeed, the purpose for which electroshock therapy was initially developed and used in psychiatric medicine was to return the patient to a primordial, liminal state, or 'blank slate', from which a (supposedly) new and healthy psyche could then be reconstructed (Klein 2007: 32). In a similar vein, the 'open space' of this vast, untouched terrain 'is like a blank slate on which meaning may be imposed' (Tuan 1977: 54). As was discussed in Chapter One, trauma and PTSD are closely related to the loss of meaning; in this sense, it is as though the meaningfulness that Santiago is now lacking is expressed by the emptiness of the landscape.

Reading the landscape of *Nacido y criado* in this way, the shock of the car crash (both physical and psychological) would seem to have returned Santiago's life to a condition comparable to that which was the aim of electroshock therapy. The first thing the audience witnesses him doing in this new location is to hunt, a primal activity based on pure survival, and one which is highly antithetical to his previous occupation of interior designer. The physical movement from interior to exterior is in direct opposition to Santiago's state of mind; while his body and work are now based in the outdoors, doing manual labour, psychologically he has withdrawn into his own interior, where he hides and takes refuge. The frozenness of the landscape mirrors his shocked condition; he is physically, psychologically and temporally frozen by trauma. Again, there is a reversal of order here; the frozen exterior is the antithesis of what is happening inside of him, as Trapero has stated: 'el tipo estaba viviendo un infierno y se va al hielo [the guy is in a living hell, so he heads for the ice]' (Pérez, *Página 12* 2006). His body itself is also a type of landscape of trauma, since his shoulder and torso are severely scarred by burns from the car crash. Once again, this is an example of the turning inside out, or 'unmaking of the self', that characterizes trauma (Scarry 1985).

[72] Braude refers to Turbio Viejo, the town in which *Nacido y criado* is set, as 'purgatorio de almas perdidas' [purgatory of lost souls] (2006).

The way in which Trapero employs landscape as a visual idiom might in itself be seen as an ethical response to trauma, in a similarity with Martel and Carri, as discussed in the previous chapters. Luckhurst, for instance, laments a common feature of trauma narratives: '[t]o be in a frozen or suspended afterwards, it seems to be assumed, is the only proper ethical response to trauma' (2008: 210).[73] Narratives that take such an approach may do more harm than good, from an ethical perspective, since 'communal entrapment in melancholia can be regarded as a vehicle for renewing cycles of violence' (213). *Nacido y criado* corresponds, rather, to the type of trauma text 'that acknowledges yet seeks to *work through* the traumatic past, premising communality not on preserving trauma but on transforming its legacy' (213, original emphasis), because the film, whilst it acknowledges the scar left by trauma, does not keep its traumatized protagonist fixed in his frozen, suspended state indefinitely. Santiago *works through* his trauma to the extent that he is eventually able to leave Patagonia and return to Milli. Concurrent with this process of working through is the transformation of landscape from 'space' to 'place', achieved through the presence of the local community, in particular the 'family' of Robert and Cacique.[74] For, as Stein's value theory, discussed in Chapter One, demonstrates, valuing is *the* human activity par excellence, and the sharing of motivational energy amongst individual subjects is community-forming in the highest degree. Andermann notes that 'landscape in *Nacido y criado* is crucially not just a spatial figure for Santiago's inner desolation and shock […]. Rather, it is simultaneously registered as a social space, as *place*' (2012: 70, original emphasis). It is by humanizing 'space' in order to create a 'place' that Santiago's life recovers meaning; that he is able to regain his identity and return to the land of the living.

A key site in which the tension between space and place is manifested in *Nacido y criado* is the rudimentary airport where Santiago, Robert and Cacique work. On the morning after his sexual encounter with Betti and Robert, a restless Santiago experiments with the public address system at the airport (now deserted, due to poor weather conditions). He eats toast in front of the

[73] 'Afterwards', used as a noun, refers to the Freudian concept of *Nachträglichkeit*, or 'afterwardsness': a 'mode of belated understanding or retroactive attribution of […] traumatic meaning to earlier events' (de Lauretis 2008: 118).

[74] Tuan states that 'humanized space is place. Compared to space, place is a calm center of established values' (1977: 54).

microphone and listens as the noise generated by his chewing reverberates throughout the empty building and airfield. He sets off a deafening alarm which gets Robert out of bed in a panic, then calls to him over the loudspeaker, saying 'Come on over, I've made toast.' This absurd scene, as well as providing much-welcome comic relief, transforms the airport from anonymous space, a quiet, public airport in a remote location, into place, an arena now animated by a private – even intimate – human interaction. At the same time, this cathartic moment crucially marks Santiago's initiation into the process of working through trauma.

An emblematic part of this process is the idea of *sangre*, or blood, as the film's leitmotif that points not only to trauma, but also to the familial bond. By conflating trauma and kinship, the word *sangre* evokes the present-day crisis of the family and the ongoing transformation of what has traditionally been perceived as the foundational unit of society, both in Argentina and globally. Aguilar sketches the instability of a social order in crisis in the Argentine context thus: 'not only conjugal matrimonial ties but also familial ideas as entrenched as the heterosexual union, the stability of the group linked by ties of blood, the authority of ancestors, and the sense of belonging are in crisis' (2011: 33). What new social forms and structures will emerge from these familial crises are as yet unknown, giving rise to a profound sense of the precariousness of the social fabric, as was discussed in Chapter One in relation to Taylor's moral philosophy and as Aguilar goes on to note: '[h]ow can we construct an experience if modernity has swept away traditions but can no longer sustain itself as permanent renovation and provider of meaning? How can we create experiences from variability, precariousness, and accidents?' (41). In *Nacido y criado*, the accident functions as a catalyst for change, the shock of the car crash engendering a revised formation of community based on non-blood ties, and a non-normative assertion of 'family', which might also be read as a revised vision for nationhood.[75]

Indeed, Page notes that '[o]ne of the effects of the [Argentine] Crisis [of 2001] has been to promote changes in the imagined space of the nation' (2009:

[75] It is also notable that this type of familial configuration appears more supportive and stable than the families portrayed in Martel's and Carri's films, even though those families are tied by blood.

110). One form in which these changes have been represented in cultural production is 'first the internal fragmentation of the nation and then the consolidating effect of a shared experience of crisis' (110). In an allegorical reading, *Nacido y criado* might be said to follow such a form: the family (nation) is shattered by the car crash (crisis), giving way to a new configuration consolidated around the respective crises of the three men. This familial revision, however, ultimately proves unable to 'sustain itself as permanent renovation and provider of meaning' (Aguilar 2011: 41). Their shared crises bring the men together, but they all eventually return to their respective blood ties: Santiago reunites with Milli, Robert is reconciled with his girlfriend and accepts that he is to become a father, and Cacique's children and relatives rally round him following his wife's death. In this way, the film points towards the biological family as the social structure that is the primary source of meaning, and which, though itself in crisis, also functions as an antidote to crisis. Although it proposes an alternative form of communality based on bonds of solidarity and friendship in the wake of trauma, the film also upholds the value of blood ties; indeed, the 'born and bred' of the title, evoking the well-rehearsed nature-versus-nurture debate, would seem to affirm the parity of the terms.

Public Displays of Trauma: *Carancho*

In a similar vein to *Nacido y criado* and, indeed, Martel's *La mujer sin cabeza*, in *Carancho* the car crash is the motif around which the traumatic events of the film revolve. Whereas in the former, the crash is an isolated event whose fallout is portrayed in great detail, in the latter, accidents occur in proliferation; our view of how they affect the lives of those involved in them, however, is severely limited. In *Carancho*, the focus is not on the individual so much as on the system; and not just that system which generates the tragedies in the first place, but also that which feeds on them in a parasitic manner: the insidious business of insurance fraud. In other words, *Carancho* depicts 'disaster capitalism' – that is, 'the treatment of disasters as exciting market opportunities' – in its everyday form (Klein 2007: 6), whereby pain and trauma are exploited for profit.

The film tells the story of Sosa (Ricardo Darín), a lawyer who has lost his licence to practice and has resorted to working for the Foundation, a corrupt, mafia-type organization which deals in all manner of insurance fraud, including

cheating victims of traffic accidents out of their insurance settlements. Sosa is essentially an ambulance chaser, a human scavenger (albeit a reluctant one) on the streets of metropolitan Buenos Aires. When he falls in love with Luján (Martina Gusman), an overworked paramedic with a social conscience, he resolves to leave the Foundation and begin an honest life. The affable Sosa, however, is an indispensable asset to his employers, who would rather see him dead than let him leave with his loyal clients in tow.

Carancho was well-received by audiences, both in Argentina and internationally (it was distributed in North America by Strand Releasing), becoming the second-most viewed nationally-produced film in Argentina in 2010 (Losada 2011: 41). It also performed well on the festival circuit in Argentina and abroad, picking up several awards, including Best Narrative Feature at the Philadelphia Film Festival, and was nominated for the 'Un Certain Regard' award at Cannes. Perhaps the most significant impact of the film, however, was its influence in bringing about the so-called 'anti-*carancho'* law in Argentina, aimed at putting an end to the type of rampant exploitation and corruption in the insurance, legal and healthcare systems represented in the film. This, in itself, is testimony to the way that 'cinema does not occupy a space external to the events that it registers but is very much part of the economic system, the social relations, and the cultural milieu it might be supposed to depict', and thus also has the power to effect social change (Page 2009: 4).

Although there is a formal similarity between the opening titles of *Carancho* and those of *Nacido y criado* – a series of still images accompanies the title credits of both – there is a sharp contrast in tone between the two introductions. While *Nacido y criado* opens with family portraits, *Carancho* begins with a succession of still black-and-white images, shot in extreme close-up from ground level, of shocking scenes from a car wreck: shattered glass strewn across pavements, shards of twisted metal, isolated body parts. Amit Thakkar's observation, following an analysis of the Mexican film *Amores perros* (2000), aptly describes the scenario emerging here: '[f]lesh and shrapnel […] merge in crash cinemas […] perhaps to underline the perverse logic of a capitalist society hell-bent on technological growth' (2014: 13). This opening montage has a forensic quality, which creates a detached, objective tone, in contrast to *Nacido y criado*'s mood of familial intimacy. In *Carancho*, the series

of images is followed by a black screen, which conveys shocking statistics on death rates pertaining to traffic accidents in Argentina, as well as informing the viewer that a burgeoning indemnity market exists to exploit these accidents; this is neoliberal capitalism at its most brutal.

In a way that is at least reminiscent of Argentina's social activist, 'liberation' cinema of the 1960s – in particular, Getino and Solanas' iconic *La hora de los hornos* (1968), with its black screens bearing graphic revolutionary slogans – *Carancho*'s introduction establishes a strong element of social commentary. It sets up a contrast between the human bodies portrayed in all their flesh-and-blood vulnerability (what we might call personal trauma) throughout the remainder of the film, and a more statistical view of human life, in which personal trauma is incorporated into the realm of biopolitical power. Pieter Vermeulen helpfully summarizes the concept of biopolitics originally put forward by Michel Foucault (1980):

> Biopolitics and governmentality are dedicated to the care of life […]. Biopolitical institutions such as safety measures, insurance, and hygienic regulations address the vulnerability that is an essential aspect of (especially modern) life in order to equilibrate and regulate the accidence and contingency that afflict life. (Vermeulen 2014: 143)

What *Carancho* portrays, therefore, is a clear expression of the point at which biopolitics transgresses the boundary between *care* and *control*: a disturbing collapse of distinction between care for life and exploitation of vulnerability, within the parameters of legality. The ambulance chasers, or vultures, fashion themselves as social workers and are even considered as such by the very clients they are exploiting. In a way, this situation, in which trauma is caught up in a complex entanglement of medical and legal implications, is a logical progression of the historical trajectory of trauma itself, since '[t]rauma was from the beginning a "medico-legal" problem' that emerged 'as part of a (biopolitical) vocabulary to map, predict, and regulate the proliferation of physical accidents and psychological damage that modernity incited' (Vermeulen 2014: 147). This refers to the adoption of early concepts of trauma (which, as was outlined in Chapter One, oscillated between the physical, neurological and mental realms),

into the legal sphere, in relation to accident insurance claims during rapid industrialization in the nineteenth century.

The situation also underscores the precariousness of the socio-economic predicament in which Sosa's clients find themselves; the state, which is meant to protect them, has left them exposed and vulnerable. As Page notes, the state's power over biological life is one 'that is expressed to most devastating effect in weakness: the state's inability to uphold its part of the social contract' (2009: 193). What the film suggests, then, is that when the state fails in its duty of care towards its citizens, dubious private enterprises will step into the breach with their own corrupt brand of 'care', which inevitably becomes the only recourse for those who find themselves in sheer financial desperation.[76] The situation in which these people are left, therefore, is similar to that of the families of the disappeared under the military dictatorship of 1976-83, a regime that, though not itself a private enterprise, was actively committed to implementing the neoliberal policies that paved the way for the situation presented in *Carancho*. In other words, the destruction of autonomy and diminished capacity for resistance occasioned by the ruling class creates a society in which people can be more readily controlled, manipulated and exploited, in much the same way as were the families whose homes were violently raided or whose babies were taken from them by the junta during the dictatorship era.

The landscape of *Carancho*, like that of *Nacido y criado*, is a hostile one; but here, the hostility is not that of nature, but rather that of modernity – of the traffic, noise, and violence, both structural and physical, brought on by the economic hardship and corruption of the urban jungle. The hunting that is witnessed in *Nacido y criado* has here given way to scavenging, as human vultures feed off the scraps of physically traumatized bodies. In a similar fashion to *Nacido y criado*, in *Carancho* the body outwardly manifests trauma, as '[b]lood and bruises are naturalized on the corporeal landscape' (Losada 2011: 42). However, whereas damaged flesh is hidden away and protected in *Nacido y criado* (exemplified by Santiago's rigid refusal to remove his clothes and expose

[76] In this sense, *Carancho* shares conceptual links with other Latin American films that feature what Thakkar describes as a *choque* (or 'shock') aesthetic in the form of car crashes. For instance, in Alejandro González Iñarritú's *Amores perros* (2000) many of the film's characters are 'tragically predetermined by financial circumstances which are sometimes exacerbated by the neo-liberal economics of the 1990s' (2014: 23).

his scarred body), in *Carancho* that flesh is on public display – on the streets, in ambulances, and in the emergency rooms of rundown hospitals, where vulnerable bodies are exposed and violated by preying eyes, and where there seems to lurk a constant risk of contagion.[77] In one scene, Sosa and a male undertaker stand over the naked corpse of a woman on a mortuary table, discussing how she died and whether there is a husband to contact (the conversation is clearly not about social or medical care, but a business opportunity); the juxtaposition of the exposed female body and masculine business transaction is particularly disturbing here. In the midst of all this urban and moral decay, the doctor – the sole possessor of genuinely altruistic motives – is sick: Luján is so overworked that she resorts to injecting self-prescribed drugs in the hospital bathroom just to keep up with her exhausting schedule. Indeed, the hospitals in which Luján works are, paradoxically, inhospitable places, where dying patients might well be turned away or, worse, face physical assault or gunshot (as in one particularly high-tension scene), rather than be cared for or saved.

The trauma presented in *Carancho* corresponds with trauma in its etymological meaning; that is, as a wound of the flesh, from which psychological understandings of the term later evolved (Luckhurst 2008: 3). The graphic way in which physical violence is presented in *Carancho* is a distinctly barbaric representation of trauma. In one particularly visceral scene, for example, Sosa injects a tranquilizer into the arm of his friend Vega (José María Rivara), who is seemingly aware but unconcerned about what is about to unfold. Sosa props up Vega's leg and instructs him to hold it straight, then moves to the limits of the frame and re-emerges holding a sledgehammer. His intention is clear. He swings the sledgehammer and Vega erupts into an agonized scream. Sosa utters reassurances as he helps Vega outside; then he gets into a car and signals to a vehicle waiting nearby, which begins to move in Vega's direction. With perfectly timed precision, Vega steps off the footpath and throws himself in front of the

[77] This underscores Stein's characterization of psychic contagion as being the motivation in the mass form of collectivity, the type of collectivity in which persons view one another as objects rather than fellow subjects, as was discussed in Chapter One. Community, as we saw, is the form of collectivity in which subjects view one another as subjects, and this, by contrast, is what is portrayed in *Nacido y criado*.

oncoming car, smashing the windscreen before falling, bloodied and unconscious, onto the street.

Viewed comparatively, *Nacido y criado* and *Carancho* present an inversion of the civilization-barbarism dichotomy that has been a pervasive theme in Argentine cultural production since the nineteenth century (Sarmiento, 1988; first published in 1845). In the case of these films, the wilderness of Patagonia is, paradoxically, the civilizing locale, while the urban 'civilization' of Buenos Aires is home to the barbaric.[78] In *Carancho*, presenting trauma in such a visceral way carries distinct moral and ethical overtones. The self-inflicted violence of Sosa and Vega's staged accident is the lowest point of unethical conduct for Sosa, just as Luján's self-medication (or, rather, drug addiction) represents the lower limit on her scale of professional ethics. Although both Sosa and Luján are largely motivated by ideals of social justice, each appears to be trapped in a cycle of self-destruction from which, despite their efforts, neither has sufficient moral nor material resources to escape; indeed, in one of the concluding scenes, Luján admits that she enjoys the feeling she gets from drugs and expresses no desire to stop taking them. In *Carancho*, '[l]ife is emptied of ethics in the name of survival' (Losada 2011: 42). For the characters in the film, attempting to live ethically means certain death, so caught up are they in the web of corruption that is the system. The precariousness of the socio-economic backdrop to their lives has reduced the protagonists' capacity to make moral or ethical decisions or take action on them, even if they have the capacity to make such judgements in the first place. They are essentially in a shocked, PTSD-like condition of reduced autonomy and capacity for resistance, similar to that of the families of the disappeared in Argentina under the dictatorship.[79] Furthermore, as was stated in Chapter One, this condition is essentially that which characterizes the globalized age, since, as Stein has demonstrated, communities are analogous

[78] Page also notes that Eduardo Mignogna's *Cleopatra* (2003) 'rehearses a critique of materialism that has a long history in Argentine thought [which] inverts Sarmiento's formulation in *Facundo* to associate urban centers not with liberal values and civilization but with barbarism' (2009: 116). Similarly, María Luisa Bemberg's *Camila* (1984) renders metropolitan Buenos Aires a space of barbarism rather than civilization.

[79] It is also worth noting the continuity in this regard between well-documented manifestations of trauma occasioned by political systems, such as the Holocaust, and this more recent example of politically-induced trauma.

to individual subjects in a number of ways, suggesting that a communal experience of trauma analogous to individual trauma is possible.

The civilizing influence of family and community, so central to the symbolic framework of *Nacido y criado*, is almost entirely absent from *Carancho*. Family life is confined to the background stories of the clients whose lives have been shattered by accidents and who come to the Foundation looking for help; thus, it is always on the margins of the film's main action. The world inhabited by Sosa and Luján is one of profound isolation and alienation; they both live alone and, while Luján's brother is mentioned, Sosa's family life and background are never revealed to the audience. This isolation is perhaps what drives them into the cycle of self-destruction in which they end up: Luján's loneliness and lack of familial support might account for her poor judgement in becoming involved with Sosa and participating in his scams, to the extent of jeopardising her career and even her life. Similarly, Sosa's desire to win back Luján's respect and affection, pushing him to reckless extremes to escape the Foundation, perhaps stems from a need for inclusion and stability in the wake of his loss of professional credibility and in view of his being alone in the world. Sosa's proximity to his clients' suffering in a way mirrors the familial closeness that helps Santiago to work through his trauma in *Nacido y criado*, but in Sosa's case this contact rarely develops beyond a cold form of bureaucracy. Thus, his life remains in a frozen state of traumatic suspension, as though permanently scarred, with no hope of resolution. It is in a context similar to this that Page reads Argentine cinema's retreat into the private sphere as 'a critical intervention, signalling the failure of a bankrupt, dysfunctional state and emphasizing the primacy of biological life in times of severe economic crisis' (2009: 193).

Whilst *Nacido y criado* employs a realist aesthetic for representing trauma, in *Carancho* Trapero has taken another artistic route, opting for a genre production: a noir crime thriller in the vein of the global commercial blockbuster. This choice speaks to how the film negotiates issues surrounding globalization and the need to cater to both a national and international audience. It allows Trapero to negotiate the local within a global form, thereby accommodating the 'contradictory demands of local and global audiences' (Andermann 2012: 143). Andermann states that, within Argentina, critics tend to view genre production as

a way of 'replacing [the arthouse cinema of the 1980s] with a cinema that is at once popular, contemporary and formally and technically versatile' (143). International critics, on the other hand, 'have focused on genre as a mode of allegorising the national and global dimensions of neoliberal crisis', which, at the same time, can be read as 'a strategy of resistance for the remaking of (national) community' (143-4). To this effect, Losada makes a salient observation on how *Carancho* speaks to a global audience:

> For a thoughtful international audience […] the Argentina of *Carancho* will serve as a symptom, or a particularly exacerbated microcosm, of the rapidly globalizing economic norm of mafia capitalism – the slide into a post apocalyptic condition increasingly recognized as its own by an ever-growing sector of humanity – in which the state has been devastated and the law serves only those who can pay for its services, a condition Argentines are accustomed to, but one with which the Americans are only recently becoming familiar. (2011: 41)

Whilst highlighting the moral and ethical concerns that are dealt with in the film, Losada's reading is comparable to what Michael Rothberg describes as 'our positioning in this globalized scenario of exploitation and trauma'; he states that '[w]e are more than bystanders and something other than direct perpetrators in the violence of global capital. Rather […] we are *implicated subjects*, beneficiaries of a system that generates dispersed and uneven experiences of trauma and wellbeing simultaneously' (2014: xv; original emphasis). As well as being true of the characters represented in *Carancho*, this also applies to its viewers – the consumers of films as global products. The visceral scene described in the previous section, in which Sosa and Vega stage a mock accident, encapsulates the insidious violence fostered by the neoliberal system which, as Klein demonstrates (2007), make such high-risk actions profitable. Furthermore, the reaction the scene provokes in the audience, who inevitably avert their eyes as soon as the sledgehammer appears, also illustrates the way in which Kaplan's notion of 'vicarious trauma' (2005) might engender such 'implicated subjects'.

Conclusion: Towards a Biopolitical Perspective of Trauma

Vermeulen emphasizes the need for contemporary trauma studies to 'locate their ethico-political commitments within [the] biopolitical horizon' (2014: 151). He argues that 'the relation between *communitas* and *immunitas*' in Roberto Esposito's account of biopolitics consists in a dynamic 'that is structured very much like the scenario of traumatic encounter' (149), and thus might also be read as a theory of trauma:

> For Esposito, modernity is the name of the project that countered *communitas* by developing a massive apparatus of immunization. *Immunitas* is that which de-activates the mutual obligation that characterizes *communitas*. […] Modern thought mobilized notions such as sovereignty, personhood, property and liberty in order to shield the individual from the risk of contagion by the unpredictable effects of *communitas*. (148)

There is a crucial difference between Esposito's elaboration of biopolitics and that of Foucault (1980). In *Bíos: Biopolitics and Philosophy* (2008), Esposito takes Foucault to task on his hesitation 'between an understanding of biopolitics as a set of technologies of subjectivation (a politics of life) and the idea that biopolitics limits and consumes life (a thanatopolitical assault on life)' (Esposito 2008: 31-2, cited by Vermeulen). Foucault's work, in other words, 'does not explain how it is possible that "a power of life is exercised against itself"' (2008: 39, cited by Vermeulen). This task is taken up by Esposito via the key concept of immunity; or more precisely, the dual nature of immunity (or the immune system) as a boundary that protects from external threats but can also turn against itself and undermine its own defences, rendering the immune individual 'inherently *communal*' (Lewis 2015: 214; original emphasis). In this configuration, state power perhaps more closely resembles Rothberg's 'system that generates dispersed and uneven experiences of trauma and wellbeing simultaneously' (cited previously). However, whilst Esposito's task is largely a political one, his theory extends beyond the context of state mechanisms of power over life and death to the way immunity functions in all aspects of interpersonal life; it is, therefore, highly compatible with the structural approach to trauma put forward thus far in this chapter. The essential question in the notion

of immunity as a (porous) boundary in a constant state of tension with community is that of identity, and identity, 'the most basic ontological unit, the most primitive thing in existence, the individual substance' (Lewis 2015: 214), is, after all, what is at stake in the traumatic encounter and its aftermath.

Vermeulen's insights are pertinent in view of what has been discussed thus far in relation to *Nacido y criado* and *Carancho*. Firstly, he observes that '[m]odernity emerges with the diminishment of natural and transcendental protection' (2014: 149). It might be argued that the family (and community life, more broadly) constitutes one of these diminishing forms of natural protection.[80] He goes on to state that 'immunization does not consist in the outright exclusion or negation of community', but rather, '[i]n order to master the excessive and contagious dimensions of community, the process of immunization "homeopathically" includes what it excludes' (149). The word 'homeopathic', used interchangeably with 'structurally aporetic' by Esposito, corresponds to the immunization process that 'reproduces in a controlled form exactly what it is meant to protect us from' (Esposito 2011: 8) and is based on the etymology of the term; any link with the alternative medical practice is purely conceptual.

Reading Santiago's 'surrogate family' in Patagonia, then, as a kind of homeopathic strategy against the traumatic loss of his real family, it might be said that family, as a sort of community-in-micro (or 'controlled form' of community), functions, on some level, as a form of immunization against the contagion of the (now globalized) community. Furthermore, Vermeulen, in this vein, revises Sigmund Freud's repetition compulsion, which now becomes a 'homeopathic strategy through which life manages to contain – rather than deny – its self-defeating drive' (2014: 150).[81] If we read Santiago's surrogate family scenario as a form of repetition drive, in that it mimics his real family – not in order to negate it, but rather, in order to assist him in overcoming his familial trauma – this concurs with the hypothesis of a surrogate family acting as a homeopathic strategy of immunization. Santiago eventually returns to his family because he recognizes that he does not belong in this new scenario. For, as

[80] Aguilar's assertion, to the effect that 'familial ideas' and 'the sense of belonging are in crisis' (cited previously), as well as the readings of the two films that have been offered here, tend to support this claim.

[81] In repetition compulsion, 'the subject constantly relives traumatic scenes in the hope of belatedly processing unassimilable experiences' (Vermeulen 2014: 150).

Vermeulen notes, '[r]epetition can only develop into the healthy process of "working through" if working through […] is understood as a more productive and more successful way of containing – rather than cancelling – trauma' (2014: 150). Although it is through community that Santiago is able vicariously to work through his trauma, that particular community was never intended as a permanent arrangement; rather, it is in recognizing that he is not 'at home' in that new community that he reasserts his own identity and returns, albeit scarred, to a form of his original life. In other words, the (controlled) integration he experiences is just sufficient for him to find what he needs to return, rather than being an end in itself. The sexual encounter with Betti (a repetition, or subversion, of his conjugal intimacy with Milli) escalates his recovery process, not because of what it *is* (an attempt to cancel or negate traumatic loss), but rather because of what it *is not*; he is only able to recognize where he truly belongs through recognizing where he does not belong. In this way, 'repetition' develops into 'working through' because Santiago recognizes working through as a more successful way of containing, rather than eliminating, his trauma.

As noted previously, in the neoliberal society of *Carancho*, family is largely absent from the symbolic order (in part, an indication of the crisis of the family occasioned by modernism). In yet another morphosis of the now-familiar (traumatic) process of turning inside out, the flesh and blood that previously pertained to family here pertain, rather, to the marketplace, where flesh and blood, instead of having intrinsic or symbolic value, are now viewed in terms of market value. Globalization functions, at societal level, in a similar way to trauma, in the sense that, through a larger, less controllable community, it 'deactivates the immunization process that separates inside from outside, and ceaselessly exposes the subject to communication, contagion, and contamination' (2014: 151). The film demonstrates that the combined forces of globalization (the perceived threat of an overwhelming *communitas*) and the demise of the immunitary capacity of family, either the literal family or in the sense of a society characterized by social solidarity, leave that society in a condition that resembles a profound state of shock, whereby autonomy and capacity for resistance are diminished. This is evident both in the helplessness of the families who come to the Foundation for assistance, and in the inability of Sosa and

Luján to overcome their ethical shortcomings and break free from the cycle of destruction that threatens to overwhelm them.

The scenario concerning insurance fraud in *Carancho* demonstrates the way in which globalization 'reflects a condition in which immunization no longer works to shield life from accidence and contingency, but in which immunitary technologies have begun to generate danger and risk in order to perpetuate themselves' (2014: 151). The immunitary capacity of insurance no longer functions as it should in a society where flesh and blood have been assigned market value; and so 'danger and risk' are generated by Sosa and his contemporaries, exemplified by the fraudulent 'accident' in which Sosa breaks Vega's leg. Only retrospectively do we recognize *Carancho*'s opening shots of stills from a car wreck as pertaining, in fact, to the *final* scene of the film, where the car in which Sosa and Luján are fleeing is slammed by another vehicle at a junction. The audio that accompanies the (now familiar) stills from the final crash depicts the voice of a female paramedic providing emergency attention to Sosa and Luján, thus fatalistically mirroring the scene in which the ill-fated lovers first met. The circularity of the narrative suggests that the (biopolitical) compensatory immunization measures that have been put in place in the globalized society, such as insurance, health and legal services, are in fact bringing about the self-destruction of that society. In the globalized neoliberal world of *Carancho* there is none of *Nacido y criado*'s 'working through'; there is merely the endless reiteration of trauma. In the conclusion of the thesis, which follows, I reflect on this outcome in relation to what has been discussed in the other chapters, and to the theoretical framework that has informed them.

CONCLUSION

Trauma and Film in Dialogue

Viewed collectively, the chapters of the thesis present different manifestations of trauma appropriate to the various stages of life, development and sociality, demonstrating particularly vividly how it is expressed in and through the body. The order of the thesis chapters deliberately reflects this developmental progression and each of the films interrogates the relationships between mind and body, individual and collective, and private and public to varying degrees. Yet, at the same time, each chapter foregrounds one or other of these oppositional categories. In Carri's *La rabia* the focus is on early childhood and how the infant develops intersubjectively. The consequences when the supporting familial and social environment does not provide the adequate foundations and/or ongoing support for this process are evident both in that film and in Martel's trilogy, which reveals problems associated with the relationship between motherhood and adolescence, a key phase of identity formation and moral awakening. Trapero's films focus on sociality in the adult world, revealing tensions between notions of private and public.

This concluding chapter brings the films into dialogue with one another in order to set out the findings of the thesis comparatively, before considering the wider implications and limitations of this research. My original approach is a testament to the universality of these films, both in terms of themes and with regard to their critical appeal. They lend themselves to multiple interpretations that may transcend national boundaries, as well as political, ideological and philosophical divides. That Argentine cinema is capable of eliciting such a broad diversity of responses and attracting a high level of international success is evidence of its richness. This multivalent quality has undoubtedly contributed to the success of films associated with New Argentine Cinema, even if the term itself can be challenged. Conceiving trauma as a borderline structure when approaching the films permits us to address the increasing polarity and political tension between different ways of viewing the world: liberal/conservative, left/right, open/closed. This approach facilitates a nuanced and profound

exploration into the ways in which these contradictory categories might be in dialogue, and even in contention, with one another.

Keeping it in the family: trauma as theme and locus

The main site of traumatic experience depicted in the films discussed in the thesis is the domestic sphere: they all deal with families in some formation, some more conventional than others. The family, as both thematic focus and vehicle for transmission, is a unifying feature of this corpus of films and, in all of them, the family is seen to be in ongoing crisis, stemming from some form of traumatic event; Santiago's ongoing attempt to rebuild his life following the sudden loss of his wife and daughter in *Nacido y criado*; the way in which Vero is haunted by the accident she flees in *La mujer sin cabeza*, or the brutal and abusive family relationships portrayed in *La niña santa* and *La rabia* and the effects on the victims and witnesses. The family as an ontological anchor has a spectrum of manifestations ranging from supportive to detrimental in the films. Indeed, the family is somewhat paradoxical in all of them, in that, while it is often the source of trauma, and its consequent or related crises – for example, in *La rabia*, Martel's trilogy and *Nacido y criado* – that crisis pertains to the sense of 'homelessness' put forward in the introduction to this thesis. It is the dysfunctionality and fragmentation of the family that is the source of trauma and crisis. The symbolic support that the family would ideally provide is either broken or missing; either the family itself is the source of trauma, or the disintegration of the family is the result of uncontrollable circumstances which leave the individual protagonists traumatized in different ways.

Chapter Two's exploration of trauma – on Carri's *La rabia* – examined the social influence on the development of the brain and, therefore, the emotional life of the person. The human brain is more inherently social than that of animals, in that humans develop the social parts of the brain *outside* of the womb. This underscores that we are social beings that are made for interpersonal relationships – not merely relations governed by psychic contagion, but empathic, emotional responses to one another. Whilst this chapter focused on Carri's film, these findings are also highly applicable to Martel's films in relation to the crisis of motherhood that they represent and, indeed, to all of the films discussed in the thesis. As Dufays notes, *La rabia* 'stresses the violent nature of

family relationships, the "naturalization of violence", as the director puts it, which implies an "animalization" of the characters' (2014: 27). This echoes notable feminist theories, such as that of Shulamith Firestone, who refers to 'the tyranny of the biological family' (1970: 11) and holds that the family comprises 'an inherently un-equal power distribution' (9). *La rabia* upholds this perspective to a large extent; yet, Firestone also grants that the family, 'despite its oppressiveness, is now the last refuge from the encroaching power of the state, a shelter that provides the little emotional warmth, privacy, and individual comfort now available' (238). These contrasting views of the family affirm the biopolitical perspective that was advanced vis-à-vis Trapero's films in Chapter Four, which considered ways in which the family might act as a robust defence against the traumatic potentialities of biopolitical power.

Staying with this idea of natural determinism and the family, the question is whether the transmission of trauma is a matter of nature or nurture – as conjured by the title of Trapero's film, *Nacido y criado* – or whether it ultimately pertains to both (as that title also suggests). It is notable, for example, that both *La rabia* and *Carancho* employ circular narrative structures: in the former, the opening scene features the sound of barking and a rural landscape at dawn, followed by the scene in which Ladeado kills small animals that are trapped inside a bag. The film's penultimate scene is at night, when Ladeado shoots his father, followed by a shot of the landscape and the sound of barking, referring back to the opening scene. As Dufays notes, 'this narrative structure imprisons us within a circle of time', and with it, 'the film seems to convey the idea of a natural determinism. This determinism is tragic in that it is foreshadowed and suggested by the omnipresence of a nature that is crude in all its aspects' (2014: 28). Trapero's *Carancho* displays a similarly cyclical and fatalistic depiction of trauma and violence, since its closing scene (retrospectively) plays out the event (the fatal car crash) which was depicted in the opening shots. Both these directors' films engage with the idea of the distinction between human and animal, and how the processes of dehumanization associated with the separation of these two ontological categories opens the floodgates to violence and trauma. The notion of contagion is central to this same dehumanization process; in *Carancho*, the sick and festering bodies on display in hospital corridors, and in *La rabia* as the connotation of rabies, the identification of Nati with the

eviscerated pig, and the traumatic psychic contagion that affects her. The idea of contagion is also present in Martel's trilogy, but in a different way: it manifests as an obsession with hygiene and washing; for example, the rancid swimming pool that gives Momi a rash, and José's subsequent nicknaming her "*Momi sucia*" [dirty Momi] in *La ciénaga*; in *La niña santa*, it arises as a preoccupation with hair – a troublesome outbreak of head lice, and the cheap hotel shampoo that desiccates everyone's hair; in *La mujer sin cabeza*, it appears as Candita's hepatitis (indeed, the name "Candita" connotes a bacteria, candida, that causes yeast infections), Vero's incessant washing, and the rotten stench coming from the blocked canal. As Martin notes, this preoccupation with hygiene recalls Julia Kristeva's (1982) notion of the 'abject' and pertains to the 'logic of exclusion' (Martin 2013: 151), which performs a similar function to the dehumanization processes played out in Carri's and Trapero's films. A more overt example of this process is the confusion over the victim of the hit-and-run and the conflation of the boy with a dog in *La mujer sin cabeza*, which, like in *Carancho*, calls into question the way human life, particularly that which is vulnerable, is valued, and the ethic of care that is the responsibility of the individual, the community and the state.

Locating trauma: landscape and environment

As discussed in the individual chapters on the different directors and their work, in all of the films, location and landscape are implicated to some degree in the way that trauma and crisis are represented. All of the films apart from *Carancho* are set in rural areas (albeit in different parts of Argentina), whose diverse geophysical and climatic qualities provide the perfect backdrop for the particular manifestations of trauma therein. The exposed and arid Pampas in *La rabia* is reflected in the exposure, vulnerability and nakedness of the characters, in particular Nati and Alejandra, evoking the 'forced open state' associated with trauma. The stifling tropical wetlands of the northern province of Salta in Martel's trilogy connote a sense of stagnation, claustrophobia and entrapment that have emotional reverberations for the characters in the films, recalling the threatening character of trauma. The frigid remoteness of Patagonia in *Nacido y criado* acts as a visual metaphor for Santiago's mental and emotional inertia, suggesting a mental state that is 'closed' indefinitely in the attempt to contain

and encapsulate traumatic experience. These landscapes are archetypal in terms of the Argentine historical imaginary, which, on the one hand, tends to reinforce the civilization/barbarism trope. On the other hand, it showcases the kind of primal or innate violence that occurs out of sight of the city, suggesting that it is not only the neoliberal urban centre that is the locus of violence – that trauma is everywhere, and it transcends the boundaries that ostensibly separate us all. Indeed, even *Carancho* is set in the conurbation of La Matanza in *Gran* [Greater] Buenos Aires, as opposed to the city itself.[82] Stein describes landscape as a material source of lifepower for both individual and communal life, characterizing it as a 'disposition' which operates just as contagiously upon the individual as other people's moods and dispositions do. The way landscape is presented in all of these films – its role as a metaphor and visual idiom for the trauma experienced by those who inhabit it – certainly bears this out. For Stein, such dispositions are community-forming, and this is illustrated in *Nacido y criado*, in which the wild 'space', or blank slate, of snowy Patagonia is transformed – and *transformative* – and becomes a 'place', through the socializing influence of the group of friends that become Santiago's alternative family and support him in confronting his loss.

To summarize how these interconnections between the films have been achieved, the thesis has established an innovative framework for exploring trauma, offering an original approach to the manifold ways in which it is presented in the films that I have investigated. Indeed, the multifarious representations of trauma presented in the films by Carri, Martel and Trapero that were chosen for this study show that a more inclusive framework was needed. By setting out a structural approach in Chapter One, my analysis reworked our understandings of trauma as it is presented in these films, problematizing the term and engaging with it in a more nuanced way than previous studies. By applying a structural reading to the work of these three directors, the thesis marks a distancing from the typically post-Holocaust notion of trauma as unrepresentable, with the inherent connotations of the impossibility of cultural representation implied by such an axiom (a point I return to briefly below). In fact, the films showed precisely that trauma is represented cinematically in

[82] Trapero grew up in this area, whose name means 'the killing', or 'slaughter', and is also the name of the director's film production company.

complex and contrasting ways. Furthermore, they drew our attention to wider issues that are often attendant upon trauma, such as moral and ethical dilemmas, and different ways of being in the world. Whilst they contrast in aesthetics and employ diverse cinematic strategies, the films display comparable narrative approaches to trauma, whereby pivotal, shocking events are internalized by the protagonist, thus converting bodily shock into psychological trauma. I have found that the forms of trauma represented in these films go beyond the political, to the very heart of the human condition and that they offer unique insights into how the individual negotiates the moral and ethical ambiguities associated with trauma. The different ways in which these films engage with violence and trauma demonstrate how these phenomena occupy the ambiguous spaces between the body and the psyche, the individual and the collective, and the private and political spheres.

Beyond Argentine Cinema? Theoretical Approaches and Applications

My analysis has implications for the study of Argentine film, constituting a notable contribution to the literature. Proposing that the term 'New Argentine Cinema' requires re-evaluation, the thesis has opened the work of these directors to a field of critical analysis in which none of these films has previously been read, as outlined in the Introduction. Whilst this framework provides the basis for further comparative work on Argentine film, that scrutinizes trauma in this way, for example, in comparing *Los rubios* and *La rabia* more directly, or other works from the directors studied here, it is in theoretical reconceptualization of trauma that this thesis has the potential to deepen discussion on a number of issues. In particular, by revisiting and introducing the sorely underutilized work of Edith Stein, framing cultural production and Stein's work in a novel way, I hope that this can be taken up beyond the selection of films and broader contexts discussed in this thesis. In general, Stein's delineation of the role of empathy and its conduciveness towards more holistic, person-centred forms of reflexivity and intersubjectivity is highly informative for pedagogical practices across the disciplines. The close attention she pays to embodiment, affect and empathy are particularly applicable to the other visual arts, as well as to performance and theatre studies. Indeed, Stein's work also offers much potential for development in application to trauma and the study of identity in the humanities – in cultural

production and possibly beyond. One point of contention in trauma theory has revolved around the identification of trauma as either a physiological/neurological or a psychological problem. While the structural approach demonstrated that ultimately trauma is a problem concerning meaning and identity, Stein's theory shows how all these – body, psyche, meaning (in terms of her value theory) and identity – are deeply interconnected in a complex network of relations between body, individual and community. She draws clear distinctions between the law of the psyche and the law of the spirit, delimiting what pertains to each. Trauma is equally connected to both of these realms; this is why it is a boundary phenomenon (psyche/body and spirit/meaning). Her work demonstrates the interconnectedness of the individual and the community. Even an individual person is not an island, for to be a 'self' entails reflection and being 'given' to oneself. In Stein's theory, the 'borders and boundaries' between the individual and the community are, rather, a porous relationship that is in a constant state of negotiation in lived experience, in which meaning is simultaneously being created and drawn upon by both the individual and collective. It thus helps us to reflect on what communal life is and how it could be in order for there to come about the optimum flourishing of human life in all its myriad forms and manifestations: culture, morality, wellbeing, solidarity, meaningfulness – all of which are implicated in trauma. Stein elucidates the intimate dynamic that exists between, on the one hand, the body and the individual psyche and, on the other, individual bodies and psyches together in communal living, through the concept of the stream of experience which pertains both to individuals and communities. The idea of the stream of experience demonstrates that the individual and the community are not compartmentalized and never can be; that they are intimately interconnected and simultaneously influence each other in the form of a synergy. The meaningful framework that the community and living in community provides for the individual could act as a strong defence against traumatic forces, or help to restore normality more easily and quickly after traumatic experience, either individual or collective.

To return to the notion of how we represent and conceive trauma (as the overarching aim in this thesis), it is notable that Stein's work pre-dates the Holocaust. The implication of this for our understanding of trauma is that her thought is not influenced by the overarching notion of collective trauma and

unrepresentability tropes of the post-Holocaust world. The efficacy of Stein's call for a rich inner life as a defence against trauma is poignantly illustrated by Viktor E. Frankl, a psychiatrist who has written extensively about his own experience as a prisoner at Auschwitz. In reflecting on life in the camp, he writes:

> In spite of all the enforced physical and mental primitiveness […], it was possible for spiritual life to deepen. Sensitive people who were used to a rich intellectual life may have suffered much pain (they were often of a delicate constitution), but the damage to their inner selves was less. They were able to retreat from their terrible surroundings to a life of inner riches and spiritual freedom. Only in this way can one explain the apparent paradox that some prisoners of a less hardy make-up often seemed to survive camp life better than did those of a robust nature. (1962: 35)

The insights Frankl gleaned from living through the Holocaust also challenge some entrenched post-Holocaust assumptions about trauma. In relation to Adorno's assertion concerning poetry after Auschwitz, cited previously, Frankl's observations are pertinent; on thinking about his wife (who, unbeknownst to him, was already dead) while in the concentration camp, he says:

> for the first time in my life I saw the truth as it is set into song by so many poets, proclaimed as the final wisdom by so many thinkers. The truth – that love is the ultimate and the highest goal to which man can aspire. Then I grasped the meaning of the greatest secret that human poetry and human thought and belief have to impart: *The salvation of man is through love and in love*. (36, original emphasis)

Whilst further discussion of this topic is beyond the scope of the thesis, Frankl's thoughts call to mind a brief scene from Trapero's *Carancho*, one which is more heartening perhaps than the bleak cycles of violence depicted in the film. The sole exception to Sosa and Luján's apparent alienation from family life occurs when they attend a birthday party for the daughter of one of Luján's patients, who has also become Sosa's client. As Sosa and Luján dance together, laughing and mingling among these newfound family and friends, they appear truly

‘themselves’ – joyful, fulfilled and at ease – for the first and only time throughout the film. Perhaps this scene affirms that a possible antidote or panacea to trauma is some form or sense of ‘home’.

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