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Permalink
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Publication Date
2008-02-01
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Schizoanalysis must devote itself with all its strength to the necessary destructions. Destroying beliefs and representations, theatrical scenes. And when engaged in this task no activity will be too malevolent.1

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guttari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*

Manuel Puig’s *El Beso de la mujer araña* (1983) and Ricardo Piglia’s *Plata quemada* (1997) present unlikely tragic heroines. The works examine the problem of heteronormativity as central to the Argentine totalitarian state and also post-dictatorial neo-liberal democracy, provoking simultaneously a critique of the biological determinism inherent in a reification of the term “woman.” Puig’s novel implies that the naturalization of the sexual binary is not only a problem in the totalitarian drive for power but also in the revolutionary movements which have contested such rule. The novels appear as the literary vanguard’s challenge to mass culture’s drive for cultural homogenization and historical revision. Whereas Puig’s Molina parodies the construction of the *femme fatale*, performing what José Amícola terms as “repetition with critical difference,”2 Piglia’s Dorda exposes the illegitimate rhetoric of democratic consensus under the *dictadura económica*.3 As the latter states, “la literatura tiene una lógica que no siempre es la lógica del consenso.”4 The schizophrenic character emerges as subject who lives between the materiality and fantasy of financial capital and between the categories of man and woman which work in tandem with “free” market economics.

Analyzing the regime of value produced in the wake of the Argentine dictatorship through the lens of schizophrenia also provides an alternative hermeneutic lens for unraveling the history of the gendered subject in Argentinean literature and politics. Playing with realist temporality and narrative, Puig and Piglia unravel European and Argentinean archetypes of *civilización* and *barbaria* as well as the modes of emplotment through which the rhetoric of barbarism works as a gendered allegory of the nation.5 Analyzing gender through the framework of schizophrenia engages with the paradox of desire under late capitalism, engages both the materiality and idealism of gender politics,
and opens the field of women’s studies to subject positions which navigate between “man” and “woman.”

The Reification of Gender Under Neo-liberal Rule

In *Tiempo Presente: Notas sobre el cambio de una cultura*, Beatriz Sarlo states Argentina and Chile have the “tragic privilege” of maintaining democratic entitlement as an open-ended question for all time. Sarlo contemplates the epistemological and representational crisis generated in the transition to democracy. As capitalism relinquishes responsibility for State-sponsored atrocity and the State relinquishes responsibility for capital-sponsored atrocity, the networks of control and dissent become increasingly more diffuse and difficult to demarcate as real. As social benefits erode, unemployment increases, the public sector shrinks and mass culture saturates everyday life; consumption regulates the rhetoric of necessity.

The post-dictatorial articulation of value (codified as both economic and moral) relies on a digitalized network; cyber space becomes the medium through which democracy both represents the idealized polis and connects with the citizen. The flow of American movies, music, rhetoric and aesthetics replaces the dictatorial state. The periphery becomes both a consumer market and labor source while democracy becomes aesthetic. As Deleuze and Guttari state, “The Third World is deterritorialized in relation to the center of capitalism but belongs to capitalism, being a pure peripheral territory of capitalism.” Although capitalism extricates itself from the State, it perpetuates territorial inequity and dependency through such systems as foreign aid. By using the adjective “pure,” Deleuze suggests neo-liberal post-colonial states are now in the same position as prior to independence. Likewise, neo-liberal policies such as Mercosur and NAFTA propose to do business in Latin America without being accountable for social costs or the provision of democracy.

Extricating itself from the dictatorship, the Argentinean transition to a more liberal market system doesn’t emancipate but rather economizes domination. Deleuze’s concept of the “war-machine” foreground neo-liberalism’s violence while writing against the grain of the phonocentric subject. While dictatorial state asserted rule as through an “institutionalized, regulated, coded war, with a front, a rear, battles,” neo-liberalism
emerges as a “war without battle, without neither confrontation nor retreat, without battle lines.” On the one hand, “war” describes the violence of emergent regimes of value operating as de-territorialized regimes of government. Puig and Piglia deliberately play with the dictatorial and post-dictatorial codification of “State” and “war” simultaneously evacuating these terms of singularity.

Although neo-liberalism veils itself as the more egalitarian political alternative to the dictadura militar, the new regime of value insists on unilateral power. In its desperation to conceal previous codes of war, ideologues employ a neo-realism promoting an aesthetic “hegemony of the technical.” The following is an expert from an American academic journal about the need for a neo-liberal policy in Latin America. Albert R. Coll, Professor of Strategy and Policy at the United States Naval War College, states:

As of 1997, the United States faces an unprecedented degree of security, stability, and economic prosperity in its relations with Latin America. Never before have U.S. strategic interests in Latin America been as well-protected or have its prospects seemed, at least, on the surface, so promising... The most fundamental has been the spread of so-called economic “neo-liberalism.” When headed by tough, capable leaders such as Alberto Fujimori and Carlos Menem, democratic governments can exhibit the confidence and resilience necessary to implement programs of economic austerity and other painful measures required by the transition to a less statist economic system... The strengthening of democratic traditions is expected to rescue Latin American societies from the chronic chaos produced by military governments and caudillista dictatorships lacking legitimacy. The United States can be perceived as encouraging a set of economic policies and trends, but it can not afford to be seen as dictating or imposing its will.

This passage documents the neo-liberal definition of sovereignty as the “rule of law” and metropolitan control. The same scientific and juridical metaphors that reify the figure of the post-dictatorial liberated woman also represent neo-liberalism as ideologically flexible and neutral. Coll downsizes the State, privileges the market and promotes a neo-realist aesthetic. At once, he invokes over a centuries worth of literary myths and popular fictions about Latin America.

Mythologies

In the above passage, the Commander refers to a masculinist myth actually produced by Argentinean literary nationalism– the caudillo. Ironically, the Commander’s slip shows how myth or “depoliticized speech” travel through unpredictable global
circuits of exchange and value. The caudillo myth surfaces also in the fiction of Jorge Luis Borges’ *Obras Completas*, Eduardo Gutierrez’s *El Chaco* and Domingo F. Sarmiento’s *Facundo o Civilización y Barbaria* (1845) and *El Chaco: último caudillo de la montonera de los Llanos* (1866). This body of literature documents the caudillo presence in the cultural imagination.iii In addition, as historian Ariel De La Fuentes’ *Children of Facundo* documents, the Argentine caudillo myth was Sarmiento’s reproduction of a European myth about the “despotic” and “typical” governmentality of “Oriental societies.iv Sarmiento relies on European narratives of “barbarism” to legitimize liberal rule in the Americas. A century later, Coll resuscitates the “caudillo” as a particularly powerful “real” image for resurrecting Argentine nationalism during the neo-liberal era.

Images of female normativity served as rhetorical devices in the disciplining of a Argentine nationalism. In *El Matador*, Echeverría codes the Pampa as a place of untamed terror and desire. Sarmiento, on the other hand, recodes the countryside through the mythical and hyper-masculine figure of the gaucho. As historian Ariel de la Fuente reveals, the gaucho as a literary and national archetypes emerged during a time of war. This mythology gives way to Argentina’s self-concept as “child of the Occident” but “Father of its own Orient.” The urban letrado’s social role was particularly important in creating an illusion of unity and consensus.

Neo-liberal rhetoric has a particular knack for packaging old myths as new news. Literary critics such as Roberto Gonzalez Echeverría find the “figure of dictator” as the “foundational myth of modern history of Latin America.”xv Piglia names this body of literature “el museo de la novela de la eterna,” necessarily placing the national sovereign at the center of universal history. For Piglia, the specter of Sarmiento serves as a reoccurring trope. Piglia critiques Sarmiento’s manipulations of space, the codification of the primitive and untamed as woman. The rendering of two “irreconcilable” but “symmetrical” spaces between the Pampa and the State disrupts the illusion of cohesion and foregrounds Argentina’s necessarily antagonistic origins. Sarmiento’s realism, however, simultaneously reifies both gender and poverty.xvi

The twentieth century “boom” repeats the caudillo myth in the monstro novel as a Latin American allegory.xvii For example, the figure of the Latin American despot as the
central character emerges in Gabriel García Márquez’s *El Otoño de la patria*, Mario Vargas Llosa’s *La Fiesta del chivo* and Julia Alvarez’s *In the Time of the Butterflies*. Boom novels reproduce Sarmiento’s realist theory of “negative consciousness” by narrating consciousness as not outside the subaltern realm. The boom novel becomes “the absolute of the place where history is narrativized into logic.” Unlike Puig and Piglia, the boom novels negate formal and meta-historical self-reflection.

Thus, when Carlos Menem proclaims “*sempre habrá pobres*” he draws from a Pandora’s Box of representations about the Argentine periphery. The impetus behind Menem’s statement can be traced to nineteenth-century liberalism and the Argentine Novel. As proponents of liberal market policies, Malthus and Adam Smith also portray poverty as a supplement to natural law.\(^{18}\) Ironically, the anesthetization of democratic emancipation in the boom novel becomes the very negation of Latin American self-rule under neo-liberalism. Piglia’s essay “Tres propuestas para el próximo milenio (y cinco dificultades),” shows how the language of economics relies on technocratic laws of linguistic regularity. As he states, “Los economistas buscan controlar tanto la circulación de las palabras, como el flujo de dinero.”\(^{19}\)

*The Heroine’s Response*

We no longer know if it is the process that must truly be called madness, the sickness of being only disguise or caricature, or if the sickness is our only madness and the process our only cure. But in any case, the intimate nature of the relationship appears directly in the inverse ratio: The more the process of production is led off course, brutally interrupted, the more the schizo-as-entity arises as a specific product.\(^{20}\)

The schizophrenic texts *El Beso* and *La Plata* break open the reification of gendered and subjugated consciousness. Puig’s fragmented page, the fiction of the citation, works within the novel form to disrupt the seamless narratives of *civilization* and *barbaria*, sex and gender, resistance and democracy. *El Beso* also explores the installation of what Hannah Arendt termed as the establishment of the “minority as a permanent institution,” breaking the seamless reproduction of narrative through the interruption of footnotes. Unlike Arendt, Puig relates heteronormativity as “the rule of arbitrary administration and despotism.”\(^{21}\) Puig correlates the institutionalization of
queerness and women with “minorities” to the ascent of medical-legal language. As he states,

La homosexualidad se construye como categoría medico-legal en el momento en que se fundan instituciones orientadas a controlar y vigilar la producción de identidades colectivas bajo la noción de ciudadanía en una sociedad que se vuelve cada vez más cosmopolitana y se percibe amenazada en su identidad nacional.xxii

In this passage, Puig works contrary to the naturalization of the category of woman, also arguing that liberal democracy posits a binary between citizenship and homosexuality. In a similar vein, in the essay “El error gay” Puig speaks to the history of queer invisibility, an invisibility that neither the worker’s movement nor the field of women’s studies has fully confronted. Molina states, referring to gender normativity in a liberal democracy: “Los homosexuales no existen. Existen personas que practican actos sexuales con sujetos de su mismo sexo, pero este hecho no debería definirlos porque carece de significado.”xxiii A footnote accompanies Molina’s statement which quotes Herbert Marcuse’s comment, “the liberation requires a new morality and revision of the notion of the ‘natural man.’”xxiv Here, Molina suggests the invisibility of queer life from there civic sphere is produced not by the lack of same sex encounter but by a silence which does not “caress” signification. The suggestion, hence, is that the entire construction of the political under dictatorship is produced by this erasure (an erasure that reifies sexual difference).

Why then does the field of women’s studies insist on this reification in order to assert a political agenda? Perhaps Deleuze’s account of the neurotic impulse in modernist thought provides a provisional answer. Neurosis, as opposed to psychosis, is a “psychic repression….such that social repression becomes desired.” Deleuze criticizes the following neurotic assumptions (1) the patient is mad, (2) art reflects reality and (3) the cure is re-integration into society. Echoing Deleuze, Puig questions the Oedipal drive at the center of totalitarian and neoliberal power where the woman is naturalizes as woman in the drive to reify a patriarchal matrix of authority and address. In a remote footnote, citing Freud’s “Psychoanalytic Theory of Neurosis,” Puig describes Argentina as a neurotic child in need of an adult hero as a model of conduct. He continues by stating that “en nuestra sociedad, la occidental, esa visión tiene un componente de agresividad.”xxv Here, Puig is critiquing the myth of the tragic hero in literatura. As Puig
presents his mode of representing gender: “abajo del vidrio viene una luz, entonces las caras están iluminadas de abajo, y los cuerpos echan una sombra medio siniestra contra los paredes, sombras de gigantes, y la regla del dibujo parece una espada cuando él o la colega la agarran para trazar una línea.”

The schizophrenic subject, however, neither woman nor man, allows the sublimated to return (at least as a fragment of the story). In schizo-art, narration is self-reflexive —- revealing the disjuncture and modes of management by which the gendered self is produced. The text inverts dominant signs and archetypes, emptying them of meaning without claiming to be outside them. Schizo-analysis challenges serial logic, playing with the narratives of gender normativity under Argentina’s liberal democracy. For Deleuze, “Schizophrenia is like love: there is no specifically schizophrenic phenomenon or entity; schizophrenia is the universe of productive and reproductive desiring machines. Art often takes advantage of this property of desiring-machines by creating veritable group fantasies in which desiring-production is used to short-circuit social production, and to interfere with the reproductive function of technical machines by introducing an element of dysfunction.”

Piglia echoes Deleuze in his description of Dorda, as does Puig in the loves scenes between Molina and Valentin. As Piglia states, the schizophrenic “Oía voces, entonces (según Bunge), el Gaucho Rubio. No siempre, a veces, adentro del cerebro, entre las placas del cráneo. Mujeres que le hablaban, le daban órdenes. Ése era su secreto y hubo que hacerle varios tests y varias consultas con hipnosis para que fueran apareciendo los contenidos de esa música íntima.” The “intimate music” that Dorda hears is somewhere between the social construction of man and woman regulated by the neo-liberal Argentine state.

For Piglia, the madness is the machine and the history of that machine. Plata’s doesn’t seek to narrate the margin’s unconscious as an unmediated voice. As he states, “No se trata de ver la presencia de la realidad en la ficción (realismo), sino de ver la presencia de la ficción en la realidad (utopia). hombre utópico. En el fondo, son dos maneras de concebir la eficacia y la verdad.” Both Deluze and Piglia show the intimidation that dominant society feels in the face of schizophrenics. The social anxiety springs from society’s inability to tract a real voice. As Piglia shows, “Los que matan por matar es porque escuchan voces, oyen hablar a la gente, están comunicados con la
central, con la voz de los muertos, de los ausentes, de las mujeres perdidas, es como un
zumbido, decía Dorda, una cosa electrónica que hace cric, cric adentro del mate y no te
deja dormir.” As Deleuze states, capital represses the latent schizophrenia in a market
economy. The madness is the “schizophrenic age” not the schizophrenic.

When Piglia refers to “la voz de la autoridad,” he mimics Sarmiento and
Echeverría. A Piglia claim, Argentina’s “first displacement” was caused by the
distinction sex distinction in Echeverría’s El Matador. Dorda hears la cautiva’s voice in
his ear. Piglia represents the canonical gaucho narrative as a recurring sound. He states,
“Siempre había sido objeto de interés para los médicos, los psiquiatras. El criminal nato,
el hombre que se ha desgraciado de chico, muere en su ley.”

Piglia does not seek to contain the gaucho’s voice. Plata ends with: “La voz, al Gaucho, le salía firme y toda la
ciudad estaba quieta, en silencio, y su voz sonaba como la voz de Dios que llega desde lo
alto, la voz del Santísimo, allá en el pueblo.”

The novels warn against writing resistance narratives that mimic nature. Valentin
was duped by the notion that he can escape the ubiquitous role of desire under capitalist
and authoritarian rule. As Deluze states, “the way a bureaucrat fondles his records, a
judge administers justice, a business man causes money to circulate; the way the
bourgeoisie fucks the proletariat, and so on...Hitler got the fascists aroused. Flags,
nations, armies, banks get a lot of people aroused.”

Punctuated with irony, Puig’s and Piglia’s novels break down the romance of
commodity exchange. There are two pivotal textual moments when Piglia cracks the
image of money as the embodiment of heterosexual consummation. As the pile of bills
reflects in the mirror, the reader is forced to contend with the fact money’s hallucinatory
power to produce a society in its mirror image. La Plata represents the “desiring-
machine” as a pathological system where technological images project heterosexual
consummation as consumption. In the moment Dorda burns the money and social outrage
begins, Piglia reveals a system driven by the desire for money (pieces of papers) as un-
productive desire. In addition, Puig and Piglia re-write bourgeois myths of love through
the queering of the hero figure. In both the novels, the hero becomes the heroine. In the
heroine’s story, a heroine in between sexual categorization, is a new theory of the
gendered subject – a schizophrenic subject who challenges the foundational fictions not
only of Argentinean state formation but also within the study of the relationship between women.


ii José Amícola, “Camp y posvanguardia” (Buenos Aires: Paidos), 53.

iii See Osvaldo H. Rial’s *La Dictadura económicas* (Buenos Aires: Galerna, 2001).


v Francine Masiello, *Between Civilization and Barbarism: Women, Nation, and Literary Culture in Modern Argentina* (University of Nebraska, 1992).


viii *Anti-Oedipus*, 374.


xiii Ariel de La Fuente’s *Children of Facundo* (Durham and London: Duke University, 2000) cites these novels as ones that represent caudillo narratives.

xiv De la Fuente, 3.


xvii Avelar, 13.

xviii David Harvey: “Population, Resources and the Ideology of Science,” *Economic Geography*, vol. 50, no. 3 (Clark University, 1974), 259.


xx *Anti-Oedipus*, 136.


xxiii Ibid.


xxv Puig, *El Beso*, 141.

xxvi *Anti-Oedipus*, 30.


xxix *Anti-Oedipus*, 275.