

INTRODUCTION

CAPITALISM, POLITICAL VIOLENCE, AND RESISTANCE IN CONTEMPORARY ARGENTINE LITERATURE

IN 1969 IN HIS SHORT TEXT “WHAT IS AN AUTHOR?” MICHEL FOUCAULT applied his investigations into the nature of power relations to literary history.¹ Some six years later, Ricardo Piglia published the short story “Homenaje a Roberto Arlt” (1975) and created a literary experiment that synthesized his previous critical work in literary form and posed the question he perceived to be fundamental to all literary criticism: “¿cómo funciona la ficción en la sociedad?” (how does fiction function in society?).² A brief discussion of Piglia’s text from the perspective provided by Foucault’s will serve to illuminate the motivations and objectives of the present study. This is not, however, meant to suggest that Piglia consciously conceived of his literary text as a meditation on Foucault’s critical work. While the publication of Piglia’s diary does demonstrate that the Argentine author was familiar with Foucault’s writing, it is equally clear that Piglia drew on vastly different sources to create this particular text.³ Indeed, as we shall later see, the very fact that Piglia was not directly influenced by Foucault but that the two authors consistently demonstrate parallel concerns is of particular importance in and of itself.

In Foucault’s celebrated essay, he argues that “an author’s name is not simply an element of speech” but is in fact “functional in that it serves as a means

of classification.”⁴ Thus he argues that “the ‘author function’ is not universal or constant in all discourse.”⁵ Instead, each written text exists within a network of power relations in any given society, and the “author function” is a mutable concept that is shaped through their application. As Foucault traces the genealogy of the “author function,” he writes that:

First, they are objects of appropriation; the form of property they have become is of a particular type whose legal codification was accomplished some years ago. It is important to notice, as well, that its status as property is historically secondary to the penal code controlling its appropriation. Speeches and books were assigned real authors, other than mythical or important religious figures, only when the author became subject to punishment and to the extent that his discourse was considered transgressive. In our culture—undoubtedly in others as well—discourse was not originally a thing, a product, or a possession, but an action situated in a bipolar field of sacred and profane, lawful and unlawful, religious and blasphemous. It was a gesture charged with risks long before it became a possession caught in a circuit of property values.⁶

Thus, as in all his work, Foucault’s analytical technique “consists of taking the forms of resistance against different forms of power as a starting point” and “of using this resistance as a chemical catalyst so as to bring to light power relations, locate their position, and find out their point of application and the methods used.”⁷ For Foucault it is only when discourse expressed its “transgressive” qualities that the author function came into being. A further salient point for the present discussion is that, although the function of the author’s name was once to assign judgment, to decry, and to punish, following the advent of capitalism, discourse became little more than “a possession caught in a circuit of property values.”

In “Homenaje a Roberto Arlt,” Piglia claims to have discovered “el único relato de Arlt que ha permanecido inédito después de su muerte” (the only Arlt story that has remained unpublished after his death), and the text contains the “Arlt” story and a critical prologue and explanatory notes written by Emilio Renzi, Piglia’s literary alter ego.⁸ By now Piglia’s literary subterfuge is well established: the text apparently composed by Arlt is in fact a plagiarized copy of a Spanish translation of a text (*Las tinieblas*) by Russian author Leonid Andreyev.⁹ The Andreyev text in question was an apposite selection as it demonstrates many key features of Arlt’s work, and as Ellen McCracken notes, for a time the story was catalogued as Arlt’s in libraries, and certain critics “analyzed it as if it were indeed his.”¹⁰ Moreover, the conception of plagiarism as a creative endeavor creates a strong link to such stories as “Pierre Menard, autor

del *Quijote*” by Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges. Indeed, many critics note that the text effectively synthesizes the literary projects of Borges and Arlt, and several have even argued that the text could equally be titled “Homenaje a Borges.”¹¹ Investigations in this direction have frequently led to what Bruno Bosteels characterizes as a “fairly common reading, restricted to the intertextual effects of plagiarism.”¹² For the present purposes, however, rather more important are those interpretations that note that the “crime of plagiarism is not a moral or literary problem but an economic one because it violates the laws of private property,” and those which follow Piglia’s own reformulation of Argentine literary history in which “los mecanismos de falsificación, la tentación del robo, [y] la traducción como plagio” (the mechanisms of falsification, the temptation of theft, [and] translation as plagiarism) are the essential components of “la tradición argentina” (the Argentine tradition).¹³ In the first instance, economic interpretations of Piglia’s story serve to demonstrate that it resists the “circuit of property values” inscribed in the contemporary author function.¹⁴ In the latter case, it would appear that for Piglia the fundamental feature of Argentine literary history is that it transgresses the dominant relations of power at any given moment due to its insistent contravention of the norms dictated by the author function. When it is noted that Piglia’s conception of Argentine literary tradition can be traced to Domingo Faustino Sarmiento’s *Facundo: Civilización y Barbarie* (1845), a text written in a vastly different political context that opens with a falsely attributed quotation,¹⁵ it becomes apparent not only that this transgression of the author-function is intimately connected with Argentine politics, but also that the function of this transgression has changed over time in accordance with developments in the nature of power relations. Each of these features reemerges with particular force when it is remembered that in Piglia’s later novel *Respiración artificial* (1980), Renzi again appears as a character and returns to the foundational text of Argentine literature (*Facundo*) in order to account for the importance of falsification in Argentine literary history.¹⁶

Respiración artificial shares many of the same literary preoccupations as “Homenaje a Roberto Arlt.” The figures of Arlt and Borges and the connection between false attribution, plagiarism and Argentine literary history are as important to *Respiración artificial* as they are to Piglia’s earlier story. However, between the publication dates of each text, the historical circumstances had significantly changed, and with them the function of literary transgression altered accordingly. I refer, of course, to the advent of Argentina’s most recent and most brutal military dictatorship of 1976–1983. With regard to Foucault’s analysis, it would appear that rather than simply infringing the basic tenets of capitalist circulation, Piglia’s later text demonstrates that the author’s name

once more served to denounce and to punish and as has been consistently argued in the existent criticism, illuminates the advent of political disappearance as a technique of power. And this is precisely the point. In the first instance, the purpose of the present book is to analyze the ways in which literary texts bring to light the forms of power instigated by the military coup of 1976 through their very ability to transgress and resist the same power relations that transpierce them.

Nonetheless, recent developments in theoretical discussions of the effects of the dictatorship somewhat complicate the matter. For example, a considerable body of scholarship examining cultural texts written in the postdictatorship period has come to question the validity of the democratic transitions in the Southern Cone, arguing that the economic and political transformation from national state to transnational market was both the most significant development within these countries and the triumph of the dictatorships.¹⁷ Moreover, within this body of work, critics such as Idelber Avelar note that the Argentine case is unique in the Southern Cone insofar as this major transformation was only partially achieved by the dictatorship itself and fully implemented by the Peronist government of Carlos Saúl Menem some six years after the return to democracy.¹⁸ As Argentine philosopher and psychoanalyst León Rozitchner argues, precisely because transitional Argentine democracy developed “against the background of a previous dictatorship, which can always return to re-impose its violence,” a “disguised terror” remained “within Menem’s political democracy.”¹⁹ As Rozitchner explains, this threat was exploited to persuade the Argentine people to “submit to the law of the Market and the State.”²⁰ Thus the dictatorship itself, the transition to democracy, and the economic transformation of the country are inseparably and deeply interconnected. Moreover, as Avelar attests, “the Argentine transition to the global market was far more unstable than that of its neighbours” primarily because “the Argentine generals confronted a working class whose degree of organization and unionization was unparalleled in the continent” and because in Argentina “the phenomenon of armed urban guerrilla emerge *before* the coup.”²¹ As discussions of these phenomena have largely been articulated through the theoretical conceptions of mourning, melancholy, and trauma, they have concurrently focused on the postdictatorship period.²² However, as the conceptual focus of the present book shifts to themes of power and resistance, it stands to reason that to account fully for the radical alterations of power relations in Argentina instigated by the most recent dictatorship of 1976–1983, it is necessary to take a long historical view and consider the dictatorship together with its antecedents and its aftereffects. Moreover, as the existing scholarship makes clear, the exercise of power in Argentina throughout this long historical period is inseparably

connected both with the emergence of a neoliberal state in the early 1990s and with the consistent use of political violence (ranging from the pre-dictatorship guerrilla to the dictatorship's horrendous physical violence and to Rozitchner's "disguised terror") to achieve this goal.

For the reasons outlined above, the present study does not focus on the work of one sole author but rather engages in the detailed analysis of select literary texts by the important Argentine authors César Aira, Marcelo Cohen, and Ricardo Piglia written between 1979 and 1998. Conscious of "the proliferation of allegorical structures in the literature written under dictatorship" and during the postdictatorship period but nonetheless eschewing the well-established critical focus on trauma and memory, the book traces the allusive fragments of Argentine political history woven through the texts selected.²³ Hence, the book follows the development of Argentine politics from the period of revolutionary fervor epitomized by the civil uprising of students and workers known as the Cordobazo in 1969 through the period of military rule from 1976 to 1983, the transition to democracy begun in 1983, and ultimately to the structural adjustment program implemented by Menem in the early 1990s. In developing this historical narrative, the book delineates the complex intertwining of capitalism and political violence prevalent in late twentieth-century Argentine history, examines the changing nature of power relations throughout the period, and explores the potential of literature to precipitate resistance to these political developments. Thus I contend that certain Aira novels can be considered examinations of the development of capitalism in nineteenth-century Argentina and of the revolutionary fervor of the 1960s and 1970s; that Piglia's work contains an exploration of the philosophical origin, nature, and consequences of the most recent military government; and that Cohen's early novels are a critical reflection on the sociophilosophical nature of the transition to democracy begun in 1983 and on the late capitalist society engendered by the structural adjustment program of the early 1990s.

In the introduction to his study of allegory and mourning in postdictatorship literature, Avelar prefaces the justification for his own examination of the nature of resistance in the period by stating that "if 'resistance' was once the banner under which a certain Latin American literature was written, the advent of allegory in postdictatorship certifies that resistance has become a rather modest agenda. If resistance was the axis that connected individual and collective experiences under dictatorship, now this connection must be established otherwise."²⁴ In my own study, the attempt to trace the development of resistance as counterpoint to the alterations in power relations from the years preceding the dictatorship to the advent of neoliberal capitalism in the early 1990s also necessitates that the connections between these periods and

theoretical conceptions must be established “otherwise.” To demonstrate that across the work of Aira, Cohen, and Piglia political and structural violence is deeply interconnected and entangled with the development of neoliberal capitalism in Argentina, it has been necessary, as in the work of Foucault, to focus first on resistance. Nonetheless, as Avelar intimates, traditional theoretical conceptions of resistance sustained in the years preceding the military coup were decimated during the subsequent military government and their systematic program of state terrorism that they euphemistically referred to as the “Dirty War.” For this reason I contend that each author conducts philosophical explorations to explain the connections between capitalism and political violence and that each attempts to invent new ways of being that are inherently opposed to the philosophical systems they discover. In order to create the new categories necessary to describe resistance across the period, the present study engages extensively with such theorists as Alain Badiou, Jean Baudrillard, Michel Foucault, and Félix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze (both individually and in their co-authored works). In adopting this approach, however, the danger remains that the book could reinforce a particular form of scholarly colonialism within which critical theory is largely developed in the Global North, while primary material is produced in the Global South. I would suggest, however, that the book resists this particular form of intellectual hierarchization. In the first instance, I have consistently read each author’s work in line with Piglia’s argument that literature represents “un modo de *significar* (y no de reflejar) de *iluminar la realidad* a través de una praxis específica, que tiene estructuras propias, [y] que no tolera intervención exterior” (a method of *signifying* [and not of reflecting], of *illuminating reality* through a specific praxis that has its own structures [and] that does not tolerate exterior intervention).²⁵ This is to say that each literary work analyzed in the present volume is understood as a form of praxis within which theory is produced through the very act of writing. Thus the present book is neither a study of history nor of philosophy but dwells in the borders between these disciplines as they are explored, contested, challenged, and rewritten through literature. Nonetheless, as in the previous discussion of “Homenaje a Roberto Arlt” in the light of Foucault’s “What Is an Author?,” it is inescapable that European theory provides me with a vocabulary and conceptual framework that can illuminate and describe the specific functions of each of the Argentine texts I examine. Returning briefly to my discussion of Piglia’s story, therefore, will also elucidate further attempts to resist scholarly subordination.

Of those critical reflections on “Homenaje a Roberto Arlt,” which closely follow Piglia’s assertion that “todos los grandes textos son políticos” (all great texts are political), two of the most important are those written by Bruno Bo-

steels and Graciela Speranza. In the latter, Speranza notes that the text introduces a Marxist and Brechtian conception of plagiarism as a political literary practice, while Bosteels draws on Piglia's early critical writing to uncover the "the invisible lineage of Brecht–Mao" that underpins the story.²⁶ This is to say that, in both instances, these texts delineate those theorists who did influence Piglia and demonstrate how he deployed their work in order to unify the literature of the seemingly irreconcilable figures of Arlt and Borges in an explicitly political manner.²⁷ While repeating these arguments at length is unnecessary, a brief overview of Piglia's appropriations of Borges and Arlt will serve to highlight the key political features of "Homenaje a Roberto Arlt." In a diary entry from 1970, Piglia succinctly summarizes those elements of Borges's literature that he finds particularly engaging. As he writes:

Tomé a Borges como ejemplo de la doble enunciación, o mejor, del texto doble. La cita, el plagio y la traducción, ejemplos de una escritura dentro de otra, que está implícita. Se lee por escrito un texto ajeno y la apropiación puede ser legal (cita), ilegal (plagio), o neutra (traducción). Borges usa su modo personal de traducir para apropiarse de todos los textos que cita o a los que plagia: su estilo "inconfundible" vuelve todo lo que escribe de su propiedad. Usa con gran destreza también las atribuciones erróneas, delirantes y múltiples: habitualmente le atribuye a otros sus propias frases pero también toma como propias formulaciones ajenas.²⁸

(I took Borges as an example of a double enunciation, or better still, of a double text. Citation, plagiarism and translation: examples of one form of writing implicit within another. One reads someone else's text through the act of writing, and the appropriation can be legal (citation), illegal (plagiarism), or neutral (translation). Borges uses his personal manner of translation in order to appropriate all of the texts which he cites or that he plagiarizes: his "unmistakable" style ensures that everything he writes becomes his property. He also uses outrageous and multiple erroneous attribution with great skill: he habitually attributes his own phrases to others but he also takes other people's formulations as his own.)

Piglia's indebtedness to Borges in the creation of "Homenaje a Roberto Arlt" is immediately apparent: both plagiarism and false attribution are literary practices that Piglia acquires from his literary forebear.²⁹ Nonetheless, it is essential for Piglia to fuse this practice with elements of Arlt's literature in order to transform it into an overtly political strategy. In his critical writing on the work of Arlt, Piglia argues that "el dinero . . . aparece como garantía que hace posible la apropiación y el acceso a la literatura" (money . . . appears as the guarantee that makes the appropriation and access to literature possible) and thus that Arlt "desmiente las ilusiones de una ideología que enmascara y sublima en el

mito de la riqueza espiritual la lógica implacable de la producción capitalista” (refutes the illusions of an ideology that masks and sublimates the implacable logic of capitalist production as spiritual wealth).³⁰ This is to say that, for Piglia, Arlt exposes the structural functioning of the capitalist economic system that his own use of plagiarism (borrowed from Borges) ultimately transgresses. As Speranza and Bosteels suggest, a review of Piglia’s laudatory praise of the work of Bertolt Brecht reveals a further political transgression implicit in the work of Arlt that can also be encountered in Piglia’s homage.³¹ In an article published in the important journal *Los Libros* in 1975, Piglia asserts that “para Brecht los valores y gustos dominantes no son otra cosa que la expresión ideal (en este caso: estética) de las relaciones sociales dominantes” (for Brecht dominant values and tastes are nothing other than the ideal [in this case, aesthetic] expression of dominant social relations) and that “el modo de producción capitalista transforma todas las relaciones ‘espirituales’ . . . en lazos económicos” (the capitalist mode of production transforms all “spiritual” relations . . . into economic ties).³² In sharp contrast, as María Antonieta Pereira notes, “Arlt produjo una escritura perversa, fuera de la ley literaria instituida y, en ese sentido, inauguró otro estilo, que sería también la narrativa de las traducciones populares que él leía” (Arlt produced a perverse literature, outside the instituted literary laws and, in this way, inaugurated another style, which would also be that of the popular translations that he read).³³ Thus, Piglia argues, Arlt’s literary style is inherently outwith the bounds of the dominant perception of good taste, and by attributing a plagiarized translation to Arlt in his “Homenaje,” Piglia appropriates this style in order to expose the economic relations masked by aesthetic common sense, as in his interpretation of Brecht. As in Piglia’s interpretation of the work of Mao, then, in “Homenaje a Roberto Arlt,” “el efecto estético, la significación ideológica, el modo de producción, las formas de distribución y de consumo, los materiales y los instrumentos de trabajo, es decir el sistema literario en su conjunto, está determinado por los intereses de clase” (the aesthetic effect, the ideological meaning, the mode of production, the forms of distribution and consumption, the materials and instruments of work, which is to say the entire literary system, are determined by class interests), such that it contains both “una lucha ‘democrática’ contra el manejo de la oposición legible/ilegible manipulado por la burguesía y una lucha ‘socialista’ contra las relaciones de producción capitalistas que hacen del ‘autor’ el propietario privado del ‘sentido’” (a “democratic” struggle against the management of the opposition legible/illegible manipulated by the bourgeoisie, and a “socialist” struggle against the capitalist means of production that make the “author” the private owner of all “meaning”).³⁴ That in this instance Piglia recognizes the importance of the author within the capitalist mode of literary production

while simultaneously undermining the privilege afforded to them also serves as a further connection to Foucault's "What Is an Author?" and reveals the coextensive nature of their respective analysis.

That Piglia and Foucault share parallel concerns is demonstrated in several instances in Piglia's critical work. For example, in his essay on Mao, Piglia seeks to address "el problema de la nueva función del arte" (the problem of the new function of art), while in his work on Brecht he reflects on "la función social del escritor" (the social function of the writer).³⁵ In an even more striking example found in another edition of *Los Libros*, Piglia paraphrases Gramsci and specifically states that "todos los que saben escribir son 'escritores,' ya que alguna vez en su vida han practicado la escritura. Lo que no hacen es cumplir en la sociedad la *función* de escritores" (everyone who knows how to write is a "writer," insofar as they have practiced writing at some point in their lives. What they do not do is fulfill the *function* of writers in society). Thereafter, Piglia proposes to "analizar los distintos 'contratos sociales' que se interponen entre un texto y su lectura" (to analyze the distinct "social contracts" that are interjected between a text and the act of reading it).³⁶ That the terminology and the analytical framework deployed by Piglia closely resemble those found in Foucault's essay is not entirely surprising given Piglia's involvement in *Los Libros*, a journal that was fundamental in introducing various strands of European critical thought (including structuralism) to Argentina.³⁷ Nonetheless, the parallels between the two authors are particularly notable. For example, each author has commented (though in disagreement) on the nature of the author function in the medieval period.³⁸ In addition, Foucault reflects that "even within our own civilization, the same types of texts have not always required authors; there was a time when those texts which we now call 'literary' (stories, folk tales, epics, and tragedies) were accepted, circulated, and valorized without any question about the identity of their author."³⁹ From this basis, Foucault goes on to envision a future culture within which "discourse would circulate without any need for an author" and "would unfold in a pervasive anonymity."⁴⁰ In a similar manner, Piglia has shown a persistent preoccupation with anonymous literary texts. For example, in an important essay from 1970, Piglia analyzes North American literature (an important influence on his own writing, as he frequently asserts) and argues that the texts produced by writers associated with the Black Panthers "vienen de la experiencia colectiva y tienden hacia el anonimato" (are derived from collective experience and tend toward anonymity).⁴¹ Similarly, in diary entries in 1972, Piglia both asserts that North American writers of detective fiction are "artesanos anónimos" (anonymous artisans) and ruminates on creating "un grupo literario anónimo" (an anonymous literary group) to "publicar un panfleto contra los canales de distribución de la literatura" (publish a

pamphlet contrary to the channels of literary distribution).⁴² Once more, the proposal is not that Piglia was influenced by Foucault in establishing this position. Indeed, it is far more likely that Piglia's primary influence in exploring the nature of anonymous texts was, in fact, Borges. For example, in Borges's story "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius," the discovery of an anonymous and supplementary addition to a plagiarized copy of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* leads to the creation of an entirely new world ensconced within our present reality. Moreover, within this new world "es raro que los libros estén firmados" (it is unusual for books to be signed), as "no existe el concepto del plagio" (the concept of plagiarism does not exist), and "se ha establecido que todas las obras son obra de un solo autor, que es intemporal y es anónimo" (it has been established that all works are the creation of one author, who is atemporal and anonymous).⁴³ Given these features of Borges's story, it appears almost as if "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" serves as something of an ur-text for Piglia's "Homenaje a Roberto Arlt." Nonetheless, as we shall now see, it seems likely that the story also draws inspiration from the work of another Argentine author: Macedonio Fernández.

In a series of diary excerpts related to Fernández, Piglia records that on various occasions he "insinuó que estaba escribiendo un libro del que nadie iba a conocer nunca una página" (insinuated that he was writing a book of which no one would ever recognize a single page). As Piglia relates, Fernández planned to publish the book in secret such that no one would ever know it was his. While "en principio había pensado que se publicara como un libro anónimo" (in the beginning he had thought of publishing it as an anonymous book), he later thought "que debía publicarse con el nombre de un escritor conocido. Atribuir su libro a otro: el plagio al revés" (that he should publish it under the name of a known author. Attribute his book to another: plagiarism in reverse).⁴⁴ This is, of course, largely the same practice that Piglia deploys in "Homenaje a Roberto Arlt," and the incorporation of Fernández's work into Piglia's literary experiment also serves to highlight another means by which the present text evades the risk of intellectual hierarchization. In a diary entry from 1968, Piglia asserts that "desde el principio la literatura [argentina] se sentía en falta frente a las literaturas europeas" (from the outset [Argentine] literature considered itself to be lacking in comparison with European literatures). Nonetheless, he also proposes that "a partir de Macedonio y de Borges nuestra literatura—en nuestra generación—está en el mismo plano que las literaturas extranjeras" (from Macedonio and Borges onwards, our literature—in our generation—is found on the same plane as foreign literatures).⁴⁵ This is a claim reiterated several times in Piglia's diaries and one that he repeated again in an interview in 1996 stating that "estamos, usando un término de la música, mucho más 'en sincro.' Por fin somos contemporáneos de nuestros contemporáneos europeos

y norteamericanos. Porque antes no lo éramos . . . tanto” (we are, using a term from music, much more “in sync.” Finally we are contemporaries with our European and North American contemporaries. Because before, we were not . . . so much).⁴⁶ While Piglia certainly refers to international authors of fiction, the salient point is that by following the example of Borges, Fernández, Arlt, and others, Piglia has also become contemporary with European critical theorists and philosophers. I would also suggest that while their literary forebears may not be the same, this holds equally true for Aira and Cohen. Moreover, in line with the central thesis of the present book, I would suggest that this is particularly the case because each of the authors under discussion examines the colonizing forces of contemporary neoliberal globalization, as do each of the theorists whose work I draw on. Indeed, it is these same forces that ultimately imbue their texts with contemporaneity and negate any form of intellectual hierarchization.

This contemporaneity between Latin American authors and European theorists can perhaps be illuminated further by reflecting upon Doreen Massey’s reformulation of the distinction between “space” and “place.” For Massey, space should be understood both as a continual process and “as the product of interrelations” ranging “from the immensity of the global to the intimately tiny.” Thus Massey posits that space is necessarily formed of a multiplicity understood “as a simultaneity of stories-so-far.”⁴⁷ Having reconceptualized space in this manner, Massey goes on to propose that places thus become “collections of those stories,” and she proposes “an understanding of place . . . as woven together out of ongoing stories, as a moment within power-geometries, as a particular constellation within the wider topographies of space, and as in process, as unfinished business.”⁴⁸ For Massey, places are “spatio-temporal events.”⁴⁹ Similarly, throughout the present study it is the specific place, Argentina, that emerges as a preeminent site for the localized application of globalized forces such that theoretical critiques of contemporary capitalism are illuminated in a particularly visceral manner. The idea of the nation endures as a useful concept, therefore, precisely because it localizes the power-geometries of increasingly globalizing forces that are then examined and contested through the ongoing stories recounted by the Argentine literature under examination. Nonetheless, as in Massey’s conception of place, the resultant nation becomes “a constellation of processes rather than a thing,” one that is understood “as open and as internally multiple,” and crucially “one in which the elements of that multiplicity are themselves imbued with temporality.”⁵⁰ This temporal element is especially pertinent given that the present study, at first sight, appears to contain two contradictory impulses. On the one hand, a chronological argument similar to that described by Foucault in “What Is an Author?” has been developed

across the work of Aira, Cohen, and Piglia tracing the historical development of power relations and resistance in Argentina in the latter half of the twentieth century. On the other, however, the philosophical analysis of the three authors' work generates a series of connections between their texts that initially appear to undermine this same historical analysis. I would suggest that the problem both originates and is resolved in the fact that the Deleuzian conception of becoming, understood as "the very dynamism of change" in which "only difference returns and never sameness," is the central philosophical theme that I perceive in each author's work and that underpins the historical development of literary resistance in late twentieth-century Argentina.⁵¹

As Ronald Bogue explains, within Deleuze's philosophy of time, "history belongs to the world of Chronos, the time of measure and sequence," while becoming "partakes of the time of Aion, a convulsive, adifferentiated temporal flux."⁵² While Deleuze's conception of Aion and Chronos will be examined in greater detail in chapter 6, I would suggest that, with regard to the arguments described above, the linear development of power relations and resistance corresponds to the historical time of Chronos, while the philosophical conceptions of resistance described in each text more properly belong to the time of Aion. This is particularly pertinent given that where "history is a memory that fixes time in discrete points[,] becoming unfixes those points and generates free-floating lines."⁵³ Thus it would appear that the apparent contradiction between the two lines of analysis is both inherent to and resolved within Deleuze's ontology and philosophy of time. For this reason, I have attempted to resolve this problem by incorporating a Deleuzian approach (suggested by the texts themselves) into the structure of the book. Indeed, the literary correlate of Deleuze's philosophical system has been the fundamental principle guiding the construction of the text.

In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari explain their approach to literature by stating: "We will never ask what a book means, as signified or signifier; we will not look for anything to understand in it. We will ask what it functions with, in connection with what other things it does or does not transmit intensities, in which other multiplicities its own are inserted and metamorphosed, and with what bodies without organs it makes its own converge."⁵⁴ The essential point is that Deleuze and Guattari advocate a creative approach to literature that entails the connection of disparate elements in pursuance of new interpretations and new ways of being. To explicate this process, Deleuze and Guattari argue that a "book is an assemblage" that can be linked to other assemblages by "machinic" connections.⁵⁵ Joanna Page provides a succinct definition of each of these terms. As she explains. "For Deleuze and Guattari, both living organisms and technological apparatuses can function as machines

if they engage in processes of becoming through being connected with other machines in ever-evolving assemblages. Those connections produce further connections, none of which are organized by any transcendent figure.⁵⁶ In his critical work *Fricciones*, Tomás Abraham suggests that within his book, Piglia and Aira appear as “dos zonas intensas” (two intense zones) liberated from their actuality.⁵⁷ To communicate the philosophical connections between Aira, Cohen, and Piglia in the present study, I too consider the three authors not so much as historical figures but as intensive zones of philosophical potentialities. Moreover, the structure of the book itself reflects the historical and philosophical arguments it contains by fusing two different critical approaches: that articulated by Aira in his book *Las tres fechas* and that delineated by Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* and *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*.

As Abraham notes, the subject that preoccupies Aira in *Las tres fechas* is “el tema de la experiencia” (the theme of experience). In this book Aira argues that “la experiencia se sedimenta en la psique y, cuando se la relata, necesariamente se desdibuja” (experience is deposited in the psyche and, when one narrates it, it is necessarily blurred).⁵⁸ In order to recover this original experience, every individual literary text can be interpreted through the relationship established between three different dates: “la de escritura, la de publicación, y la de los sucesos que cuenta” (that of writing, that of publication, and that of the relevant events).⁵⁹ As Aira makes clear:

Cada fecha en uno de esos triángulos evoca un aspecto distinto de la vida del autor, y el lector necesariamente debe reaccionar de modo diferente a cada una de ellas, dentro de la unidad del libro. Y a su vez la ecuación inestable de las tres resuena en las ecuaciones de los otros triángulos y modifica la reacción individual a ellos.⁶⁰

(Each date in one of these triangles invokes a different aspect of the life of the author, and the reader should necessarily react in a different way to each one of them, within the unity of the book. And at the same time, the unstable equation of the three is echoed in the equations of other triangles and modifies the individual reaction to each of them.)

I retain the idea that individual works crystallize personal experience but also consider them to be imbued with the historical circumstances in which they were composed. Furthermore, this model is applied across the work of three authors, reflecting the machinic unity I perceive between their texts. This leads to the second of my structural models, the Deleuzian plateau. Deleuze and Guattari acquire the term “plateau” from Gregory Bateson’s investigations into certain Balinese cultures, and it is described as “a continuous, self-vibrating region of intensities whose development avoids any orientation toward a cul-

mination point or external end.”⁶¹ In *A Thousand Plateaus* each plateau is “precisely dated,” yet Deleuze and Guattari argue that each one “can be read starting anywhere and can be related to any other plateau” as they “are not subjected to an external plan of organisation.”⁶² The book thus creates “a fabric of intensive states between which any number of connecting routes could exist.”⁶³ Deleuze and Guattari name this fabric the “plane of immanence.” The present work is divided into three plateaus, named after each author and dated in accordance with Aira’s “tres fechas” (three dates). The first zone of intensity is “César Aira” and is subtitled “29 de Mayo de 1969, La fecha de los sucesos que cuenta” (29th May 1969, The Date of the Relevant Events). The date is that of the mass student and worker uprising against the military dictatorship of General Juan Carlos Onganía, known as the Cordobazo. The second zone is “Marcelo Cohen: 27 de Marzo de 1991, La fecha de escritura” (27th March 1991, The Date of Writing). The date is that in which the Ley de Convertibilidad Monetaria (Convertibility Law) was approved by congress.⁶⁴ This marks an important moment in the implementation of President Carlos Menem’s Structural Adjustment Program and the opening to the world economy. It receives its title because “la [fecha] de escritura corresponde al presente” (the [date] of writing corresponds to the present).⁶⁵ In sociophilosophical terms Cohen occupies the most recent time frame in our chronological sequence, and the structural adjustment program arguably establishes the paradigm for this period. The third zone is “Ricardo Piglia” and receives the inscription “2100, La fecha de publicación” (2100, The Date of Publication). The justification is that, in Aira’s system, this third date represents “el futuro remoto” (the remote future).⁶⁶ The date is drawn from a short critical essay by Piglia in which he channels Borges once more and eagerly anticipates “el año 2100, cuando el nombre de todos los autores se haya perdido y la literatura sea intemporal y sea anónima” (the year 2100, when the names of all authors have been lost and literature is atemporal and anonymous).⁶⁷

In *A Thousand Plateaus* Deleuze and Guattari make the claim that “all we know are assemblages. And the only assemblages are machinic assemblages of desire and collective assemblages of enunciation.”⁶⁸ Where it appears that Aira, Cohen, and Piglia are bound together in a continuous historical progression, I would argue that they are in fact held together in a different manner. Each author describes specific phenomena and presents distinct philosophical arguments that nonetheless appear in the work of the other two. In order to describe the machinic assemblages that emerge from such connections, each plateau concludes with a philosophical reflection on the individual author’s work through the interpretive framework provided by *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*. I propose that each author’s work corresponds to a single compo-

ment of the literary machine that Deleuze and Guattari perceive in the work of Kafka. Thus the analysis of each author's work is connected as in Deleuze's analysis of Kafka, where three "different diabolical machines—letters, novellas, and so-called unfinished novels"—constitute the different elements of a single literary machine.⁶⁹ This connection is not at all arbitrary, as each Argentine author demonstrates a particular preoccupation with Kafka's work. This is evidenced for Piglia by the prominence of Kafka in *Respiración artificial* and his suggestion that he would have liked to author Kafka's diary.⁷⁰ For his part, Aira has categorically stated that, having reread Kafka continuously throughout his life, "en realidad nunca se sale de él" (in reality, I never leave him).⁷¹ Finally, as Cohen recounts in the autobiographical text "Pequeñas batallas por la propiedad de la lengua," when Osvaldo Lamborghini came to visit him in Spain in the seventies, he demanded that Cohen "leyera *Kafka*, por una literatura menor, el libro de Deleuze" (read Deleuze's book, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*).⁷² This anecdote is particularly relevant as my own argument is that Deleuze's analysis of Kafka proffers a model for understanding the distinct forms of resistance encountered in the work of Aira, Cohen, and Piglia. As this analysis develops, it also becomes clear that Piglia's work, rather than serving as a historical connection between Aira and Cohen, can be considered the twist in the Möbius strip that returns all the authors to a single plane of immanence.

In *Las vueltas de César Aira* Sandra Contreras contends that Aira's "vuelta al relato" (return to the story) signals a return to narrative literature following the various formal experiments of the artistic vanguards of the 1960s and 1970s and those of Piglia and Juan José Saer in the 1980s.⁷³ Somewhat contradictorily, however, my own historical argument commences with Aira. Indeed, this opening chapter lays the foundation for the historical argument contained within the book as a whole. Moreover, while Aira's novel *La liebre* is the most important in his "ciclo pampeano" (pampas cycle) for the construction of Contreras's central argument, it is rather *Ema, la cautiva* that is of singular significance in delineating a political interpretation of Aira's work.⁷⁴ In chapter 1 I propose that Aira responds to the dual experience of state terrorism and the early development of a neoliberal capitalist economy under the most recent military dictatorship by returning to and reimagining nineteenth-century Argentine history. It is my contention that Aira allusively presents General Julio Argentino Roca's Conquest of the Desert as the foundational moment not only of the national state and a capitalist economy but of the systematic use of genocide as a political tool to achieve the first two objectives. Furthermore, I suggest that Aira advances this analysis in order to explore the philosophical and historical repercussions of the relationship between capitalism and political violence throughout twentieth-century Argentina.

Chapter 2 proposes that in *La prueba* Aira responds to the opening of the Argentine economy under Menem in the early 1990s by once more returning to the past. This time, however, I argue that Aira transposes the revolutionary impetus epitomized by the Cordobazo in 1969 to this contemporary moment. In facilitating this historical transference, I argue, Aira describes the process of obtaining a revolutionary subjectivity by engaging a truth-procedure as defined by Alain Badiou. This process in turn unleashes a schizophrenic process of becoming-other as defined by Deleuze, which is itself both product and limit of the neoliberal capitalist model implemented by Menem. Subsequently, I demonstrate that *La prueba* can be read as a strange philosophical and literary bildungsroman that describes the truth-procedure that Aira engages in the field of art through his unique literary process known as the “huida hacia adelante” (flight forward), a term derived from Aira’s critical assessment of Alejandra Pizarnik that accounts both for his refusal to correct his own work and his prolific publication.⁷⁵ I propose that *La prueba* is paradigmatic of the process of continual metamorphosis, where incredible transmutation and transformation are the norm that underpins the majority of Aira’s work and that demonstrates considerable correspondence with Deleuze and Guattari’s interpretation of Kafka’s stories. Indeed, it is my argument that *La prueba* accounts for the innumerable schizophrenic becomings-other that permeate Aira’s work and that are inherently political and anticapitalist. In this way, I argue that Aira’s literature is in perpetual resistance to the evolving structures of capitalist power.

In chapter 3 I establish that in the texts *Insomnio* and “La ilusión monarca” Cohen examines the transition to democracy and delineates the new forms of power, control, and resistance that emerge in its wake. Ironically, Cohen situates these texts, written in the aftermath of state-sponsored terrorism and strict control and set in the near future, in enclosed spaces subject to severe repression. These Cohen texts are punctuated by uncanny fragments and remnants of the dictatorship’s systematic repression, manipulated by the author to expose the limits of the apparent freedoms gained through the transition. In this way I argue that Cohen reveals the continuation of corruption and violence beyond the conclusion of the period of state-sponsored terrorism and subjects the transition to a philosophical examination that gives it a rather different inflection. I therefore contend that Cohen reflects back on the processes at work during the so-called Dirty War to expose the fact that the last military government exercised both disciplinary and sovereign power, as described by Foucault, to control Argentine society. The chapter then discusses representations of resistance in the two texts that correspond to the transformational model of becoming as defined by Deleuze.

Chapter 4 opens with a brief discussion of “La ilusión monarca” that suggests that within the text Cohen begins to articulate the redundancy of disciplinary enclosures in contemporary society and to describe the emergent forms of power that replace them. In this way Cohen reveals the Argentine case to be paradigmatic of the transition from disciplinary to control society as described by Deleuze. The main body of the chapter then examines the novel *El oído absoluto* while also making reference to the later text *Variedades*. The chapter proposes that in these texts control has been generalized and dispersed throughout the worlds they describe and that the society of control has been fully realized. In the absence of overt state-sponsored terrorism, I argue, Cohen suggests that the mass media has assumed the position previously occupied by the military and that a proliferation of hyperreal images and a process of perpetual simulation, as described by Jean Baudrillard, are manipulated to consolidate the neoliberal capitalist state and coerce and control the population. Additionally, I demonstrate that Cohen continually attempts to discover strategies to counteract the new forms of power he describes. Much as Deleuze and Guattari argue that Kafka’s novels are the logical extension of the strategies deployed in his stories, so too do I show that Aira’s literature reaches an impasse that condenses into the sociopolitical description of the mechanisms of the society of control found in the work of Cohen. It is demonstrated that in this new reality a seemingly absolute yet closed set of hyperreal images, modeled on the Deleuzian simulacrum, masks the anarchic freedoms Aira espoused. The possibility of transmutation, metamorphosis, and transformation, heralded as a powerful force of resistance, has been assimilated within the matrix of control. Yet in the midst of this system of ostensibly total control, Cohen discovers the power of Baudrillardian seduction, of the anonymous text, and of rumor to proffer resistance as they become accessible to insurgency and present a challenge that forces power to reveal itself as such. Ultimately, however, I argue that Cohen’s texts contract into an undecidable point where resistance and acquiescence become almost indistinguishable.

Regarding Piglia, I first contend that he is the writer par excellence of the 1976–1983 dictatorship and that his work serves as the literary connection between the other authors. In chapter 5, detailed analysis of *Respiración artificial* demonstrates that Piglia employs a remarkably similar strategy to that which Aira utilized in *Enma, la cautiva*: he decries the crimes of the military dictatorship not only by conflating historical periods but by dissecting the philosophical roots that rationally justified the military’s actions. This investigation suggests that Piglia’s novel reveals Immanuel Kant’s conception of the cogito and the law to be at the center of the rational capitalist state and finds them culpable in justifying and sustaining the horrendous state violence of the time.

In response, I argue that Piglia attempts to define an alternative understanding of time that would liberate the individual from these logical underpinnings of the most recent military dictatorship.

Chapter 6 focuses on Piglia's novel *La ciudad ausente*, and my proposal is that it essentially anticipates Cohen's critique of contemporary neoliberal capitalism and realizes that which could only be hypothesized in *Respiración artificial*. In the new situation of the transition to democracy and Argentina's opening to the global economy, I suggest, Piglia begins to describe the limited freedoms gained through these processes, to sketch the outline of the control society, and to emphasize the importance of the mass media as a new technology of power. All of these features are more fully developed by Cohen. Additionally, the text suggests that this seemingly new situation is but a continuation of the logic underpinning the previous dictatorship and that Piglia counteracts it through the complex structure of the novel that defines a metastable form of time (Aion) that engages the eternal return in order to produce the new and absolutely different. I thus propose that in *La ciudad ausente* Piglia wills and unleashes the Deleuzian event masked by the military government's systematic repression and that the text itself becomes a timeless resistance machine opposed to political violence and neoliberal capitalism. The chapter also delineates the connections between Piglia's epistolary novel *Respiración artificial*, the story-producing machine described in *La ciudad ausente*, and Deleuze and Guattari's description of Kafka's letters. Through this analysis I demonstrate that while Cohen's literary project is predominantly related to *La ciudad ausente*, an incipient version can be found in *Respiración artificial*. Similarly, it is shown that while Aira's literary project is predominantly related to *Respiración artificial*, it can also be encountered in miniature in *La ciudad ausente*. Through further discussion of the three authors' work, I demonstrate that from a certain point of view each author appears to precede the others and that the processes they describe are co-implicated and complementary. In the conclusion, I argue that the three authors occupy a "plane of immanence" as described by Deleuze, that they reconfigure the Argentine nation in line with Félix Guattari's description of Integrated World Capitalism, and that their work perpetually generates resistance to this same capitalist system within Argentina.

It is important to note that my reading of the work of Aira, Cohen, and Piglia is deliberately provocative. For example, Contreras argues that Aira's engagement with twentieth-century vanguard artists is opposed to the theoretical connection between "vanguardia y revolución" (avant-garde and revolution) prevalent in 1960s Argentina, to the political and aesthetic vanguards of the 1970s, and to the aesthetics of "negatividad" (negativity) proposed in the

1980s.⁷⁶ My own argument is that elements of each of these intellectual trends are instrumental to Aira's literary process, and I present a new political reading of Aira's work of a type more commonly associated with the work of Piglia and Cohen. Similarly, I argue that the specific Argentine historical and literary context surrounding Cohen's early novels is particularly important, an argument that is more often made with regard to Aira and Piglia. Finally, I provide an original, highly theoretical (and Deleuzian) reading of the work of Piglia, despite the fact that he does not use such concepts in his own critical writing and has questioned their overt use in literary criticism.⁷⁷

Arguably more controversial, however, is that, despite the fact that Aira and Piglia have become "dos imanes" (two idols) of Argentine literary culture, an apparent antagonism between them has solidified into something of a critical commonplace such that they are frequently considered to be irreconcilable poles of contemporary Argentine literature.⁷⁸ These arguments are not without foundation. In an early critical essay published in the 1980s, Aira claimed that *Respiración artificial* was "una de las peores novelas de su generación" (one of the worst novels of his generation) and that Piglia was paradigmatic of "una falta de auténtica pasión por la literatura en la narrativa argentina contemporánea" (a lack of authentic passion for literature in contemporary Argentine fiction).⁷⁹ It appears that this initial antipathy has endured, as years later Aira stated that he had no interest in Piglia's work.⁸⁰ It initially appeared that Piglia shared this cool indifference. Abraham relates in *Fricciones* that shortly after the publication of Aira's article, he met Piglia and asked if he had read it. Piglia did not reply.⁸¹ In the intervening years these antagonisms condensed into an interpretive framework typified by Contreras, who presents Aira, in part, as the "anti-Piglia."⁸² With the publication of the final volume of Piglia's diaries, we now know that the attacks emanating from Aira and his literary associates *did* preoccupy Piglia and his friends for several months in 1981. First Piglia claims that the journal that would publish Aira's (in)famous article *Vigencia* "hace la política cultural de la dictadura" (carries out the cultural policy of the dictatorship).⁸³ Later he makes an oblique reference to Aira's article, refusing to name the author and stating only that it was "escrito por un sirviente de O. L. [Osvaldo Lamborghini]" (written by a servant of O.L. [Osvaldo Lamborghini]), before again accusing the journal of working "para el nuevo consenso del general Viola" (for General Viola's new consensus).⁸⁴ A day later, Piglia makes his only direct reference to Aira, noting that "en una entrevista César A. dijo que yo tenía cara de policía" (in an interview César A. said that I had the face of a policeman), and he later laments that Aira's group have constructed him as their "enemigo ideal" (ideal enemy) and states that "no tengo nada que ver con la invención de rivalidades que no propongo ni me interesa" (I have noth-

ing to do with the invention of rivalries that I do not propose and that do not interest me).⁸⁵ Despite these acute differences it is my intention ultimately to reject Aira's assertion that Piglia and Saer belonged to a different literary generation.⁸⁶ In the first instance, such a move could be defended through Piglia's early writings, where he both entirely rejects the compulsion to organize time in discrete decades and proposes that "si algo define a una generación—más allá de las exterioridades biológicas—es una problemática común, históricamente situada" (if something defines a generation—beyond any external biological appearances—it is a common problem, historically situated).⁸⁷ As I have explained above, this is precisely how I view the literature of Aira, Piglia, and Cohen. Yet this is not to suggest that there is a totalizing concordance between each of the authors, and I do not wish to overlook the important differences in their work. Rather, I consider a generation, defined in the manner above, to be akin to Massey's description of places, which, "rather than being locations of coherence, become the foci of the meeting and the nonmeeting of the previously unrelated and thus integral to the generation of novelty."⁸⁸ With this in mind, it is useful to consider some of the primary critical disjunctures that separate the work of Aira from that of Piglia.

Within the introduction to *Las vueltas de César Aira*, Contreras defines Aira's unique literary output in contradistinction to various recent trends in Argentine literature. A key component of this discussion is to define Aira's process in contrast to Piglia's literary project. In so doing Contreras summarizes Piglia's literary enterprise, suggesting that in the tradition of Macedonio Fernández he advocates the "poética de la novela como utopía negativa" (poetics of the novel as a negative utopia), a literary ethics and praxis that works with "lo que todavía no es" (that which is not yet) and is opposed to the "mecanismos abstractos del poder" (abstract mechanisms of power) and "las presiones del mercado" (the pressures of the market). Contreras then proposes that Aira specifically rejects Piglian negativity.⁸⁹ For Piglia the "poética de la negatividad" (poetics of negativity) is a literary strategy that entails the "rechazo a lo que podrían ser los lenguajes estereotipados que circulan en la cultura de masas" (rejection of what could be the stereotyped speech that circulate in mass culture) and the refusal to "entrar en esa especie de manipulación que supone la industria cultural" (enter in this kind of manipulation that the cultural industry proposes).⁹⁰ Thus Piglian negativity is an essential component of what he considers the purpose of literature: it resists the power of the state by creating fragmentary counternarratives that oppose the narratives and stereotypical language utilized by the powerful to maintain control.⁹¹ Contreras and others interpret this Piglian strategy in such a way as to suggest that it is the "paradigma de negatividad . . . el que la literatura de Aira viene a trans-

mutar” (paradigm of negativity . . . that Aira’s literature comes to transmute).⁹² Evelyn Galiazo is a particularly committed exponent of this critical approach. For her, Aira’s “huida hacia adelante” (flight forward) is directly opposed to the “poética de la negatividad” (poetics of negativity), and she argues that in order to construct his own literary theory, Aira “necesita descargar toda su artillería contra Piglia” (needs to discharge all his artillery against Piglia).⁹³ Thus Galiazo proposes that Aira completely rejects “la negación” (negation) and finds its key exponents, Piglia and Saer, “responsables de una doble culpa: la de instalar al impulso negativo en primer plano y la de comprender a la praxis narrativa como un mero ejercicio de oposición” (responsible for a double offense: that of installing the negative impulse in the foreground, and that of understanding fictional praxis as a mere exercise in opposition).⁹⁴ Galiazo contends that Aira’s affirmation of innovation, creation, and process (which is to say, the “flight forward”) completely undermines Piglian negativity, and she passionately argues that the lesson Aira teaches us is that in literature, “no es cuestión de apropiarse del material mítico que aportó la dictadura para asegurarse unos cuantos lectores. La causa es la literatura misma y hay que inmolarse por ella; hay que sacrificar el éxito, e incluso la obra, para que triunfe el proceso, siempre” (it is not a question of appropriating the mythical material that the dictatorship produced in order to secure a few readers. The cause is literature itself and one must sacrifice oneself for it; one must sacrifice success, and even the work itself, so that the process will triumph, always).⁹⁵ Contreras is subtler in her approach yet still contends that Aira’s “*afirmación inmediata de la potencia absoluta y autónoma de la invención*” (*immediate affirmation of the absolute and autonomous power of invention*) transforms Piglian negativity and completely changes “el elemento del que se deriva el sentido y el valor de la ficción” (the element from which the meaning and value of fiction is derived).⁹⁶ Importantly, several critics consider Piglian negativity to be more creative and innovative than Contreras and Galiazo acknowledge. For example, Joanna Page discusses Piglia’s engagement with scientific discourse to demonstrate the creativity of his literary experimentation.⁹⁷ As will become clear, I share the perception of Piglia’s work as inherently creative and question the dichotomous model proposed by Contreras and Galiazo.

Edgardo Berg has persuasively argued that the construction of literary genealogies is of central importance to Argentine literary criticism.⁹⁸ I would suggest that this tendency is the principal source for many antithetical readings of Aira and Piglia and has been exacerbated by the authors’ adherence to the same trend. As we have already seen with regard to “Homenaje a Roberto Arlt,” Piglia consciously constructs a literary genealogy that unites Arlt, Borges, and Macedonio Fernández, and his insistence on this specific literary genealogy

has guided much criticism of his work. This leads to assertions such as that made by Pampa Olga Arán that “resulta poco menos que imposible hablar de la obra de Piglia sin hablar ‘con’ Piglia” (it seems a little less than impossible to speak about Piglia’s work without speaking “with” Piglia) because he reduces “la distancia entre el proceso creativo y el interpretativo” (the distance between the creative and interpretive processes) to a minimum.⁹⁹ The same process is equally evident in criticism on Aira. For his part, Aira selects a different artistic lineage, suggesting that Manuel Puig, Alejandra Pizarnik, and Osvaldo Lamborghini are his “trío tutelar” (guardian trio), and I would suggest that a large body of criticism consistently reads Aira’s literature through the framework of his own critical interventions.¹⁰⁰ Such strict and separate genealogies are, of course, too precise and are easily challenged. Thus Jorge Fornet (at least in part) reads Piglia in conjunction with both Lamborghini and Puig, and Ariel Schettini notes that Piglia composed a particularly influential essay on the latter author.¹⁰¹ Similarly, Aira has called Arlt “el mayor novelista argentino” (the greatest Argentine novelist) and, despite suggesting that he has had his “altibajos en relación con Borges” (ups and downs in relation to Borges), has stated that “mi verdadero maestro de lectura fue Borges” (in truth, it was Borges who taught me how to read).¹⁰² Indeed, he has even stated that “Arlt para mí es un grande. Bueno, habría que decir uno de los dos grandes: el otro, claro, es Borges. Tan distintos y tan parecidos, ¿no?” (Arlt, for me, is a [literary] great. Well, it should be said, one of the two greats: the other, of course, is Borges. So different and yet so similar, no?)¹⁰³ Thus it seems that it would be more appropriate to suggest that the work of both Aira and Piglia contains strong centripetal forces that draw the reader back to their own interpretations of their self-selected literary genealogies as well as equally powerful centrifugal forces that generate new lines of flight away from those same lineages. For example, as we have seen in “Homenaje a Roberto Arlt,” Piglia creates a literary text that incorporates his critical work on Arlt, Borges, and Macedonio Fernández. However, when Piglia repeats the story of an author seeking first to create an anonymous text before choosing to falsely attribute it to another famous writer in his diaries, Piglia accredits the proposal (using several of the exact same phrases) not to Macedonio Fernández but to the author Ezequiel Martínez Estrada, claiming that Estrada described the project to him in 1959.¹⁰⁴ Thus even in a text that appears to synthesize perfectly his literary lineage, Piglia surreptitiously introduces an alternative frame of reference that constitutes a creative line of flight away from that same heritage. So too in the present work could other avenues of investigation, incorporating the work of other authors, have been explored.

As we have seen, Piglia has argued that to “cruzar a Arlt con Borges” (to

cross Arlt with Borges) was “una de las grandes utopías de la literatura argentina” (one of the greatest utopias in Argentine literature).¹⁰⁵ It appears that at present to cross Aira with Piglia represents a similarly utopic goal. Nonetheless, due to the themes under discussion in the present book and the strong centrifugal forces encountered in the work of each Argentine author, it is clear that several other, equally important writers could have been readily included within the study. For example, where Galiazo contends that Aira’s literature is opposed to that of Saer due to his literary relationship with Piglia, Nancy Fernández has demonstrated that their work can be constructively read together.¹⁰⁶ With this in mind, an exploration of “negativity” as developed in Saer’s literary output could also have been incorporated within the present study. As mentioned above, Manuel Puig is included within Aira’s self-selected literary genealogy, and Piglia was an early defender of his work. For this reason, Puig’s work could also have provided another avenue of investigation. Indeed, his explorations of popular culture could provide an interesting counterpoint and historical antecedent to my analysis of the contemporary mass media society in the work of Cohen. Similarly, there are a series of other authors who examine the relationships between literature, psychoanalysis, politics, violence, and capitalism throughout their work who could have been productively integrated into the present analysis. Arguably most important in this regard is Osvaldo Lamborghini.

Not only did Aira compile and edit Lamborghini’s complete works after his untimely death, but the blending of obscenity, pornography, and politics in texts such as *El fiord* is echoed in the more grotesque transformations found in Aira’s fiction. Moreover, just as I argue that the spectacular metamorphoses found in Aira’s literature are inherently political, so too Daniel Link has argued that *El fiord* “anticipated all political literature of the seventies.”¹⁰⁷ In addition, as Lamborghini’s conflation of politics and perversion is coupled with an excoriating reexamination of Argentine political history, it could provide an important addition to my analysis of the rewriting of history found in works by Aira and Piglia.¹⁰⁸ Similarly, Lamborghini’s literature could provide a decisive corollary to my exploration of the sexual nature of contemporary capitalism in the work of Cohen, and of the anticapitalist and schizophrenic pursuit of desire in the work of Aira. As we have seen, it is also the case that it was Lamborghini who gave Cohen Deleuze and Guattari’s book on Kafka.

My historical argument too could have been augmented through incorporation of such authors as Rodolfo Enrique Fogwill and Sergio Chejfec. As regards the former writer, Link has argued that the 1970s in Argentina represents a “long” decade, opening with the Cordobazo in 1969 and extending until the end of the most recent dictatorship in 1983. In making this argument,

he proposes that it is Fogwill's 1983 novel *Los pichiciegos* that "marks the end-point of the seventies in Argentine literature."¹⁰⁹ Nonetheless, Martín Kohan argues that in his story "La larga risa de todos estos años," Fogwill comes to "cuestionar la ruptura bienpensante dictadura/democracia" (question the self-righteous rupture dictatorship/democracy).¹¹⁰ This contradictory fusion of closure and continuance following the return to democracy could provide a further perspective on my analysis of similar tendencies in the work of Cohen and Piglia. Moreover, this would also necessarily include consideration of the Falklands-Malvinas conflict. With regards to Chejfec, his explorations of time and subjectivity in the postdictatorship period under neoliberalism in novels such as *Lenta biografía* and *Los planetas* could supplement my analysis of the same philosophical themes in the work of Aira, Cohen, and Piglia.¹¹¹ Moreover, Chejfec's more recent novels such as *Los incompletos* and *La experiencia dramática* could be deployed to extend my analysis of capitalism in Argentine literature beyond the economic crash of 2001–2002 and explore how this event reconfigured conceptions of capitalism and the nation.¹¹² It appears, then, that much work remains to be done. Nonetheless, I chose to focus on the work of Aira, Cohen, and Piglia because their work coalesced around a shared set of philosophical ideas, historical problems and literary practices.

In *Fuera de campo: literatura y arte argentinos después de Duchamp*, Speranza conducts a highly original reading of Piglia's fiction and argues that it corresponds to the model of the Duchampian ready-made and the idea of "el *détournement*" (misappropriation), understood as the aspiration to overcome bourgeois conceptions of originality and private property through art.¹¹³ During this examination Speranza cites Lautréamont's maxim that "el plagio es necesario, el progreso lo implica" (plagiarism is necessary, it is implied in progress).¹¹⁴ It is important to remember that Aira has claimed that Lautréamont "es en definitiva mi escritor favorito" (is, in the end, my favorite writer), and he consistently refers to the model of the ready-made in his criticism.¹¹⁵ As Speranza continues her argument, she describes Borges as the "gran plagia-rio del Río de la Plata" (the great plagiarist of the River Plate) and notes the importance of his work to Piglia.¹¹⁶ It is essential to note that in the preface to *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze references Borges's "Pierre Menard, autor del *Quijote*," "as a supreme justification to his philosophy of difference and repetition," in which "the most exact, the most strict repetition has as its correlate the maximum of difference."¹¹⁷ Such a model is equally evident in the Duchampian ready-made, as it is in William Burroughs's cut-up method, praised by both Piglia and Aira.¹¹⁸ This latter connection is especially important given that, as Page notes, Cohen too "understands his own work to engage to a significant extent with the 1960s and 1970s novels and stories published by Thomas

Pynchon, William Burroughs, and J. G. Ballard.”¹¹⁹ Where Abraham notes that “es evidente que [Aira] ha leído la obra de Deleuze” (it is evident that [Aira] has read the work of Deleuze)—and this holds equally true for Cohen—with the publication of his diaries, we now know that Piglia also read Deleuze (singling out his book on Leopold von Sacher-Masoch for particular praise) and taught his philosophy to a class of psychoanalysts.¹²⁰ Thus the theoretical framework that unites the three authors in the present study is the method utilized to justify my provocative reading. Moreover, that the three Argentine authors coalesce around the work of Burroughs’s experimental method of composition provides me with my final stylistic cue for the present book.

In his diaries, Piglia describes writing an early article on North American literature by stating that “usé en cierto sentido el método del cut-up de Burroughs e intercalé en el ensayo frases y dichos de distintos escritores y busqué, por primera vez, usar la forma del collage” (I used, in a certain sense, Burroughs’s cut-up method and inserted phrases and sayings from different authors into the essay and sought, for the first time, to use the collage form).¹²¹ While the requirements of academic writing prevent me from appropriating the words of others in the same manner as Piglia, I have nevertheless sought to “cut up” and incorporate copious citations into my own prose. Indeed, I approached writing the book in a similar manner to the way György Ligeti composed music. As Ligeti makes clear, he would “divide up the score into a large number of individual parts,” regardless of the fact that “as far as hearing them was concerned, these individual parts were completely submerged in the overall texture,” a compositional technique he would name “micropolyphony.”¹²² While my own strategy is not a direct appropriation from the work of Ligeti, I have nonetheless tried to incorporate numerous other voices into my own prose such that “polyphony is written, but harmony is heard,” as he summarized the function of micropolyphony.¹²³ In this way, it is my hope that the present text carries the trace of the “single and same voice for the whole thousand-voice multiple” that raises the “clamour of Being for all beings” in Deleuze’s univocal ontology.¹²⁴ In a small way, I hope the present book reflects the polyphony inherent in the univocity of being that is manifest in the plane of immanence with which I conclude.

In “Homenaje a Roberto Arlt,” Piglia makes the claim that “el crítico literario es siempre de algún modo un detective” (the literary critic is always, in a certain way, a detective).¹²⁵ Given that in the present study I have attempted to follow clues scattered throughout the novels and critical texts written by Aira, Cohen, and Piglia to uncover a deep philosophical connection between them, this statement has a certain resonance. Equally, I have employed a methodology that implies that reading is a creative endeavor. As such there is the risk

that the specific role of detective I have assumed is that of Erik Lönnrot from Borges's "La muerte y la brújula," who follows clues entirely of his own conception.¹²⁶ If this is the case, I can only hope that some future reader will assume the role of Red Scharlach and infuse my arguments with a truth value that they presently lack. Given these qualms, I draw great comfort (and perhaps the ultimate justification for the book itself) from the work of Aira. As he categorically states, "el malentendido es una parte importante de la literatura" (misunderstanding is an important part of literature), and "nunca hay que subestimarlos" (it must never be underestimated) because, ultimately, it is "la fuerza interior de la metamorfosis" (the interior force of metamorphosis).¹²⁷ I can but hope that the present volume has contributed to this transformative process.

**CÉSAR AIRA: 29 DE MAYO DE 1969,
LA FECHA DE LOS SUCESOS QUE CUENTA**

(29 MAY 1969: THE DATE OF THE RELEVANT EVENTS)

El malentendido es la fuerza interior de la metamorfosis.

Misunderstanding is the interior force of metamorphosis.

César Aira, Diario de la hepatitis, 35–36