**A (Cyber) Damsel in Distress: Digital Memory and Self-Figuration in Mariana Eva Perez’s *Diario de una princesa montonera - 110% Verdad***

**Abstract**

This article discusses the commonalities and differences between traditional ways of bearing witness to trauma (i.e. testimony, *memoires*) and more experimental ones in new media. It focuses on one of the most provocative Argentine autofictions to date, namely Mariana Eva Perez’s blog *Diario de una princesa montonera - 110% Verdad* (2009-2012), where Perez shares with her loyal followers details of her everyday life as a daughter of parents disappeared during the 1976-1983 dictatorship. I argue that the use of new media and an autofictional character (the Montonera Princess) allow her to talk about her painful past without the somber tone and restraint that we often associate with testimony. *Diario de una princesa montonera* has some attributes of conventional diaries such as their focus on everyday life and their colloquial tone. But Perez relies on the attributes of online diaries (interactivity, immateriality, ubiquitousness) to approach disappearance, a state crime characterized by its spectral/immaterial nature. The re-mediation between old and new media helps her deliver a contribution to the genre ‘memories of the dictatorship’ that is specifically tailored for the digital age.

**Keywords:** digital memory, remediation, autofiction, blog, dictatorship, Argentina, children of the disappeared.

**Remembering Disappearance in the Digital Age**

From even before the end of the 1976-1983 dictatorship in Argentina, in which thousands of people were persecuted, tortured and disappeared, right up to the present, both the relatives of the victims (notably the Mothers and Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo and the children of the disappeared) and also society more broadly have honoured the absent in films, novels, photographs, plays and street performances during marches and commemorations. Now, at the start of a new millennium that has seen the emergence of a new generation of ‘memory agents’, it is possible that we are facing a paradigmatic shift in the remembrance of Argentina’s unburied bodies. The generation of the grandchildren of the victims are the first generation entirely born (and bred) digital. Their strategies of memory will probably thus be determined, in large part, by the skills and aesthetics of social networks and new media.

Members of older generations are also discovering the potential of digital media for cultural memory. The studio Huella Digital in Buenos Aires, specialists in interactive documentaries and led by Martín Malamud (a Professor from the ‘missing’ generation) is currently exploring the possibilities offered by virtual and augmented reality to create animations of the dictatorship’s clandestine centres of detention and torture. The first simulation made as part of this project, the interactive or 3D ESMA (Escuela Mecánica de la Armada), the most iconic of these sites of horror, has already been used to support the testimonies of survivors in trials against perpetrators that were reopened in 2005. The studio, that in the past worked closely with the human rights organisation Instituto Espacio para la Memoria (IEM), now dissolved, is currently collaborating with a group of anthropologists from the University of Buenos Aires to create an interactive documentary on El campito, one of the four clandestine detention centres active in the military base Campo de Mayo. While the use of immersive technologies to recreate a concentration camp poses a number of significant ethical questions – the risk of identifying with both the perpetrator and the victim thanks to the subjective perspective of the user, for example – the project has at least one unquestionable benefit. The military attempted to disappear not only people but also the evidence of the atrocities they carried out, including crime scenes themselves. While it is still possible to visit the ex-ESMA, now converted into a Space of Memory, El campito and other clandestine centres of torture and disappearance no longer exist. Virtual and augmented reality thus become memory aids that allow people to ‘visit’ those (web)sites of memory but in the digital realm.

Moreover, Marina Zerbarini, a pioneer net artist in Argentina, created in 2003 *Tejido de memoria* (Memory Weave), an interactive artwork, containing video files with testimonies of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo, photographs of the ESMA, and graphs with statistics of the poverty index in the country, a consequence of the neoliberal policies introduced by the military regime, all interconnected in an online platform. *Memory Weave*, which was included in the exhibition *Woman: Memory of Repression* curated by artist and activist Raquel Partnoy, gives considerable importance to users’ input: a simulator called Valentina asks questions to the users and their answers become part of the creative process and the work itself. The title refers to the way memory works – weaving/combining subjective and collective images and narratives – and to the texture (*tejido*) of recollections: visual, mediated, rhizomatic, fragmentary, at times even chaotic. With this ‘work-in-progress’, as she calls it, Zerbarini found in digital media the optimum medium for conveying the nature of memory, and specifically the memory of disappearance, a phenomenon that points to the past as much as to the present, not least because it is an ongoing crime, strictly speaking still being committed today.

Silvana Mandolessi, the director of an ambitious project on digital memories in Latin America, argues in this vein that disappearance is ‘a *technology* that produces a subject with a new ontological status: the disappeared are non-beings, because they are neither alive nor dead’.[[1]](#endnote-1) For Mandolessi, digital memory, that is a memory mediated by digital technology, is, like disappearance, determined by the transgression of the boundaries of categories such as life and death, materiality and immateriality. It is perhaps because of this shared immateriality of memory, digital media and disappearance that on 24 March, the date of the coup, thousands of Facebook users in Argentina join social and viral campaigns to remember those absented. Using the social network as a grief medium and an online memorial people remove their profile pictures and leave the spaces empty to evoke the ghostly presences of the disappeared. Though this campaign is a product of the ‘connective turn’ (Hoskins 2011) it is not an entirely new strategy of memory. As Cecilia Sosa (2017) has pointed out in her study of this phenomenon, the Facebook campaign to commemorate the disappeared is reminiscent of an historic artistic urban intervention in Buenos Aires that visually represented disappearance: the so-called *siluetazo*, which in 1983 confronted passersby with the spatial dimension of the absence of thousands of bodies in the city.[[2]](#endnote-2)

This article discusses precisely the similarities and differences between traditional ways of bearing witness to disappearance and more experimental ones in new media. It explores to what extent digital technologies are changing the ways we remember disappearance today by focusing in one of the most provocative Argentine autofictions to date, namely Mariana Eva Perez’s blog *Diario de una princesa montonera - 110% Verdad* (2009-2012). [[3]](#endnote-3)

In her online diary Perez shares with her loyal followers details of her everyday life as a daughter of disappeared parents, resorting to dark humour, parody and an autofictional character (the Montonera Princess) that allows her to talk about her painful past without the somber tone and disciplinary restraint that we often associate with the testimony genre. Moreover, her followers comment on her posts, laugh at her jokes and send her virtual hugs when the Princess is upset or has a bad dream, thus co-creating with her a virtual network of mourners and a type of collective memory specifically tailored to the digital age.

Despite the sensitive subject of the blog and its irreverent tone both critics and the members of what the Princess calls the ‘ghetto’ (meaning the relatives of the victims of the dictatorship and members of human rights organisations) have been enthusiastic about *Diario de una princesa montonera*. But what are they praising Perez for? Not everyone agreed that the ‘newness’ of her blog has to do with her use of new media to remember the disappeared. It is worth asking, then, what, if anything, does new media add to more traditional ways of remembering the victims of traumatic events beyond the initial excitement these technologies often generate?

In this article I position myself in a middle ground between those who are overtly enthusiastic about the potentialities of digital technologies for memory purposes and those who are skeptical about the impact of new media for cultural memory. Instead it is perhaps more productive to explore how old and new media, traditional and experimental strategies of remembering, operate together, redefining and *re-mediating* (Bolter and Grusin 2000) each other in those dialogues without completely erasing their boundaries.[[4]](#endnote-4) Referring to a series of Latin American cybercultural products Claire Taylor and Thea Pitman have said in this respect that ‘the most interesting and innovative work taking place [in the region] is precisely at the interface between the old and the new technologies’ (2007: 1). Following this observation I will look at how Perez’s blog departs from traditional diaries by relying on specific characteristics of online platforms such as interactivity, ubiquitousness and immateriality to remember disappearance but, at the same time, at how it echoes some of the attributes of this old media (secrecy, accounts of everyday life in the first person, the use of the present tense) to offer a memory of absence that escapes both the formality of academic papers (Perez works in academia) and the institutional discourses of human rights organisations (where she previously worked).

***Hijis* in the Blogosphere**

‘No one should imagine tears or cheap shots’, writes the Montonera Princess after telling us how Nassera, her French friend with Algerian parents and whose son is disappeared, confessed that she has stopped living and that she thinks night and day about him. This warning could also be addressed to the readers of *Diario de una princesa montonera* – *110% Verdad*, Mariana Eva Perez’s blog, published in book form in 2012, that draws on the adventures of the Princess in the ‘Disneyland of the *Droits de l’Homme*’, meaning Argentina under presidents Néstor Kirchner and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner between 2009 and 2012. Just as with Nassera, the Princess goes to bed and wakes up thinking of the disappeared (Perez has often remarked that she has never dreamt so much of her disappeared parents as when she was writing the blog). Yet her chronicles provoke more laughter than they do tears, despite the fact that she suggests in one of her entries that the tissue company *Carilina* should sponsor her blog.

The Montonera Princess is, like Perez, a daughter of disappeared parents. And like her, she is also other things too: a ‘premature dumb-militant’, ‘the youngest expert in ESMAology’, a ‘precocious girl of human rights’, an ‘orphan expelled from the ghetto of human right activists’, an ‘idiotic Cosmopolitan girl’, a ‘former superstar orphan’, and an ‘old-girl raised by grandparents’. In her blogosphere there are other *hijis*, a term that playfully refers to children of disappeared parents. There is, for example, the group of nerd *hijis*, the MP *hiji*, the buizshow *hijis* such as Camilo García (whom the Princess begs never to change because ‘*hijis* militontos’ there are in abundance whereas there are very few ‘*hijis* chimenteros’), the ‘top model *hiji’* or ‘the Girls’ (‘*hijis* chicks’). Other important characters of this royal universe are the Nene, with whom the Princess used to work at ‘\*\*\*’ answering inquiries about the possible whereabouts of children of disappeared parents, the ‘bloggers’ Lalie and Marie, Jota, the ‘Aunties of the Esma’ and the ‘Neighbours with Good Memory of Almagro’, the committee in charge of organising the flagstone-homages for the disappeared in that part of the city.[[5]](#endnote-5)

The adventures of the Princess posted on the blog – from the chronicles of her visits to the ESMA trials while crocheting, to the anecdote of how Jota touched her for the first time in the former ESMA, more precisely between the torture rooms known as Capucha and Capuchita, the most unexpected place for a first date – reveal to what extent it is difficult, if not impossible, to make a distinction between the private, the public and the intimate in post-dictatorship Argentina. Perez’s decision to write a blog (a platform of ambiguous nature, located between the private and the public) is a highly relevant one that points to the blurring of the boundaries between these spheres following the coup.

But the most radical gesture of this blog is perhaps to have consciously ignored a series of – disciplinary, linguistic, political and even generational – limits that until not long ago determined *what* and *how* to talk about the dictatorship and its effects in the present. One of the most significant merits of this blog was, in fact, to remind us that the borders of the sayable, particularly when it comes to the ‘temita’ [minor issue] (an ironic term that refers to the sensitivity often attached to the subject of the disappeared), are not imposed only by the hegemonic politics of memory during certain periods of history, or by the ineffable nature of the events in question, but also by the rules of the genres and mediums that we use to speak about them.

‘What new words can I use? How can I escape the institutional prose that I used when writing the propaganda that Nene asked me to write but that I could not sign as my own? Would the Montonera Princess ever be able to change her fate as a *militonta* to finally become a Writer?’, wonders our heroine, at the same time as her blog provides clear evidence of her having inverted ‘the sign of the mark’, as she calls the impact the abduction of her parents made on her. Indeed, hers is not the blog of a daughter of disappeared parents who wants to become a writer but rather a blog of a writer who is *also* a daughter of disappeared parents.

In this vein the choice of three literary genres – fairy tales, online diaries and autofiction – to narrate the post-dictatorship era allows Perez to testify to her experiences as a daughter of disappeared parents without falling into a cathartic memory, an epic narrative or a cold analysis of those years, instead expanding our view of the past to take it to truly unexpected places.

The presence of motifs of and characters from children’s fables are clear references to a lost childhood. The Princess of ‘illustrious lineage of human rights’ tells us about her conflictive relationship with a man called Nene (Boy); she chooses to call her father’s bazar a ‘toy shop’; and she has tantrums and is spoiled like a birthday girl. In her chronicles there are several fairy tale-like heroes. There is, for example, M (who works at the Forensic Anthropologist Centre and who has enchanted all the female *hijis* with his charm), and there is, of course, Jota (her Prince Charming), whom the Princess marries at the end to live happily ever after. But if these figures are, as in most fairy tales, not ambivalent (not good and bad at the same time), a third heroic figure in the Princess’ tales is a more complex character.

I am referring to ‘Prince Néstor’, as she calls Néstor Kirchner, the former president of Argentina, known for his implementation of a strong state-led politics of memory and the condemnation of previous neoliberal politics of oblivion. The Montonera Princess is visibly touched and happy when Néstor becomes President of Argentina and proudly attends a meeting with him in the Government House. However she is also wary about her expectations: ‘I hope I don’t regret following you’, she challenges him when they finally meet. The ‘climax of her faith in politics’ is then followed by disappointment, the ‘lowest point (in English in the original) of my relationship with the Kirchners’, when in 2009, on the occasion of a speech about the state programme known as Fútbol para Todos, set up to broadcast all football matches on open access television stations, Nestor’s wife and subsequently President of Argentina Cristina Fernández de Kirchner refers to the previous media politics with an inopportune phrase – ‘disappeared goals’, as if the goals had been kidnapped by commercial television –, which compared such policies to the abductions and disappearances that took place during the dictatorship.

The other key moment of her relationship with these symbolic parents is the day Néstor Kirchner died in October 2010. On that occasion, the Princess remembered 24 March 2004 when Kirchner asked for forgiveness on behalf of the Argentine state and when he removed the portraits of Videla and Bignone from the walls of the Military College at the ESMA. But then she also remembers ‘the appallingly written and never revised laws of reparation intended to benefit the relatives of the disappeared’, ‘the use and abuse of the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo’, and the ‘the attempt to sell the ESMA to the highest bidder’. Curiously, although she considers those emblematic gestures of Kirchner insufficient and therefore somehow hypocritical, she also later cries over his death as if he were a relative of hers and even regrets having lost faith in him. Ultimately, these toings and froings in her relationship with Néstor Kirchner are all attempts to grieve the death of The Father who, unlike her biological father, was able to have a proper burial.

These heroes coexist in the blog with the villains of this story. But unlike what happens in the hegemonic narratives of Argentine collective memory, here the bad guys are more mundane and ordinary than those in fairy tales. Indeed, if the military cap printed on the t-shirts of human rights organisations with the slogan ‘Justice and Punishment’ alluded to a unique enemy easily identifiable as the ‘other’ (the military), the Princess warns us – following a path already opened up in novels by writers such as Luis Gusmán and Martín Kohan – that there are in Argentine history less obviously monstrous characters that are nonetheless ‘more perverse than [dictator Jorge Rafael] Videla’. One example is the ‘Plaintiff 1’ that breastfed the Princess’ appropriated brother without asking where his real mother was (‘an udder, someone suddenly attaches him to an udder, an udder that does not ask where the baby comes from nor sees that as a scandalous act’). Another example is Dora the Multi-processorappropriator,[[6]](#endnote-6) who stole a baby and raised him as if he were her own.

Finally, this controversial adaptation of fairy tale structures and motifs to the Argentine context also has another key prototypical figure of the genre, the ‘Good Fairy’ Munú, a camp survivor who is also a sort of mother figure for the Princess. This character is fundamental in the Princess’ tales because it is a post about her that makes explicit why Perez has chosen an online autofiction and not a more conventional type of testimony to tell her story.

The Princess writes at one point that she cannot finish the testimony of how Munú testified in the ESMA on her experience as a prisoner there, pointing to the difficulty of bearing witnessing to trauma: ‘And this is the end of the Adventures of the Good Fairy Munú in the Kingdom of Testimony, at least in the way I can write about them. I can’t go on because I get cramps in my hands and I risk writing an academic paper or a text for the ghetto of human rights organisations’.

This post is crucial because it makes explicit the reflective nature of the blog that, if anything, pays testimony to the impossibility of testimony in similar fashion to Albertina Carri with her pioneering film *Los rubios* (The Blondes, 2003). Indeed, the crossover between fantasy and reality, fairy tale and history, fiction and autobiography problematizes the testimonial status of the blog, a status already suggested by the subtitle. *110% Verdad* promises the reader that this will be a more truthful account than the ‘pure’ truth of testimony. Equally, however, the title might suggest that the blog is one hundred per cent truth and ten per cent imagination, or vice versa.

*Diario de una princesa montonera* – *110% Verdad* cannot be defined as testimony, at least not in the sense that human rights organisations understand the term. The diary is written in the first person (occasionally disguised as the third person), but the narrative voice belongs to an autofictional character. The use of a pseudonym or *nickname* is common in the blogosphere and it points to an essential characteristic of blogs, namely that they are simultaneously spaces of self-representation and mise-en-scèneof a self that hides as much as it says it shows. Thus the first commitment of the blogger to his or her readers is not to be honest (to say ‘la Verdat’ [‘The Truth’]), as with biographers or witnesses, but to be entertaining.

Furthermore, the posts of the Montonera Princess are also not testimony if this term is understood as a denouncement. While denouncements always refer to real events that took place in the past, many of the entries of the blog are about dreams of guerrilla adventures or imaginary meetings with her disappeared parents or with Néstor Kirchner, all accounts, in sum, with little or no relevance in a judicial sphere. It is thus not surprising that even when in one of the first entries the Princess claims playfully that ‘the testimonial duty is calling me. Primo Levi, here I come!’, she also rejects the idea that her blog has any testimonial value. In later posts the Montonera Princess says, for example, that ‘if this blog were a testimony there would be cockroaches, but it’s fiction’, and more categorically ‘I’m the one who can’t bear another testimony’.

If *Diario de una princesa montonera* – *110% Verdad* is not testimony it is also not a personal but an online diary. The tone and register of the online diary – short, episodic, direct and colloquial – allows her to distance her writing both from the institutional prose of certain human rights organisations and also from the prose of academia (Perez was finishing her PhD on post-dictatorship theatre when she was writing the blog).

The apparently banal comments of her characters are in fact effective ways of disarming the common places of the ‘liturgy of memory’ as she calls it. Such is the case, for example, when the Princess claims that the T-shirts of Trial and Punishment are ‘démodé’. ‘We urgently need a fashion emergency on the Left, please’, she writes after begging for tailored models. Or when she explains that even in social networks, and not only in the Plaza de Mayo, it is possible to *militonear* (a word play between ‘militar’/militate and ‘tonto’/dumb). It is thus not surprising that the Princess gets all excited when one 24 March everyone uses Facebook to discuss whether they should change their profile picture for the silhouettes of the disappeared, the motto Never Again or for the picture of ‘your favourite disappeared’.

The potential of the virtual platform for the construction of a ludic and un-solemn memory of the past is reinforced in the blog by the use of words in diminutive (‘temita’) or grammatical wordplay (‘hijis’, ‘Verdat’, ‘Identidat’) that attempt to remove the weight carried by these symbolic terms that have been overburdened by history.

The Princess has also turned to other strategies to dissipate the gravity of memory, as when she writes that ‘I always need a beer or a joint to deal with the *temita* because I can’t do it when I’m sober’, or when she uses expressions such as ‘in the middle of my sorrow – I say it like that, gently, so I don’t freak you out’.

This playful and parodic memory is far from being superficial or a mere irreverent gesture, because the Princess well knows that ‘one thing is to defy the ghetto’s common sense and another to go too far and end up being a snob’. This ludic memory is rather one of the diverse strategies that the relatives of the disappeared use to say what cannot be said straightforwardly. Moreover, the playful transformation of a traumatic history and of the vocabulary attached to it is also a way to transform the past ‘so I can appropriate what I have inherited’. With these words the Princess is referring to the dress that her grandmother Site (nickname of Rosita Roisinblit, vice-president and founder of Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo) gave to her for her wedding with Jota and that the tailor adjusted so it fit her body. The phrase, however, could be also read in reference to another less tangible but equally real legacy.

Finally, unlike the confessional spirit of diaries (and despite being published in a collection entitled *Confesiones*) Perez’s blog is everything but a confessionary, not least because the Princess not only talks about her life. Showing a similar curious spirit to the child protagonists of children’s fables, she also wants to know more about her followers, who they are, what they do. ‘I Google everything’, she writes at one point, when investigating one of her readers. And then she says even more explicitly: ‘I told you that I suffer from *detectivism*’. The Princess is a detective and a voyeur, just as we, her readers, are (‘Are you good detectives, readers?’, she asks), as other hijis are (‘they are also good detectives’) or the way M (sic) is, ‘the most handsome detective of the ghetto’. Yet it is also true that *detectivism* is an illness that affects many children of disappeared parents, as suggested for example by the film *M* (Prividera, 2007), the fictional characters of Patricio Pron or Félix Bruzzone, the play *Mi vida después* (Arias 2008), or the collection of poetry ‘Los detectives salvajes’, directed by Juan Aiub y Julián Axat, poets and children of disappeared parents.

One main difference between blogs and personal journals is that if the former usually have a theme, the latter have no other topic than the life of the writer. Moreover, the blog is ephemeral: it usually disappears when the blogger decides to close it. The personal diary, on the other hand, survives its author; it is founded on the principle of posterity and the idea of the secret (Pauls 1998). Thus the writer of journals is usually less concerned about his or her style. Blogs, on the contrary, are written to be shared (they are carefully edited) and to communicate, apart from also being interactive.

In this aspect, Perez has tried to keep the dialogical tone of the blog in her book, as made evident for example by the comments of her followers added later to the volume (‘Jony questions my last phrase’). Yet, she also knows that the immediate and interactive nature of blogs can never be completely reproduced in a book. The blog is, in sum, a text written in the first person but it exists in a communitarian space, as observed by the Princess: ‘I write it in the blog so I don’t forget it; it is as if I were asking a group of strangers to remind me of it’.

Her community, however, is not only comprised of unknown people. In Perez’s blog there are links to other websites of ‘cool *hijis*’, such as *El caballo Enrique* or *Amontonados:* *Temporalidades de la infancia*, the blog of the exhibition that brought together the work of María Giuffra, Lucila Quieto and Ana Adjiman. In turn, each of these blogs includes links not only to Perez’s blog but also to the blogs of other children of disappeared parents. *El caballo Enrique* has an entry, ‘Blogs that I follow’, with links to *Diario de una princesa montonera*, but also to the blog of the Colectivo de hijos. Similarly, the blog of Angela Urondo, *Pedacitos de Angelita*, in which the daughter of Francisco Urondo, the famous poet murdered by the dictatorship in 1976, shares reflections and images of her life history, also includes links to Perez’s blog, the Colectivo de hijos blog and to another blog, *Infancia y Dictadura*, where Urondo gathers together accounts of dreams and childhood memories of former children of the dictatorship. Finally, the blog of María Giuffra has a section (‘Nos-otros’ [‘We’]) where she publishes the work of artists and authors of her generation, many of them children of disappeared parents such as Perez, Julia Coria, Julián Axat and Lucila Quieto.

These rhizomatic connections between the blogs construct a map of aesthetics and common concerns linked to a generational memory that circulate outside more established fields and disciplines such as cinema or literature. These manifestations of an emerging form of digital memory need to be taken into account because they constitute an original way, both in content and form, of discussing the legacy of the traumatic past in Argentina.

In *Diario de una princesa montonera* – *110% Verdad*, affinities with the memories of other artists of Perez’s generation are also evident in some posts (‘I saw Ávila’s film *Clandestine Childhood* and Arias’ play *My Life After*. I had hoped that I wouldn’t like or be moved by *Clandestine Childhood* but I wasn’t in luck’), in the choice of certain images (as when Perez publishes a photographic montage with the image of her father following the visual logic of Lucila Quieto’s 1999-2001 work *Archaeology of Absence*) and interviews in which she pays tribute to other artists such as Bruzzone, Quieto, Laura Alcoba or Lola Arias.

All of these artists have a similar approach to the past, using humour, parody, the reconfiguration of the public/private dichotomy as a political tension, and critical analyses of the armed struggles. In addition, they avoid taking a moral stance on the 1970s, and make references to contemporary figures who appropriate the past such as the archaeologist or the detective. Above all, these artists all share a preference for autofiction when offering testimony of their life stories.

Similarly *Diario de una princesa montonera* is not an autobiography, and not a testimony but an (online) autofiction. Autofiction distrusts the referential capacity of language and the fidelity of memory, it deconstructs the autobiographical I and is the opposite of documentary literature because it does not believe that an experience that has taken place outside the text can be fully transmitted with words.

According to Serge Doubrovsky, who coined the term in 1977 to refer to his novel *Fils* (offspring/ties), one of the main attributes of autofiction is the establishment of an ambiguous or simultaneous pact between the author and the reader according to which the latter trusts in the shared nominal identity between the narrator, the author and the character of a narrative (autobiographical pact). At the same time he or she will read that narrative as if it were a fable or an invention (fictional pact).

The Montonera Princess often refers to this double pact: ‘You know that my diary is mostly a fiction but the bit about the cheese is True’; ‘Is it True or Hyperbole? I leave it to you, reader’. She also disseminates pieces of information that we could easily link to Perez, including her initial (‘M\* is my name’) or her activities: ‘I dedicated a play to my grandmother’, ‘I studied Political Science’, ‘I started a seminar with María Moreno’. The Princess even includes photographs of Mariana (artistically modified by blogger Natalia Perugini, alias ‘Kit Sch’) when referring to events that supposedly happened to the Princess. Despise all these analogies, however, the narrator makes it clear that it would be narrow-minded to read her blog as simply another autobiography. ‘I came back and I am fictions’, she writes, parodying Evita’s famous phrase (I will come back and I will be millions). This phrase has the aim of removing all doubt about the self-referential status of her writing.

As well as avoiding this ambiguous pact and the straightforward identification between the author and the reader, which would result in a cathartic memory that Perez wants to avoid, autofictions have another advantage over more conventional testimonies. They allow her to ‘write beautifully’ and irreverently without sacrificing rigour and commitment.

Perhaps the key to dealing with the ghosts of the past is to rely on an un-solemn memory of the dictatorship, which brings to light the lacunae of language to name the unspeakable but which also reserves a place for laughter, pleasure and beauty, as happens with this blog. We read there: ‘I start writing a list of words that we, the *hijis*, cannot use with the same innocence as normal people: centre, grill, transfer, machine, blindfold… About a year ago I wrote a similar list. I wanted to write about the *temita* and I started a list of words that I self-censured, words from \*\*\*, words from the ghetto, words from Site [Princess’s grandmother]. It was the only thing I could write at the time. There were no alternative words. Now we are inventing them’.

**(Re)Mediated Past**

Such self-reflexive posts are indicative of the emergence of a new lexicon of memory, associated with the second and third generations of post-dictatorship Argentina, made possible in part thanks to the characteristics of online diaries analysed above. The informal/colloquial tone of blogs and their interactivity are both key components for delivering a non-solemn and playful memory of the past and to understand the way young generations can create affective communities of memory with their peers. Furthermore, the fragmented language of blogs and its immateriality point to the difficulties of representing both the spectral and traumatic nature of disappearance in *any* media.

Most critics have argued that the online form of *Diario de una princesa montonera* is what makes Perez’s blog different from previous formations of memory in Argentina. Silvana Mandolessi, for example, argues that the particular configuration between the public and the private in online diaries allows Perez to exhibit a new relationship between intimacy and politics in post-dictatorship Argentina, what Reinaldo Laddaga calls ‘a mediated intimacy’ (2016: 129). In a similar vein, William R. Benner examines ‘the feedback loop which is generated in the exchange of responses and comments between author and readers’ in Perez’s blog and argues that this loop, special to the blog format, ‘allows the reader to take an active role in the artistic production of the blog […] and gives those indirectly affected a chance to contribute to her own artistic endevours’ (2017, unpublished). Before Benner, writer Carlos Gamerro pointed out that the blog format and its interactive dynamic permits Perez to test her humour with the ‘no-hijis’ (2015: 512). If children of disappeared parents in Argentina have always been known to possess a particularly dark humour (see Sosa 2013; Gatti 2014), Perez uses the potentialities of the blog format to ‘Take the jokes outside the ghetto, opening them up to a wider audience to see if they too dare to laugh’ (Gamerro 2015: 512). The blog format thus ‘move[s] the process of mourning the disappearance of her parents from the personal to the collective sphere’ (Benner 2017), a collective made up not only of relatives of the disappeared but also by an heterogeneous and transnational audience, fostering a more comprehensive, ‘travelling memory’ (Erll 2011) of disappearance.

Not everyone, however, agrees that the novelty of Perez’s blog lies in its digital or interactive nature. Writer Martín Kohan (2014) has said that, despite all the promises made about new media, he remains unconvinced about how innovative new technologies are in relation to literary narration. For Kohan the possibilities opened up by having an open debate on the blog’s forums, for example, are often impeded by the insults made by trolls who can hide in the anonymity of the (virtual) medium. Moreover, he claims, hyper-connectivity and the hypertext have improved but not revolutionized the long-term relationships between text and illustration or between one text and another. He concludes that new technologies have not so much promoted new genres or new narrative formats but rather encouraged a return to two traditional genres that were on the verge of disappearance, namely aphorisms (Twitter) and the diary (blogs). In the case of the latter, he adds, even the possibility of following the development of blogs in real time – as if they were a *reality show* of a diary and not just a diary – dissolves over time, particularly when blogs became books, as happened with Perez’s blog, published in 2012 by Capital Intelectual. Thus, for Kohan what is innovative about *Diario de una princesa montonera* is not so much its (interactive) medium but Perez’s humour, and more precisely the target of her humour: less the figure of the *guerrillero* or the *épica setentista* (which have already been the focus of previous parodies in books by, for example, Rubén Mira and Carlos Gamerro) than ‘another more delicate zone [of the past]: that of memory rites and reparation, of loss and the pain of loss’ (2014).

I agree with Kohan that new media is as much about the return of old genres as it is about innovation.[[7]](#endnote-7) However, as I have argued here, in the case of *Diario de una princesa montonera* Perez’s decision to use a blog does not so much mean the return of the diary form (or of other autobiographical narratives such as testimonies or *memoires*) as, on the contrary, provide proof of the limits of such forms when it comes to testifying to the trauma of disappearance. Perez claims that if the disappeared were abducted in the public sphere as a result of state terrorism, it is only fair that they are mourned and remembered in the public realm (in this case, that of cyber space), and not merely in the privacy of family homes or via the secret world of traditional diaries. Perez chooses an online diary and not merely a diary to talk about her life as a daughter of disappeared parents precisely because, unlike diaries, blogs are communitarian and written to be shared. She relies on the openness of the blog format both to create an affective community of mourners and also to point to the public dimension of the crime. And yet Perez’s blog does not completely erase or replace all the attributes of the more traditional medium. Her blog is, like old-fashioned diaries, still focused on her everyday life, it is written in the first-person and it reserves significant space for her dreams. The diary format is thus not entirely rejected in Perez’s blog but rather re-mediatedand refashioned, half public and half clandestine, located in a middle ground between transparency, immediacy and hypermediacy, and between individual and collective memory.

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1. Mandolessi’s project is funded by the ERC starting scheme and it is entitled ‘“We are all Ayotzinapa”: The Role of Digital Media in the Shaping of Transnational Memories of Disappearance’ (2016-2021). It investigates the case of the disappearance of 43 students in Mexico in September 2014 and the role that new media has in the transnationalisation of the case and the commemoration of the victims. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. The most comprehensive study on the *siluetazo* to date is Gustavo Bruzzone and Ana Longoni, eds. *El siluetazo* (Buenos Aires: Adriana Hidalgo, 2008). [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Perez was born in 1977. On 6 October 1978 her parents, José Manuel Perez Rojo and Patricia Roisinblit, two members of the *Montoneros* organisation, were kidnapped, taken to the clandestine camp Regional de Inteligencia Buenos Aires (RIBA) and disappeared. In the ESMA Patricia had a son, Guillermo, who was raised by a couple in complicity with the torturers of Perez’ parents. While working with the Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo (her grandmother, Rosa Roisinblit is the vice-president of that organisation), Perez gathered together key information about his brother and found him. Since then they have a complicated relationship, the subject of Perez’ plays *Instrucciones para un coleccionista de mariposa* and *Abaco*. I have analysed *Diario de una princesa montonera* elsewhere but in an essay that asks to what extent the term postmemory, often attached to works of children of disappeared parents, is pertinent to describe this particular type of memory in Argentina (2016). [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. In their book *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (2000), Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin argue that in the last decade of the twentieth century ‘older electronic and print media are seeking to reaffirm their status within out culture as digital media challenge that status’ (5) and that ‘our culture wants both to multiply its media and to erase all traces of mediation: ideally, it wants to erase its media in the very act of multiplying them’ (5). But the medium rarely disappears and immediacy coexists in the cyberspace with hypermediacy. New media relies on old media and viceversa, allowing us to understand one particular medium in relation to another. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. The three asterisks refer to a human rights organisation where the Princess worked in the past, most likely Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. The ‘Multiprocesadora’ is an electric food processor/multiprocessor. Perez plays with this word and the similarities with the sound of the word ‘apropiadora’ (someone who stole babies during the dictatorship). [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. In ‘From the Baroque to Twitter: Tracing the Literary Heritage of Digital Genres’, Claire Taylor argues that instead of making a radical rupture with old media, authors of digital works in the Hispanic world speak back to rich Hispanic tradition of literary experimentation, reformulating, expanding and re-mediating that tradition. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)