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## Memories in Orbit: Loss in Sergio Chejfec's Los planetas

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## **Abstract**

The protagonist of Sergio Chejfec's 1999 novel *Los Planetas* (known only by the initial S.), claims to have made the decision to become a writer only because of the disappearance of his friend from adolescence (known by the initial M.) who he declares was much more apt than he at telling stories. The stories, says S., "took on ample and diffuse subjects . . . that came to him from who knows where, acquiring a new dimension through his voice" (104). S. the writer, by contrast, is uncomfortable with his own voice, and with "[his] inclination towards the replacement, the substitute." In other words, S. is torn between the desire for conserving and the fear of converting, and of symbolizing...

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The protagonist of Sergio Chejfec's 1999 novel *Los Planetas* (known only by the initial S.), claims to have made the decision to become a writer only because of the disappearance of his friend from adolescence (known by the initial M.) who he declares was much more apt than he at telling stories. The stories, says S., "took on ample and diffuse subjects ... that came to him from who knows where, acquiring a new dimension through his voice" (104). S. the writer, by contrast, is uncomfortable with his own voice, and with "[his] inclination towards the replacement, the substitute." In other words, S. is torn between the desire for conserving and the fear of converting, and of symbolizing.

Throughout the novel, on a personal level, S. continues to experience that tension. He has achieved (and suffered the loss of) a beautiful affective bond with M., a joy and a grief that cry out to be sung, and yet he recognizes that his voice is *not* M.'s voice, that the authorial text is not and can never be the adolescent's oral tale. The brilliance of Chejfec's novel is that it makes S.'s experience a part of the reader's experience as well. With its few temporal references and frequent jumping in time (along with the feeling timelessness inherently suggested by tales of adolescent adventure), *Los Plantas* confers a feeling of being outside-of-time while simultaneously lamenting the passing of time and distancing of its narrator and spokesman from the most important person in his life.

The ideas of the memory-in-ruin and the memory that can never be told in its own voice run parallel in this novel. By dint of its internally-defined set-up (S. is in his thirties or forties and lives in a foreign Latin American capital) it necessarily asks the question of what is to be done with other painful Argentine memories of the seventies. That is to say, in both a spatial and temporal self, it frames itself as an allegory for the country's political and social breakdown. *Los planetas* asks the reader to contemplate Argentina's past both from up close (as per the intensity of the personal connection with M. and the love affair that both characters maintain with the geography of Buenos Aires) and from afar — via the prism of the narrator's troubled relationship with his own memory (he forgets some details of importance even as he remembers other seemingly insignificant moments).

In his grief and his struggle to remember, S. strives literally to become his dead friend M., to reanimate him by coming to know him through what M. (while living) was wont to call the "intermittences" of personal experience (105). "With M. I achieved solidarity," he writes, "an effective bond within which our intermittences were able to unwind

themselves not only without pressure or force, but also by a glint of mutual understanding.”

“Mutual understanding” is a translation of the Spanish term *compenetración*, or co-penetration, a beautiful synonym for the will-to-solidarity similar to the German term *einfihlung* as employed by Freud to describe the putting of oneself in the place of another. What concerns S. here is precisely his own ability to remain “in feeling,” that is, to stay temporally close to all the beautiful memories of M. conjured up at the moment of his loss. Towards the end of the novel, in his most extreme act of self-denial, S. even attempts to take out an identity card in M.’s name. By such an act, S. seems willing to not only take on the mantle of M.’s identity as a thinker, writing stories according to what he imagines to be M.’s perspective, but also to experience the end of his own name, the renouncing of his own experience, and the forced distancing from his own family – in essence to declare *his* solidarity with the experience of death itself.

S. declares that when he writes, he will be *less* himself. And, he specifies, in order to invoke his own identity and M.’s memory, he must ignore “*when we are*” (*cuándo somos*), the temporal aspect of being (105). His embrace of the “intermittent” quality of memory is a challenge to the mnemonic and affective erasure inherent in the march of time. And it is also a challenge to what Sergio Villalobos-Ruminott has called the “‘sin of archival,’ or the surrendering of the painful past to the so-called ‘cartographical’ logic of the archivist ... that is to say, to a particular text genre such as “memoirs” or “post-dictatorship studies” (73). “The indifferentiation of the tone, the calligraphy and the stroke,” he charges, “make of texts small milestones that circulate and sell in the post-dictatorial archive, exhausting their reserve in the exchange, in the sustained pragmatic utility inherent in reading them as referential monuments to a certain problematic” (73-4, my translation). “The old difference between use-value and exchange-value,” he concludes, “also would reach its end” (74).

*Los planetas* – like Ricardo Piglia’s *Respiración artificial*, Diamela Eltit’s *Lumpérica*, and Roberto Bolaño’s *Estrella distante* – takes on the difficult task of remembering an allegorically-rendered tragic past event while simultaneously struggling to avoid commemorating it, that is to say unwittingly declaring an end to the violent events and proscribing its continuing reverberations in the present. Indeed, the danger is that as a kind of monument or a *milestone* literature can serve as a bandage, but not a true suture, acting as a substitutive symbol that concludes public reflection without recognizing continuing private and systemic hemorrhaging of feeling, so to speak.

When a commemoration allows the book to be closed on active remembering, or when “post-dictatorship” writings are relegated to their own genre and place on the shelf, pain naturally becomes anger and the writing of the history of a tragedy, although important, naturally seems a puny milestone.

In S.’s case, the violence in question is the unexplained disappearance of M. just days before news of a mysterious explosion makes headlines in Argentina and just after the return of Juan Domingo Perón to the country. His invocation of M.’s life, through a series of shared episodes of city life in Buenos Aires is then an attempt to manifest a pain that

remains lived in the present, a continued experience of suffering which seems to be representative of other experiences of loss during the Argentine dictatorship (although the dictatorship itself is rarely, and only tangentially, mentioned).

As Idelber Avelar has skillfully illustrated in his book *The Untimely Present*, novels such as *Los planetas* demonstrate a use of allegory in the Benjaminian sense – as a belated contemplation of urban “ruins” that signal a specific historical ground zero “before the fall.” The exercise in writing serves, then, not only to call attention to the censorship of *other* tragic stories with nameless victims but also to the way in which both the conceptual and physical structures of the city try – but fail – to mask the effects of the violence that made the contemporary economic and governmental *status quo* possible (3). For Avelar, this “resignification” of urban space means that post-dictatorial fiction “maintains an estranged, denaturalized relation with its present” (10). He mentions, by way of anecdotal example, Ricardo Piglia’s observation that in the late ‘70s Argentine bus stops had been renamed “zones of detention” (*zonas de detención*). “Whereas the symbol privileges timeless, eternalized images,” Avelar writes, “allegory, by virtue of being a ruin, is necessarily a temporalized trope, bearing within itself the marks of its time of production. If mourning is in a fundamental sense a confrontation with time and its passing, allegory, as the trope that voices mourning, cannot but bear in itself unmistakable temporal marks” (4).

Considering Avelar’s profound thesis, isn’t it curious to think how Sergio Chejfec manages to compose a remembrance that is fundamentally disconnected from time (writing outside the *cuándo somos*) and yet still achieves the “unmistakable marks” of allegory? In fact, all of the episodes that S. recounts through M.’s perspective involve confusion: he’s not sure which episode came first, nor what street M. and S. were on, nor if what happened was real or a dream. M., in fact, is described as the type of person who knew nothing of geography, who loved the city and was yet fundamentally unable to navigate it, a person who (according to S.) would not even have recognized his own home from a train window.

The tricky relationship that S. forges with time makes his episodic narration an allegory, as described by Avelar, precisely because M.’s fuzzy geographical orientation in the city means that the two friends constantly re-trace their steps when walking; that is, they constantly *revisit* places without meaning to, provoking the exercise of memory. They also find themselves accidentally in some of Buenos Aires’s less frequented neighborhoods, bearing witness to the messiness of everyday life and contemplating what we might call – in a Benjaminian sense – the ruins of the city. In other words, they develop their own common places that reawaken their consciousness of that which might be easily overlooked.

In one series of narrations, they wander the city with S.’s father, searching for his car that has been stolen, when they witness a wreck between two cars backing out of their driveways. Strangely, the group of three pauses there before the wreck because they sense what is about to happen. They are “engrossed by the danger and taken to abstraction, forgetting even themselves” (168). As a result of the impact, the trunk of one

of the cars opens, revealing a cluster of vicious rats. The driver of the car then asks the three to close the trunk, as he cannot bear to look at the rats. M., S., and his father remain frozen, not wanting to be bit by a rat, yet knowing that they should help the man. It is at this point that S. sees the man's face as that of a rat, and begins to ruminate on the nature of rats, humans, tortoises, and indeed all species. He finds it strange that as a species everyone is predictable, yet individual, theoretically able to act of his own will. "Meaning consists of this," he thinks, "in seeing each animal as an emblem of a group" (169).

It is in this way that the city renders up enigmatic meaning for S. and M., leading them to both recognition and abstraction, allowing them to find familiarity and strangeness in everything. Events are predictable, yet surprising, such that the reader cannot determine whether they are happening for S. or for M., in the present or in memory. Earlier in the novel, when the two friends share their thoughts on trains, S. comments that "These themes [referring to their philosophical conversations about life] assured their continuity because of the fact that we each lived with the reality of trains, and also thanks to the monotony of our lives, a custom to which little by little we obediently resigned ourselves. I would mention certain things that I had seen, and M. in turn referenced others" (29). Life is repetitive for these two friends, and time is irrelevant, yet each experience and each return becomes new as it is examined for fresh detail or remembered in a different way.

Clearly, the reader might say, S. stands for Sergio, and M. stands for *Muerte* [death] or *Memoria* [memory], yet the character of M. clearly also stands for more than that. He is a way-of-being, an innocence that was interrupted both by real violence of the state and by the organization of a post-dictatorship society in which his peculiar artistic way of being would likely be less welcome. There is a trick in implying (through the positioning of the novel's one temporal event, Perón's return to Argentina) that M.'s death is not actually related to the dictatorship itself, having necessarily taken place before. Allegorically speaking, however, his loss and the loss of his perspective and ideals certainly *is* related to the concrete costs of military rule.

In parallel fashion, the end of the friendship between S. and M., caused by violent death, is also representative of the end of an idealized childhood when time seemed infinite and there were unlimited opportunities to wander the city alone and together. As a result, a broad experience of general loss – of childhood, of friendship, of the city the way it was – becomes allegorical of this one violent loss of M. Everyday experiences force the remembrance of something specific; their repetition acts as a refusal to close the book on that particular tragedy. All experiences of "how things were before," in general, become experiences of "how things were before this horrible loss took place." M.'s "intermittences," we might say, are precisely this kind of irruption of the past into the present.

Thinking in terms of this "before", I would add to Piglia's anecdote about the Argentine bus stops such ambiguous changes in the city as the kinds of public works often pursued by dictatorships in general, and certainly favored by the generals of the Operation Condor governments of South America and their acolytes, whether they be the Chicago Boys in

Chile or former Economy Minister Martínez de Hoz in Argentina: the expansion of urban infrastructure, the increased technological sophistication of media conglomerates, the new apartment buildings and commercial spaces, et cetera. The ambiguous nature of progress which became especially evident during the Argentine peso crash of December 2001 is also evident, allegorically, in the beautiful yet seemingly *passé* attitude that the character M. expresses *vis-à-vis* the city: in one extended scene he marvels at the organization of city streets, “entelechies defined by what they are not,” in his words. He reacts with exclamation at the idea that they can change names, or be represented by the number of a bus line (102-3).

In Chile, the sociologist Tomás Moulián has expertly explored the idea that tragedy can be written upon the geography of a city in his book *Chile: Anatomía de un Mito*. There, citing new Chilean malls and other public spaces, he explores the notion that the current economic reality – brought about by the borrowing and infrastructure rebuilding of the Pinochet regime – allows the present to operate on the basis of its own creation myth, attempting to erase the connection between past suffering and the present way-of-life. A reference point that serves to illustrate Chejfec’s recognition of this and his resulting treatment of the temporal – especially in opposition to the symbol (defined by Alvelar as eternal or epic and by Villalobos-Ruminott as substitutive) – is the character S.’s relationship to the printed press (one of the “texts” that appears in *Los planetas* with a degree of emotional intensity for the narrator).

Idelber Avelar writes that postdictatorial texts overcome the predicament described by Villalobos-Ruminott by “display[ing] the pressing awareness of time proper to allegory. As opposed to the market’s perpetual present,” he says, “where the past must incessantly be turned into a *tabula rasa* to be replaced and discarded with the arrival of new commodities, the allegorical temporality of mourning clings to the past in order to save it” (4). Villalobos-Ruminott, for his part, speaks of a “*golpe a la lengua*” (a coup d’état of the tongue), “a coup that paralyzes the recourse to history, in the sense of the history of feeling, the place of the hiding of the truth, the tradition, and the reasons for the present” (76). It has been my sense that a key product of the “perpetual present” that participates in the daily re-invention of the *tabula rasa* of memory is journalistic text.

At the beginning of *Los planetas*, S. confronts the journalistic product directly. Reading the news of the explosion in a newspaper, he gets the impression that changes in nature do not last: “even if they are brutal or violent their effects dissipate rapidly, folding themselves into the general landscape ... and the silence returns” (17). Still, he expects that the news he is about to read (of the explosion) will leave a lasting change. And he suspects that the open-and-closed nature of the news story serves to mask wider changes taking place. The article, he says, speaks of human remains in the countryside without taking into account the permanent threat that exists there before and after: “The macabre thing disguised itself as senselessness or innocence, and also banal, replacing the true face of terror.” He also notes how the remains of the explosion are found little-by-little, both close to and far away from the epicenter of the explosion, in such a way that they are “separated into disperse traces,” much, one might say, as each individual news topic or story parses out a larger reality into discrete bits, like milestones or *mojones*.

S.'s desire to write by re-living the "intermittent" experiences of his own memory and M.'s is also an embrace of a different kind of episodic story-telling than that which takes place in the press. In *Los planetas*, S. places himself between the temporal and the intemporal and makes of the city a different kind of geography that allows him to remain in *einfihlung* or "in feeling."

In addition to S.'s experience of "intermittent" memories through the re-tracing of his steps in the geographical space of the city, Chejfec offers the reader an additional perspective on the functioning of visual memory through a mysterious character by the name of Grino. Grino, who only appears at the beginning and the end of the novel, has an unclear (really, a non-existent) relationship to the other characters. His initial appearance in the novel's first page precedes S.'s reading of the newspaper article, and momentarily confuses the reader into thinking that Grino will be the main character. His second appearance, towards the end, precedes the incident in which S. tries to take out an identity card in M.'s name (see note 1). Since each appearance is linked, by juxtaposition, to some form of archival photography (the newspaper in the first instance, a school photo in the second), it is not surprising that he should comment on the nature of photographs, albeit in a different context.

Grino is a person who picks through photos of people he does not know, specifically (we learn in the first instance) of a preadolescent ballerina. He may be a journalist, or simply a twin soul to S., one who is frustrated in his attempts to read the past through its remains. Though Grino recognizes the humanity of the photograph's subject (whom he names Sela), his seeing her is complicated, he says, by his thoughts and dreams, which lead him to imagine a story for her — past and future — as well as to compare her with photographs of swimmers he had once seen in a magazine in his youth. Ultimately, although we are to believe that he is conflicted about his reaction, Grino experiences a "scandalous attraction" and eventually masturbates (his bottle has been filled with "liberated semen") (15, 212). This troubling event, this dream and release, this little explosion, makes a strange companion to the caption below the photos of the swimmers, "The girls are thankful for their healthy development" (16).

Grino himself makes a comparison between this photo and all photos when he considers another image, a so-called "snapshot of plenty" that depicts a beach and a row of waves that are on the point of collapse (211). When something natural (the sea) visually demonstrates its artificiality (the temporal freezing of the waves), what becomes evident is an external mechanism: not only the machine of the camera but a general "second nature," a mechanical system that allows for the multiple uses of something which appears to be simple and pure. In the final line in his second narrative section, Grino concludes, "The machine that moved the waves was the same that fabricated the photos and directed the planets and the people" (212).

Like a commemorative text or a commemorative holiday, an image (especially photographic) therefore constitutes a troubling symbol. It tends to reveal less about the subject than about whatever the onlooker might imagine or associate with the subject, and — paradoxically — it reveals more about the artificiality of its creation than about the actual thing seen. In fact, Grino's relationship to the image helps to resolve the difference

between an “intermittence” and a “milestone.” Whereas intermittent images are difficult to see and nearly impossible to re-visit except by the accidental re-tracing of the steps of an emotional event (such as a conversation had while strolling Buenos Aires), milestones or records or photographic images are easy to obtain, the result of our deliberate looking, our most ready and least creative access to the past. As such, the intermittent reveals the real (the allegorical) at least in glimpses, whereas the milestone reveals the unreal, the one dimensional, the supernatural to use Grino’s word (the symbolic). The intermittent leaves us frustrated with its incompleteness, desiring a further taste of the real; the archive or the milestone actually invites us to lean upon the easy associations of our dreams (as Grino has done), and leads us to satisfaction, a full but false feeling, even a climax.

The intermittences and the milestones are indeed like two different planetary orbits, two different kinds of paths around the sun. (Grino also compares his experience to a solar eclipse in reverse, a moment of light that draws attention to the darkness and the impossibility of dawn.) S. echoes this sentiment in another portion of the novel when he struggles with his mental images of different parts of Buenos Aires, worrying that they may not be pure, that they may become mixed with other memories. Images, he says, are like sounds, occupying fugitive places and replacing themselves constantly (140). He also talks about the troubles he has with his one photo of S., and says that he tries not to look at it too much for fear that it will interfere with the complexities of his memory.

This combined with Grino’s story indicates a general suspicion of the eye’s ability to betray memory, as though it were an organ somehow detached from the soul. In one scene earlier in the novel, S. and M. encounter a disembodied eye along the side of the railroad tracks; M. is afraid of the eye and of its potential power, as it indicates a “perspective without background” (Span. *lontonanza*, as in the background of a painting), an eye that does not reveal the seer (much as a photograph does not reveal its taker).

Ronald Kay, writing about the Chilean Eugenio Dittborn’s “Cuadros de horror” (portraits of supposed criminals made using their I.D. photos), claims that the eye behind the camera converts a person into a limited interpretation of him- or herself, many times a negative one. The established order [of the photo] returns to the subject a mortgaged individuality, in a denigrated form, and restores him to the condition of subjectivity in the pejorative sense of the word (‘several subjects were apprehended by officials of the Homicide Division ...’) such that he has supposedly or effectively broken the law (34, my translation). Although S. is surprised by not having found a mention of M. anywhere in the press, he celebrates that it has not happened, because “M.’s name was isolated by silence and in that way returned to a state of pure enchantment, in which any name floats until we rescue it with its use, aligning it to an individual. And, as it is known, it is a short step from there to sorcery” (42). In other words, he is happy that M. has not been converted into an archive or official archive, as happened to Dittborn’s criminalized subjects. As Kay writes, “By way of the regulatory and formalized intervention of the mechanical eye, in the quadrilateral of the identity photo, there is instituted an *exchange* space where desire for the intimate and the dream of the singular are ceded to the stereotype” (my emphasis).

Willy Thayer, in a brilliantly poetic essay, “El xenotafio de luz,” takes up the same issue of the photograph, but in a different fashion. Photographs reproduced from other photographs such as those head shots typically re-printed for a person who has died (whether for the newspaper, for family members, or for a funeral), are — according to Thayer — also places where light itself dies. The original light cast upon the subject, perhaps itself an artificial flash, is then “embalmed in a photo that becomes a negative from which to reproduce copies (173).

Looking at the photo and circulating it then becomes an act of “exhuming the remains of light,” or “immortalizing the solar cadaver,” an act of dehumanization that leads eventually to a “definitive disappearance in circulation” (174). Echoing Sergio Villalobos-Ruminott, we might call this a “golpe al óculo,” an ocular coup, the other way in which the symbol paralyzes the recourse to history, by repeating it in a way that makes it less brilliant. (Photos offer a “nonexistent intimacy,” says Thayer, their only depth are the thoughts we cast on their surface.)

This reproduction or photocopying is not the same kind of repetition that Villalobos-Ruminott counsels, nor to which S. and M. aspire. In their case, the goal is to remain in memory in a way that challenges or resists the new era, the “perpetual present.” “The being, the identity, the truth that shows itself and perpetuates itself in intermittences” (*Los planetas* 224) ... “the calligraphy of the stroke” (V-R 73) ... ruins ... these things resist consumption by the newspaper and the archive and ultimately also resist, in Thayer’s words, “the future in an era when there will no longer be stories, lives, landscapes, nor lights to photograph or write about.” Reproductions of reproductions formalize and reduce experience, in the same way that bus routes re-create a city’s map by numbers. “Photography,” writes Thayer, “like writing, reveals but also erases its parcel.”

It is certainly for this reason that Chejfec refuses to name either of his two victims, S. or M., even if one of the names is his own. And, as Thayer has signaled, it is the tendency toward erasure (historical as well as symbolic) of both the reproduced photograph and reproduced text that moves the language of this memoir necessarily into the poetic and apocryphal realms, into the territory of planets in orbit, mysterious photo developers, severed eyeballs, car-invading rodents, and unnamed pilgrims. Only the depiction of an alternative cosmos of experience, an orbit of interlocking experiences not bound in expected ways, could move us out of the “second nature” of which Grino speaks (formalized, controlled by systems, exchange-oriented, and manipulative of the emotions), back into our primary nature, into our quiet and intermittent experience of real things lost.

S. writes, “Since the absence of M not only I, but also several others, live in a flat present, desegregated from reality, within a territory whose boundaries are imprecise if they exist at all, and depend on our movements, and where nevertheless stillness is the only adequate alternative” (231).

When S. moves through the geography of the perpetual present, he senses his (as well as the collective Argentine) history in ruins, allegorically. When someone's hand blocks S.'s view of the sun late in this novel, he remembers the bright light that ringed M's profile in one of his memories (173, 171). Memory comes, powerfully and intermittently, in the blinking of an eye, in that obscure place where we see what we are not seeing. Like during an eclipse.

The Argentine poet Juan Gelman, writing of his lost son in the poem "XXXII", seems to capture the allegorical sense of the cosmos that informs Chejfec:

eternamente perseguido por ti  
o persigiéndote paso  
los días malos y los buenos contemplo

el bello cielo sé  
que no cesarán los astros ni  
las aventuras con los astros después  
que mis ojos se apaguen y

ya no se oigan los ruidos de tu cuerpo  
y la Revolución siga avanzando  
y retrocediendo  
exactamente como

nosotros nuestro amor  
y todo haya terminado menos  
el sol el mal el bien otros amores y  
lo que fue de nosotros

The cosmos offer an intermittent glimpse at a movement that is endless and represents, for Gelman, an eternal movement of love that continues even when the eyes are not there to see it, when the ears can no longer hear the "noises of your body." The "revolution" of a planet, the "advancing" and "going back" is a movement that continuously returns the celestial body to its formal position, but never in quite the same way. The relative position of stars and planets is always changing, but the movement itself indicates their presence, even those celestial bodies that are invisible.

At the end of *Los planetas*, S. describes his merging with M. as a repeating voyage, as a "symmetry" (232). As he looks out the window of a train, he imagines that he is on one more adventure with M., even though he quickly realizes that his is pulling into a different station. No matter; S. anticipates the noises of the birds, the trees on the platform, the sounds of the train's slowing, and realizes the stopped train as the promise of another voyage. The feeling of reaching the station is a temporal marker of what has been lost, in Idelber Avelar's terms, and thus does not stand as a symbol but rather as an allegorical revisiting, an intermittent experience of *einfihlung*. It is an experience that

defies permanent symbolic monuments and commemorations in text; it cannot be avoided nor sought out, for it is orbital, revolutionary.

How do we remember those we have lost? Is it by their last words? Is it through their photographs and their mortal remains? Or, like S., do we recognize that such commemorations of tragedy become substitutive labels? Is it possible instead to look beyond the geographic, journalistic textual and photographic products of the perpetual present, to honor someone by revisiting him through the kinds of ruins that truly elucidate memories of the kind of person he was, the way he thought, and the way he represents the way things were before the violence came? It seems that Chejfec does in fact epitomize Avelar's Benjaminian reading of allegory in *Los planetas* precisely because in order for memory to have *use* for a mourner, as a recourse to *empfindung*, it must reject its exchange value, its parceling into *mojones*. Memories must continue to be difficult to pin down – in orbit – written so as not to be substitutive, but rather to be as fleeting and frustrating an experience as the passage of time itself.

#### Notes

The term was originally coined by Robert Vischer and used by Freud and Freudians to refer to both the projection of emotions and the study of the aesthetic response to human beings.

When S. fails in his initial efforts to change his name, the government employee at the desk recommends that he might try writing a book under the new name, to give more credibility to his application.

The Spanish word for “milestones” here is *mojones*, and can also be translated roughly as “little shits.” It is likely that Villalobos-Ruminott, when making reference to marketable dictatorship memoirs of all genres, intends this second meaning as much as the first.

From the Greek: *entelecheia*, “A thing having its end within itself.”

It remains unclear whether there is merit in exploring Grino's name. It is a relatively common last name, and yet any name in this relatively name-free novel must be considered significant. Perhaps it is meant to sound like *grano* (Eng: grain) a miniscule element of sand, or a unit of measurement for a small amount of light. It also sounds like *grito* (Eng: a cry, a scream) and may suggest the idea of interjection. Another possibility is that it reads like an abbreviation of *peregrino* (Eng: pilgrim), which would seem to reference the story (embedded in this novel) of two natives of the town of Formosa, Argentina who leave home on a pilgrimage seeking a new identity. In any case, I feel drawn to this idea of Grino as someone who represents a consideration of the minute and the transitory.

Eternally pursued by you  
or pursuing you I spend  
the bad days and the good ones I contemplate

the beautiful heavens I know  
that the stars will not cease  
the adventurers with the stars after  
my eyes extinguish

the noises of your body are no longer heard  
and the Revolution continues advancing  
and retreating  
just like

we our love  
and all that is done except  
the sun the bad the other good loves and  
what came of us

(my translation)

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