

***Uma farsa: Post-Dictatorial Strategies of Forgetting and Remembering in Bernardo Kucinski's K. Relato de uma busca***

*Uma farsa: Estratégias de esquecimento e lembrança no K. Relato de uma busca de Bernardo Kucinski*

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**ABSTRACT:** The novel *K. Relato de uma busca*, whose publication coincided with the Brazilian National Truth Commission, has proven remarkably more effective in producing a public and institutional reckoning with the crimes of the military regime than any of the institutional mechanisms implemented by the government or any other testimonial novel previously written about the abuses of the military regime. Its appeal, in part, has to do with Kucinski's usage of various discourses—fiction, testimonial, epistolary—that successfully challenge the authoritative, and non-dialogic discourse of the military regime. This essay argues that in this novel, politics and fiction are inverted: instead of having a law that fictionalizes the memory of the violence perpetrated by the dictatorship, we have a work of fiction that, by memorializing the struggle of a father in search of his disappeared daughter, brings the crimes committed by the military back into the political discourse.

**KEY WORDS:** Dictatorship. Legal fiction. Transitional justice.

**RESUMO:** O romance *K. Relato de uma busca*, cuja publicação coincidiu com os trabalhos da Comissão Nacional da Verdade, revelou-se mais eficaz em fomentar o reconhecimento dos crimes da ditadura militar do que outros mecanismos institucionais e outros romances testemunhais sobre o regime militar. Este ensaio propõe que parte do seu sucesso está relacionada ao uso que Kucinski

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faz de vários discursos—ficcional, testemunhal, epistolário—capazes de desafiar o registro autoritário e não dialógico do discurso militar. No romance *K. Relato de uma busca*, políticas e ficção são invertidas: em vez de uma lei que dramatiza a memória da violência perpetrada pela ditadura, temos um trabalho de ficção que, rememorando a trágica busca de um pai pela filha desaparecida, traz os crimes cometidos pelo regime militar de volta para dentro do discurso político.

**PALAVRAS CHAVE:** Ditadura. Ficção legal. Justiça transicional.

## INTRODUCTION

In 1975, the board of the Chemistry Institute of the University of São Paulo officially fired Professor Ana Rosa Kucinski and revoked her title after she failed to appear at work for nineteen months. In compliance with the military regime, the board ignored the journalistic evidence that pointed to a political explanation for her absence. Ana Rosa Kucinski, a militant with the ultra-left group *Ação Libertadora Nacional* (National Liberating Action), had in fact stopped reporting to work at the university because she had been abducted, tortured, and killed by the military in 1974. The Brazilian military dictatorship began in 1964 with General Castelo Branco's seizure of power through a coup d'état that was largely supported by civilians.<sup>1</sup> In 1968 the Institutional Act Number 5 (AI-5) declared the elimination of *habeas corpus*, which guarantees any imprisoned individual's right to a hearing in front of a jury. It was precisely this decree that allowed the practice of disappearing political dissidents to become a primary means of social control. In 1969, with the rise of General Emílio Médici, Brazil entered the darkest moment of the dictatorship, usually referred to as *anos de chumbo* (years of lead). This period ended in 1974, the same year Ana Rosa Kucinski was abducted. Almost forty years later, on April 17,<sup>th</sup> 2014, the University of São Paulo, finally acknowledged its mistake and formally apologized to

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<sup>1</sup> Renee Dreifuss (1983) is the first among many historians, like Nina Schneider (2014), Daniel Aarão Reis (2000), to employ the adjective “civilian-military” when discussing the Brazilian dictatorship. By using the adjective ‘civilian,’ they all imply a certain degree of participation on the part of Brazilian citizens, who, in believing that this dictatorship was democratic and legitimate, bought into the rhetoric constructed by the conservative forces.

Kucinski's family. What made this news all the more remarkable was that the impetus for the university's *mea culpa* was the international academic debate surrounding the publication of *K.* (2011), a novel written by Bernardo Kucinski, Ana Rosa's brother.

After twenty-one years of military rule, Brazil returned to democracy only in 1985, through what historian Timothy Power calls a "conservative" (11) transition, in which civilian elites associated with the outgoing military regime assumed a commanding role. The various transitional policies implemented by the post-dictatorial governments have been incapable of effectively changing the ways in which the dictatorship is remembered and narrated. On the contrary, they upheld the tradition of impunity started in 1979 with the promulgation of the Amnesty Law by the military dictatorship itself. Some of these transitional policies romanticize the memory of the dictatorship and of its victims by creating fictionalized stories of guerrilla warfare, resistance, and redemption. They perpetuate the fictions told by the military about "subversives" and "terrorists." The novel *K. Relato de uma busca*, whose publication coincided with the Brazilian National Truth Commission, has proven remarkably more effective in producing a public and institutional reckoning with the crimes of the military regime than any of the institutional mechanisms implemented by the government or any other testimonial novel previously written about the abuses of the military regime. Its appeal, in part, has to do with Kucinski's usage of various discourses—fiction, testimonial, epistolary—that successfully challenge the authoritative, and non-dialogic discourse of the military regime. In this novel, I argue, politics and fiction are inverted: instead of having a law that fictionalizes the memory of the violence perpetrated by the dictatorship, we have a work of fiction that, by memorializing the struggle of a father in search of his disappeared daughter, brings the crimes committed by the military back into the political discourse.

## **1 Forgive and Forget or How Brazil Transitioned to Democracy**

In the collection of essays powerfully titled *O que resta da ditadura* [What is Left of the Dictatorship], Edson Teles and Vladimir Safatle analyze why it has been a challenge to

properly historicize the dictatorship and why it has been more convenient to forget the crimes committed by the military. They call this forgetting an “historical astigmatism” (Teles, 2014, 9) that impedes the possibility of looking critically at the recent past. Teles and Safalte show that the legacy of the dictatorship is still visible in Brazil in police repression—the implementation of death squads, the general impunity of military police who commit horrific crimes—and argue that the dictatorship should be analyzed “not through the number of deaths left behind, but through the traces [the dictatorship] has left in the present, or better, through what the dictatorship will have left for the future” (Teles, 2014, 10). According to this logic, “the Brazilian dictatorship was the most violent dictatorship of the Latin America dark cycle” (Teles, 2014, 10). The roots of this lasting violence lie precisely in the ways in which the military dictatorship was able to maintain an appearance of legitimacy—which allowed a modicum of political freedom and the autonomy of the judicial system while at the same time enabling extra-judicial killings or disappearances—throughout its twenty-one years of existence.

In his seminal *Legal Fictions* (1967), legal scholar Lon Fuller explains that in the juridical realm “a fiction is either 1) a statement propounded with a complete or partial consciousness of its falsity or 2) a false statement recognized as having utility” (13). Legal fictions become “dangerous” (156) Fuller continues, when people start to believe in them. While Fuller is thinking about laws, I am proposing here to apply this concept to the fictional legitimacy of a political system. On the one hand, those involved in the military coup d’état of 1964 knew that to call it a “revolution” was false, yet they still agreed to do it because of its utility: it allowed them to expunge a progressive government who would have hurt their economic and political interests. On the other hand, the legal fiction escaped its utility the moment in which civilians actually believed in the actions of the military despite the falsity upon which they committed these actions. The fiction of legitimacy, or the legal fiction, that the military spearheaded has had important repercussions for the policies implemented to produce a smooth transition to democracy. To a certain extent, the transitional processes in the post-dictatorship moment can also be understood as an extension of this legal fiction, or *farsa* as Kucisnki aptly describes in his *K. Relato de uma busca*.

One example of such a transitional process is Brazil's 1979 Amnesty Law, which allowed exiled militants to return but blocked the prosecution of participants in the dictatorship's crimes. This law was the product of a slow, planned transition to democracy that started in 1974, when power shifted from the hard-liner Emílio Médici (1969-1974) to the more moderate Ernesto Geisel (1974-1979). The Amnesty Law, says literary scholar Rebecca Atencio in her book *Memory's Turn* (2014), invited reconciliation to the sanitized official narrative of the dictatorship. Thus, the testimonial works by political exiles published after the implementation of the Amnesty Law are "a reconciliation by memory" that is "not entirely inconsistent with institutionalized forgetting, and in fact uncritically promotes a similar vision of reconciliation" (Atencio, 2014, 13). The Amnesty Law sought to erase from public memory the dictatorship's human rights abuses and crimes perpetrated by the military.

Similarly, the early democratic governments in Brazil also sought to "disappear" the crimes of the dictatorship in order to stabilize the country's political and economic systems. In 1985, the first democratic president, Tancredo Neves, carefully elected by the military and a selected group that represented the opposition, died soon after he was officially sworn into office. His vice-president, José Sarney, became president after him and instead of fostering a culture of memory, together with his cabinet, decided that in the face of Brazil's precarious economic situation, it was better to forgive and forget the crimes of the military dictatorship. At the same time, many generals and regime allies were still highly visible in Brazil, and democratic politicians feared the specter of "Argentinization": neighboring Argentina, which had been the first post-dictatorship country to stage human rights trials against the military of the junta, faced political collapse, barely fighting off an attempted coup in 1987.

As Brazilian institutions blithely behaved as if twenty-one years of oppression had never occurred, the families of the victims, began making their way into the public spotlight. Their first intervention appeared in 1985, on the wave of the human rights activism occurring at the same time in Argentina, under the famous banner *Nunca más*; in Brazil, this took the form of a report entitled *Brasil Nunca Mais*. This report collected every document that proved any of the extensive violation of human rights perpetrated by the

regime. It remains one of the most valuable sources of evidence documenting the violations of human rights during the military dictatorship.

The report, however, proved insufficient. Like the government, the rest of Brazilian society also seemed to want to forget and move on, choosing not to become involved with the fight for justice started by the families of the tortured and disappeared. It seemed that the victims of the dictatorship do not belong to society as a whole, but only to the families they have left behind. Maria Rita Kehl, in her essay “Tortura e Sintoma Social” [Torture and Social Symptom], analyzes this paradoxical situation, where military officials and their allies refused to publicly discuss any of these issues even as the victims of the dictatorship openly shared their trauma and made accusations of human rights abuses against specific individuals (126). Kehl blames both the perpetrators of the atrocities and Brazil’s silent majority, who looked the other way while their fellow citizens were being tortured.

In 1995, the Brazilian government of President Fernando Henrique Cardoso passed the *Lei dos Mortos e Desaparecidos* [The Law of the Dead and Disappeared]. This law finally recognized the crimes committed by the State under the dictatorship, ordering that reparations be paid to the victims’ families; it also instituted the *Comissão Especial dos Mortos e Desaparecidos Políticos* [Special Commission of the Dead and Political Disappeared, CEMDP] and granted it the power to identify the victims of the dictatorship. However, as historian Glenda Mezarobba points out, the law allows the state to continue to shirk full responsibility for its crimes and for restitution: it places the burden of finding evidence on the victims, releasing the State from having to identify and charge those who were directly involved in the abuses (111). Granting redresses solely in the form of monetary payment, without performing official investigations of human rights abuses, perpetuates the culture of silence. As Mezarobba also shows, the process of identifying victims and making reparations was not played out in public, in view of all of Brazilian society, but took place mostly within the private sphere of the family (118); by keeping it

private and domestic, at the level of the family, this process of indemnification absolves the public of its passive complicity with the state's crimes.<sup>2</sup>

In 2007, the *Comissão Especial dos Mortos e Desaparecidos Políticos* [Special Commission of the Dead and Political Disappeared, CEMDP] presented its final report, *Direito à memória e à verdade* [Right to Memory and Truth], the culmination of an eponymous initiative launched in 2006 by Human Rights secretary Paulo Vannuchi. This report contains the names and the stories of the victims whose families applied for reparations, but the allegations are rarely accompanied by official, corroborating military documents; the primary “proof” of the State's illegal actions offered in the report are the victims' DOPS [Department of Political and Social Order] files. Although it marks an important step for Brazilian transitional justice, the *Direito à memória e à verdade* report reflects the contradictory nature of the Brazilian government's stance toward the dictatorship. As Atencio (2014) points out, the word *justice* is absent from the report, as is the word *victim*. These absences challenge the function of institutional mechanisms such as the CEMDP, which appears to advance the transitional justice discourse in Brazil while in fact fictionalizing it by offering *only* the appearance of progress.

On December 10<sup>th</sup> 2014 the *Comissão Nacional da Verdade* (Brazilian National Truth Commission, from here on CNV) delivered the final report of its investigation to former president Dilma Rousseff, who was illegally detained and tortured by the Brazilian military police during the dictatorship. In this report, the individual victim took center stage, but justice remained an afterthought. While volume one of the report provided a series of recommendations for improving the Brazilian transitional justice process, the CNV had no enforcement power, and as human rights scholar Kathryn Sikkink wrote in 2015, “the key test of the truth commission's impact, then, is whether it can provide not only public acknowledgement to victims and a record for collective memory, but also spur the Brazilian state to hold offenders accountable.” The CNV thus failed this test. Again, the report seemed to farm out responsibility, framing the abuses committed by the dictatorship

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<sup>2</sup> Also Seligmann-Silva in his essay, “Narrativas contra o silêncio: cinema e ditadura no Brasil”, refers to the dictatorship as something very personal since it appears that the memory of the violence perpetrated during the dictatorship is an issue that is restricted to the inner circle of family and friends ( Seligmann-Silva 67).

as crimes against humanity that must be addressed with proper trials—a function of the courts, not of the CNV itself.

According to pioneering transitional justice lawyer Juan Méndez, the new state formed after the dictatorship has four related but distinct obligations toward its victims: 1) to arrest and try, based on credible evidence, those accused of human rights abuses; 2) to fully investigate each case; 3) to provide reparations; 4) to ensure that the the armed and security forces of the newly democratic state are free of any past criminal elements. Méndez insists that the new democratic order “must be based, from the start...on the simple notion that in a democracy there are no privileges—much less in criminal cases—for those who wear a uniform or happen to be powerful” (Méndez, 2000, 128). As we have seen thus far, in Brazil the military forces continue to play a pivotal role in government affairs, and many participated in the writing of the 1988 Constitution. For example, Jarbas Passarinho, a colonel who served as a minister under Costa e Silva, Médici, and Figueiredo and who signed the AI 5, presided over the constitutional commission in charge of the amendments related to the Armed Forces. The CNV report is significant insofar as it manages to transpose some of these more common steps of transitional justice from a more general Latin American context to a Brazilian one. The report reminds its audience that “the state is obliged to present specific information on circumstances of gross violations, such as the identity of the perpetrators, and in the case of death and disappearance, the location of the bodies” (CNV, 2014, 35). The individual dimension of the right to truth is evident in the report not only in its naming of the 377 perpetrators—191 of who are still alive—but also in its positive identifications of 434 people who were abducted, tortured, and murdered.

In the report the victim has a central role, and, perhaps more importantly, his or her suffering is not solely reduced to ideology-related political persecution. The report includes accounts of horrific human rights violations motivated by gender, sexuality, race and class antagonisms. In volume two, various specialists that participated in the creation of the report comment on these identity-based abuses, enumerating crimes perpetrated specifically against homosexuals, women, indigenous people, and peasants. With the advent of Truth Commissions as a quasi-judicial, quasi-political, quasi-theatrical tool for a State to come to terms with its atrocities, such narratives become central to the discourse of human rights.



As the literary scholar Julie Peters notes: “narrative has come to be used instead of (or alongside) punishment or victim compensation: not as evidence (even where it is also used as evidence) but as a form of remedy, in and of itself. That is, narrative in human rights has come to have an independent legal-political function” (Peters, 2012, 19). But as therapeutic and moving this method can be, it frequently suffers from a perceived lack of legal legitimacy or authenticity and hence has limited power when it comes to enforcing accountability.

The CNV’s detractors call these accounts half-truths on the grounds that they are not supported by documentary evidence. This, of course, reinforces the skepticism of the “silent majority” and highlights a major fault within the moral order of Brazilian society. Conventional wisdom now holds that the military dictatorship was illegitimate, but fails to acknowledge the grounds on which this view rests. The absence of transparency and institutional accountability has created a moral vacuum that allows certain comforting myths invented by the architects of the dictatorship to endure. The media’s coverage of political dissidents and acts of criminality has perpetuated some of these ideas, such as the need for national security and the necessity of preserving the social order through the deployment of a violent, heavily armed military police force. Under these circumstances, the testimonies of victims lack clear moral authority and can be dismissed as yet another necessary evil, a collection of half-truths meant to facilitate the process of reconciliation and, eventually, forgetting.

But, as the philosopher Margaret Walker writes, “from the point of view of moral repair, the testimony of those wronged in truth commissions...should be viewed less in therapeutic terms than in terms of how it represents and respects their citizenship, civic dignity, credibility and moral agency” (Walker, 2001,122). According to Walker then, those who criticize the testimonies for being illegitimate narratives—since many documents that would have legitimized them are still kept hidden—are diminishing the civic dignity of those who witnessed the atrocities that the State committed. One way to make these testimonies legitimate is to extrapolate them from the political discourse in which they have been produced and transfer them to a discourse in which speculation is a virtue and what matters is not so much the process of establishing the exact historical truth or the discovery

of hard facts but rather the creation of verisimilitude, the semblance of reality and direct experience.

The official discourse that emerged after the end of the military regime exhibited and extended the same fictionalizing tendencies that the dictatorship established in 1964, highlighting a continuum between the dictatorial past and the present. One way to expose and undermine the narratives that sustain the dictatorship's claim to legitimacy is to create equally powerful rhetorical artefacts, such as novels, which in their appeal to an affective truth and their artful re-appropriation of disparate discursive strategies, can have a wider, more visceral, and more bracing reach than official discourse and subvert the latter's hold on public opinion. In the following part of this article, I argue that Bernardo Kucinski's *K* is a work of fiction that has accomplished such a political act because it has been able to reinsert into the public's consciousness and mainstream political discourse the story of the author's sister, Ana Rosa Kucinski, who was disappeared by Brazil's military regime.

## **2 Bernardo Kucinski's *K*: The Politics of Fiction**

The preface to *K* opens with the salutation *caro leitor*, creating a sense of intimacy that requires a certain degree of compliance, a willingness to be interpellated, on our part. Here Kucinski abruptly informs us that “tudo neste livro é invenção, mas quase tudo aconteceu”, a sentence which literary scholar Vincenzo Russo identifies as “a chave de leitura que informa toda a interpretação de *K. Relato de uma busca*” (38). As others have argued, Kucinski makes his own intervention within the panorama of testimonial narratives by proposing a peculiar literary form, one that does not conform to any of the canonical genres developed from the encounter between literature and testimony. While calling it a “novel” might raise some skepticism (Russo, 2017, 37), we are left with the fact that *K*, “a book explicitly presented as literature came to be regarded as truth by a national truth commission” (Atencio, 2016, 129). Yet, the question lays precisely in why the CDV recognized it as truth. Differently than other fictional narratives of the military dictatorship, *K* actively performs political work because its fictional form *is* the direct result of many years of historical manipulation and frauded discourse about the military dictatorship. That

is to say Kucinski chose to frame the events of the disappearance of his sister, Ana Rosa, as if it were a legal fiction, thus employing a similar, yet different, strategy of forgetting and remembering than the official one.

A text like *K.* which emerged together with the CNV, inevitably models part of its own narrative on the truth-telling experience of the families of the victims, who by participating in the public hearing become “fictional” witnesses of what has happened to their loved ones. The claim that everything in this book is invention, but that almost everything happened can also be thought of in relation to the CNV testimonies, with which Kucinski is in direct conversation. Kucinski does not state that the events narrated are true. However, while we read *K.* we cannot help but feel a certain familiarity with some of the places and names that the author mentions (such as the description of the House of Death in Petrópolis, the first newspaper article in which the terms *desaparecidos* appears, or the references to the massacre of Araguaia). It is the combination of both fiction and history that allows Kucinski to represent an absence. Literary critic Roberto Vecchi argues something similar when identifying the desire for restitution as the driving force behind textual representation of political disappearances. However, because this restitution is basically impossible, one needs to understand how it is precisely that impossibility that creates what he calls a “filologia de ausências” (145). Along those lines, Vecchi shows how a text like *K.* is exemplary of doing just that, offering a partial version of the past, but a version that is the “maior recomposição possível” (144). Similarly, literary scholar Marianna Scaramucci proposes that we understand *K.* as an anti-monument insofar as it represents the “fixação do luto num espaço, o espaço do texto” (13). Ultimately, the tension between the need to advocate for authenticity, so that Ana Rosa’s tragedy is finally acknowledged, and the lack of actual archival documentation that would definitively prove her torture and disappearance provides the play in which Kucinski represents his sister’s disappearance.

This tension also results in a fragmented and discontinuous narrative. Its incoherence stands in contrast to the narrative employed by the military dictatorship about itself. Instead of providing conclusive explanations or axiomatic truths, Kucinski’s book leads to a proliferation of questions, some of which Kucinski answers only partially

through his imaginary reconstruction of actual historical events, a technique to which he explicitly draws our attention to in the beginning, when he writes that “fiquei *imaginando* em que etapa da tragédia em gestação isso aconteceu” (10). The answers, of course, to these questions—about Ana Rosa’s whereabouts, about who ordered and carried out her abduction, about what happened when she fell into police custody—can only come from the imagination and be delivered to us as fiction because the official historical record is, as far as we know, silent.

In the first chapter, evocatively entitled *As cartas à destinatária inexistente* [Letters to someone who doesn’t exist], he introduces the story through a letter that arrives at his home but is addressed to his disappeared sister. The author wants us to reflect on the relationship between the written word and authenticity, for example the name on the envelope that is “selado e carimbado como a atestar autenticidade [...] registro tipográfico...de um mal de Alzheimer nacional” (12). The written trace of his sister’s existence, which has long been absent from any official registry or archive, appears in the “rol dos vivos” but only as a “esquecimento coletivo do rol dos mortos” (12). If we were to stick with what is official, we would believe that his sister were still alive. However, in this system what is official is often not representative of the reality but a calculated distortion of it—that is, a fiction.

Kucinski describes the discrepancy between what the families were experiencing in their searching and the answers they were receiving from the government as theater: “montaram uma farsa. Um teatro para me torturar” (35). A *farsa* can be a fraud or a lie, it can refer to an artistic genre, or to the act of persuading someone based on an illusion. Here, *farsa* encompasses all these meanings: the lies in regard to the whereabouts of Ana Rosa Kucinski, the idea of putting on a theatrical show (in reference to the original Portuguese *teatro*) and lastly it refers to the entire process of legitimization of the military regime, starting with creating the fiction of the “revolution” of 1964. The fiction created by the government is another abuse that these families have to endure; they live in a theater of the absurd where official communication both fails and mocks them. And when they finally do receive answers, they are lies, which further foment their anger, sorrow, and feelings of powerlessness. If the State constantly produces legal fictions to cover its crimes, and

continues doing this even after the dictatorship ended, then the counter-narratives that challenge these legal fictions need to be strategic in the ways in which they make the reality visible again.

A counter-narrative like *K.*, is successful in contrasting the discourse employed by the dictatorship precisely because it is so fragmented and discontinuous. By refusing to challenge the official version openly, it can penetrate it subtly. According to this strategy then there cannot be only one storyline, just as there cannot be only one narrator, even if this can result in a relativizing account of the events. Indeed, *K.* offers us multiple perspectives, and, also, multiple voices. The narration moves from the author, Bernardo Kucinski, to the central figure of the story—supposedly his father—whom we know only by his last initial, *K.*, and whose desperate search for his daughter we follow throughout the text. However, we, the readers, know more than *K.*, precisely because Kucinski tells this story from the point of view of all the actors. One of the more emblematic—and problematic—figures in this array is the lover of one of the darkest figure of the dictatorship, the DOPS chief Sérgio Fleury.

When this shift in narrative point of view occurs, there is not a clear indicator signaling that oscillation, forcing the reader to move slightly back in the narration in order to figure out who is speaking. Kucinski's deliberate creation of narrative disorder and aural confusion suggests that he does not want us to know exactly who is speaking, as if, at times, it does not really matter. The question of who is speaking and under what authority came up during the CNV investigations, which, as we have already seen, are comprised mainly of second-hand accounts. Something to take into consideration, however, is that not having one fixed narrator throughout the story also reflects the plurality of voices that actually characterize the dictatorship, which included civilians who knew what was going on and went along with the abductions and the tortures. On the other hand, the story could have been even more heartbreaking if only the father had been its narrator. The omniscient narrator, whose vantage point contrasts sharply with the occluded and solitary one of the father, appears to annul the father's voice. However, it is precisely this oscillation between omniscient narration and highly personalized, idiosyncratic voices that explains the novel's

potency. A third-person narrator gives the story an objective, disinterested, and quasi-official air that an account written entirely in the first person would lack.

Nevertheless, while the third-person narrator offers a more totalizing view of society, the style, in Kucinski's hands, it is frequently disorienting. In contrast to the style employed by the military, the language in *K.* is not assertive, but quiet, reserved, and makes extensive use of free indirect speech. Moreover, sentences are often constructed using the subjunctive form, with liberal use of speculative words like "maybe" and "perhaps"; insights into characters' minds are delivered in stream-of-consciousness. In structuring the text in such a way, Kucinski not only makes tremendous demands on the reader's powers of concentration, since if we stop we might lose track of who is speaking and about what; he also frustrates our inveterate demands for narrative coherence and linearity. *K.* skillfully rejects national, familial, and linguistic enclosure. Thus while the novel's characters, including the narrator, never mount a direct attack on the Brazilian political system, the very form of the text nonetheless strikes directly at the heart of the military regime's most sacred myths: its claims to unity, coherence, and homogeneity.

What is striking about *K.*, when the novel is considered alongside other testimonial narratives written by ex-militants, apart from its self-conscious fictionality, is that it lacks clear heroes. None of the political actors of those years escape Kucinski's critique. Kucinski places the blame for what has happened to his sister on the entirety of Brazilian society, on both the military and the militants. In the chapter *A queda do ponto* [The Trap], Kucinski imagines the moment in which Ana Rosa and her husband are taken. He describes their anxiety and terror in realizing that someone betrayed them. While using indirect speech to vocalize their thoughts, he then suddenly barges into the discourse by stating that: "vão se passar décadas até os raros sobreviventes admitirem em retrospecto que a única saída era aceitar a derrota" (25). Once Kucinski returns to indirect speech he writes that they too had realized that "a chave da solução era assumir a derrota, dar a luta por encerrada" (26). Kucinski did not partake in the armed struggle. He was working as a correspondent in London when Ana Rosa was captured. Almost as if to justify his own disenchantment with the revolutionary's idealism, Kucinski points out that they still had

time to go back to the non-clandestine identities of their ordinary lives if they so desired, “não por covardia, por sabedoria” (26).

Kucinski continues his own critique of the armed struggle in the chapter titled *Carta a uma amiga* [Letter to a Friend]. He imagines his sister writing to a friend about the foolishness of the armed struggle and the impossibility of quitting: “[c]omo sair disso? Não sei como sair, só sei que, se antes havia algum sentido no que fazíamos, agora não há mais” (47) In this letter Ana Rosa writes that “[s]into neles [those who started the opposition] um fatalismo, uma frieza, até uma perda de humanidade, como se apolitical fosse tudo e nada mais interessasse” (49). By resorting to the epistolary form instead of indirect speech, the author attempts to create a stronger intimacy with the reader. Although the reader supposedly believes that the letter is from Ana Rosa, the semi-testimonial form of the text permits a certain ambiguity, and thus this letter functions as Kucinski’s own space within the narrative to express his political beliefs. Indeed, the letter is a manifesto of sorts, one that identifies all the problems Kucinski has with the armed struggle in Brazil; he harshly criticizes those who only lived for their politics, without really being in touch with their reality. It is self-serving of Kucinski to use the voice of his sister, a militant, to express what are clearly his own doubts about the armed struggle. To his credit, Kucinski has been actively involved with the militants who survived the military repression, particularly their collaborations with the São Paulo Truth Commission. It is likely, however, that his assumption of an anti-guerrilla posture, which supposedly acknowledges the faults of both sides, along with his status as a professor at the University of São Paulo, influenced his book’s political reception.

Kucinski also extends this critique to disengaged intellectuals who, like K., thought of their art as being separate from the political environment in which it was produced. The novel shows how someone like K. —a poet so preoccupied with art for art’s sake, so wrapped up in his own literary ambitions, that he does not realize his own daughter has gone missing—becomes politically conscious. This change deeply marks K.’s relationship with Yiddish and poetry, and it pushes him to reconsider the relationship between politics and literature. K. stops writing in Yiddish because he understands that this language is not adequate to describe the reality surrounding him. Indeed, when he feels compelled to craft

some sort of record of his searches, and, more importantly, Ana's disappearance, he fails to do so:

Era como se faltasse o essencial; era como se as palavras, embora escolhidas com esmero, em vez de mostrar a plenitude do que ele sentia, ao contrário, escondessem ou amputassem o significado principal. Não conseguia expressar sua desgraça na semântica limitada da palavra, no recorte por demais preciso do conceito, na vulgaridade da expressão idiomática. Ele, poeta premiado da língua iídiche, não alcançava pela palavra, a transcendência almejada (135)

There is then a certain dialectic at work in how *K.* functions politically: it is not simply that *K.* is a literary work that changes institutional decisions; it is also a literary work that reflects on the limits of literature as a political tool. Indeed, *K.* arrives at a realization that “estava errado fazer da tragédia de sua filha objeto de criação literária, nada podia estar mais errado. Envaidecer-se por escrever bonito sobre uma coisa tão feia” (136). The moment in which such a reflection takes place, is also the moment in which the political unconscious of the work manifests itself, proving that a purely aesthetic work cannot exist. In order for *K.* to communicate what has supposedly become incommunicable through a language and a literature too detached from his reality, he needs to switch not only language—that is, from Yiddish to Hebrew—but also form, from poetry to letter:

Naquela mesma noite, *K.* escreveu sua primeira carta...em hebraico impecável. Assim, não era mais o escritor renomado a fazer literatura com a desgraça da filha; era o avô legando para os netos o registro de uma tragédia familiar (137).

*K.* acknowledges that in order to communicate to his family Ana Rosa's tragedy he needs to leave his doctrinaire aestheticism behind and change the way he writes. This is also reflected in Bernardo Kucinski's choice to write a work of fiction instead of continuing to publish non-fiction about the dictatorship.<sup>3</sup> However, Kucinski does not dismiss history. He

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<sup>3</sup> Among others: *Brazil: state and struggle* (1982), *O fim da ditadura militar: o colapso do “milagre econômico”, a volta aos quartéis, a luta pela democracia* (2001).



adopts a mixed testimonial form, with clear references to real historical events and people, like Zuzu Angel, Vladimir Herzog and most importantly his sister, Ana Rosa Kucinski. *K.*, then, shows that when fiction lends to history the possibility of creating a space—through fragmented narratives, free indirect speech and speculative language— wherein Ana Rosa and *desaparecidos* can reappear again, it becomes possible for them and for their family members to obtain recognition, both from the public and the state.

To conclude, by staging a fictional narrative made up of things that actually happened, Kucinski gives voice to a truth that the State cannot offer in any official form, because such penance would undermine its own authority. This explains why the Brazilian government chose to perpetrate the production of legal fictions—the 1988 Constitution, the 1995 Law of the Dead and Disappeared, the 2010 CNV—well after 1985. What these institutional policies have done, following the trend started during the military regime, is to create an appearance of justice and legality. Once we look more closely at these policies, we see that they are politically vacuous, in the sense that they do not seek to alter radically the way the public thinks about the dictatorship. Instead, what seems to be politically viable in this *farsa*, to use Kucinski's definition of the Brazilian political system, is a testimony already present in the 2007 *Right to Memory and Truth* transposed into the discourse of fiction: that of Ana Rosa Kucinski. Indeed, while her story had already appeared in several of these reports, the authorities only issued an official apology when *K.*, a work of fiction, was published. By choosing to present his *relato* as if it were a fictional work, Kucinski mimicked the same fictional legitimacy which first allowed for the continued existence of the military dictatorship and which subsequently surrounded the transitional policy to democracy. And yet, it is precisely because *K. Relato de uma busca* employs a rhetorical strategy similar to the one employed by the official discourse that it successfully subverts their *farsa*: its form punctures the stage so to reveal what exists behind the curtain.

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