

# ‘As ditaduras podem voltar, eu sei’: On the Construction of Trust in Julián Fuks’s *A resistência*

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**Abstract:** In the present essay, I examine truth and trust as socially embedded co-constructions. To ground my analysis, I focus on Julián Fuks’s *A resistência* (2015), a novel that addresses Brazil’s dictatorial past (1964-1985) while alluding to contemporary and future concerns. Through close readings of Fuks’s metafictional novel, I examine the ways in which trust develops in tandem with doubt and suspicion. This focus sheds light on how attention to trust can be crucial for both lectoral engagement and the democratic processes of discussion and consensus.

**Keywords:** Postdictatorial novel, truth, Brazil, suspicion, human rights

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What does the truth matter if nobody trusts it? What is truth, in the end, if people are willing to believe everything and nothing? We are currently witnessing a moment that has been characterized as “post-truth,” in which “fake news” increasingly shapes political beliefs and the outcomes of elections. It is a moment in which the public’s trust in media, the judiciary, and electoral integrity is remarkably low. In Brazil, the most recent presidential election was mired in and fueled by widespread corruption and an almost unprecedented lack of trust in the country’s political system. This mistrust exacerbates the very real fear in contemporary Brazil that the dictatorship could in fact return, that the country could lurch backward into totalitarianism, and that history could be forgotten,

revised, repeated.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, as Michael Lazzara has pointed out, Latin Americanists have increasingly pointed out that a culture based on the “imperative to remember” ultimately limits one’s ability to use memory as a means to critique the present (18). If access to truth is increasingly mediated or complicated, and if remembering is no longer sufficient to uncover past atrocities and place the present into question, what does this say about our relation to the truth?

With Brazil’s last presidential election and its aftermath as backdrop, I work in the present essay to examine truth and trust not as discrete phenomena but as socially embedded co-constructions. In order to ground my analysis, I turn to one literary example in particular: Julián Fuks’s *A resistência* (2015), a novel that addresses Brazil’s dictatorial past (1964-1985) while alluding to contemporary concerns.

This essay has three parts. First, through an analysis of Fuks’s novel, I examine the ways in which trust continues to operate at the micro-social level in Brazil, despite the unmistakable decay of trust that has occurred at the macro-social level. I propose that we think of trust not as the opposite of or antidote to suspicion, but as a form of situated knowledge that is perhaps (and somewhat paradoxically) not even available to us if we are not capable of suspicion first. Put another way, trust and suspicion give way to each other. In this sense, I approach trust as a hermeneutic and epistemological category, inasmuch as I frame it first and foremost as mode of reading; that is, as a mode of literary criticism or of interpreting narratives, but also as a mode of processing and understanding information or knowledge—a mode of “reading” political and historical realities.

In the second part of the essay, I consider the unique mode of storytelling encoded within *A resistência*, arguing that it is conducive to a mode of reading that enables an increased awareness of the interplay of truths, trust, and suspicion

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<sup>1</sup> This fear has also been fueled, in part, by the nostalgia for the dictatorship expressed by President Jair Bolsonaro. In addition to honoring accused torturers and publicly expressing admiration for torture and abuses of the dictatorship, he called on military forces to commemorate the 55<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1964 coup that installed the dictatorship (Phillips). Furthermore, the relative newness of Brazil’s democracy also contributes to contemporary concerns about the potential rise of authoritarianism. Compared to Argentina and Chile, Brazil has had a tardy response to the crimes committed under dictatorial rule. After return to civilian rule in 1985, it was ten years before the state adopted its first institutional step toward accepting responsibility and offering reparations. It was not until 2012 that Brazil inaugurated the Comissão Nacional da Verdade.

at the micro-social level. The semi-autobiographical and metafictional elements of this narrative remind readers that trust is not formed in specific individuals but rather constructed communally, and that this co-creation demands constant discussion and careful attention. Through close readings that focus on the novel's mode of storytelling, I argue that *A resistência* constitutes a particularly fecund ground for developing a deeper awareness of the ways in which trust is developed collectively and in tandem with doubt—between narrator and reader and between individuals in society; significantly, we are reminded of the ways in which engagement with the former type of development is reflected by and informs the latter.

Finally, in the third part of this essay, I remark on trust as a dimension of social reality that is culturally, politically, and historically situated—with respect to Brazil's past (the military dictatorship) as well as the present moment, as the country is faced with mistrust in government and the media, the advancement of militarization, and the erosion of democracy. Significantly, these realms in which I examine trust—the micro-social networks of trust that I emphasize in the novel, and the concerns I pose regarding trust in macro-social sphere—are not unrelated. In the conclusion of this essay, I explore the connections between these realms, suggesting that a focus on trust might contribute to a greater flourishing of truth, inasmuch as I view the relation between truth and trust as mutually determinative. Both are crucial for the development of a robust, public critical consciousness and of democratic processes of discussion and consensus.

### ***Toward a Fictional Narrative of Human Rights***

I refer to *A resistência* as a fictional narrative of human rights for several reasons. Sophia McClennen and Alexandra Moore, in their introduction to the *Routledge Companion to Literature and Human Rights*, state that the concept of human rights “is at once an idea, a set of discursive norms, a legal practice, and a political claim,” and it “depends on *storytelling* and on practical political advocacy” (1, my emphasis). McClennen and Moore also include the following in a list of the primary aims of the volume: “to denote human rights literature not as a set of texts, but as the outcome of a *reading practice* that focuses on the interplay of literary representation and juridical-political rights work” (2, my emphasis). I highlight these points because they are crucial for my argument that an

understanding of human rights narratives as dependent upon or constituted by political advocacy *and* storytelling, as well as denoted as “the outcomes of reading practices,” allows for a conceptualization of storytelling, reading practices, and literary scholarship (particularly as these relate to fictional narratives) as relevant to our understanding of real world juridical, political, and social issues.

Researchers in various disciplines have dealt with issues of human rights in Latin America from the twentieth century to the present, particularly those that relate to dictatorships and their aftermath. In the humanities, these are often embedded within “memory studies” and increasingly within the interdiscipline commonly referred to as “law and literature.” As I consider truth and trust in *A resistência* as these relate to not only the novel’s form of storytelling, but also to modes of reading and interpreting such narratives, it is important to ground this discussion in a brief overview of: 1) the ways in which truth and trust are relevant to memory studies and law and literature; and 2) the ways in which my reading of Fuks’s novel both borrows and diverges from some of the predominant preoccupations within these two sub- and interdisciplines.

The narrator of *A resistência* describes his struggle to write his novel as an attempt to examine family trauma and the implications of the past—from national history to personal histories—for the present. Following the 1976 coup in Argentina, the narrator’s leftist intellectual parents (like the author’s) live in fear but continue to try to form a family. In October, the husband’s office is ransacked, and in December, they receive a call that a newborn is available for adoption. Friends are disappeared, and one who remains warns the couple that they must leave the country. After adopting the baby (the narrator’s older brother), they flee to Brazil, which is also ruled by military dictatorship at this time.<sup>2</sup> In exile, they have a biological son, the narrator.<sup>3</sup> It is important to note that the novel’s unique treatment of memory is representative of a new moment in the history of fictional narratives that address dictatorships in Brazil and the

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<sup>2</sup> Their decision to flee to Brazil could be explained, in part, by a comparison of death tolls as a measure of dictatorial brutality in Argentina and Brazil. While political repression and human rights abuses occurred under military rule in both countries, there were far fewer political murders in Brazil compared to Argentina (in absolute and per capita terms).

<sup>3</sup> The narrator is never referred to by name, perhaps making it easy for readers to imagine that he is Julián Fuks himself. This assumption is not called into question until the narrator is referred to as “Sebastián” for the first and only time, on the antepenultimate page of the novel.

Southern Cone. Within the wave of narratives published in the decades following the fall of South American dictatorships, a portion have come to be classified according to a shared particularity of their authors, namely the decade of their birth. This is the so-called *Generación de los 70*, many of whom were children of leftist militants or *hijos de desaparecidos*.<sup>4</sup> Born in 1981, Fuks sits at the cusp of this broader category of postdictatorial fiction.<sup>5</sup> In *A resistència* and other novels published from the early 2000s to today, narrators address the impact of past experiences that belong not to them, but to their parents. These narrators seek the truth based on the blurred outlines of childhood memories, and on events they either did not directly witness or experience—the latter perhaps passed down to them through family photographs or memories, or through snippets of conversations they overhear in adulthood (or think they overheard in childhood). In the case of Fuks, the semi-autobiographical and metafictional nature of this storytelling highlights the ways in which the ability to trust in narratives of the past shapes our interactions with narratives in the present.<sup>6</sup>

Within memory studies, a good deal of scholarship directs its gaze to the past, focusing on attempts to recuperate and preserve memory, mitigate past traumas, and address mourning. Nelly Richard and Alberto Moreiras have emphasized that “the figures of trauma, mourning, and melancholy have become emblematic figures of a certain critical thinking about dictatorship,” and Michael Lazzara has likewise referenced similar concerns as central to the first wave of the “memory turn” in Latin American scholarship during the 1980s and 1990s (104).<sup>7</sup> This work also tends to focus on “truth”: revealing past atrocities, bearing witness, bringing the truth to light, and overwriting the official “truth”

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<sup>4</sup> This category of literature has also been referred to as *literatura de hijos* by (among others) Alejandro Zambra, who uses the expression to describe the writing of those who experienced the dictatorships as children. Other examples of *Generación de los 70* novels include: Alejandra Costamagna’s *En voz baja*; Felix Bruzzone’s *Los topos*; and Nona Fernández’s *Space Invaders*.

<sup>5</sup> Fernando Rosenberg uses the term “truth and reconciliation novels” to refer to a particular group within this broader category: novels published in the 1990s and 2000s that deal with the aftermath of the dictatorships and civil wars in the 1970s and 1980s (59). Though I am concerned with a similar corpus, here I focus explicitly on novels such as Fuks’s, published in later decades (from 2010 to the present).

<sup>6</sup> Along with *A resistència*, one might also consider Gonzalo Eltesch’s *Colección particular* and Alia Trabucco Zerán’s *La resta*.

<sup>7</sup> In addition to the critics Lazzara mentions (Idelber Avelar, Nelly Richard, and Alberto Moreiras), one might also consider the work of later critics of the memory turn he describes. These include, for example, Rebecca Atencio, Elizabeth Jelin, and Beatriz Sarlo.

propagated by the regime. Of course, with respect to memory studies, transitional justice, and related efforts to confront the crimes against humanity committed by dictatorial regimes across Latin America, the imperative to remember the past and to bring the truth to light—to uncover, unveil, reveal—is essential. Brazil in particular has had a tardy response to the crimes committed under dictatorial rule, and the truth-seeking process has faced significant impediments. Chief among these is the 1979 “Lei da Anistia” (Law No. 6.683/79), which granted immunity to military officials responsible for human rights violations during the dictatorship and consequently eliminated any incentive for perpetrators to help reveal the truth.<sup>8</sup> However, while “uncovering the truth” continues to be a necessary objective in Brazil and an important focus of memory studies and transitional justice scholarship, it is only part of the equation. As Eve Sedgwick reminds us, we know that the effectual force of exposing these truths resides somewhere other than in the exposé’s relation to knowledge per se (Sedgwick 141). Though some might suggest that a lack of suspicion entails a lack of critical awareness or inquiry into extrinsic matters of historical violence or human rights abuses, revealing human rights abuses and state violence tells us something we already knew; it does not necessarily generate solutions or interventions in present-day politics and society (Sedgwick 144).

To be clear, my concern with trust does not entail a departure from the hermeneutics of suspicion.<sup>9</sup> What I propose, grounded in a close reading of *A resistência*, is ultimately a more nuanced and pragmatic account of trust and truth, a self-consciously postcritical analysis of the ways in which trust operates in the novel. In the introduction to *Critique and Postcritique* (2017), Rita Felski

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<sup>8</sup> This law granted total amnesty to individuals involved in politically motivated crimes or human rights violations between September 2, 1961 and August 15, 1979. It is noteworthy that the amnesty granted was not bilateral and that, following military dictatorships in Argentina, Uruguay, and Chile, these countries have repealed their amnesty laws. Furthermore, while the Brazilian Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of the Lei da Anistia in April 2010, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights ruled later that year that the law is in conflict with the American Convention of Human Rights and that it represents an obstacle to the investigation of the facts (*Gomes Lund*). The ruling also cites the law as “perpetuating a climate of distrust” in the transition process, and it describes it as “a Law that generates impunity, lack of trust regarding protection from the State, and a eternally opened social wound...” (*Gomes Lund* 5).

<sup>9</sup> The hermeneutics of suspicion is a phrase coined by Paul Ricoeur to capture a common spirit that pervades the writings of Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, and Friedrich Nietzsche. Eve Sedgwick (among others) has responded to this, most famously in her essay on “reparative reading” (as opposed to “paranoid” practices of reading).

and Elizabeth Anker acknowledge that we are witnessing the flourishing of viable alternatives to a hermeneutics of suspicion. As they see it, if we consider critique to be both an intellectual project as well as a mode of interpretation, then “postcritique” seeks to find ways of reading that might offer constructive alternatives to criticism that have as their goal a more sophisticated account of how specific readers engage with specific texts (1). The “post-” of postcritique denotes a complex temporality: “an attempt to explore fresh ways of interpreting literary and cultural texts that acknowledges, nonetheless, its inevitable dependency on the very practices it is questioning” (1). Without suggesting the abolition of critique, it is in this postcritical sense that I propose an attention to “trust” as a fresh way of interpreting literary texts—as an alternative to suspicious hermeneutics, but without dismissing this tradition or the fact that suspicion can be necessary and fruitful. I am not advocating blind trust, but I do argue that this is no worse (or better) than blind or diehard skepticism. Toril Moi has perhaps articulated this point best: “To ban suspicion is no better than to generalize it. [...] The point is to be able to show why suspicion is called for in a particular case” (37).

I ask, in other words: How do we read now—in 2020, in Latin America and beyond—and to what end? What is the importance of reading and critical thinking for an engaged public? What is the basis for micro- and macro-social networks of trust, and what role do fictional narratives have in revealing that basis and shaping our attempts to develop it? If we think of trust as a form of paying close attention, a mode of reading that requires just as much care and discernment as suspicion, then we can think of reading (which inevitably relies on trust even as it calls it into question) as an activity that develops this kind of critical capacity. This is not insignificant, especially if we consider that any kind of meaningful intervention in the social sphere depends upon public engagement.<sup>10</sup> In response to the question, “What is the importance of reading?” one might interrogate the importance of reading *literature* in particular. Novels such as *A resistência*, after all, are not the only human rights narratives that relate to past and present human rights issues, reckon with private and collective memory, and make truth claims regarding these issues. Many human rights

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<sup>10</sup> Felski and Anker point out that a shift away from suspicious hermeneutics might inspire a more nuanced vision of how political change comes about (15).

narratives endowed with such truth-telling power are nonfictional: legal processes, journalistic texts, truth and reconciliation commission reports, etc. What, then, is the payoff of considering trust not as it relates to our encounter with truth claims in nonfictional genres but with respect to our reading of fictional narratives? One possible response to these questions is reflected in the epigraph to *A resistência*. Notably, the quotation is from a collection of essays entitled *La resistencia*, by Argentine novelist Ernesto Sábato: “Creo que hay que resistir: éste ha sido mi lema. Pero hoy, cuántas veces me he preguntado cómo encarnar esta palabra” ‘I believe that it’s necessary to resist: this has been my motto. But today, how often have I asked myself how to embody this word’ (124). In addition to his creative work, Sábato also led Argentina’s National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons and wrote the prologue to the commission’s report, *Nunca más* (*Never Again*, 1984).

The “law and literature” movement has engaged profoundly with Sábato’s question and more broadly with the ethical implications of the conception of art and literature as either mimetic and merely representative of reality or as engaged and participative in direct social and political action. As Lorna Hutson acknowledges, various scholars have argued over the “real effects” of literature and law, debating whether effects of realism rather than real-world effects are proper to literature, and whether the opposite is true of law (Hutson 146).<sup>11</sup> Some law and literature scholars insist that literature and art acquire ethical value through their capacity to disrupt legal regimes and to disclose what those systems exclude or repress; such accounts valorize literature’s opposition to law as “precisely what endows aesthetic experience with bearing upon and relevance to social justice” (Anker and Meyler 9).<sup>12</sup> Working beyond this opposition between law and literature, my concern is with the ethical value and political significance

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<sup>11</sup> Among others, Hutson cites Julie Stone Peters and her foundational essay, “Law, Literature and the Vanishing Real: On the Future of an Interdisciplinary Illusion.” Other important figures include James Boyd White, Peter Brooks, Robert M. Cover, and Kenji Yoshino.

<sup>12</sup> It is worthwhile to note that law and literature scholarship has frequently considered such narratives in strict opposition or competition. In their introduction to *New Directions and Law and Literature*, Bernadette Meyler and Elizabeth Anker make note of this tendency and acknowledge that various schools of thought or theory have reinforced a common view, namely that “law and literature not only furnish radically different versions of truth but also represent competing discourses and registers of thought” (9). In this view, “literature’s alterity to law and politics is what allows it to generate insight into law’s constitutive failures and negative limits” (9).



that literary narratives might provide on their own rather than as an effect of their opposition to law.

Working through the law/literature binary is a necessary condition for any adequate consideration of trust in the literary sphere. It is relevant both to the social structure constituted by legal regimes and to the role of literature and aesthetic production in the processes by which these structures take and change form. Put another way, modes of storytelling and aesthetic experience are both shaped by reality and have real effects in turn. Bernadette Meyler has recognized that legal and literary forms may diverge; however, she makes clear that the significance of this fact “lies not in the divergence but rather in the institutional forces producing it” (169). Fictional *and* legal narratives are shaped by institutional forces that condition what literature and the law “know” to be true, and how they know it. Moreover, these narratives—and therefore, more broadly, fiction and the law—form part of the cultural processes that contribute to social practice and to the composition of socially embedded activity frameworks. It is in this sense that I consider *A resistência* as an example of the potential of fictional narratives of human rights, or literature more broadly—as it is interpreted, interrogated, and as it examines and questions in turn—to be a necessary complement to juridical processes and legal texts that also attempt to bring about reformulations or reimaginings of what we know to be true. The epistemological problem of the so-called “post-truth” moment is also a political problem of a moment that is not “post-trust,” but in which we must increasingly question how we engage with narratives and why we decide to extend or withhold trust in them.

The task of comprehending and interpreting these narratives is thus one that relates to the trust placed in them. Whereas legal narratives tend to suggest a one-to-one correspondence between narrative and objective reality, fictional narratives such as *A resistência* make explicit the impossibility of such a correspondence. I turn to the concept of trust to address the tension between the positivist approach one might associate with legal theory and the more postmodern approach now firmly associated with literary criticism. As we witness a decline in trust in those individuals and institutions we would expect to administer or arbitrate truth and justice, I propose turning to literature not as an ethical salvific, but because literary narratives that do not make totalizing claims to truth remind us that reading is the very condition of trust. The unique generic

position of *A resistência* and its metafictional representation of memory emphasize the demand such a method of storytelling presents to its readers: that we trust or *participate in*, however briefly, the creation of its fictions, or the invention of its realities. From there, perhaps, we might question our participation in politics and justice. That is, while human rights scholars are right to insist on state responsibility for rights, we also ought to strive to develop clear norms regarding our own obligations as literary scholars and as readers.

### ***Narrating Truths and Building Trust***

The narrator of *A resistência* constantly questions his own responsibilities and reveals to his readers the difficulties associated with accessing the truth as it relates to the Brazilian dictatorship as well as to concerns that have become even more pronounced in recent years. As he interrogates the past, he attempts to comprehend multiple histories, ranging from the human rights abuses perpetrated by the military regime to a much more familial, intimate constellation of traumas and silences. He begins one chapter with a series of proclamations, admissions, and doubts regarding his ability to write not a story, but a history: “Isto não é uma história. Isto é história. Isto é história e, no entanto, quase tudo o que tenho ao meu dispor é a memória, noções fugazes de dias tão remotos, impressões anteriores à consciência e a linguagem, resquícios indigentes que eu insisto em malversar em palavras” (23). He thus immediately positions himself as both storyteller and historian: one who claims to have only memory at his disposal and who reminds us that the testimony of a historian is never neutral; as Hayden White has pointed out, the historian is embedded in history, an actor in the plot. Despite his doubts that memory is fleeting and language is impoverished, the narrator insists on creating a narrative that cannot be neatly defined as either story or history, just as *A resistência*, inasmuch as it can be defined as autofiction, falls somewhere between the genres of novel and autobiography. The narrator concludes this chapter with continued uncertainty: “Não consigo decidir se isto é uma história” (25).

The narrator’s play on the polysemic nature of the Portuguese “história”—which can mean both “story” and “history”—probes the tensions that arise between truth and narrative. As the narrator grapples with his position as both author and critic of a narrative that makes claims to truth, he acknowledges the

limitations of both his authorship and his interpretation. As he cycles between the truths he interprets, the truths he attempts to tell, and the truths he interprets again as his own critic, he self-consciously oscillates between trust and a lack of it. The narrator openly shows his readers that he is caught between “story” and “history.” More importantly, he acknowledges his own doubts, eventually attempting to arrive at some sort of collaborative truth by sourcing family members’ memories and claims to truth. Through this open negotiation, Fuks’s narrator shows himself to be caught between a postmodern approach and a more positivist one. “Por um instante me confundo,” he continues, “esqueço que também as coisas precedem as palavras, que tratar de acessá-las implicará sempre novas falácias” (Fuks, *A resistência* 23-24). By questioning his own position as author of a narrative as well as historian and investigator of his family’s past (along with Brazil’s and Argentina’s), he implicitly performs a sort of wariness of the pitfalls of both ideology critique and surface reading.

The ways in which we read have often been associated with different stances regarding the political or revolutionary potential of texts and critics. Proponents of symptomatic reading (associated with the 1960s) have often assumed that such criticism performs politics by other means. Proponents of surface reading (associated with scholars whose intellectual formation took place in the 1980s and later) such as Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus have argued against this, pointing out that this view unduly privileges the critic as a kind of glamorous hero whose work is a form of activism (5-6). The critical commitment to disclosing (pain, violence, oppressive structures, etc.) and debunking, in this sense, inevitably exaggerates the power of the critic to effect social and political transformation. Such oppositions suggest an either-or approach to internal and external forms of engagement: either we focus on the internal dynamics of literary (or journalistic or legal) narratives, or we read with an attention to the cultural and political chains of mediation in which these narratives are embedded; we are either belle-lettrists, preoccupied with formal aesthetics and therefore politically disengaged (or even complicit), or we are politically committed social constructivists.

In an attempt to overcome some of these binarisms, I turn to trust to mine its potential as a model for the same sort of judicious, critical, and probing interpretation as “symptomatic reading,” and as an effective lens through which to engage in “surface reading.” Fuks’s narrator’s questioning of his role as

author/historian, and his constant, almost exasperating insistence on the lack of correspondence between his narrative of the truth and any objective reality provides a productive testing ground for trust and doubt; that is, he perpetuates an interrogation of ways in which we read (trust, doubt, and ultimately pay attention to) narratives and their contexts. His interrogation emphasizes fiction's capacity to not just expose the truth, but to highlight the flaws, problems, and difficulties of accessing it. Through this kind of reading, we might divorce ourselves from the idea that we can make such total claims to absolute truth; the belief that we *can* is tantamount to the refusal to accept that there are things we do not know.

There is much that the narrator of *A resistência* does not know about his family's past. He observes that his parents often lower their voices when referring to certain episodes or names from the past, as if they still lived in the time of the dictatorship, or as if they could still be caught and punished by the regime. Incredulous, he finally asks his father who he thinks is eavesdropping: Who today would be interested in his parents' "trivial details" from such a distant past? His father's reaction echoes prevalent concerns in Brazil today:

[...] a resposta que meu pai repete é uma absurda mescla de devaneio e lucidez: as ditaduras podem voltar, você deveria saber. As ditaduras podem voltar, eu sei, e sei que seus arbítrios, suas opressões, seus sofrimentos, existem das mais diversas maneiras, nos mais diversos regimes, mesmo quando uma horda de cidadãos marcha às urnas bienalmente—é o que penso ao ouvi-lo mas me privo de dizer. (40)

Beyond a fear that the past can recur, the father's reply suggests that the parents' musings are more than trivial. Their hushed voices, like the son's admission to himself that dictatorships and oppression can indeed return, invoke a similar urgency: that of placing political value in memory. This urgency is heightened as the public's loss of trust in those institutions and individuals expected to administer and arbitrate truth and justice—from media and the judiciary to electoral integrity and elected officials—contributes to the gradual erosion of

democratic institutions and to the significant possibility of a shift toward authoritarian regimes.<sup>13</sup>

When the narrator's father warns his son that "dictatorships can return," the narrator repeats this to himself and acknowledges that he is aware of it. However, he does not voice his concern aloud, either to spare his father this brutal reality, or due to a "reticence" that he does not understand (Fuks, *A resistência* 40). He continues by describing what else remains known but unspoken in a page-long list of what he and his father both know and do not know about one another. The son both knows and does not know that his father belonged to a movement, that he trained in Cuba; he both knows and does not know that he never fired a well-aimed shot, that his involvement was limited to tending to the wounded in the streets. His father, for his part, both knows and does not know that his son is writing this book, and that it is about their family (40). When his father *does* admit that his son is writing this book, the narrator continues, he says he will send his son a document from Operation Condor—a document with his name on it, proof of his involvement. The narrator asks his father to send it, but in doing so, he reveals his unspoken intentions to the reader: "Eu lhe peço que mande, mas não conto que quero inseri-lo no livro, que pretendo absurdamente atestar minha invenção com um documento (40). Inventing and remembering become one, as the narrator reminds us that we do not possess our memories—we author them. What is more, all of these "truths"—that father and son simultaneously know and do not know—are somehow simultaneously enough and not enough. The narrator, even as he trusts his father's knowledge and memories and his own construction of a "true" story, has enough doubt to wonder whether a document that constitutes historical evidence is necessary to corroborate some of these truths. He concludes this passage with the following: "Envergonhado, tal vez, com a própria vaidade, ele nunca me manda o arquivo; eu nunca volto a pedir, envergonhado também" (40). With this confession, the narrator reveals a kind of tacit agreement. He frames this unspoken pact as the result of shame or

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<sup>13</sup> A recent survey by Datafolha (conducted in December 2019) illustrates but one example of lack of trust in some elected officials (in this case, President Bolsonaro). According to the survey, 80% of Brazil's population claims to distrust statements made by President Bolsonaro; 43% of those interviewed said that they never trust in the president's statements, and 37% said they sometimes trust in them. Those who said that they always trust in his statements made up 19% of the respondents; 1% of those surveyed were unsure how to respond ("80% dizem"). For more on the history of authoritarianism in Brazil, see Schwarcz.

embarrassment; however, the agreement also constitutes a form of trust—a willingness to be dependent on one another, an acceptance of the knowledge that each can provide. Furthermore, the narrator places his readers in a similar position: we too are unable to ask the narrator or his father to share this document.

It is productive at this point to present trust as a form both of knowledge and of dependence. Georg Simmel stresses that trust, or confidence (*Vertrauen*) in another person is a basic form of human knowledge, and he shows that trust stems from our inability to know everything, and thus, from our contingency, relationality, or interdependence with others (450). This interdependence is especially relevant to the relationship between a reader and narrator, given that the latter cannot provide the former with anything like full knowledge. In this sense, trust is a commitment between two or more parties. Significantly, trust is based not only on the relationship between these parties but also on the relation between available knowledge and trust more generally. If one possesses full knowledge, there is no need for trust; by the same token, a complete absence of knowledge makes trust evidently impossible (Simmel 450). Trust, therefore, can be defined as a willingness to be dependent (Faulkner 311).

This trust, understood as a form of mutual dependence, is present throughout *A resistência*, not only in terms of an understanding or agreement between individuals but in terms of what this metafictional narrative asks us as readers to believe. The narrator constantly questions whether what he writes is a history or a story, whether it is a trustworthy portrayal of his knowledge of the past. Near the end, he presents a draft to his parents, who, feeling themselves “partidos entre leitores e personagens, oscilaram ao infinito entre história e história” (Fuks, *A resistência* 135). A family discussion begins, as the parents take on the role of critics. The father rejects the description of him storing guns under the bed, claiming that he did keep guns in the house but would never have kept them in such an obvious hiding place. Both parents continue to pile on accusations of discrepancies between story and history. The scene in which the father throws a grenade at a protest in the park, the father insists, is absurd; the mother is quick to agree, and an argument ensues. Significantly, though much of the novel revolves around the narrator’s brother (his adoption, his conflicts with his family), the brother is absent from this discussion. The novel concludes with the brother opening the door to the narrator and to an encounter (a discussion, a possible form of understanding or reconciliation) that is left to the imagination

of readers, as the final sentences announce that “within seconds,” the narrator will hand the book to his brother (139).

The arguments between Fuks’s narrator and his family (and even his own arguments with himself as author) reflect a demand for discussion, and they constitute a kind of performance of the possibility of reconciling trust with suspicion. Paul Ricoeur, referring to his own attempts to reconcile trust with a hermeneutics of suspicion, describes this possibility in terms of a Habermasian “ethics of discussion” (qtd. in Kearney 156). The hermeneutics of suspicion functions against systems of power that seek to prevent confrontation between competing arguments at the level of genuine discourse, Ricoeur reminds us, and so it is in such discourse that “we bring together diverse and opposing interests with the hope that they will engage at the level of rigorous argumentation” (156). This ethics of discourse obliges one to offer the best argument possible, in the expectation that discussants will in turn articulate their mistrust (or “resentment and aggression,” as Ricoeur would say) in the form of an equally plausible argument (156). It is through this sort of discussion—between individuals and within families and society more broadly—that suspicion between opposing interests gives way to trust and a certain level of consensus.

As the family argument continues, the father claims that a certain passage of the draft “lacks verisimilitude,” and the narrator becomes outraged:

Mas foi assim, vocês me contaram, desse caso eu acho que me lembro bem, por algum motivo ele ficou marcado para mim. Há muitas estranhezas na história de vocês, eu argumento, essa não seria a única. Algumas até tive que omitir porque nenhum leitor toleraria: como aceitar que tenham voltado à Argentina em pleno regime, clandestinos e vulneráveis (...)? (Fuks, *A resistência* 136)

He continues to list the aspects of his parents’ history that he had to omit from his telling of it, the seemingly far-fetched occurrences that no reader would willingly believe. At the root of the narrator’s outburst, it seems, is not so much the need to convince his parents that he *has* accurately portrayed a series of events but rather a sense of betrayal in response to the implication that he cannot trust in the veracity of his parents’ history, of the stories they have passed down to him. The parents’ insinuations that no reader would ever believe such

representations of resistance raise a series of doubts. In essence, the narrator (and in turn, his reader) is pushed to question the possibilities for trust at multiple levels. Can the narrator trust what his parents have told him? Can he be trusted to write this history? Can the reader trust the story he tells?

Throughout *A resistência*, in arguments both with himself and with his parents, the narrator questions the extent to which his narrative can be deemed not only truthful, but credible. The narrator (and, we might imagine, the author) ultimately decides to publish the story that his family argues is not only too unbelievable, but also too painfully private. One can imagine that the narrator hopes that readers will indeed trust it, or at least find it credible. After all, his parents eventually concede that perhaps this story of resistance *did* happen as the son describes it: “Bom, pode ser, minha mãe contemporiza, que seja, a reunião no parque pode ter acontecido, meu pai aceita e concede: Aqueles eram mesmo anos inverossímeis” (Fuks, *A resistência* 136). During the dictatorship, everything seemed improbable, and reality itself seemed unbelievable; therefore, perhaps to accept that this story of resistance falls within the realm of possibility is not, in fact, so outrageous. This family argument and eventual (though perhaps reluctant) consensus reveals two important points with respect to truth and trust-building within the novel. First, there is the fact that the truths this fictional narrative is capable of revealing are ultimately conditioned by the fact that the “truth” of fictional narrative is grounded not in veracity, but in effects of verisimilitude. Second, there is the equally important fact that the narrator of *A resistência* nonetheless strives to create an account that is accurate and sincere. Beyond this, he is concerned with developing an account of the past that is collectively sourced and vetted. This last point speaks to the notion that trust in a narrative depends not only on the veracity and verisimilitude of a given statement (as well as on the trustworthiness of the narrator) but also on the social and cultural conditions of its construction and dissemination (Latour 23).

Fuks’s narrator never does procure the document from Operation Condor that his father allegedly possesses, and he never cites it as evidence. Nevertheless, it does not matter. This is not to suggest that documentary and archival evidence are unnecessary supplements to historical memory but that what the narrator asks his readers to trust in is his ability to recount something meaningful—rather than his capacity to produce an objective, adequately sourced account of the past. In this sense, the narrator acknowledges the possibility that sometimes fictions



come closer to what really happened than historical or legal narratives, inasmuch as they get directly at the meaning behind or beyond the facts. Because this type of metafictional narrative contains and operates within this grey area between belief and doubt, it offers a politically useful model for exercising trust and examining the ways in which we do so.

### *The Significance of Trust in the Public Sphere*

In the Brazilian context, from the dictatorship to the present, trust is significant to justice on both an institutional as well as an individual, or interpersonal level. Though Fuks's novel provides a model for the ways in which trust, like a muscle, can be developed or flexed at a local, micro-social level, one question that remains is what relevance such a model has for considerations of how trust might operate in the broader public sphere. In the remainder of this article, therefore, I would like to remark briefly on the capacity of this fictional narrative of human rights to illuminate the significance of trust in the public sphere—specifically, the difficulties posed in mediating it and the necessity of building trust in coexistence with (not in lieu of) suspicion and doubt. To be clear, I am not arguing for trust for trust's sake, or suggesting that trust in elected officials and the judiciary (for example) is always necessary; rather, I am arguing that trust between individuals must be rehabilitated—that, for the sake of democracy, it is worth questioning how we might prevent our ability to *exercise* trust from devolving into atrophy. If the lessons on trust in Fuks's novel can be expanded to the macro-social sphere of institutions and government, then perhaps the possibility for expansion lies in weighing the usefulness of trust and examining the ways in which it is achieved, even at the micro-social level between narrator and reader, between family members, and between friends.

Following the election of Bolsonaro in 2018, Fuks composed an online manifesto—"Manifesto da literatura pela democracia, pela liberdade, pela empatia"—which was signed by many writers, journalists, literary critics, editors, and professors, including Chico Buarque, Roberto Schwarz, Lygia Fagundes Telles, Veronica Stigger, and Lilia Moritz Schwarcz. In the manifesto, Fuks warns that Bolsonaro's candidacy and gestures toward authoritarianism represent threats to democracy in Brazil. However, Fuks is adamant that democracy will not be dismantled, and that culture—particularly literature—will

not be silenced: “Contra a censura, contra o desprezo, contra o desdém, contra a imposição de falsas verdades e de equívocas certezas, escritores e escritoras sempre souberam se erguer” (“Manifesto”). The active resistance of writers against “falsas verdades e equívocas certezas” requires an understanding of the ways in which these are disseminated through narratives and perpetuated in society. Whether or not we consider the narrators of novels such as *A resistência* (or of legal or media narratives, for example) to be trustworthy or reliable, we are ultimately dependent upon them for as long as we choose to pay attention to what they narrate. This is why we take seriously the deception of the public by the media and politicians: they often have the outsized power to impose a particular version of reality on a great number of people. Hannah Arendt has described this phenomenon in depth:

In an ever-changing, incomprehensible world the masses had reached the point where they would, at the same time, believe everything and nothing, think that everything was possible and that nothing was true. [...] The totalitarian mass leaders based their propaganda on the correct psychological assumption that, under such conditions, one could make people believe the most fantastic statements one day, and trust that if the next day they were given irrefutable proof of their falsehood, they would take refuge in cynicism; instead of deserting the leaders who had lied to them, they would protest that they had known all along that the statement was a lie and would admire the leaders for their superior tactical cleverness. (382)

Whereas Arendt refers to the effects of totalitarian propaganda, recent studies in social psychology have described similar tendencies more generally as “truth bias” or “truth default.” The former refers to the tendency to believe that another person’s communication is honest independent of its actual honesty. The latter involves the idea that as a default, people presume without conscious reflection that others’ communication is honest (Levine 381). This is not to suggest that we might as well throw our hands up and succumb to our innate susceptibility to populist demagoguery, fake news, or brainwashing. However, the opposite stance, which Arendt describes as one held concurrently (“to believe everything and

nothing”), is just as damaging. It is a similarly fatalistic resignation: to insist that corruption is endemic to society (Brazilian or otherwise), and that we must therefore preempt or counteract the dangers of misplaced trust with constant hyper-suspicion. Both positions assume that the only reality on which we can depend (or trust) is the story that narratives present to us. Both positions also meet the inevitable (i.e., the limitations of our own knowledge and our interdependence) with despair.

While our interconnectedness and our inability to know everything is inevitable, the totalitarian propagation of claims to absolute, unitary truth is not; or rather, what matters more than the fact of our limitations and such claims is our response to them. Arendt’s description of a populace so ready to believe in everything and nothing at the same time is a call to remember and recognize the potential recurrence of authoritarian mechanisms of truth. As Fuks’s narrator knows, dictatorships “existem das mais diversas maneiras”; they can exist across a variety of social and legal regimes, and they can exist even when “people march out to vote” (Fuks, *A resistência* 40). Fictional narratives, like legal narratives, media, and politicians, have the potential to propose and construct alternate versions of reality and thus influence or persuade the public. Significantly, the stories that these present to readers constitute not only alternative grammars (variations on the past and the present), but the possibility for different modes of reading or engaging with narratives that make claims to the truth. When we read a narrative, we weigh the possibilities for this narrative to impose a different version of reality. Though we might have our doubts, to keep reading is to engage with and participate in a narrative (a fiction, a truth report, a news article), and, in this sense, to trust. We keep reading because we seek to interpret, to understand; this process is not blind trust or an involuntary suspension of disbelief, but a “willingness to be dependent” that is the result of a careful evaluation and judgment of both the sincerity and reliability of the speaker and the accuracy of the information provided. To be able to trust someone, in this sense, depends upon being able to read them. Trust, in turn, is what authorizes democratic ways of relating to knowledge and to one another, insofar as trust demands discussion and interpretation, debate and consensus.

In Fuks’s manifesto, he cites literature as a form of activism and calls on writers, critics, and editors to continue to practice their trade: “Por isso clamamos por uma união de todos e todas que prezem pela democracia, que valorizem a

existência da diversidade e do dissenso. A literatura, afinal, tem como ideal e como fim a aproximação ao outro, a compreensão de suas aflições, de seus suplícios, o encontro entre diferentes.” Fuks thus recognizes literature as a means to intervene in contemporary politics, and he describes literature’s ideal, or what writers (and readers) must value and strive for, in terms of what his novel’s narrator performs: an attempt to extend one’s sphere of consideration beyond oneself through paying attention to and listening to, or reading, others. This representation of a plurality of opinions and dissent is conducive to democratic, communal forms of trust-building that are antithetical to those perpetuated by dictatorial regimes and corrupt governments.

Through Fuks’s recourse to metafictional elements that illustrate the ethics of discussion and consensus building, the novel provides an alternative to strong claims to truth. It likewise offers a departure from the monopolistic hold that totalizing or coherentist claims have on our understanding of both history and possibility, inasmuch as making a space for trust allows us to, by means of interpretation, charge ourselves with imagining and enabling new and different social and political formations. Once we (like Fuks’s narrator) acknowledge that truth is fragmented and unstable, it does not follow that we are denying it or retreating into a bland form of relativism. The capacity for trust, an epistemically evaluable, discerning attitude, allows for the hope that, in the words of Eve Sedgwick, “the future may be different from the present” (146). This imagining of different futures (and in turn, the understanding that the past could have happened differently) takes on urgency in contemporary Brazil, given the broad lack of trust in institutions and the government. As the narrator of *A resistência* reminds us through his performance of truth and trust as co-created (between narrator and reader, between individuals), truths are a necessary precondition for trust, just as trust is a necessary precondition for constructing truths. The value of trust is thus inseparable from its relation to truth. Moreover, this value resides in the capacity of trust to fortify the truths that we co-create, thus ensuring the possibility that we make these truths politically useful: that we develop them in service of a future in which dictatorships do not return, and that we strive to rehabilitate trust as a mechanism for converting truths to action. Both are crucial to the development of public critical consciousness, to debate, consensus, and a robust democracy. As we attempt to navigate the erosion of democracy and the rise of authoritarianism, the abundance of fake news and the denial of empirical

evidence, or as we risk limiting critical thinking to disconnected ivory towers of different sorts, is it not precisely the category of “trust” that needs rehabilitation in this sense?

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