‘These films are caught between the need to expose the horror of the past and the desire for personal and collective catharsis.’ Discuss with reference to AT LEAST TWO post-dictatorship Argentine films.

The films Boda secreta (1988) by Alejandro Agresti, Un muro de silencio (1993) by Lita Stantic and Los rubios (2003) by Albertina Carri, all made after the return to democracy in Argentina, explore the social and psychological effects of the military dictatorship which lasted between 1976 and 1983. In this essay I will examine how these films deal with the issue of representing such a difficult topic.

To what extent does Galdós prove himself to be a realist writer?
The works of Galdós are commonly interpreted within the context of nineteenth-century Realism, his novels being compared to those of other leading European Realists of the period, such as Balzac and Dickens. However, the precise characteristics of the Realist movement are not easily defined as its practitioners are often charged with not being very realistic at all. Possible definitions abound; they do seem to concur on a number of points which should characterise Realist fiction. Firstly, it is presumed that the plot and characters must be based on reality: both the events and the people in the novel should be plausible, in the sense that they could conceivably exist in the world which provides their inspiration. Secondly, the plausible plot and its protagonists should be firmly placed within a broader context of contemporary social and/or political realities; and lastly, that the novelist should aim for narratorial objectivity in his representation of real life. These three general characteristics largely preclude both Romantic and idealist approaches to literary creation, although vestiges of these appear in Galdós’s novels as in those of his contemporaries. Naturally, any attempt to make literature realistic is thwarted by irony: the aim is to create a reality (that is itself being a contradiction in terms) which is ultimately only an illusion of reality. However realistic a novel may be, its representation of life cannot be as comprehensive or as objective as life itself. Galdós demonstrates an almost modernist consciousness of the problems of transforming life into art. How successful was he in portraying the reality of life in general, and specifically life in nineteenth-century Spain? What aspects of his literary technique contribute to the effect of Realism in his novels?

To what extent can La campaña and El general en su laberinto be read as historiographic metafictions?
Confessing to a fascination with clocks and watches, Varela in La campaña remarks that the past is not only to be remembered but to be imagined, in the same ways as the future is imagined, ‘para que ambos tengan sentido’. Both La campaña and El general en su laberinto represent imaginative re-workings of the past, re-opening the closure of official history to emphasise the marginal and the untold stories. As such, both novels reflect concerns which are typical of the new Latin American historical novel – and indeed, of historiographic metafiction in general, as theorised by Linda Hutcheon among others. Central to these concerns is the issue of narrativity and the problematisation of representation: in contrast to the traditionally conceived historical novel, the new and postmodern historical novel foregrounds the increasingly blurred distinction between the two discourses of history and literature, the relationship – often arbitrary – between past events and those which are privileged to be made into History. This particularly postmodern self-consciousness is to be seen operating at a number of levels in both novels; however, many of the stylistic features which characterise historiographic metafiction are here conspicuous by their absence. Attempts to place either novel squarely with the framework of historiographic metafiction, with its typical use of the Bakhtinian carnivalesque and forms of intertextuality, are not entirely convincing; this is more emphatically the case with El general en su laberinto.