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Deregulated Cinema: Post-Dictatorship Cinema and the Neoliberal Transition in Chile and Argentina

DISSERTATION

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by

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DEDICATION

To my parents

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Deregulated Cinema:
Post-Dictatorship Film and the Neoliberal Transition in Chile and Argentina
by
Charles George Allen
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Professor Horacio Legrás, Chair

Deregulated Cinema: Post-Dictatorship Film and the Neoliberal Transition in Chile and Argentina offers a selective reading of neoliberal era Chilean and Argentine films and texts to suggest how Southern Cone cinema has responded to the transformation of modes of production and organizations of power imbricated with the transition. Part one of *Deregulated Cinema* illustrates the emergence of neoliberal spatial arrangements through the films of Patricio Guzmán to suggest the scale by which the sensorium has been altered and interpolated to work by transformations in visuality because, as Guzmán's films indicate, such transformations have important implications not only for cinema but concepts like history and nostalgia. Similarly, I propose that the films of the Nuevo Cine Argentino (NCA), which have tended to be read as anti-allegorical, respond to the conditions of expropriation that defined the neoliberal period in Argentina, with images that underline the relations of labor and looking. In this way, *Deregulated Cinema* contributes to contemporary debates about post-dictatorship Latin American cultural studies as well as film and media theory.

Introduction:

Visuality at Work: Economies of Sight in *El Asadito*

Shot in just one day, Gustavo Postiglione's "instant" black-and-white film, *El Asadito*, raises an ensemble of questions related to the commodification of visuality in neoliberal Argentina and Chile, which I discuss at length in the following pages of this dissertation, *Deregulated Cinema.* Decidedly peripheral to industrial cinema as well as the Buenos Aires-centered Argentine cinema, *El Asadito* is a *filmed* gathering of seven friends, meeting in Rosario Argentina, on December 30th, 1999, to have a New Year's barbecue. Confined to Tito's rooftop terrace—which sits above his "videoclub"—the barbecuers are being filmed by an onscreen camera, which often indiscernibly mixes with the point of view of Postiglione's offscreen camera. The men pay little attention to Postiglione's camera, which both normalizes its omnipresence and bespeaks its incomprehensibility. Neither fiction nor documentary the film makes no effort to confront the factitious with the factual. Rather, its two cameras observe capturing the character's lucubrations about women, movies, barbecues, and the impending New Year.

Figure 1.1: Lounging on rooftop, in *El Asadito*

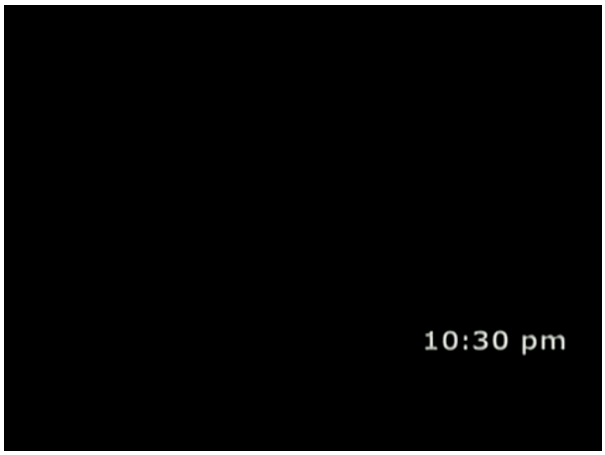

Figure: 1.2: Time from scene in *El Asadito*

The action moves in fits and starts, the time of day appearing occasionally to remind the viewer that we are headed towards some climactic finale alluded to in the millennial threat of the Y2K integral accident or perhaps with Héctor's suicide. Instead, one of the late arrivals, Turco, admits that just this morning he has slept with Tito's wife Carola. After admitting this ("pero yo te quiero Gordo"), Turco says, "Bueno, pero estamos hablando del fin del mundo," to which Tito replies, "¡Fin del mundo las pelotas Turco!" The movie ends with the sound of church bells proclaiming the New Year, now only four men left around the picnic table. The world altering accident heralded by the specter of an over reliance on technology does not take place onscreen because the impending millennial cataclysm has, in a sense, already occurred in this filmic world. This is true, at least in part, not only because *El Asadito* captures a certain economic

precarity that characterized Argentina in the 90s but because the film works to underline the ways that social relations have been attenuated and transformed by visual economies. Much like other films analyzed in *Deregulated Cinema*, *El Asadito* registers transformations in the mode of production as transformations in visuality.

In *El Asadito,* the quotidian rooftop barbecue becomes a kind of allegorical social factory where characters pitch their image and likeness to the camera. Whether lying about their lavish apartments or accolades at work, all of the characters in *El Asadito* are playing a part, falsifying stories for the camera. In many of these stories, there are references to working with and being worked-over by images. Héctor, for instance, frames his alienation in relation to his job as a painter: "Dibujo todo el día como un pelotudo […] paso todo el día dibujando tetas para que el tipo que me paga y no me echa de una patada en el orto […]."[1] The scale at which this economy works can be elucidated by the ways in which it has altered the built environment. Tito's *videoclub* serves as a reminder of the ways in which economies of moving images subtend the characters' lives, specifically, and social relations, more generally.[2] The location of the

[1] Héctor is a painter who is forced to reproduce commercialized garbage for an exacting and malevolent boss. The excessiveness of his relation to the image is what has driven Héctor to stage his suicide in front of his friends. He rants and yells, pointing the gun all over, ordering everyone to sit down. In between heavy sobs, he lambasts his job. And yet he cannot pull the trigger. There is no transcendence of the imaginary *from* the imaginary. The tragic irony here is that the imaginary relation is supposed to produce the subject as a master of the image, but instead here produces only failure. A kind of double alienation, the image of Travis Bickle (from Scorcese's *Taxi Driver*) does not bind to Héctor—he does not really believe in this identification—and yet Héctor's (and Bickle's) "act" has nonetheless captured the camera's and the spectator's attention.

[2] As Dolores Blasco and Denise Menache point out, "sabemos que quedan pocos de estos especímenes actualmente con el advenimiento tanto de lo digital como de internet, y que la mejor—si no única—forma de ver una película en el momento deseado era rentándola por varios días en el videoclub de barrio" (7).

"videoclub" *below* the rooftop barbecue is suggestive—what subtends the alienation of rooftop revelry is precisely the cinematic mode of production below.[3]

This process, or this mode of production, can be characterized as deterritorialized sensorial labor because of the way that sensoriums are interpolated to "work" and add value in the informal economy of viewing at the same time that they are "shaped to work." Along these lines, what is especially striking about *El Asadito* is how labor gets rendered through Postiglione's cinematic "double take"—the co-contamination of cameras, that blurs the lines between fiction and documentary, juxtaposing the spontaneity of an "instant cinema" with a sense of historical and semiotic overdetermination. The contamination of the two cameras serves as a double take, in that, between the breakdown of the cinematic illusion on the one hand and the overdetermined world of images inhabited by the film's characters on the other, the spectator must stop and look twice. However, looking twice only confirms that in *El Asadito* a regime of visuality predominates in which the image is illegible, overdetermined, and, above all, alienating.

[3] That this mode of production reproduces itself in a racial and gendered calculus—for instance, Carola is located offscreen—goes largely unconsidered by the film.

Figure 1.3: Héctor with the gun in *El Asadito* **1.4:** Daniel being interviewed by camera in *El Asadito*

Read from this perspective, the heavily coded social reunions—New Year's and a rooftop barbecue in Rosario—become a stage for Postiglione's characters to project their "images," to work out—as Kaja Silverman argues in relation to white masculinity—the "gradual reaffirmation and reconstitution of the dominant fiction."[4] However, in this case, the monumentalization of masculine cinematic egos is predestined to fall short—something escapes its logic on this rooftop in Rosario. The dimension of the act, taken in in the sense of eventfulness, is here excluded.[5] Héctor's outburst is one of several parodic meta-commentaries on the impossibility of each characters' imposing his own fiction on the fictional film world of *El Asadito.* The double take signals to the spectator that, insofar as the fictions spun by the all-male cast are pre-scripted meaningless failures, there is nothing to look at in *El Asadito* except "empty speech" parading as "empty speech." In this double take, affective processes are derailed—overdetermined

[4] Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins,* 65.

[5] This observation comes from Horacio Legrás, who, also kindly reminded me that the characters voice anger and confusion that "En este país, no pasa nada."

in "looking twice." What, for instance, are we supposed to make of the apparent nostalgia that sustains this group of men?

Figure 1.5: A serious conversation about how to do *asado,* from *El Asadito*

The film's representational apparatus, the double take, alters the coordinates by which we make sense of the affectively charged images that perforate *El Asadito*. What has changed in the double take is what Ackbar Abbas calls "the invisible […] and unfamiliar grid" by which we make sense of these images.[6] Just as Héctor's violent dalliances must be read as staged, so too are the idealizations for the past. Rooftop nostalgia, therefore, is not only an individual desire to reclaim an idealized past but a calculated, collective performance dependent on the whims of the "instant" visual economy. The double take appears only to confirm that images are regulated commodities, vectors for dispossession, and that therefore we have all become spectator-workers. Following Jean-Louis Comolli, it is in this sense that the spectator

[6] Abbas, "Poor Theory," 6-7.

works: "the simulacrum does not fool a passive spectator (there are no passive spectators): the spectator has to participate in his own fooling; the simulacrum is the means whereby he is helped to fool himself. The spectator, never passive, works."[7] This is further evidenced by Carola, Tito's wife, who functions to tie together the various characters' desires, ensuring that the all-male fantasy continues—sutured—into the new year. Wholly absent from the screen, an empty signifier par excellence, Carola captures the men's attention, just as their "empty" fictions capture our attention.

In a close up shot at the very end of the film, Tito declares to the group that he is Ok, because, after all, "la Carola duerme conmigo en la noche." This is not the first time Tito repeats this sentiment. He claims earlier that what is important is that a woman "abanca sus pedos." Framed in this way, Tito's comments underline a resignation to the processes of social objectification and material dispossession. Underlying this affect-laden shot, is a cynical and objectifying calculus. It is not enough that Carola sleeps with him she must also "abanca[r] sus pedos." If Tito's sincerity convinces the spectators, it is because relations are subtended and overdetermined by the financialization of life.[8] Carola functions for the men—like image and money—as a vanishing mediator that accrues attention and value. Offscreen and fungible to the vagaries of the rooftop fictions, Carola has "not the unique aura of the person but the 'spell of the personality,'

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[7] Comolli, "Historical Fiction: A Body Too Much," 46.

[8] This term was proposed by Randy Martin as a way to conceive of various scales of indebtedness that inhere in economic modes best described as "neoliberal." In a larger way, Martin sets out to understand the financialization of subjectivity. See Martin, *The Financialization of Daily Life.*

the phony spell of the commodity."[9] In one way or another, the men and the spectator become imbricated in perpetuating *this* particular fiction. The point is that if the "veil" of fiction is usurped in the double take, the image does not become less codified or ideological. These "harmless" falsehoods and tales of heteropatriarchy nonetheless work on the spectator, as Héctor's outburst indicates. Inundated by a commodified visual economy that has transformed the "invisible grids" that structure the social totality, nostalgia becomes just another overdetermined act, a superfluous choice, like how to barbecue or what movie to rent. In this way, *El Asadito* is not only a film about the possibilities of making film in Argentina at the turn of the millennium but also a film about the limits imposed on (and *by*) film at the end of the millennium.

Figure 1.6: Medium shot of Tito saying "Carola duerme conmigo, "from scene in *El Asadito*

[9] Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 256.

I. Dispossession and Deregulation: Neoliberalism in Latin America

Cinematic Deregulation: Post-Dictatorship Cinema and the Neoliberal Transition in Chile and Argentina offers a selective reading of post-dictatorship Chilean and Argentine films to suggest how Southern Cone cinema has responded to the transformation of modes of production and organizations of power imbricated with the intense neoliberalization of Chile between 1990 and 2021 and of Argentina during the broader, constitutional period, between 1983 and 2001. Neoliberal projects in Chile and Argentina were inaugurated by the dictatorial state of exception and its foundational acts of violence, and continued through liberal exceptionalism which sanctioned and extended the exception with violent means. In both countries, these periods are characterized by broad economic deregulation, which included drastic cuts in government spending, the privatization of public companies and institutions, and the removal of barriers to international trade and investment. But these changes did not occur only at the macro economic level. Its percussive effects on modes of living were equally transformative.

In the case of Argentina, Diego Sztulwark defines the constitutional period as a process of reengineering the social relationship around consumption:

> En contextos tan diversos como la Europa del Este de los años noventa y la América Latina de los ochenta, el neoliberalismo funcionó como articulador entre los mercados y las democracias nacientes, con sus promesas de consumo y elecciones libres. En el caso de la Argentina, su primera instauración vino de la mano de la violencia terrorista del Estado, y su consolidación ocurrió en tiempos parlamentarismos. Fue el gobierno peronista de Carlos Menem el que implementó con mayor coherencia las recetas promovidas por el Consenso de Washington […] De modo que el período constitucional

> de 1983-2001 puede ser leído como el corolario de una remodelación del lazo social que, en pocas palabras, produjo el pasaje de la figura del ciudadano (definido por el salario) a la del consumidor (definido por los ingresos).[10]

The dynamics of dispossession that inhere around neoliberal forms of governance are only deepened and repeated in the Latin American context. Verónica Gago's anthropological account of textile factories and *villas* in the outskirts of Argentina point to how neoliberalism is a kind of experimental expansion machine that adjusts its modes and movements in space and time according to value and accumulation.[11] In a similar vein, Willy Thayer posits the neoliberalization of Chile as a protracted and repetitive "golpe de Estado anti-vanguardista":

> El gobierno popular de Allende fue un intento de destruir la representación en el marco de la institucionalidad burguesa. Por mucho que el vector del capitalismo de Estado y el otro, de la huelga general revolucionaria, estuvieran presentes ahí como vectores, la revolución allendista era intra-marco. El proyecto clásico de destrucción del Estado como monumento del poder de clase (la teoría leninista de la extinción del estado) fue consumado por el Golpe de Estado contra-vanguardista; Golpe, dictadura y transición que se han pensado a sí mismos como "modernización" del país, es decir, teológicamente, y por lo tanto subsumiendo la tortura y la desaparición en los procesos de racionalización. La salida del marco no la produce la vanguardia. La dictadura produjo una Constitución Política que operó autoritariamente como marco, pero lo paradojal es que lo que "contenía" esa Constitución era el no-marco de la economía neoliberal. La década de los noventa y del 2000 es, en este sentido, el Golpe y la Constitución de la Dictadura, por segunda vez, es decir, en su efectivo despliegue

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[10] Sztulwark, *La Ofensiva Sensible,* 55.

[11] For Gago, the multiplicity of practices, knowledges, and technologies that function in line with government rationality (la razón neoliberal) cannot be understood from above—"desde arriba"—as a modification in the regimes of global accumulation. In addition to the macro analytic of neoliberalism's global scale, Gago proposes an analysis of neoliberalism from below: "Por neoliberalismo desde abajo me refiero entonces a un conjunto de condiciones que se concretan más allá de la voluntad de un gobierno, de su legitimad o no, pero que se convierten en condiciones sobre las que opera una red de prácticas y saberes que asume el cálculo como matriz subjetiva primordial y que funciona como motor de una poderosa economía popular que mixtura saberes comunitarios autogestivos e intimidad con el saber-hacer en la crisis como tecnología de una autoempresarialidad de masas" (25).

> neoliberal, en donde el marco de la Dictadura se rompe en el arco iris de la neoliberalización.[12]

Deregulated Cinema follows these leading theorists of neoliberalism and the transition insofar as they posit transformations in the modes of production as a continued process of communal material dispossession. "El golpe" happens twice. It is a repetitive process, distributed across the "Arco iris de la neoliberalización,"as Thayer indicates. This is the historical perspective through which I approach the commodification of life under neoliberal forms of governance and also the implications of these transformations for forms and theories of labor in late-capitalist Argentina and Chile.[13]

Deregulated Cinema seeks to position this process of dispossession through the cinematic image because the audiovisual image and its production process have historically partaken in the organization and regulation of life. Fredric Jameson argues that late-capitalism has reached a point at which, "culture becomes in effect co-extensive with the economic."[14] The development of imaging technologies has fundamentally

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[12] Thayer, "La Moneda en llamas," 2.

[13] Like Alberto Moreiras, this approach is interested in "a geocultural displacement that is in the last instance motivated and sustained by a substantive change in the structure of capitalism at the world level." Moreiras's continues: "I do not want to suggest there is a relationship of simple causality between mode of production and cultural superstructure. I am, rather, interested in the mediations that have taken place over the last decades concerning the expansion and globalization of capital accumulation: in the changes in the financial structures of capital, in the state form, in the sociopolitical regimes of rule; in the end of the division of the world into power blocks; in the development of new antisystemic movements in what some would still call civil society and in their combined effects on the production, distribution, circulation, and consumption of knowledge. All this amounts to a massive geocultural shift in the specific codifications and recodificatins of sociohistorical value" (11).

[14] Jameson, *Cultural Turn*, 131.

altered the relationship to spectatorship. Vilém Flusser, for example, suggests this is an epochal transformation:

> Since human beings depend for their lives more on learned and less on genetic information than do other living things, the structure through which information is carried exerts a decisive influence on our lives. When images supplant texts, we experience, perceive, and value the world and ourselves differently, no longer in a one-dimensional, linear, process-oriented, historical way but rather in a two-dimensional way, as surface, context, scene. And our behavior changes: it is no longer dramatic but embedded in fields of relationships. What is currently happening is a mutation of our experiences, perceptions, values, and modes of behavior, a mutation of our being-in-the-world.[15]

Similarly, Jameson writes of the image: "The image is the commodity today, and that is why it is vain to expect a negation of the logic of commodity production from it […] all beauty today is meretricious and the appeal to it by contemporary pseudo-aestheticism is an ideological maneuver and not a creative resource" (135). We can summarize these insights in the following formula: today spectators are not only consumers but producers of value. Jonathan Beller's insights, which follow from those of Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno, Guy Debord, and Paul Virilio (to name only a few), allow us to position post-dictatorship cinema as responding to the commodification of the senses—the extension ad infinitum of the workday—with images that contest, subvert, and reiterate confrontations with capital and colonial regulation.

Therefore, I read the period of Southern Cone cinema following the return to ostensible democracy as a renewed confrontation with the capitalized cinematic

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[15] Flusser, *Into the Universe of Technical Images*, 5.

interfaces that prey on visuality,[16] which were installed during the dictatorships and strengthened by transition governments in Chile and Argentina. The commodification of visuality, which continues the appropriation and privatization of the commons, occurs concomitantly with historical developments of extraction and confinement, or what Derek Gregory calls "the serial spacing of the exception."[17] That is, transformations in the image-spectator relationship do not obviate the way in which real bodies are politically determined in specific geographic and historical contexts. Films like Adrián Caetano's *Bolivia* (2001) and Lucrecia Martel's *La Mujer Sin Cabeza* (2008), which operate in a self-reflexive mode, make clear how film and multimedia have participated in the Eurocentric mapping of social difference.

The selection of films in *Deregulated Cinema* does not seek to be exhaustive. Nor in choosing to analyze the films of Patricio Guzmán, as well as exemplars of New Argentine Cinema (NCA)—among them, like Lucrecia Martel, Gustavo Postiglione, Adrián Caetano, Pablo Trapero, and Lisandro Alonso—do I aim to provide a complete panorama of post-dictatorship Southern Cone cinema. Rather, these films are discussed on the basis of their variegated aesthetic wagers, which, it is the contention of this dissertation, provide sophisticated accounts of the neoliberalization of life, labor, and

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[16] Beller, *Cinematic Mode,* 2.

[17] Gregory writes that "We need to remind ourselves that camps like these have their origins in the European colonial wars of the late nineteenth century. In such conditions, now as then, the 'external' and the 'internal' are articulated not to erase the 'outside' but to produce it as the serial spacing of the exception, for ever inscribing exclusion through inclusion" (258).

exploitation in post-dictatorship Chile and Argentina. By positioning films like *Nostalgia de la Luz* and *La Mujer Sin Cabeza* within this comparative historical horizon of continued communal expropriation,[18] I am also positioning Latin American cinema—that of Southern Cone, specifically—as offering counter narratives to the offscreen "triumphs" of neoliberalism. In the following, I detail in what sense this narrow selection of post-dictatorship cinema offers cinematic alternatives to dominant fields of visuality, discourses of neoliberalism, and the erosion of the commons. Such historical positioning aligns the films analyzed in *Deregulated Cinema* with other post-colonial art forms that subvert dominant modes of visuality in Latin America.

II. "Scopic Regimes" and Cinema of the Senses

Chapter one, "Space, Scale, and the Coils of Control: Scopic Regimes in Patricio Guzmán's Documentary Triptych" locates the preponderance of a free-ranging, dividual, and subjective gaze in Patricio Guzmán's latest films, *Nostalgia de la Luz, El Bóton de Nácar,* and *Cordillera de los Sueños*.[19] There is a coincidence between the scalar gaze that dominates Guzmán's films and the hegemonic circulation of the image. In these documentaries, space is represented in temporal logics that are asynchronous vis-à-vis the teleology of progress but synchronous to apparatuses beholden to modes of

[18] This historical horizon does not differ greatly from how Glauber Rocha assessed the situation in his 1965. In "An Esthetic of Hunger." Rocha writes: "Latin America remains, undeniably, a colony, and what distinguishes yesterday's colonialism from today's colonialism is merely the more polished forms of the colonizer and the more subtle forms of those who are preparing future domination" (59).

[19] All of these films are easily accessible through either Amazon, Netflix, or other global platforms.

production and sovereign power(s) that produce ideological discursive space. In a way, my argument turns Guzmán's use of scale on its head by using the film images themselves to index the scale at which the organization of the sensorium has been restructured by cinema and technology. What I am pressing for is a confrontation between, on the one hand, the palpable estrangement from Chile that perforates Guzmán's essayistic films, and, on the other, the cinematic image as capital. This dialectic, I argue, allows us to index the emergence of novel spatial and optical arrangements of power—what Deleuze suggestively alludes to as "societies of control" —in the films of Guzmán.

As I argue in "Space, Scale, and Coils of Control," what seems to persist in Guzmán's documentaries is *la mirada escalar,* a scopic regime that escalates the powers of the visible—like Dziga Vertov's Kino-Eye—making forces visible at all different scales. The technological *raison d'être* of this deterritorialized mode of visuality is to expand and multiply the sensorium through a potentially infinite series of repartitions. A cinema of scale, Guzmán's latest triptych also evokes a material and sensual forensics that gives pride and place to non-human phenomenon. What Guzmán's elegiac scenes of material-becoming risk, however, is a visual mode that reiterates the principle of exchange-values. Even—or especially—in its materially-expansive visual logic, Guzmán's geographical triptych reflects the contemporary condition of visuality, or

what Paul Virilio called "the unprecedented limits imposed on subjective vision."[20] Far from a proscription, this reading follows the logic and development of Guzmán's films themselves.

If "Space, Scale, and the Coils of Control" seeks to pin point examples of the transformed situation of visuality through an analysis of the use of scale in films of Patricio Guzmán, "Images After the Accident: Plasticity and Process in New Argentine Cinema" begins by tracking the preponderance of the accident in NCA films. To the extent that it is useful to continue to refer to such a diverse corpus of films as a single movement, a project that seems increasingly untenable in light of the aesthetic variety of films that make up most lists of NCA, *Deregulated Cinema* also contributes to contemporary debates in film and media theory about Argentine film at the turn of the millennium.

One of the central contentions of "Images After the Accident" is that there are simply too many accidents in NCA films to ignore. With reference to Paul Virilio's work on vision and technology, I argue that films like *Mundo Grúa* and *Liverpool* assume a dispersed picnoleptic state of spectatorship. The characters who wander the screens of Lisandro Alonso, Lucrecia Martel, Gustavo Postiglione, Adrián Caetano, and Pablo Trapero "became someone else" to use Catherine Malabou's past preterite. Having suffered some tangible off-screen mishap, these people are dramatically cut anew from

[20] Virilio, *The Vision Machine*, 49.

their biographical history. These are the figures of the new wounded of new Argentine cinema.

What is notable throughout films like *Mundo Grúa* (1999), *El Asadito* (2000), *La Ciénaga* (2001), and *La Mujer Sin Cabeza* (2009) is how this radical rupture gets elided in representation in favor of the a posteriori narrative diegesis. In criticism, this allusive and elusive image of rupture and crisis also gets obviated as a structural element of NCA film. Films operate uniquely in this respect and demand to be read according to their specific elements. Nonetheless this structuring absence—what I often refer to as the accident—propels the cinematic imaginary of many NCA films.[21] This is not to say that criticism has elided crisis and representation in Argentine film. Rather, the conditions of dispossession that characterize neoliberal Argentina get read—correctly—as the motor of the generalized crisis that pervades many Argentine films at the turn of the century. My point is simply that in addition to the aesthetic choices like shooting onsite with nonprofessional actors or the use of 16mm film, we should consider the narrative structure that is regulated by the "accident" as an important and repeated element in NCA.

These accidents, I contend, are enmeshed in a filmic language that demands to be read along the lines of the commodification of spectator attention. I similarly contend that these films are concerned with the cinematic retooling of consciousness. They offer

[21] In films like *Bolivia,* the future is positioned in terms of the eternal repetition of the same whereas in *Mundo Grúa,* for instance, the entire cinematic apparatus is conceived as an auto-poetic assemblage of accidents.

cinematic ripostes to Catherine Malabou's provocative question: "What should we do so that consciousness of the brain does not purely and simply coincide with the spirit of capitalism?"[22] With reference to Virilio, I show how films like *Mundo Grúa, Liverpool,* and *El Asadito* call attention to the transformed aspects of the visual sensorium which have been modified as the result of capital accumulation. These films draw attention to the political economy of attention, underlining how the image, as Beller argues, "is a cryptic synonym for relations of production" (4). At the same time, the structuring accident—sometimes the structuring absence of the accident—allows for a destructive opening for the experimentation and elaboration of alternative visual forms.

From the choice and construction of image, narrative, shot length, and focalization, NCA films locate themselves on the scene of the cinematic mode of production. I have tried to read this self-reflexivity as a recognition that films and filmmaking are a product and producer of social conditions. For this reason, *process* is a vital component of many NCA films. By virtue of its mode of circulation, the image's representational power has been vitiated by the speed and intensity of late capitalism. Socially atomized, visually traumatized individuals fill the scenes in films like *Buenos Aires Viceversa* (1996), *La Libertad* (2001), *Fantasma* (2006), and *Liverpool* (2008), symbolizing not only the social abandonment of rampant reification, but also, as Marx would have it, the fact that "the individual is the social being."[23] In NCA films, the

[22] Malabou, *What Should We Do with Our Brain?*, 12.

[23] Marx and Engels, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts,* 86.

individual is often positioned in such a way so as to challenge the process of reification that causes the ahistorical experience of reality—the forces that lead a person to experience reality as if it produced itself from nothing. That is, the individual in many NCA films can be read in relation to the alienation of vision that perforates society in general. This thematic has been read as anti-allegorical and melancholic in the secondary literature.[24]

With notable exceptions, most films from the NCA period eschew the immediacy of the spectacle.[25] Instead they tend to historicize via narrative fragments, image texture, irrational cuts, and temporal dilation through long, drawn-out shots. As film theorist André Bazin points out in regards to neorealism, these techniques also have the effect of making the viewer have to decide what is important onscreen—to search, find, and create onscreen meaning. Paul Schrader similarly points out that boredom—as unactualized anticipation—can be an aesthetic tool sculpted by cinematic elements:

> Why do we take it? The boredom. The distance. First, because effective slow filmmakers are masters of anticipation. Employing striking visuals and auditory tricks and bits of activity, the slow film director keeps his viewer on the hook, thinking there is a reward, a "payoff" just around the corner. It's adroit blackmail. If I leave, I'll miss what I've been waiting for. Even the seasoned viewer of slow cinema anticipates *something.* Some moment. Some unexpectation. The wait will be worth it.[26]

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[24] See for instance Joanna Page's reading of the "zoological gaze" in *Mundo Grúa.*

[25] As Guy Debord argues, this is because "The spectacle is heir to all the weakness of the project of Western philosophy, which was an attempt to understand activity by means of the categories of vision. Indeed the spectacle reposes on an incessant deployment of the very technical rationality to which that philosophical tradition gave rise. So far from realizing philosophy, the spectacle philosophizes reality, and turns material life of everyone into a universe of speculation" (17).

[26] Schrader, *Transcendental Style,* 20.

As we will see in films like Lisandro Alonso's *Liverpool* (2008), techniques such as the long take—often associated with a global "slow cinema"—are used to effectuate a certain "boredom" and "distance." Nevertheless, as Schrader suggests, these shots inevitably create tension. This is emblematized in the workplace accident that never occurs onscreen in Pablo Trapero's *Mundo Grúa.* Instead of a spectacular image, *Mundo Grúa* opts for images that suggest the repetitive and routine forces of dispossession—"the spectacle" of capital accumulation that is always already happening is here shown through the quotidian decomposition of life.

In the end, *Mundo Grúa* is representative of NCA films that offer an image that calls for an alternative matrix of attention than the one called forth by the financialization of life. I agree with Gonzalo Aguilar that these "films of perception" are precisely what position NCA film as establishing "un pensamiento sobre el estatuto actual de la política."[27] This is not to say that the long-take or other cinematic tools are not appropriable by logics of capital, but the fact that *Mundo Grúa* and other NCA films' aesthetics locate "modes of attention" as the site of artistic intervention indicates the degree to which attention has become coordinated by capital. In NCA the image becomes a site of labor refracted and illuminated by the thematic and aesthetic choices that highlight attention as a vector of value creation in late capitalist Argentina.

[27] Aguilar, "Conversación," 2.

Neoliberalism often trades in discourses that invoke the accident as justification for inequality, violence, and ecological disasters (positing that these are not systematic).[28] It is these limits and contradictions, Žižek writes, that "drives capital into permanent development."[29] On the other hand, cinema technology, like photography, has a privileged relationship to contingency. These technologies made it possible to reproduce images without the direct intervention of human mediation introducing an important quota of contingency, chance, and arbitrariness into aesthetic reproduction.[30] Of course, for many theorists, from the perspective of capital, there are no accidents. Capital's organizing principles ensure that everything is distributed according to the laws of exchange—this is one of Marx's key formulations. This was also how filmmaker Dziga Vertov understood contingency: "Nothing is accidental […] everything is explicable and governed by law."[31] Similarly, the logic of history in the films of Patricio Guzmán evince a historical materialist inevitability. Matter becomes "vibrant matter"—to borrow a concept from Jane Bennet—in that the filmic material landscape throws into relief a spatialized description of power.[32] Space becomes temporalized and time becomes spatialized in the documentaries of Guzmán so that, estranged, the Chilean

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[28] I develop these points in detail in my reading of Lucrecia Martel's *La Mujer Sin Cabeza* (see final chapter).

[29] Žižek, *Sublime Object*, 50.

[30] Lastra, *Sound Technology*, 5.

[31] Vertov, *Writings*, 287.

[32] Bennet, *Vibrant Matter*, 6.

landscape appears not as a totality but as a montage of fragments that resist the blights of neoliberal forgetfulness.

The films analyzed here register transformations in the mode of production as transformations in "visuality," and in response provide small-scale aesthetic wagers against the overwhelming colonization of the visual. As we saw already in the example of *El Asadito,* NCA provides images of sensorial labor. These are images of spectators laboring on and through the transformations of their sensorium. At the same time, at the extra-diegetic level these are images that make the spectator reflect on the relationship between among other things, labor and the image—labor and the cinema. This is one of the central tensions in many NCA films: the tendency of consciousness to coincide with commodification.

A central film in *Deregulated Cinema,* Trapero's *Mundo Grúa* stages this dialectic through the metamorphosis of Rulo, his resistance to becoming "a thing" in "Crane World." Rulo cannot find stable employment but is overworked and exploited on the worksite of the image. In a state of picnolepsy, Rulo (Luis Margani) moves through the deterritorialized factory floor that is the movie, alternatively hailed and dismissed by the object-logic of images manufactured in "Crane World." Before the screen fades to black, the last scene of the film is a close-up shot of Rulo's face flickering under the streetlights while riding in the back of a pickup truck. Once again on the move, enduring the repetitive withering away of the commons, the fate of Rulo is to wander

not in some deterritorialized manner of escape, but through the pipe-laden infrastructure of Crane World—or as Debord puts it, "the spectator feels at home nowhere, because the spectacle is everywhere."[33]

[33] Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, 11.

Chapter 1:
Space, Scale, and the Coils of Control: Scopic Regimes in Patricio Guzmán's Triptych

> *Space is not a scientific object removed from ideology and politics; it has always been political and strategic. If space has an air of neutrality and indifference with regard to its contents and thus seems to be 'purely' formal, the epitome of rational abstraction, it is precisely because it has been occupied and used, and has already been the focus of past processes whose traces are not always evident on the landscape. Space has been shaped and molded from historical and natural elements, but this has been a political process. Space is political and ideological. It is a product literally filled with ideologies.—Henri Lefebvre*

> *For all those who confuse history with the old schemas of evolution, living continuity, organic development, the progress of consciousness or the project of existence, the use of spatial terms seems to have an air of an anti-history. If one started to talk in terms of space that meant one was hostile to time. It meant as the fools say, that one 'denied history', that one was a technocrat. They didn't understand that to trace the forms of implantation, delimitation, and demarcation of objects, the modes of tabulation, the organization of domains meant the throwing into relief of processes — historical ones, needless to say — of power. The spatialising description of discursive realities give on to the analysis of related effects of power.—Michel Foucault*

> *The coils of a serpent are even more complex than the burrows of a molehill.—Gilles Deleuze*

Scholars have summarized the project of Patricio Guzmán's post-dictatorship films as "para recordar y restituir a la historia de Chile un periodo crucial y único, borrado, escamoteado a varias generaciones" (Ruffinelli, 11). The focal points of Guzmán's recent cinematographic archaeology of Chilean history and memory are material and geographic. The Atacama desert, the Andes mountains, and the Patagonian ocean are contested sites of knowledge, power, and desire. As such, they are not only sites of suppression but also of production, whether normalizing or resistant. This section attempts to evaluate this "anti-amnesia" (Dittus, 2014) project from the

perspective of spatial (material and geographic) representation in *Nostalgia de la Luz*, *El Botón de Nácar,* and *Cordillera de los Sueños.* More broadly, I try to offer some reflections on the conditions for thinking the neoliberal legacy of the Pinochet regime, enshrined and normalized after the *transición.* Cinema is an ideal medium for thinking through these conditions because, more than most cultural production cinema is from the outset overdetermined by capital (de)regulation. Just as we conceive of capital as the great deterritorializing agent of recent history, cinema with its international funders that capitalize and accrue value on investments from globalizing sets of eyes has arguably been the deterritorializing artistic form of the twentieth century. The relationship between modes of production and modes of cinematic expression are inexorably entwined.

Attempting to take stock of the recent work of the director of *La Batalla de Chile* from the tail end of the enormous filmic legacy recalls the ambivalent relationship of the narrator B to the figure of Pablo Neruda in Roberto Bolaño's "Carnet de Baile". Published in *Putas Asesinas,* a collection of short stories that allude to the end (or the beginning) of an epoch, "Carnet de Baile" is a reference to both the aristocratic tradition of "dance cards," which registered with whom the holder danced with at the evening ball, and *Un Carnet de Bal,* a film made in 1937 directed by Julien Duvivier, starring Marie Bell as the nostalgic widow Christine.[1] Narrator B's dance card serves as a

[1] While sifting through old belongings, Christine comes across her dance program from when she attended her first ball. Curious about the fate of her former partners, Christine tracks them down, discovering that each has lived a more tragic life than the next.

literary autobiography of authors and texts, fragments of narrations that hover on thresholds in temporal adverbials of already-told, to-be-told, or never-to-be-told. The tone of the narratives on B's dance card is melancholic, as when B reflects on Pablo Neruda:

> 66. ¿Como a la Cruz, hemos de volver a Neruda con las rodillas sangrantes, los pulmones agujereados, los ojos llenos de lágrimas? *67.* Cuando nuestros nombres ya nada signifiquen, su nombre seguirá brillando, seguirá planeando sobre una literatura imaginaria llamada *literatura chilena.* 68. Todos los poetas, entonces, vivirán en comunas artísticas llamadas cárceles o manicomios. 69. Nuestra casa imaginaria, nuestra casa común.[2]

B laments the monumentalized figure of Neruda in comparison with the lesser known, under appreciated (and under read) poets—many of whom were exiled or perished during the dictatorship—who have been marginalized from the "arche" of national literature but remain important influences on the narrator's life. B's discourse is full of regret, but it is also affirmative. "Chilean Literature" is an imagined site of coherence, where temples of recognition are ordained for the likes of Neruda, while forgotten prisons and madhouses await others. It is from these imagined sites of enclosure that the narrator stakes a claim for a lineage and language, "*nuestra* casa imaginaria, *nuestra* casa común" (my emphasis).

This *spatialized* anti-foundational gesture posits the literary archive as rigid, enclosing, and demarcated—auratic spaces on the one hand and pathologized spaces on the other. But there is a consistent logic to the regime of ordering in the content of

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[2] Bolaño, Roberto. *Putas Asesinas*. Editorial Anagrama, 2001.

"Carnet de Baile," because both imagined sites of literature—the religious and the carceral—are spaces of penitence. But is it not also the case that the form that the "Carnet de Baile" is of a different order altogether? The narrator is anonymous, a blank slate with the suggestively eponymous but also arbitrary name B. Short or rhythmic staccato sentences separated by arbitrary numbers fill out the characteristics of the self-styled narrator's literary bildungsroman, which—unlike traditional Bildungsroman—moves away from individualization and towards collectivity (nuestra, nuestra). Indeed, the narrator is more dividual than individual: a summation of experiences, quips, and readings that—as the numbers suggests—are endlessly divisible. However, the technology that reduces, divides, and forms this literary (dividual) narrator hails from an antiquated and aristocratic tradition of tabulating and segmenting dancing romances.

Here Bolaño's text can be read as an ironic *guiño* to the reader that the regimes of ordering into discrete molds are anachronistic to contemporary conditions, which have given rise to new economies of power relations and expression. The obvious other reference in Bolaño's story is Borges, and the alphabetically organized "Chinese Encyclopedia" that famously opens *The Order of Things*. After reading Borges' encyclopedia, Michel Foucault erupted in laughter that "shattered all the familiar landmarks of my thought — our thought, the thought that bears the stamp of our age and our geography" (Foucault, xv). What Foucault found in this confabulated

encyclopedia was the harbinger of a new and as yet unimagined episteme beyond the modern that would lack the stability of references to a center(ing) mark or origin of signification.

In Bolaño's "Carnet," the numbers give no logical coherence to the story. They are *truly* empty signifiers that, like data or code, stand in the void of unstable, transversal, and libidinal—after all, the numbers end in 69—subjectivity. It should be recalled here that "carnet" in Latin America—especially Chile—also refers to a form of identification similar to a driver's license. The dance card, then, is also a means of registration, a literary password designed in the nascent episteme that marks or rejects access to information rather than only patrolling it with walls and barriers. If indeed the medium is the message, then what this short story implies is a kind of twilight glimpse of the displacement from rigid forms and relations in favor of an already emergent fluid network that renounces individual subjectivities. Like a serpent shedding its skin, the story displays the shell, the protective former exo-skein, while simultaneously exposing the embryonic coils of another order altogether.

In what follows, I will try to identify a similar epistemic threshold in *Nostalgia de la Luz, El Bóton de Nácar,* and *Cordillera de los Sueños* by drawing attention filmic audiovisual forms and contemporary "scopic regimes of production." My interest in analyzing these three films stems in part from the proliferation of post-dictatorship films that affirm the political valency of memory politics often connected to melancholia

and mourning.[3] The post-dictatorship created the conditions in which "memory politics"—the questioning of historicist and hegemonic historical narratives in a melancholic, allegorical, or Benjaminian mode—has tended to be read as axiomatically critical. This is not to discount those readings of films that mull the violence of the past but rather to suggest that framing discussions of Latin American cultural production exclusively in this manner may occlude alternative possibilities to thinking the contemporary moment.

Geographical space and its relation to the past and the present forms the basis for the recently completed triptych. The films interlace personal and collective testimonies including expert opinions in wide-ranging disciplines with images that intimate the difficulties of remembering and recovering the past. What is a stake in remembering and recovering is also constructions of the social—of the nation and the people. In the triptych, the documentary archive includes non-human phenomena—such as light, water, desert, mountains, and ocean—alongside individual testimonies. These phenomena are metaphors for understanding disavowed and repressed Chilean histories—the landscapes become politicized sites of history and memory. The films provide great pride and place to material phenomena, inviting us to speculate about the material itself, implicating modes of perception as well as conceptions of time and memory.

[3] There are too many examples to list here, but the affective tone in films like *Sur* (1988) by Solanas or *Machuca* (2004) by Andrés Wood mourn the loss of cinema as a political tool for collective resistance or the lost possibility of a generation built on a socialist inter-class alliance.

At issue in all of these films is the relationship between space and community, geography and nation, in the aftermath of loss—the coup, dictatorship, colonialism, and neoliberal market economy. According to Irene Depetris Chauvin, Guzmán's films "propone[n] una 'espacialización de la memoria,' una relocalización de su campo de acción, y un rodeo metafórico que potencia el alcance de ese discurso al hacer posible una amplificación de la comunidad afectada por la pérdida" (Chauvin, 172). The filmic spatial geographies "insist on the materiality and spectrality of space" (Chauvin and Wilson), and, like Hegel's owl of Minerva, arrive after the event(s) of history.[4] As we will see, this project often gets read as subversive, insofar as it instantiates the discourses of the defeated in the modern nation-state archive[5] by figuring time and past events as "out of joint."

Each of the films focus on the materiality of specific phenomena and its relation to time. These phenomena are particular to recognizable geographic areas of Chile—the north and the Atacama desert; the south, with Patagonia and the ocean; and the Andes, the border to the east. Each area (and each film) demarcates the real geopolitical boundaries of the modern Chilean nation-state. Through forming a dense set of archaeological corpora tied to the specifics of each material region, the films displace the

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[4] Hegel writes in the "Preface" to the *Philosophy of Right:* "When philosophy paints its grey in grey, a shape of life has grown old, and it cannot be rejuvenated, but only recognized, by the grey in grey of philosophy; the owl of Minerva begins its flight only with the onset of dusk."

[5] "Esta selección de imágenes localiza el lugar de los indígenas—ausentes del proyecto de la nación—no solo en el espacio de la representación fotográfica, sino más bien instala al vencido en el discurso histórico del Estado moderno" (Barrazza, 90-91).

recognizable regional coordinates to the point where they are no longer or not yet comprehensible in familiar terms. The material phenomena are fungible with political-historical geographies. The properties the films endow the former also conform to the latter. The "given" and "produced" material geographies transform into estranged sites of always-already material-becoming. Space becomes temporalised, charged with a materialist time imagined as anterior, radical, and disjunctive, or, as Foucault writes, "They didn't understand that to trace the forms of implantation, delimitation, and demarcation of objects, the modes of tabulation, the organization of domains meant the throwing into relief of processes—historical ones, needless to say—of power. The spatialising description of discursive realities give on to the analysis of related effects of power."[6] As spatial imaginaries transform under the lens of the camera and the projection onscreen, the concepts of the subject, social, and political lose their consistency, transforming into deforming shells of (un)stable identifications.[7]

Nostalgia, Botón, and *Cordillera* unsettle space, geography, and cartography with juxtapositions of scale. Scale here can be understood in terms of its etymology—"shell, husk" (Old French *escale)* and "split, divide" (Proto-Germanic skaelo)—or, following Nilo Couret: "[a] spatialized system of social relations that makes place intelligible because it makes distance and proximity signify" (Couret, 72). Unlike matter or other a

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[6] Foucault, *Power/Knowledge,* 70.

[7] Understated and ignored, repressed but palpable by its very absence, is an account of other heterogenous spaces—Santiago, for instance—that are replete with subjects that have resisted staying in-place. More on this later.

priori delimitations, scale implies the severing or delineation of space, trajectories, and intensities that are *made* and inhabited, experimental, and experimented.[8] Because scale implies the possibility of an infinite series, cuttings, or delineations it has the conceptual advantage of throwing orders into disarray, and asking troubling questions for theories of epistemology, desire, and power. In *El Botón,* for example, an anthropologist named Claudio describes the process of listening to the sound of water. You listen, Claudio suggests, at first picking up sections, slivers, portions of the water—experiencing the phenomenon partially—until, "te pegai un salto" and you can hear "el canto del agua" in its immersive entirety. Claudio himself sings the sound of water in a rhythmic exhalation as the camera cuts between scenes of subaquatic bubbling, rain drops, and finally to the dark immensity of the ocean.

The films under analysis here deploy numerous strategies of scaling in the form of montage, narration, metonymy, and synecdoche. In *Nostalgia,* as Guzmán has noted, the viewer must confront the fact that human bones are made up of the same calcium found in stars; and that Chile is the site of the world's most sophisticated astronomical research yet near sixty-percent of the dictatorship assassinations remain unsolved; similarly *Botón* points out that the concentration camps used during the dictatorships were located on the same sites as earlier colonial forms of confinement used by the Chilean state to enact the genocide of the Selk'nam, Kawésqar, Yamana, and Yagan.[9]

[8] Here I am indebted to the work of the Scales of Mattering Conference held at University of California-Davis in 2017.

These juxtapositions force the viewer to ask what historical-epistemic, political and aesthetic scales undergird memory and representational politics. Put differently, the triptych films question not only what historical facts have been forgotten or censored, but what scale or means to access history has been elided, occluded, or suppressed. The films search for the a-priori historical conditions that have determined ways of viewing and enunciating by reconstructing spatial audiovisual archives. Henri Lefebvre writes:

> If space has an air of neutrality and indifference with regard to its contents and thus seems to be 'purely' formal, the epitome of rational abstraction, it is precisely because it has been occupied and used, and has already been the focus of past processes whose traces are not always evident on the landscape. Space has been shaped and molded from historical and natural elements, but this has been a political process. Space is political and ideological. It is a product literally filled with ideologies.[10]

Indeed, even in moments when the documentaries covered in this section recognize the historical plentitude of a place—as in *Nostalgia de la Luz* when the narrator compares the barren desert floor to the moon, absent of flora and fauna yet full of history—there is a lingering colonial appropriation of space at work. Mapping and cartography have been central to the colonial practice of appropriating and administering territory. In so doing, native bodies are also demarcated, marked, and deemed appropriate/inappropriate by spatialized, gendered, and racial norms (when these lines of demarcation—real and imaginary—are violated, native bodies are criminalized, and further acts of violence and appropriation are justified by the state). In these films it is not as much the temporization of territory and material that we ought to see as the conceptual progeny

[10] Lefebvre, "Reflections on Space," 31.

of a colonial imaginary but rather a mode of visuality that concurs with regimes of power tied to the contemporary—and continued—erasure of indigenous presence.

In an early scene of *El Botón de Nácar*, the narrator—voiced by Guzmán—laments never having seen a contiguous map of Chile. Because the country is so long, traditional maps divide it into three parts: north, central, and south. The narrators asks visual artist Emma Malig to make a map that might provide a more complete cartography. After Malig unfurls a massive cardboard map, intricately crumpled, dusted, and painted, the camera takes an aerial pan from top to bottom. We get not one shot that encompasses the entire map but rather an operatic pan from north to south. The idea here is that Chile and its spatial geography cannot be fully represented—the map is not the territory, as the saying goes. Aerial shots are often associated with transparent access to "what's on the ground." Points of view on the vertical rather than horizontal axis tend to carry more objective weight—just think of satellite imagery—or, as Stephen Graham writes in *Vertical: The City from Satellites to Bunkers*, "Instead of invoking satellites as an absolute form of imperial vision, it is necessary, rather to see satellite imaging as a highly biased form of visualizing or even simulating the earth's surface rather than some objective or apolitcal transmission of its truth" (31). Undermining the authority of the aerial shot is just one of many strategies used in *Botón* to show how aesthetic abstractions of space not only are incomplete, but obscure ideology embedded in how

we think, speak, and represent space.[11] Furthermore, this scene reiterates the (de)structuring device of synecdoche that appears throughout the documentaries. In short, the fragment for the whole never exactly lines up in these films.

If a metaphysical account of space is from the outset impossible—that is, if one-to-one representational thinking and mimetic aesthetics are a-priori undermined—then what performs this function and simultaneously alludes to a *beyond* or *outside* of representation can be found in the film's operations of scale. How do the various "scaling" operations relate to contemporary conceptions of space and control? The argument that I will pursue revolves around how this "scaled" conception of space imbued with "open" material and temporal resistance actually reiterates rather than undermines the mechanisms of market economy in a society of control. While the cosmic or molecular spatial geographies may be antithetical to teleological chronologies as well as to the kinds of stable, concrete, and "discrete spaces of enclosure" best elucidated by Foucault in *Discipline and Punish*, they may entrench rather than help us think beyond the "scopic regimes of production"[12] that characterize global networks of scale. In other words, these films perform a critique of organizations of power—enclosures and molds, ways of seeing and enunciating—by offering an expansive

[11] What might appear obvious to some literary and cultural critics—that mapping and cartography, in other words representation, is not mimetic in the classical sense—has not always been true in disciplines of history and cartography. In 1992 Christian Jacob, theorist and historian of cartography, suggested, "Today one would do well to apply to maps the strategies of 'deconstruction' so as to break the exclusive and constraining link between reality and representation which has dominated cartographic thinking and constitutes the implicit epistemology of its history" (Jacob, 19).

[12] Beller, *Cinema, Capital,* 17.

archive and cartography of material modulations at varying scales. But what of the coincidence between the endlessly scalable material archive and the concomitant alterations in modes of production? This archival cartography can be understood by what I want to call *la mirada escalar,* whereby a dividual, free-ranging, and transversal subjective *look* displaces metaphysical stabilities of place and point of view. Indeed, this free-play of perspective gets read by critics like Nilo Couret as means by which the viewer emplots herself "along spatio-temporal coordinates belonging elsewhere" (Couret, 71). On the contrary, space is placed in temporal logics that are asynchronous vis-à-vis the teleology of progress but synchronous to the apparatuses beholden to modes of production and sovereign power(s) that produce ideological discursive space.

I. Labor and Value: Value in Looking

In other words, it might be that these coordinates are only "elsewhere" because we have not yet recognized that they are already burrowed within the coils of power arrangements that define contemporary societies of control. For one, it is important to recall that cinema is also a disciplinary regime in terms of how it directs, navigates, and channels perception. As Jonathan Beller argues, looking is a form of labor, one that "represents a tendency towards increasingly abstract instances of the relationship between labor and capital, a new regime of the technological positioning of bodies for the purpose of value extraction" (Beller, 10). The hypothesis here is that for each mode of production there are also modulations in regimes of perception, or what Beller coins

in terms of cinema as "scopic regimes."[13] Just as Walter Benjamin showed that the modern city caused fundamental alterations in the perceptual sensorium, so cinema with its increased speed and contiguity of images has reshaped contemporary consciousness.[14]

We can conceive of these alterations of consciousness historically with reference to Gilles Deleuze's "Postscript on the Societies of Control." Written in 1990, the essay frames the contours of nascent societies of control in contrast with the preceding disciplinary society outlined in the work of Michel Foucault. Disciplinary societies of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries "initiate[d] the organization of vast spaces of enclosure. The individual never ceases passing from one closed environment to the next" (Deleuze, 1). Instead of starting from zero, passing from the enclosed zones of family, school, factory, and perhaps clinic or prison, movement is controlled in "a modulation, like a self-deforming cast that will continuously change from one moment to the other" (ibid). Instead of walls and boundaries, social organization occurs by mapping and channeling, movements and patterns so that enclosures become

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[13] Beller helpfully clarifies, "By the 'alienation of vision', I do not mean that there have not existed prior scopic regimes that structured sight. Rather, I have in mind the Marxist notions of separation and expropriation endemic to commodification. The separation and expropriation of labor from the laborer, the alienation of labor, is a precursor to the separation and expropriation of vision from the spectator. This alienation of vision, in which vision is captured to produce worlds that confront spectators as something hostile and alien, depends upon a kind of disembedding of the commons—the expropriation of a communal province (nature) that was heretofore an inalienable characteristic of humanity" (8).

[14] Walter Benjamin himself postulated that the communal quality of the movie theater might create the conditions for a popular critical engagement with art that would otherwise be derided, "Thus the same public which responds in a progressive manner toward a grotesque film is bound to respond in a reactionary manner to surrealism [painting]" (Benjamin, 1968: 235).

redundant all the while remaining available.[15] This process also opens more sites for productive exploitation, extending the space of labor to a multitude of previously unheralded locations.[16] Meanwhile, visuality and power retain a mutually imbricated relation, "the maintenance and intensification of the transformed situation of 'visuality' (transformed by industrialization and capitalization) remains essential to capital's expansion and valorization."[17]

It should go without saying that extant forms of power (such as discipline and punishment) perdure as cinema and related technology capture, regulate, and devise sensorial trajectories. The first way that cinema regulates perception can be understood in terms of the well-trod theories of visual and cinema studies. The so-called linguistic turn and Lacanian psychoanalysis influenced critics to read film as a screen/mirror on which passive spectators project their imagined coherence. Hollywood and classical cinema are prime examples of ideological machinery in deference to formal techniques that undermine the sense of "reality." The rules of narrative coherence, shot/reverse shots, and continuity editing are rarely violated, so that the artifice may be enjoyed without forcing the viewer to confront the film's artificiality. It is not just that the fourth

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[15] Haggerty, Kevin D., and Richard V. Ericson. "The Surveillant Assemblage." *British Journal of Sociology*, vol. 51, no. 4, Dec. 2000, pp. 605–22.

[16] Visuality has been a mode of domination throughout history. The *oversight* of the *overseer* on the slave plantation was one of the early modern examples of authoritarian surveillance. "Visuality sought to present authority as self-evident, that 'division of the sensible whereby domination imposes the sensible evidence of its legitimacy" (Mirzoeff, 3).

[17] Beller, *Cinematic Mode*, 8.

wall is never violated, the very stitching of frames and camera angles are meant to recede into the background. In other words, classic cinema's formal tendencies intend that film form—angles, montage, sound editing—should go unnoticed so that the viewer can bask in identification. "Quite apart from the extraneous similarities between screen and mirror (the framing of the human form and its surroundings, for instance), the cinema has structures of fascination strong enough to allow temporary loss of ego while simultaneously reinforcing the ego" (Mulvey, 203). Laura Mulvey uses this framework to criticize the patriarchal gaze of narrative fiction film,[18] while Colin McCabe uses it to interrogate films that break the cycle of identification in favor of more direct engagement with the ambiguities of "the real."[19] For McCabe,

> The real was not an external object represented in the text but the relation between text and reader which reduplicated or cut across the subject's relation to his or her experience. Classically, realism depended on obscuring the relation between text and reader in favor of a dominance accorded to a supposedly given reality; but this dominance, far from sustaining a 'natural' relation, was the product of a definite organization which, of necessity, effaced its own workings. In so far as the reality thus granted dominance was in contradiction with the ideologically dominant determinations of reality, then a text could be deemed progressive, but nevertheless such an organization was fundamentally reactionary; for it posed a reality which existed independently of both the text's and reader's activity, a reality which was essentially noncontradictory and unchangeable.[20]

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[18] "Nevertheless, as this article has argued, the structure of looking in narrative fiction film contains a contradiction in its own premises: the female image as castration threat constantly endangers the unity of the diegesis and bursts through the world of illusion as an intrusive, static, one-dimensional fetish. Thus the two looks materially present in time and space are obsessively subordinated to the neurotic needs of the male ego" (Mulvey, 209).

[20] MacCabe, *Theory and Film*, 194.

Here McCabe equates form and politics insofar as a text that contrasts in content with the consensus distribution of the sensible is rendered reactionary if the formal elements that constitute it (the text) are obscured and effaced. For McCabe, reactionary texts are illusions—like the ones banished in Plato's *Republic*—because they either reiterate or fabulate unchangeable realities distinct from the real conditions that structure reality and resist representation.

The ideological tools of classical and Hollywood cinema were particularly evident for those in Latin America engaged in the anti-colonial, anti-imperial struggle. Films made during the epoch of New Latin American Cinema (NLAC) articulated themselves from within a neocolonial order orchestrated by American, European, and national oligarchic economic and political interests that used cinema as an ideological tool to obfuscate these relations.[21] NLAC filmmakers understood that "the authority of coloniality has consistently required visuality to supplement its deployment of force."[22] Solanas and Getino's *Towards a Third Cinema* takes aim at the ideological mystification espoused by the Hollywood entertainment industry and the bourgeois pedantic European auteurist cinema in favor of a more socially engaged art that would simultaneously educate and mobilize the global colonized masses. The films of NLAC

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[21] Edward Said coined the term "imaginative geographies" in *Orientalism* to refer to constructions that delimit and mark the self-same from the Other through a series of spatializations. The space of the Other —in the colony, periphery, *banlieu, ciudad callampa,* etc.—is often a spatially marginalized, temporally differed refraction of the center. The Other is on the outside, behind the times as it were, but always so in relationship to the self-same center from which these imaginative geographies emanate.

[22] Mirzoeff, *Right to Look,* 6.

made the experimental filmic techniques developed in Europe and Russia (neorealism and Eisenstinian montage) their own to represent the social conditions of poor, working class, and indigenous subjects that historically were given precious little screen time. As the name suggests, the NLAC conception of film was pan-national, and many festivals and congresses were organized throughout Latin America and Africa to debate how to conceive of and create "a cinema outside and against the system…a cinema of liberation" (50). Cinema was perceived as a tool of liberation, and the entire cinematic apparatus—aesthetics, production processes, and distribution—was conceived as political, or as Solanas and Getino wrote, "The camera is the inexhaustible expropriator of image-weapons; the projector, a gun that can shoot 24 frames per second" (ibid). Raul Ruiz, contemporary of Guzmán, similarly remarked "Cinema in its industrial form is a predator. It is a machine for copying the visible world and a book for people who can't read."[23]

The second way to conceive of cinema as regulating the sensorium is with reference to value. Cinema as capital—capital cinema—pierces the productive capacity of consciousness in order to create surplus value.[24] Capital investment produces cinematic images that are packaged, distributed, and sold as commodities on

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[23] Ruiz, *Poetics of Cinema, 73.*

[24] "Cinema" for Beller entails "not only to what one sees on the screen or even to the institutions and apparatuses that generate film but to that totality of relations that generates the myriad appearances of the world on the six billion screens of consciousness…Cinema is a material practice of global scope, the movement of capital in, through, and as image" (14).

international markets. If human attention adds value, as it does in the multifarious forms of media that dominate our contemporary screen-worlds, then looking is indeed a form of labor. Or as Beller argues, "When a visual medium operates under the strictures of private property, the work done by its consumer can, like ground rent, be capitalized and made to accrue to the proprietor of the medium. In other words, some people make a profit from other people's looking" (Beller, 10). Cartographies of late capitalism require coming to terms with the increased preponderance of capital's mining of our fleshy sensorium that more and more takes place in the highly cybernetic interfacing of day-to-day existence.[25] Bodies not only move on screen, but are also hailed as spectators and sensorial laborers in consumption, or as Brian Massumi writes, "Capitalism's endocolonial expansion has made the law of unequal exchange that is written into its axiomatic and lethal fact of life" (Massumi, 137).

Beller differs from MacCabe and Mulvey in that he radicalizes the site of mediation as "the extraction of productive labor (value) from the body" which "alters the question of visual pleasure by contaminating it with the question of murder."[26] The problem for Beller are the real conditions that have already been altered by cinema,

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[25] Beller writes, "Although it first appeared in the late nineteenth century as the built-in response to a technological oddity, cinematic spectatorship (emerging in conjunction with the clumsily cobbled together image-production mechanisms necessary to that situation), surreptitiously became the formal paradigm and structural template for social organization generally. By some technological sleight of hand, machine-mediated perception now is inextricable from your psychological, economic, visceral, and ideological dispensations. Spectatorship, as the fusion and development of the cultural, industrial, economic, and psychological, quickly gained a handhold on human fate and then became decisive. Now, visuality reigns and social theory needs become film theory" (2).

[26] Beller, *Cinematic Mode of Production*, 8.

"Cinema took the formal properties of the assembly line and introjected them into consciousness" (10). It is not just that cinema is an art form that exemplifies the global excesses of capitalism, but that economic processes are actually accomplished in and through cinema.[27] Beller reads cinema as an assemblage that confronts and interacts with the social as a response to the 'falling rate of profit'. Rather than a semiotic mirror-machine, "cinema becomes a means to extend the range and effect of capitalized machinery and the logic of capitalization" (12). As such, images demand to be understood in terms of relations of production and circulation precisely because images are assembled like commodities. This realization, according to Beller, was the enduring accomplishment of Dziga Vertov's cinema, "Though Vertov's images do not exactly exist with the characteristics of commodities—since they induce a (self-)consciousness of existing practice—the endeavor to de-reify the commodity necessarily reveals the general commodity-structure of the image."[28] It is important to note here how Beller's conceptualization of cinema points to cinema as a "scaled-up" form of mediation[29]—cinema functions for Beller as a deterritorializing agent of capitalist expansion.

Many of these Latin American and Anglo-American theories of mediation take their starting point from philosophies of spectatorship that posit the space of viewing as

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[27] I am guided here by Steven Shaviro's useful discussion of Beller's *Cinematic Mode of Production* on his blog *Pinocchio Theory.*

[28] Beller, *Cinematic Mode of Production*, 47.

[29] "…the cinematic mode of production becomes the necessary means of extending the work day while reducing real wages on a global scale" (Beller, 12-13).

one of unadulterated consumption; i.e. the spectator as ignorant and passive.[30] Art, then, is the place of knowledge and ignorance, both the disease and the cure, the cause and the palliative—on the one hand propagating the unrealities and illusions of society to passive and consumptive spectators and, on the other, in the tradition of Brecht and Artaud, instantiating direct and active relationships with audiences which more accurately depict contradictions in the social. Guzmán's films are more in line with the latter, but my contention is that—unlike Vertov—the films *do* efface their cinematic machinery. In the triptych, *la mirada escalar* challenges the viewer to consider proliferate distributions of the sensible even in self-reflexive moments of showing that scaling entails scales not taken. Following Beller's lead, I argue this kind of visuality *does* concord with contemporary regimes of control. If the *mirada escalar* eschews the metaphysics of presence in representation, it does so because—if I am permitted the personification—these films imagine (re)distributing the sensible in terms of rigid power formations that are no longer or not yet again dominant in they ways they once were. What appears foreclosed in these documentaries is the re-appropriation of the image *after* the "the world-historical restructuring of the image as the paradigmatic

[30] At times, Beller sanctions this assumption: "We might want to add here that this totalitarian social space is not only a scene of representation, but of production. The cinema is in dialectical relation to the social; in learning the codes of commercial cinema, spectators also learn the rules of dominant social structure—indeed, the become experts" (ibid). There is however, something that always escapes this process of subjectification (Laura Podalsky demonstrates this in her book *Politics of Affect and Emotion in Contemporary Latin American Cinema*). By contrast, for Beller, "New affects, aspirations, and forms of interiority are experiments in capitalist productivity. It seems that it is precisely here, in the capture of humanity's quests for freedom by capital's myriad strategies of exploitation, that intellectuals (if you will pardon the term) must today make their interventions" (Beller, 27-28).

social relation"[31] so that cinema, once again, becomes an extension of capital circulation.[32] Seen from this perspective, Guzmán's triptych runs up against the deterritorialization of production and the commodification of vision.

II. Emergent Epistemes or the Coils of Control

In *Nostalgia de la Luz, El Botón de Nácar,* and *Cordillera de los Sueños*, we can glimpse a slippage between the films' "scopic regime"—the forms that guide the sensorium—and the contemporary epistemes of control outlined by Deleuze three decades prior. We witness, in other words, a kind of twilight entanglement of an already emergent episteme. In these documentaries, remembering and rehearsing forgotten repressed histories—even as the Chilean nation and people are decentered—are framed within oscillating material-temporal scales that reify contemporary "scopic regimes of production." Space is placed in temporal logics that are asynchronous vis-à-vis the teleology of progress but synchronous to apparatuses beholden to modes of production and sovereign power(s) that produce ideological discursive space. Without dismissing formal experimentation and complexity, I conclude that the triptych (re)produces (re)familiarized space into time-tested ideological constellations. This argument will

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[31] Beller, Jonathan. "Kino-I, Kino-World: Notes on the Cinematic Mode of Production." *The Visual Culture Reader*, 2nd ed., Dartmouth College Press, 2006, p. 61.

[32] "Circulation," Beller writes, "strictly understood, is the image of the process of production, but not production itself. In the case of Vertov, the representation of production is not enough to sustain his film work; 'it goes out with indifference (Marx, 186)" (68).

hinge on a conceptual sussing out and formal filmic analysis of *space* and *time* in their ideational and audiovisual discursive iterations.

Up until the twentieth century social theory was dominated by a historical epistemology. In 1986, Foucault commented on historicist thinking in the nineteenth century, and the possibilities of thinking space anew in the current epoch saying, "The great obsession of the nineteenth century was, as we know, history: with its themes of development and of suspension, of crisis and cycle, themes of the ever-accumulating past, with its great preponderance of dead men and the menacing glaciation of the world…The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space."[33] Foucault speculated, "Did it start with Bergson or before? Space was treated as the dead, the fixed, the undialectical, the immobile. Time, on the contrary was richness, fecundity, life, dialectic."[34] The prioritization of time over space dominated much of the most prominent work on modernity, especially in the disciplines of sociology and history, best exemplified in Durkheim and Weber.[35] Marx's contributions can also be linked to "anti-spatialism" in large part because they were conceived as materialist critiques of Hegelian idealism as "for Hegel historical time became frozen and fixed within the imminent rationality of space as state-idea" (Soja, 86). The Marxist critique is an attempt

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[33] Foucault, *Of Other Spaces,* 22.

[34] Foucault, *Knowledge/Power,* 80.

[35] Harvey, *Urbanization,* 141.

to materialize time—to recognize the materialist dialect in a revolutionary temporality not beholden to the Hegelian spirit.

Though much less persistent in contemporary scholarship, the insistence on space and spatial terminology has continued to incite historically (historicist) oriented critiques. Facing rebuttals from historians nearly forty years ago, Foucault responded in *Knowledge/Power:*[36]

> For all those who confuse history with the old schemas of evolution, living continuity, organic development, the progress of consciousness or the project of existence, the use of spatial terms seems to have an air of an anti-history. If one started to talk in terms of space that meant one was hostile to time. It meant as the fools say, that one 'denied history', that one was a technocrat. They didn't understand that to trace the forms of implantation, delimitation, and demarcation of objects, the modes of tabulation, the organization of domains meant the throwing into relief of processes — historical ones, needless to say — of power. The spatialising description of discursive realities give on to the analysis of related effects of power.[37]

Foucault's work, especially in *History of Madness* (1961), *The Birth of the Clinic* (1964), *Discipline and Punish* (1975), and *The History of Sexuality* (1976) comprised studies on the spatial orderings of modernity—the asylum, the clinic, the prison—that focused on how space was produced and "actually lived" as well as on the relations between its parts. "The space in which we live, which draws us out of ourselves, in which the erosion of our lives, our time, and our history occurs, the space that claws and gnaws at us, is also, in itself, a heterogenous space."[38] For Foucault, analysis of space was antithetical to

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[36] Originally published in the French journal of radical geography *Herodote.*

[37] Foucault, *Knowledge/Power,* 77.

[38] Foucault, *Of Other Spaces*, 23.

historicism but not history, "a whole history remains to be written of *spaces* — which would at the same time be the history of *powers* (both of these terms in the plural) — from the great strategies of geopolitics to the little tactics of the habitat."[39]

It is precisely a story of space and power that I am trying to emphasize in Guzmán's films. In order to tell that story, it is necessary to sketch a trajectory of his earlier work so as to underline the continuations and ruptures in the historical contexts filmed as well as to note alterations in cinematographic presentation. The early films, from the 1960s and early 70s—*La Batalla* included—document the dialectical changes of that present *in situ.* Camera angles and editing emphasize the antagonistic and contested nature of public spaces which stand for *the commons,* as well as the continued divisions along economic and political class. The social agents of change here are the variegated masses of history, and it is their conspicuous absence that haunts Guzmán's post-coup and post-dictatorship films. These later films purposefully resist forgetting the memory of popular organizations of the social. But even as they continually retread the contours of Chilean history, in search of some residues or reservoirs of salvageable historical knowledge, these films also trace the cartographies of a new kind of space which is not governed by the same forces as the past.

III. Cinematographic Context: Present and Past, National and Personal

[39] Foucault, *Knowledge/Power*, 149.

Director of numerous films during tumultuous years of social change in Chile, Guzmán began his career in Spain, where he studied and began making films that were low-budget, experimental, and defied the norms that emanated from Hollywood. These early films, *El Paraíso ortopédico* and *La Tortura y otras formas de dialógo,* centered around historical transformations in Latin American beginning with the 1968 Olympics in Mexico, the student massacre at Tlateloco, and guerrilla and pacifist movements across the continent.[40] Guzmán returned to Chile in 1969 to participate in the "anarchic" fervor of the "Cine Popular" which formally announced its allegiance to the Unidad Popular in a manifesto by the Cineastas de la Unidad Popular.[41] In the same year, Guzmán shot and presented his first film in Chile, *El Primer Año,* and assumed the role of instructor in the "Taller de Cine Documental" of Cine Chile. This early work is marked by the sensation—noted in countless interviews by Guzmán—that documentary filmmaking in Latin America had an important role in observing and preserving the *present* of the revolutionary process. In a sense, this early work was conceived as a supplement to the revolutionary process by self-reflexively documenting social transformations. In this way, *El Primer Año* and *La Batalla* documented a society in progress. They were meant to reflect and refract society—to be consumed in the dialectical milieux of the transformations that took place under Allende. In other words, society and social actors

[40] Guzmán, Patricio. "Hacer La Memoria de Chile: Entrevista a Patricio Guzmán." *Araucaria*, vol. 11, 1980, pp. 137–43.

[41] ibid.

were meant to see themselves in action. Guzmán has emphasized the relationship between his filmmaking language and revolutionary social identity: "Fue un descumbrimiento del modo de ser chileno, la manera de hablar, la síntesis de la idiosincrasia de un campesinado y de un proletariado, de una comunidad deseosa de hacer cambios, que vive un moments épico: el comienzo de un proceso revolucionario."[42]

While the early Guzmán films were gripped by the urgency to document the transformations of the present, the films made after the transition to democracy in 1990 reflect the historical experience of exile and displacement. The obstinacy and difficulty of explaining the transformations in Chile since *La Batalla* in a sense replaced the urgency to document the changes *in situ.* In *Cordillera,* as the camera's steady gaze floats over Santiago, nestled below wisps of cirrus clouds and the awesome snow-swept Andes, the narrator (Guzmán) reflects, "La ciudad dónde yo nací, me recibe con indiferencia. Siempre que vuelvo, siento la misma lejanía. La ciudad que veo, no lo reconozco." Here, more directly but no less persistently than in *Nostalgia* and *Botón,* the filmmaker sets up the dialectical relationship between the personal and national, the foreign and the familiar. The formal filmic characteristics—*Nostalgia, Botón,* and *Cordillera* included—reflect the history that subtends these relationships as well as

[42] Guzmán, *Hacer la memoria,* 143.

challenge generic categorization. Guynn[43] and Foley[44] have argued that "documentary'" is a means to disavow the always-already fictional aspects of the documentary film in order to paint it with a veneer of truth.[45] In short, documentaries are more than "creative treatments of actuality" (Grierson). Chauvin describes Guzmán's post-dictatorship films as exploring the historical legacy of the coup and its aftermath, "operando un 'giro subjetivo' en la práctica documental, ensayando un discurso de memoria que se cruza y se valida con la experiencia personal del propio director" (172). *Memoria Obstinada*, a film about how the legacy of the dictatorship is remembered, stages the social reencounter with the censored *La Batalla*, reflecting the power, and at times ambiguity, of confronting documentation of the past. The first-person narrative voice that accompanies *Nostalgia*, *Botón*, and *Cordillera* performs the function of directing the diegesis in a complex temporal (a)chronology that questions its own authority. For instance, in *Nostalgia* the introductory sequence of the telescope and intercalated shots of the moon is followed by the off-screen narration of a middle-class Chilean home, replete with basic kitchen appliances, television set, and radio. The

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[43] In an interview with *Cineaste*, Guzmán describes his affiliation with fiction, "The voiceover in *Nostalgia* is very simple and pared down, spoken in the same direct language as my first short stories…The truth is I first of all set out to write a short story" (Guest, 1). Here Guzmán undermines the naive notion that documentary is an objective take on reality or even argumentative/informative in structure. Instead, like a narrative short story, Guzmán's documentaries deal in figurations. They present semiotic systems laden with metaphors, metonyms, allegory, and synecdoche.

[44] Foley, Barbara, *Telling the Truth: The Practice of Documentary Fiction*.

[45] Guynn, William, *A Cinema of Non-Fiction*.

narrator tells us that this home could very well have been his own, and thus represents the tranquility of Chile he felt in the Frei years. This sequence functions to undermine the notion of (metaphysical) spatial stability while underlining the cognitive dissonance of such a view vis-à-vis the ensuing traumatic changes that would occur in the Allende and dictatorship period. In *El Botón de Nácar,* the narrator reflects on how he only recently learned the story of Jemmy Button, a Yámana man who was enslaved on Fitzroy's Beagle in the 19th century and forcibly exiled to Europe. The problem of memory, of what one learns about the past—and what is meant to be forgotten—is symptomatic of the filmmaker as well as of the national relation to the past, so personal and national historical cartography are co-constitutively challenged and rewritten in the wake of colonialism.[46]

In terms of genre categorization, it may be more helpful to read these films as documentary essays. Timothy Corrigan shows that in variety of artistic genres the essay "acts out a performative presentation of self as self-negation in which narrative or experimental structures are subsumed within the process of thinking through a public experience" (6). The essay film poses questions for film categorization and troubles the

[46] Following Christina Sharpe, the "wake" is also "the ways that we are constituted through and by continued vulnerability to overwhelming force though not *only* known to ourselves and to each other *by* that force" (20). Sharpe uses the multi-valences of the word to conjure the living history—the contemporary "weather"—of the Transatlantic Slave Trade. Sharpe writes: "[…] I want to think 'the wake' as a problem of and for thought. I want to think 'care' as a problem for thought. I want to think care in the wake as a problem for thinking and of and for Black non/being in the world. Put another way, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* is a work that insist and performs that thinking needs care and that thinking and care need to stay in the wake" (13).

waters of epistemology. That is, the intermixing of scientific, social, and artistic discourses disturbs hierarchization of knowledge, especially when the essay stages an encounter between the personal and the public.[47] Following similar lines of inquiry Reda Bensamaia argues that the essay is "fundamentally anti-generic,"[48] because it crosses so many boundaries, narrative and non-narrative, realist and experimental, documentary, non-fiction, and fiction.

In the blurring of generic boundaries and authorial self-effacement of the documentary essay, we should hear echoes of the etymological relation of "essay" with "attempt" (in French, *essai, la tentative*). Tentative attempts are conditional—whether abstracted or specific—lures with no privileged access to truth or veracity. The nature of an "attempt" underlines the limited scope of a project and undermines assertions of sovereignty over Truth. Institutions, nation-states, communities, and other inter-subjective relations bear witness to the conflictual narrations of the past, but they do not have a transcendental hold on their narration. The essay-film form, then, is just as strong an indictment to dictatorship or liberal democratic historicism as direct epistemological counter-evidence to hegemonic historical narrations. The very form

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[47] This the point Adorno makes in "The Essay as Form": "In its relationship to scientific procedure and its philosophical grounding as method, the essay, in accordance with its idea, draws the fullest conclusions from the critique of system […] In the realm of thought it is virtually the essay alone that has successfully raised doubts about the absolute privilege of method. The essay allows for the consciousness of nonidentity, without expressing it directly; it is radical in its non-radicalism, in refraining from any reduction to a principle, in its accentuation of the partial against the total, in its fragmentary character" (9).

[48] Bensmaïa, *The Barthes Effect*, 8.

itself provincializes transcendental claims to historical truth. Further, the essay is a perfect medium for exercises in scale because it disrupts categorization through the active construction of zones and spaces that blur binary distinctions like self-other and inside-outside.

Guzmán's films have most often circulate(d) outside of Chile. This was and still is not unusual for Latin American films. The limited domestic market—due to political or economic reasons—and distribution of capital have driven circuits of production and consumption outside of Latin America,[49] and in addition Guzmán faced official censorship. The director has lamented the lack of circulation and viewership of his films in Chile as his work has always been intended for domestic posteriority, "Hacer la memoria de Chile, eso es lo que queríamos hacer…*La batalla de Chile* está hecha entonces con criterios 'para adentro'. Esto es fundamental. Porque muchas películas se desnaturalizan cuando están hechas para la 'solidaridad internacional. La película fue

[49] In general, the overwhelming dominance of Hollywood in Latin American markets shaped by neocolonial dependency created difficult conditions for stable and autonomous film production. United States policy often had direct influence over national film industries. For in- stance, during WWII the US sought to shore up support from Latin American countries through the Good Neighbor Policy. In the case of Mexico, the policy stipulated that the US provide financial and technological support to the Mexican film industry in exchange for military and ideological support. Through this measure the US sought to promote so-called 'American' values to their Mexican neighbors as well as diversify and expand Hollywood's financial hold on the global cinema market. By contrast, Argentina maintained its neutrality during WWII. In response the US imposed economic sanctions on the Argentine market which included a prohibition on the export of film-stock. These policies produced qualitative differences in national film production in Mexico and Argentina. In 1942 the Mexican film industry produced 43 films. Two years later, the industry produced 80 films. By contrast, in 1942 Argentina produced 56 films. One year later that number dropped to 24 (the film embargo started in 1941 with major restrictions on film-stock followed by an all-out ban the following year). See: Falicov, Tamara. *The Cinematic Tango: Contemporary Argentine Film.* London: Wallflower Press, 2007.

hecha para que el pueblo chileno la vea. Y ya verá."[50] Nevertheless, Guzmán's films have garnered a great deal of critical attention and numerous awards on the international film-festival circuit. In toto, the oeuvre—the triptych films *Nostalgia, Bóton,* and *Cordillera* included—have something of a privileged corner in cinematic representation of the Chilean past and present, *because of* or alternatively *in spite of* their popularity abroad.

Putting aside reception for a moment, Guzmán's films hold this privileged position because the work marks the historical and epistemological rupture of the coup and post-coup era. *La Batalla de Chile (1974)*, the three-part documentary that follows the rise and subsequent fall of the Allende-led Popular Unity government marks the historical transformations in the distribution of the sensible, and the violent immunological politics of the dictatorship that followed. Few documentary films realize the historical dialectic in detail like *La Batalla* because few films were able to document social transformations with such immediacy. The filmmaker and cinematographers document large social groups such as industrial workers, campesinos, unions, truckers, politicians, and the bourgeoisie *in situ* during the clamor for political representation. Because of the immediacy with which the filmmakers worked on *La Batalla,* they did not

[50] Guzmán, *Araucaria,* 142.

need to recur to as many methods of distanciation and estrangement as other NLAC films to produce an engaged cinema.[51]

Instead, *La Batalla* utilized techniques of anti-imperial *cinema verite*—observational style, confrontational engagements with the camera—to reveal the actual conditions of society, free from ideological obfuscations, by offering what we might today call a "cognitive map" of Chile at its defining moment in the 20th century. That is not to suggest that the film documents or aspires to document a social totality. The social actors are noticeably heterogeneous and incomplete. Those that appear in the

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[51] It is common to see Guzmán's films amongst directors of the New Latin American Cinema (NLAC) like Raúl Ruiz, Miguel Littín, Fernando Solanas, Octavio Getino, Fernando Birri, Glauber Rocha, Jorge Sánjines, Julio García Espinosa, and Tomás Guttiérez Alea. In order to propagate social and political activity, NLAC films (like *La Batalla*) often made use of techniques that incited affective responses like estrangement and confrontation. Estrangement, a concept tied to affect with a conceptual genealogy related to the uncanny (da Umheimleche), is a sense of disorientation and alienation—the unhomely—where the given, what is taken for granted, becomes strange, alien, haunted and *siniestro,* "it is the name for everything that ought to have remained hidden but comes to light" (Freud, 623). Confrontational techniques were often used in *cine engagé* (engaged cinema) to dis-alienate and embolden the viewer to take steps towards revolutionary action.

In Solanas and Getino's *La Hora de los Hornos* the inter-titles place the artificiality of the film front and center, allowing viewers a critical distance to absorb and reflect on the film's didactic anti-colonial call to action. Estrangement is used to propel the audience into a higher understanding of historical and contemporary repression—a jarring distancing opens space for more complete, to borrow Fredric Jameson's term—"cognitive mapping." Laura Podalsky uses Miguel Littin's *Chacal de Nahueltoro* and Solanas and Getino's *Hora* to point out how "affective engagements exceed the politicizing function ascribed to them." For instance, Podalsky analyzes a scene in which a close-up shot shows a cow's face the moment before the animal is slaughtered interspersed with ads of white people drinking Coca-Cola as a solidifying affective mechanism to the analogy "being drawn between the cattle (Argentina's top export item to the First World) and the Third World laborers whose blood-work sustains the global flow of goods aimed not at themselves, but rather at lighter-skin folk living (and consuming) elsewhere."

Similarly, Ismael Xavier has shown in *Deus e o Diabo na Terra Do Sol,* how scenes of 'slow violence'—long takes, slow pans, and dilated scenes with marginalized subjects in the historically ignored Brazilian sertão—interrupted by rapid montage sequences such as the killing spree of Antonio das Mortes, suggest the possibility (or inevitability) of historical and social redemption. As with Glauber Rocha's *Barravento,* popular social practices are depicted not as ideological mystifications, but rather as containing kernels of resistance developing in a historical dialectic to posit utopic space(s) of liberation, allegorized in the enigmatic last shot of the sea in *Deus Diabo.* In a way, Rocha redeems accumulation as violent accumulation by using techniques of distanciation to posit a utopian spatial teleology.

third portion of the film, entitled “Poder Popular,” are especially incipient. The tripartite structure of *La Batalla* implies movement and change driven by class antagonisms. Ana López has pointed to several examples of how filmmaking language in *La Batalla* reflects the revolutionary ethos of historical change. For instance, López shows how the alterations between mediated and unmediated representation in *La Batalla* underline the societal antagonisms in Chilean society.[52] This was the stated goal of Guzmán and the other workers on the film, “Todo process revolucionario conlleva muchos problemas, es necesario asumirlos, aceptarlos y dar lucha ideológica desde dentro. Todos los cineastas chilenos…teníamos claro cuál era el camino para sentar las bases de un cine al servicio de la revolución. Queríamos hacer un cine renovado, distinto, nada celebrativo, épico, experimentador.”[53]

The social spaces filmed in *La Batalla* are contested by the various factions of the “part with no part” and entrenched capitalist classes. Even in the wake of the "victorious” military coup, "the people” are front and center, and it is their paradoxical absent excess that lingers at the end of the third portion of the film. In other words, the film mediates between two representational political ruptures: on the one hand, the claims and visibility of the “part of no part,” and on the other, the police logic of the regime that understands "politics" only in terms of power. The suppression of the

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[52] López, Ana. “The Battle of Chile: Documentary, Political Process, and Representation.” *The Social Documentary in Latin America*, edited by Julianne Burton, University of Pittsburgh Press, 1990.

[53] Guzmán, *Araucaria,* ibid.

former—"politics" in the sense described by Ranciere—is the logic of the latter, a kind of "parapolitics"[54] that legitimates power and violence through excess and reference to traditional sites of inclusion and exclusion: nation, family, church, etc.

In Guzmán's later films, the lack of documentation of contemporary social movements and actors is notable, and is suggestive of the historical disintegration of "traditional" agents of social change. Personal and political contexts necessitated a change in perspective and an alteration in aesthetics. As a result, from *La Batalla* on the cinematic gaze turned inward towards individual experiences of the coup and its aftermath in films like *Memoria Obstinada (*1993), *La Isla de Robinson Crusoe* (1999), *Le Cas Pinochet* (2001), and *Salvador Allende* (2004). However, the impetus of *La Batalla* in some sense never changed, "Hacer la memoria de Chile, eso es lo que queríamos hacer. No variaba el criterio de la película con o sin victoria."[55]

Uncovering the suppressed memories of the Unidad Popular, the coup, and its aftermath—some documented in *La Batalla*—became a tangential entry into the political itself. Such a move occurred concomitantly with an abeyance from grand historical

[54] I borrow this term from Bruno Bosteels, especially in "Politics, Infrapolitics, and the Impolitical".

[55] In any case, the absence of the same historical actors of *La Batalla* in Guzmán's later films should not be read as absence of antagonism. There are always epicenter(s) of conflict that condition the in-determinedness of narration and representation. Society as such is never self-transparent. Political representation does reveal its own limits, i.e., the point at which the antagonisms become determinative or the *point de capiton* of existing antagonisms. For Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, this kind of historicizing is precisely what is necessary to move away from modes of power incipient and entrenched in late capitalism: "The Left should start elaborating a credible alternative to the Neo-liberal order, instead of simply trying to manage it in a more humane way. This, of course, requires drawing new political frontiers and acknowledging that there cannot be a radical politics without the definition of an adversary. That is to say, it requires the acceptance of the ineradicability of antagonism"(Laclau and Mouffe, xvi-xvii).

narratives that purport to delineate the ground of social antagonisms. The memory of the absent excess or the representational vacuum left by the "part with no part" can be read as entering into a dialectical relationship with the present in films like *Salvador Allende* and *Memoria Obstinada*. In these films a crisis of representation is palpable, in which material and language are not transparent conduits to truth. Representation encounters blockages to the trauma of the past, but in such a way that memory is re-signified to reveal societal antagonisms suppressed under the consensus of the transition.

There are parallel developments in critical social theory. In brief, the metaphysical illusions of modern humanism have been doused with a far-reaching skepticism under the various aegises of post-colonial theory, archaeology, genealogy, psychoanalysis, and deconstruction, to name only a few. Faced with the historical arcs of the twentieth and twenty-first century, concepts like progress, revolution, class etc., have been hollowed out. As Simon Weil anticipated nigh a century ago, "We can take almost all the terms, all the expressions of our political dictionary, and upon opening them, at their center we will find the void."[56] Especially influential in the fields of Latin American studies, the universal subject and the political have been undermined and replaced by the concepts of the non-subject or transversal subject, as well as, by the impolitical and infrapolitical.

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[56] Cited in Bosteels, *Politics,* 212.

Time is a *basso continuo* in Guzmán's films. It frames both the immediacy of historical change in *La Batalla* and the distance from the massive social transformations that took place in the wake of the dictatorship documented in the subsequent films. In this sense, the logic that moves Guzmán's films has not changed, but the historical context has. While the social masses are absent from the more recent triptych—especially conspicuous given continued claims of autonomy from indigenous groups and the enormous political upheavals that lead to the current constitutional process—the scope and scale is no less epic than *La Batalla*. In a way, the ontologized material scale of territory and space are metonyms—stand-ins—for the absent masses of history; and in this sense are metonymical agents of social change.

IV. Historical Context: Neoliberalism, Dictatorship, Memory

Late 20th century post-dictatorship Latin America was characterized by an intense neoliberalization of society wherein massive changes of the infrastructure and social imaginary took place. Even before the *golpe de estado* in September of 1973 that removed the government of democratically elected Salvador Allende and installed the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet, Milton Friedman's "Chicago Boys" were drafting economic reforms for Chile—policies of economic liberalization which included drastic cuts in government spending, privatization of public companies and institutions, and the removal of barriers to international trade and investment. In 1988, Alejandro Foxely, future Finance Minister in the transition government of Patricio Alywin, described

Chile as a laboratory for neoliberal reforms in Latin America: "Chile es el país que ha aplicado en forma más rigurosa y consistente las políticas y reformas neoliberales. Su experiencia se acerca al *test* del 'caso puro.' Se trata en verdad de un 'experimento,' casi de laboratorio."[57] This statement came on the heels of a decade in which rapid-fire privatization was imposed on a public still reeling from hyperinflation and the traumatic violence of the dictatorship.[58] This "shock-doctrine" economic approach in Chile was oft-hailed as a success story became justification for the dissemination of neoliberalism across the globe.

Though it takes on discrete and particular characteristics in each place, neoliberalism can be understood as the result of a historical process in which the ruling classes attempted to restore their dominance in the face of popular socio-democratic advances made after WWII. For David Harvey, neoliberalism is a realignment of class dominance through structural economic changes justified by ideological mechanisms appealing to individualism and freedom. Western colonial-state dominated institutions like the IMF and World Bank assisted the dissemination of the neoliberal ordering of life and economy, a process that began in countries in the Global South. Harvey concludes that Chile "provided helpful evidence to support the subsequent turn to neoliberalism in both Britain (under Thatcher) and the US (under Reagan) in the 1980s. Not for the

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[57] Foxley, *Experimentos neoliberales,* 45.

[58] Klein, Naoimi. *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*. Alfred A. Knopf, 2007.

first time a brutal experiment carried out in the periphery became a model for the formulation of policies in the centre."[59]

Wendy Brown takes aim at the reduction of neoliberalism to macro-economic manipulations. Unlike "laissez faire'"economic liberalism which views all spheres of life as compatible with the market, "Neoliberalism is a constructivist project: it does not presume the ontological givenness of a thoroughgoing economic rationality for all domains of society but rather takes as its task the development, dissemination, and institutionalization of such a rationality" (42). This constructivist project occurs all the way down to the levels of biology and physiology, so that bio-political controls insure the productive capacity of markets. Neoliberal rationality is productive; it creates and molds subjectivities: "Because neoliberalism casts rational action as a norm rather than an ontology, social policy is the means by which the state produces subjects whose compass is set entirely by their rational assessment of the costs and benefits of certain acts" (43). Drastic economic cuts to government jobs and programs are not just a means to allow the market to function "naturally," without interference but a redefinition of the State as a rational market actor that *produces* subjects.

After the Chilean economic crisis of 1980-81, the discourse surrounding the market and state intervention sought to naturalize the horizons of the economy on the basis of free-market limitations—i.e., to establish the free market as an a-priori, natural,

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[59] Harvey, *Neoliberalism*, 9.

and inevitable phenomena that ought not be tampered with except to provide the conditions from which it would "act naturally." The results of such measures transformed the social sphere from one that was regulated by states, which we can broadly describe as involved in the project to expand individual freedoms and distribute risk (at least minimally) from market irrationality, to what Juan Poblete calls the post-social, "whose rationality derives from the neoliberal version of the economy, and whose ethos, instead of socializing and distributing risk in solidarity, individualizes and privatizes it."[60]

The legacies of dictatorships are still a major topic of Latin American Cultural Studies scholarship, and extensive studies in trauma, mourning, melancholia, and justice have been inexorable to extirpate the physical and psychological hold of the dictatorship since the return to ostensible democracy. One of the central concerns here is a politics of memory in the epoch after the dictatorship, the so-called "transition." For Nelly Richard, the politics of the transition "jettisoned the private memory of disagreements to suppress the 'inconvenient' aspects of the past."[61] It should be said that the transition government of Patricio Alywin was limited by the 1980 Constitution as well as by the 1978 Amnesty Law passed in order to protect groups and individuals that participated in torture, murder, and disappearances. Nevertheless, the transition abrogated any real sense of "politics" by delegating and suppressing dissensus through

[60] Poblete, "The Memory of the National and the National as Memory," 97.

[61] Richard, Nelly. *Residuos y Métaforas (Ensayos de Crítica Cultural Sobre El Chile de La Transición)*, 29.

"regulated diversity, pacts and negotiations" (Epps, 487). According to Tomás Moulian, the pacts made under the transition represented an "almost atavistic negation of what the Unidad Popular had been."[62] Under these conditions, memory is a destabilizing agent, "It would therefore seem…that political consensus is only capable of referring to memory (of evoking it as a theme, of processing it as information), but not of practicing it or of expressing in its torments" (Richard, 30).

The vicissitudes of the transition have given rise to an abundance of literature that takes as its objects of analysis cultural productions that deploy various stratagems towards representing the past and post-social present. Recent scholarship has argued that the coup was in the words of Patricio Marchant a "coup against representation," because of dissonances it caused in thinking and representing the social.[63] The means by which this era has been periodized and represented has worked to define the present, in Juan Poblete's words, "as a perverse mixture of continuity and rupture." Put slightly differently, what this secondary literature attempts to define is the various articulations of a post-social present coming to terms with the memory of previous configurations of the social.[64] In a close analysis of the Chilean avant-garde, Nelly Richard has argued that the key feature of this period of cultural production is the melancholic dilemma of articulating these ruptures and continuities:

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[62] Moulian, Tomás, *Chile Actual: Anatomía de Un Mito*, 25.

[63] Poblete, "Memory," 95.

[64] Ibid.

> la condición postdictatorial se expresa como 'perdida de objeto' en una marcada situación de 'duelo'. Ese dilema melancólico entre 'asimilar' (recordar) y 'expulsar' (olvidar) atraviesa el horizonte postdictatorial produciendo narraciones divididas entre el enmudecimiento-–la falta de habla ligada al estupor de una serie de cambios inasimilables, por su velocidad y magnitud, a la continuidad de la experiencia del sujeto- y la sobreexcitación: gestualidades compulsivas que exageran artificialmente ritmo y señales para combatir la tendencia depresiva con su movilidad postiza.[65]

The cultural responses to the post-dictatorship condition(s) invoked by Richard revolve around a Benjaminian-inspired analysis. In his theses on history, Benjamin associates historicism with a movement that reifies the past.[66] This version of history whitewashes the past into a smooth unvariegated time of progress. This was the project of the dictatorship and even more perversely the transition, engendered in equal parts by the short-term memory of the market economy and atomized neoliberal rationality. In the words of Poblete, "the Chilean military dictatorship, use[d] the 'breakdown' of the political system and 'clean slate' figure as a founding narrative for a national memory capable of creating the foundational basis of their often authoritarian projects" (97).

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[65] Richard, *Residuos,* 37.

[66] In one of the clearest glosses on historicism, Benjamin writes: "The nature of this sadness stands out more clearly if one asks with whom the adherents of historicism actually empathize. The answer is inevitable: with the victor" (256).

For scholars of memory politics in Latin America, various avant-garde movements—such as the *Escena de Avanzada* and *CADA*[67] who counted as members Diamela Eltit, Raul Zurita, and Eugenia Brito—to name only a few—found crises of language and representation in the wake of the dictatorship, and responded with forms of expression that de-stabilized the smooth time of historicism while also recovering or making visible kernels of past traumas.[68] In regards to politics, we might say that the dominant avant-garde artistic attitude exposed and refuted the groundless basis for

[67] There is substantive debate surrounding the coherence of *la avanzada* as an aesthetic movement. The primary poles of this 'debate' are usually discussed in terms of the positions laid out by Chilean critics Nelly Richard and Willy Thayer. Richard emphasizes the distance, both aesthetic and political, of the historical avant-garde and the *avanzada.* She points to the local and marginal politics of the *avanzada* compared with the universal and international bent of the historical avant-garde. By contrast, Thayer points to a congruence between the temporal movements of the neo-avant-garde and the dictatorship, specifically their fixation on rupture and novelty. Several points in this debate are relevant for this section on Guzmán and film: specifically, the possibility or impossibility of representation in the wake of the coup as well as the question of aesthetic complicity in local and global regimes of neoliberal ordering of life.

[68] Against historicism, Benjamin posits, "A historical materialist therefore…regards his task to brush against the grain" (257). Benjamin finds examples of materialist aesthetics (that he dubs 'stirring' [erregende Schrift]) in the tradition of the baroque. Often associated with allegory, ruins, and ruination, Benjamin considered the baroque as a temporalised correction to the repressed teleology of classical symbolism. [The baroque arts] "are concerned not so much with providing a corrective to classicism, as to art itself…the baroque, offers a more…permanent version of this correction" (Benjamin, OGTD, 177). Allegory, which is to the fragment what the symbol is to the whole, reveals the muffled temporality of *memento morti,* decomposition, and decay. It should be noted here that there is a long and esteemed history of allegorical and baroque stylizations in Latin American aesthetic history. Bolívar Echeverria, for example defined "baroque ethos" as "tan distanciada como la clásica ante la necesidad trascendente del hecho capitalista, no lo acepta, sin embargo, ni se suma a él sino que lo mantiene siempre como inaceptable y ajeno". In other words, the baroque ethos harbors the possibility for a different world, a future alternative to the reigning capitalist paradigm. (Echeverria, 73).

authoritarian political projects while simultaneously exposing itself to absence and finitude (the absence of a universal subject and the finitude of politics itself). [69]

The Benjaminian-inspired allegorical relation to the past is uniquely suited to narrate the discontinuities that characterize the post-dictatorship conditions for representation. Idelber Avelar has argued that Latin American cultural production from this era can be identified by its "refus[al] to accommodate to the limits of the possible" (Avelar, 105). Avelar analyzes works across Latin America by Tununa Mercado, Silviano Santiago, Diamela Eltit, and Ricardo Piglia that provoke "untimely memory" in a moment when the past and memory are threatened by dictatorship historicism and market accommodations. Avelar's larger argument in *The Untimely Present* is that post-dictatorship Latin American fiction has used allegorical methods to mourn the past and resist its active forgetting. Put differently, allegory's resistance—in Benjamin's reading, primarily in *Origin of German Tragic Drama*—to totalization and its insistent desire for

[69] In the nineteenth and twentieth century various theorists, artists, and philosophers recuperated the baroque as an aesthetic that favored heterogeneity over homogeneity (Nietzsche) or inconformity over progressive, linear history (Benjamin). In the so-called New World, the baroque was reevaluated and re-interpreted by writers like Lezama Lima and Alejo Carpentier to differentiate Latin American cultural production from Europe as a means towards de-colonization. Similarly, in his essay on Kepler's astronomical elliptical orbits, Severo Sarduy points to the (neo)baroque as a metaphor for cultural de-centering. Therefore, the baroque can be conceived not just as an aesthetic technique delimited to the iterations of seventeenth century art and architecture that responded to the upsurge in Protestantism. Instead, "the baroque refers not to an essence but to an operative function, to a trait. It endlessly produces folds. It does not invent things" (Deleuze, 3). Following Deleuze's reading, the fold produces a disjunctive or heterogeneous teleology, dismantling Cartesian dualism as well as subject/object distinction. This comes from a reading of Leibniz's paradoxical monad, which Deleuze suggests has as its operative function to erase inside and outside.

justice and restitution in the face of the latter's impossibility made it an ideal mode for symbolizing the post-dictatorship period.

Re-symbolizing past and present—the task of mourning and resistance to forgetting—is further problematized when considering contemporary neoliberal Chile. Patrick Blaine suggests that in Guzmán's documentaries, "historical memory is antithetical to the ideology of neoliberalism, which depend on 'forced obsolescence', creating a present essentially devoid of substantial meaning" (Blaine, 121). In a more historically inflected approach, Tomas Klublock counters that, "the film's [*Memoria Obstinada's*] powerful evocation of personal tragedy and loss produces a sense of memory that is restricted to the individual and defined by nostalgia, rather than a form of collective memory engaged with current political questions."[70] For Klublock, the film inscribes the neoliberal tendency towards atomization and stratification of social groups into individuals, sapping any potentiality for a collective restitution of the past. Commenting on *Salvador Allende* (2004), Alessandro Fornazzari argues in a similar vein that the film's recuperative project to restore the figure of Allende, "ends up distanced and removed from the problems of the present, rather than opening new engagements with it" (Fornazzari, 85).

In *Speculative Fictions,* Fornazzari notes that Guzmán's films reveal the limits of a memory politics as a project of restitution: "the difficulty…is that the 'great

[70] Klublock, "History and Memory in Neoliberal Chile," 276.

transformation' (Chile's neoliberal transition) has estranged concepts such as memory politics, restitution, and the incompleteness of the work of the past…The project of memory politics that they [Guzmán's documentaries] reveal are its own limits" (85-86). For Fornazzari, the gesture is both "excessive and lacking…necessary and impossible" (86), because "one of the characteristics of post-dictatorship Chile is that the boom in memory becomes undistinguishable from the boom in forgetting" (69). Instead of discarding the film as reproducing neoliberal modes of rendering the past, Fornazzari suggests lingering on the moments of impossible restitution in order to "open the documentary archive."

The triptych films open up the documentary archive to territory, land, water, and matter. The material world becomes the archeological site for sifting through the ruins of the late twentieth century Chilean state. The latter's absence bespeaks the privatization and atomization of neoliberalism. The films traverse geographical topologies—in much the same way transference works in psychoanalysis—to reveal truth(s) of the present in the scratched, missing, and incomplete documents of the past.[71] They do so with audiovisual filmic cuts that not only determine the diegetic

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[71] But, what truth is speaking here? From whence and for whom does this truth address itself? To what degree do these films follow the project elucidated by Fornazzari? Do they 'brush against the grain' of history—to paraphrase Benjamin—in a materialist and allegorical mode? How do they frame the always-open, always-recessive archive? What are the limitations of a discourse that fixates on absence as the sine qua non of political action? More specifically, what imaginary temporality and spatiality are mobilized in *Nostalgia, Boton,* and *Cordillera* and in what ways do they reflect contemporary neoliberal Chile? Is this a materialist or idealist project? And further, is the gap between material (materialism) and thought (idealism) still destabilizing, anti-hegemonic, and as productively out-of-joint in the neoliberal ordering of life?

presentation on screen, but are also "cuts" that delimit the scales of analysis (of territory, memory, and matter).

V. Scaling up in *Nostalgia de la Luz*

Nostalgia, Botón, and *Cordillera* represent space in such a way that new and unheralded sets of relations appear to be possible and emergent—suggestive of "beyonds" of language and representation. The ontologized material scale of territory and space can be read as metonyms—stand-ins—for the absent masses of history, and as agents of social change. With the absence of the masses, the landscape becomes the site from which social change is figured. The desert, the ocean, and the mountains are non-places.[72] The spaces are not vacant but rather contain a gap, a void, or pure distance that makes (re)signification possible. These spaces are "impossible to see as a whole on a regular three-dimensional human scale-basis" (Morton, 1), so that what is at stake is not only a subject's aesthetic relation to beings but how relations—Being—are possible to begin with.[73] For the author of *The Order of Things,* the non-place that has always already been constitutive of modernity is not a lack but rather the site from which to

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[72] Bruno Bosteels makes the case for the importance of the non-place (a term coined by Marc Augé) in Foucault's genealogical methodology, as the site that emerges as the logical consequence of thinking past origins. "The genealogist's refusal to become entangled in the metaphysical search for origins, in other words, forces a situated reconsideration of both novelty and the conditions for its emergence…the site of an emergence cannot but be a blank space, the place of a gap in between continuity and discontinuity: a pure non place" (Bosteels 2003, 122).

[73] It seems that what makes relations possible also is at stake between non-human phenomena. Therefore, these scenes do not reveal the Kantian "sublime nature" that shows us the limits of our human cognitive capacity, and at the same time the capacity for this sensuous experience that grounds Kant's categories, but rather how a certain "Being" undergirds the aesthetic judgment of "beings."

sketch relations of power and forces: "It is no longer possible to think in our day other than in the void left by man's disappearance. For this voice does not create a deficiency: it does not constitute a lacuna that must be filled. It is nothing more, and nothing less, than the unfolding of a space in which it is once more possible to think" (Foucault, 342).[74]

From the non-place history is disjunctive, non-totalizing, even abyssal; there is no ur-origin, *ante-rem*, and objective stance from which to view an unadulterated "beginning."[75] The past is never past, as the saying goes, but, even more, the past itself is malleable and unstable.[76] The historical begins, as it were, in *media res.* Stunning panning and still shots of sublime landscapes frequent *Nostalgia, Botón,* and *Cordillera*, but the viewer is reminded that this "beautiful" nature harbors the specters of history. Its forms and strata reflect specific historical moments, but they are also infinitely layered. The viewer is thrown into a geographical archive that is expansive, recessive, and no-

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[74] In his short article *This is not a Pipe,* Foucault shows that the non-relation between language and representation in Magritte's painting by the same name, "[does not] have a common ground nor a place where they can meet" so that "the 'non-place' emerges 'in person'—in place of persons and where no one is present any longer" (Foucault, 646).

[75] Origins do not give rise to historicity but rather the inverse—historicity gives rise to origins, "it is historicity that, in its very fabric, makes possible the necessity of an origin which must be both internal and foreign to it…" (Foucault, 329).

[76] Indeed, historical narrations, 'becomings into a succession', can be symbolized in different ways, consistent or inconsistent with prevailing ideologies. Zizek, following Lacan, argues that there is a gap between signifier and signified, "The radical contingency of naming implies an irreducible gap between the Real and modes of its symbolization: a certain historical constellation can be symbolized in different ways; the Real itself contains no necessary mode of its symbolization" (1989, 107). This gap, for Zizek as well as Lacan, can be filled by a "pure signifier" (without signified) that functions as a *point de capiton* in uniting a particular field, knitting its various parts into coherence, "it is the reference to a 'pure' signifier which gives unity and our identity to our experience of historical reality itself" (108).

longer anthropocentric.[77] These films enact a radically open archive through audiovisual intimations of scale. Scales imply means and modes of measurement and demarcation. They resemble what Foucault called "cuts" when he wrote "knowledge is not made for understanding; it is made for cutting." Through audiovisual cuts, the material itself seems to "vibrate" (to paraphrase Jane Bennett), channeling and actualizing forces and intensities that make history.[78]

Nostalgia de la Luz begins with two onscreen diegetic movements—an upward and downward movement on the vertical axis and a circular movement on the horizontal. Like a mise en abyme of sight itself, the camera guides and directs the frame over multitudes of optical technologies. Here from the outset is the first indication of the scopic regime that I am calling *la mirada escalar,* which will scan the geographical archive, and unsettle the historical and metaphysical sites of enclosure. With "escalar" I am hoping to suggest the real and metaphorical operations of ascent and descent as well as division and spatialization that "scales" implies. But, "escalar" should also be read in terms of intensification—specifically, a technological "escalation" that makes

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[77] In "Nietzsche, History, Genealogy," Foucault argues that, "Effective history deprives the self of the reassuring stability of life and nature, and it will not permit itself to be transported by a voiceless obstinacy toward a millennial ending. It will uproot its traditional foundations and relentlessly disrupt its pretended continuity. This is because knowledge is not made for understanding; it is made for cutting" (154).

[78] Bennett writes, "if human culture is inextricably enmeshed with vibrant, nonhuman agencies, and if human intentionality can be agentic only if accompanied by a vast entourage of nonhumans, then it seems that the appropriate unit of analysis for democratic theory is neither the individual human nor an exclusively human collective but the (ontologically heterogeneous) 'public' coalescing around a problem" (108).

phenomena legible or intelligible. Not unlike Vertov's "Kino-Eye," which sought to capture what is "inaccessible to the human eye" (Vertov), *la mirada escalar* exploits the technological possibilities of modern cinematography to make palpable forces that are not visible on their own.[79] In this way, the *mirada escalar* offers a repartitioning of the sensible at various scales of analysis. It is like a fragmented telescope that illuminates and reveals vast swaths or minute details. Taken to its logical conclusion, it offers an infinite series of repartitions of the sensible, because "scaling" or "choice of scale" is only partial and preliminary—a "shell, husk" (Old French *escale)* or "split, divide" (Proto-Germanic *skaelo*), which implies a series scales not taken.

In *Nostalgia,* the first shot frames the metallic base of a German telescope in Santiago—"que todavía funciona"—as Guzmán's third-person narration later tells us, while the grating and groaning of the machine reveals the wooden staircase circling around the telescope from screen left. The film's preliminary introduction includes no narration. Instead, the camera pans and frames the various articulations of the telescope

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[79] On the Kino-Eye Vertov writes, "Kino-Eye means the conquest of space, the visual linkage of people throughout the entire world based on the continuous exchange of visible fact, of film-documents as opposed to the exchange of cinematic or theatrical presentations. Kino-Eye means conquest of time (the visual linkage of phenomena separated in time). Kino-Eye is the possibility of seeing life processes in any temporal order or at any speed, inaccessible to the human eye. Kino-Eye makes use of every possible kind of shooting technique: acceleration, microscopy, reverse action, animation, camera movement, the use of the most unexpected foreshortenings—all these we consider to be not trick effects, but normal methods to be fully used. Kino-Eye uses every possible means in montage, comparing and linking all points to the universe in any temporal order, breaking, when necessary, all the laws and conventions of film construction. Kino-Eye plunges into the seeming chaos of life to find in life itself the response to an assigned theme. To find the resultant force amongst the million phenomena related to the given theme. To edit; to wrest, through the camera, whatever is most typical, most useful, from life; to organize the film pieces wrested from life into a meaningful rhythmic visual order, a meaningful visual phrase, an essence of 'I see'" (cited in Vertov, xxvi).

as it oscillates, whirs, opens, and elevates towards the sky. Together, ascent, descent, and circularity reflect the search and demand for traces—light, archaeological evidence, family members, loved ones, and justice for those disappeared during the dictatorship. It is a process of interminable mourning, investigation, and discovery, a search in the dark that paradoxically takes place in the arid sunlight steppes of the Atacama, a place of archival preservation, where the remains of indigenous societies, nineteenth century miners, and astronomers studying the light emitted from stars lightyears away in time and space intermingle with the bones of the disappeared and the memories of survivors of the dictatorship. The Atacama desert is a sedimented, layered *matter* of past and present around which Guzmán circles the camera—a place under inspection and a place from which to inspect—to catch glimpses of a fleeing past.

Various scholars have pointed to the "unbounded" and "open" signifying structure of the desert in *Nostalgia.* Alejandro Valenzuela argues that the 'sublime' but "austere" Atacama takes on the characteristics of "an open book" (Valenzuela, 119), and Brad Epps reads the didactic and affective features of the desert in *Nostalgia* as an unbounded classroom. "There is a lesson here," writes Epps, "and it is that the science, knowledge and learning of all things high and hard, stars and stones, can be riddled with feeling, with unsuspected, unfathomable and intense senses of attachment and implication" (Epps, 485). Writing about memory gardens and monuments in Argentina and Chile, Jens Andermann suggests that "at the same time, this power of the landscape

to resist pain and terror also stems from its radical indifference towards human life and history and, thus, its affinity with oblivion rather than memory" (Andermann, 167). Here Andermann's suggestion that monuments must "provoke the landscape" to keep memories from idly disappearing into indifferent geological time contrasts with Guzmán's epic cinematic vision of geographic (and material) plenitude.[80] In Guzmán, the landscape is *so* full of affective lines of flight because Guzmán employs modes of visuality that point to the material vibrancy of the landscape, which is not the same as indifference.

How do the affective dimensions invoked in the material landscapes of these documentaries confront the neoliberal ordering of life? Many critics of the so-called "affective-turn" have pointed out how sentimentality and intersubjective identification are easily harnessed and manipulated. Walescka Pino-Ojeda and Mariana Ortega Breña show how the legal-judicial language of individualism typical of neoliberal governance in Chile "has developed a questionable and convenient dissociation between 'them', the 'victims', and 'us', those who were not directly affected by the climate of fear" (125). This kind of discourse operates to displace the political basis for redress onto pathologized individuality, and mobilizes fear inculcated during the dictatorship "as a

[80] Andermann argues that Chilean and Argentine architecture and visual arts responded to the fragmented, ruined, or absent(ed) places for mourning with "expanded fields"—"an opening toward space which reconstitutes the human precisely as it exceeds it" (166). Andermann marshals examples such as Lotty Rosenfeld's 1979 sculpture-performance "Una milla de cruces sobre el pavimento"—in which the artist connected white bands along Avenida Manquehue in Santiago to form a cross—to argue that itinerancy becomes the mobile and performative means of mourning in an inhospitable (post)dictatorship landscape.

resource for achieving forgetting and demobilization, the ideal conditions for a pragmatic transition" (Moulian, 39).

Under these conditions, affects of collectivity are anachronistic to the politics of historical oblivion that characterize the transition. Pino-Ojeda and Ortega Breña highlight cultural production that validates "individual traumatic memories…as shared social ones…but above all the acknowledgment of social pain, the distress of recognizing this shared calamity, and the collective nature, though varying in degree and in form, of that pain" (135). They point to artifices that harness other emotions and relations through "ongoing negotiations, cross-referencing, and borrowing…," which are ultimately, "productive and not privative."[81] In the early 90s when Guzmán was filming one of his most emotional films, *Memoria Obstinada* (Ruffinelli, 190-191), almost all of the schools the director approached to screen *La Batalla de Chile* refused. "They told me" Guzmán says, "that the kids could be traumatized, that the past had to be forgotten" (Ruffinelli, 204).

[81] Rothberg quoted in Epps, 488

In *Nostalgia de la Luz,* the Atacama becomes a site of abjection[82]—an open wound, a burial ground, and a document of "barbarism" to echo Benjamin, where individual distress is also collective. The driest desert on the planet, the northern third of the gaunt Southern Cone country—the best place on the planet to observe celestial activity—is also the site of ancient fortresses, trails of indigenous empires, fleeting projects of modernization in the form of railroads and saltpeter mines, concentration camps, torture, and execution. At the same time, it is the site of resistance, memory, and collectivity. All of this, the narrator tells us, in one place, "nos permite leer este gran

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[82] Other artists have aestheticized the Atacama, perhaps chief among them, Raúl Zurita in his poetry *Purgatorio, Ante Paraiso,* and *El Paraíso Está Vacío.* Participant of CADA (Colectivo Acciones de Arte), Zurita's work is often described as mixed performance vanguardism with intertextual themes, such as the pilgrimage through purgatory inspired by Dante's *Inferno.* The titular piece of this series, *Purgatorio,* was conceived as an act of self-mutilation. The cover of the original publication is a self-portrait of Zurita, his cheek scarred by a self-inflicted burn with a scalding knife. According to Jacobo Sefamí, "El retrato del autor, en la primera pagina del primer libro, se convierte en el retrato del país. Del individuo se pasa a la colectividad. Aunque los poemas de Zurita parten de un sujeto, su aspiración es recoger el espíritu de la comunidad" (Mejilla, 22). The Atacama as poetic site of threshold, crossing, and pilgrimage appears in Purgatorio with (de)familiarized Christian references. Eugenia Brito has written that the Atamaca can refer to states of "pre-edipticos en que el cuerpo no se integra totalmente y se percibe más bien como un conjunto de pulsiones somatizadas y muy directamente relacionadas con el cuerpo matron" (Brito, 104). Here we should hear echoes of Kristeva's notion of the abject, as both a pre-symbolic lure and horrifying state of meaninglessness. Brito argues that, "Atacama, metáfora del cuerpo herido del sujeto que plantea la reescritura de Chile como Purgatorio, está puesto a ratos en él y en Chile" (Brito, 104).

For his second book, *Anteparaiso,* Zurita organized an aerial poem to be written in the sky of New York City. "MI DIOS ES HAMBRE...MI DIOS ES GHETTO...MI DIOS ES CHICANO...MI AMOR A DIOS". Written in Spanish and displayed outside of the secular walls of the museum, the poem performed an alteration to what Jacques Ranciere would call "the distribution of the sensible," as a fleeting, aggregative, and participatory call or prayer (and…and…) to the part without a part. Later, after the return to democracy Zurita staged another public act of poetry, in the Atacama desert, where he organized the monumental razing of over three kilometers (Sefami) of land to dig out the phrase "ni pena ni miedo." This simple phrase was a reframing of the popular post-dictatorship motto of the left in Chile, "ni perdon, ni olvido." The depth of the holes of each letter made them visible from airplane height. Their vast tomb-like emptiness suggest the enormous loss of the disappeared, and their inscription on the terraforming Atacama point to the long durée of the temporality of mourning. Unlike the ephemeral poems in the skies of New York, the letters in the Atacama are etched into geological time, a visible scar on the skin of a nation.

libro abierto a la memoria hoja por hoja" or what Epps calls "a present of plentitude" (Epps, 486).

Similarly, there is not one privileged teleological time nor a central point of view from which "time" might be understood objectively. The various references to the "spectrality" and "haunting" by critics of *Nostalgia* should be read in the vein of "ghostly beings"—trapped between two temporalities and spaces because of a failure to properly enter the symbolic order (usually by customary funeral rites). The specter, Derrida argues, tarries between temporalities, returning to the present as an emissary of the future emanating from the past to demand justice through the gaze.[83] In cinematic terms, what might this "gaze" look like in *Nostalgia*?

Julia Kristeva and Judith Butler provide useful theoretical frames for understanding how *la mirada escalar* undermines the spectral gaze. In *Nostalgia,* we learn that investigations of the celestial bodies tells us that the light we perceive now was emitted millions of years ago from a universe that is infinitely expanding, and that therefore, some light will never reach us. This well-known astrophysical trivia recalls the self-reflexive humility in the manner of Kant's sublime. However, the film interlaces these reflections on light, darkness, and contemplation with the "excessive and lacking…necessary and impossible" (Fornazarri, 86) gestures of restitution of those for whom the process of mourning and justice are incomplete. There are a number of these

[83] Derrida, *Specters,* 125.

"trivial" facts that take on a level of horrifying resonance in contemporary Chile as Guzmán explains in an interview with Frederick Wiseman:

> How to explain that human bones are the same as certain asteroids? How to explain that the calcium that makes up our skeleton is the same calcium found in stars? How to explain that new stars are formed from our own atoms when we die ? How to explain that Chile is the world's leading astronomical hub, even as 60% of the assassinations committed by the dictatorship remain unsolved? How is it possible that Chilean astronomers observe stars that are millions of light-years away, while children can't even read in their schoolbooks about the events that took place in barely 30 years ago? How to explain why a vast number of bodies buried by the military were unearthed and then thrown into the sea? How to show that the labor of a woman who rummages through the earth with her bare hands resembles that of an astronomer?[84]

These rhetorical questions (indeed, *how* to explain?) transform the Atacama from a place of sublime contemplation into one of haunting abjection. Or better, the film interlaces the poles of abjection into a place of both indistinction and horror with pre-symbolic unity.

Kristeva argues that the abject refers to the breakdown between subject and object. It occurs when what was once comprehensible or even pleasurable transforms into something threatening. This threat stems from the deracination of meaning—the loss of distinction—and highlights "the fragility of the symbolic order".[85] Thus, rituals, norms, regimes of law, order, etc.—in short, everything that comes from the big Other—are attempts to stabilize and cordon the symbolic order off from the abject. Intrusions of the abject, stemming at least in part from the "eruption of the Real" and the resistance of

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[84] Guzmán, Patricio. *Nostalgia for the Light; An Icarus Films Press Release*. Icarus Films, 2010, https://misc.icarusfilms.com/press/pdfs/nost_pk.pdf.

[85] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 3.

the latter to symbolization, are inevitable. Death and the corpse hold this power of the abject for Kristeva, "The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject" (4). From this we can see how the abject abuts the pre-symbolic order and attains an attraction at the same time as it causes horror. This is why Kristeva associates the abject with *jousissance,* "One does not know it, one does not desire it, one joys in it [*on en jouit*]. Violently and painfully. A passion" (Kristeva, 8).

In "Violence, Mourning, Politics," Judith Butler makes a case for the always-already shared vulnerability and loss that mark the human as a priori conditions for thinking community:

> Consider that the struggle for recognition in the Hegelian sense requires that each partner in the exchange recognize not only that the other needs and deserves recognition, but also that each, in a different way, is compelled by the same need, the same requirement. This means that we are not separate identities in the struggle for recognition but are already involved in reciprocal exchange, an exchange that dislocates us from our positions, our subject-positions, and allows us to see that community itself requires the recognition that we are all, in different ways, striving for recognition.[86]

Here Butler posits a shared but differentiated community based on the exchange of dislocation, becoming, recognition, and mis-recognition—"the differential allocation of grievability that decides what kind of subject is and must be grieved, and which kind of subject must not, operates to produce and maintain certain exclusionary conceptions of who is normatively human" (xiv-xv). The crimes of the dictatorship were also abject in this sense: the suspension of law enacted by the coup, and the manners of degradation

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[86] Butler, *Precarious Life,* 43-44.

that followed; but also the immunological denial of shared vulnerability and loss, as well as the sovereign (dis)allocation of grievability.

The level(s) on which survivors of the dictatorship approach the mourning of their disappeared loved ones, and their righteous demand for justice, are not of the order of the abject. These demands for justice exceed the political register, even as they are and have been voiced by collectivities. No transition of power, return to democracy, or reordering of societal antagonisms along more equitable lines can claim to come to terms with the demands of the mourners. Indeed, this positioning of an unassailable ethical demand on the periphery of the ontics of politics proved to be one of the most enduring forms of counter-hegemony that disturbed the dictatorships across Latin America. However, in the film the searches of Violeta and Victoria for their family members are tied with Gaspar the astronomer and Lautaro the archaeologist. What ties them together is a (relative) metonymic search for origins in the same place. At an ontological level, what ties these narratives together is the shared displacement, vulnerability, and loss that, following Butler, are always already involved in reciprocal exchange and recognition. What ties them together, in other words, is the image *as* the site of mediation, exchange, and reciprocation.

After the Santiago telescope's methodical whirling and rising towards the lighted opening of the observatory in the introductory sequence, a melancholic musical score by Miranda and Tobar accompany transition shots that fade into black-and-white

photographs of the moon. The repeated shots seem to allude to the history of the celestial body, and the repeated barrages of asteroids that have left pockmarks on its surface. There is no visible life, but these still-life photos exert the sense of time and history. From Earth to moon, we return again to Chile in a transition shot that marks the mediation of perspective. Undulating black and grey splotches, perhaps blurred images of more photos of the moon, transform into dancing sun-strokes on a window-pane shot from inside a static room awash in late-afternoon sun. The room is filled with the domestic appliances of a typical middle-class Santiago home—stove, shades, dining-room table, dishtowels, radio set. It was in a home that resembled this one that the narrator, Guzmán, became fascinated with the movements of the universe. Such a perspective, the narrator tells us, was colored by the quietude and comfort of the domestic hearth (*oikos*) that is allegorized to the nation writ large: "Estos objectos que podrían haber sido los mismos en mi casa me recuerdan a ese momento en que uno cree que deja de ser niño. En esa época, Chile era un remanso de paz, aislado del mundo. Santiago dormía al pie de la cordillera sin ninguna conexión con el resto de la tierra."

Of course, this idyllic past never was. Its remote perspective of tranquility and peace was always "looking through a glass darkly," as the film's visual references to mediation remind us. Alejandro Valenzuela points out that "the question of memory that the documentary installs does not aim to establish itself in the domains of the objective. From the outset it carries the subjective traces of Guzmán's autobiography

and emerges precisely from the domestic space of his childhood"(Valenzuela, 119). This imagined origin of peace ties the disruption of the *oikos*—both personal and inter-subjective—with the concept of time itself: "La vida era provinciana. Nunca ocurría nada. Y los Presidentes de la Republica caminaban por la calle sin protección. *El tiempo del presente era el único tiempo que existía*" (my emphasis).

With these words, the camera travels outside of the house to a street-level shot of two colorful façades. The visuals here are a step ahead of the narrator's account—the nostalgic fantasy of an eternal, isolated, and peaceful present is disrupted by the movement away from the protective interior of the familiar hearth. Predictably, then, the exterior of the houses fades into flickering images of swirling dust, accompanied by the narrative temporal alteration: "Esta vida tranquila se acabó un día. Un viento revolucionario nos lanzó al centro del mundo. Yo tuve la suerte de vivir esa ventura noble que nos despertó a todos. Esa ilusión quedó grabado para siempre en mi alma." The dust here is the embodiment of decay, delay, and dislocation. Around the same time of "el viento revolucionario," the narrator tells us, scientists fell in love with the Chilean desert sky. And although the "golpe de estado barrió con los sueños, la democracia y la ciencia," these scientists continued to work (with support from their foreign colleagues) on constructing the biggest telescopes in the world to study the universe from the Atacama. Throughout this narration, the dust swirling on the screen against pure black background (a reference to the "stardust" studied by the scientists) gradually fills a

room full of aged astrophysics technology. Here again we have a direct reference to a regime of visuality that persists throughout the time of the dictatorship due to the scale of its operation and procedure. It is not the technology of astrophysics that endures a certain historical reality but rather a mode of looking, a way of seeing, that in a sense encompasses all in its endlessly dividing scalar mechanics. This is ultimately the mode of visuality that is vindicated throughout Guzmán's triptych documentary-series.

The point worth reflecting upon is that the visual framing in *Nostalgia* divides and provincializes—in other words, makes finite—whatever is within its scope. When the documentary travels to Chacabuco, the site of nineteenth-century saltpeter mines, the narrator reminds the viewer that the dictatorship only needed to put up barbed wire for this site of labor exploitation to transform into one of carceral torture, execution, and disappearance. The ruins of the mine are initially framed from above, not unlike the camera that pans over the "map" by artist Emma Malig. However, instead of deconstructing the mimetic representation of map and territory, the mine qua concentration camp gets re-signified into another chapter in the long history of state-sanctioned violence. The historical repetitions are tied together by a logic of visual and temporal suppression. The mine becomes synecdoche for one more instance of desert barbarism. Chile does not want to *see* its most recent past, says the archeologist Lautaro. The visuality critiqued here is the visuality of the transition. It is sight defined by

enclosure, blinders, and blindness—the visual metaphysical equivalent to the historical sites of enclosure that this mode of viewing cannot bring itself to *see*.

There is a way in which the Atacama in the film takes on an aleph-like figuration —a point in space from which all other perspectives and spaces can be viewed. But, this is true because, strictly speaking there is no present, as the astrophysicist reiterates to the camera. What we perceive as present was emitted from some other time before. The light from the stars and the light from the camera arrive belatedly—what we experience as instantaneous present is in fact delayed material from the past. In an earlier scene, the camera glides along the cracked tiles of a dried lake, and the narrator reflects on how he used to believe that the origins of life reside somewhere in the interior, under the crusted surface. Now, he believes that perhaps the answers to questions about origins reside from outside, "pero ahora pienso que nuestras raices puedan estar arriba, más allá de la luz." Here the earlier visual framing of the moon's pockmarked surface, and the tessellated cracks in the desert floor form an intertwined surface, like a Möbius strip. The question of origins acquires a topology where interior is necessarily exterior and vice versa. Put in a manner that follows the visual logic of the film, looking out is looking in and—by transitive logic—looking in is looking out.

The regime of visuality set out in *Nostalgia* is one of infinite mediation. There is no transcendental point of view: rather, there are infinitely divisible points of view no longer constrained by modern humanism. The camera functions as a kind of abstract,

free-ranging, and unbound consciousness that, as we will see in regards to the subsequent films in the triptych, is equally capable of speculating about the dynamism of matter and material. The problematic, already visible here in *Nostalgia,* is that the elegiac scenes of material-becoming risk a principle of equivalence that "perfectly parallels and indeed extends the principle of equivalence implied by exchange-values… the cutting up of reality according to the abstract logic of the frame suggests that cinema is both a source and a consequence of fragmentation" (Beller, 105).

VI: Scaling Down in *El Botón de Nácar*

Set in Chile's Southern Patagonia, *El Botón de Nácar* begins with a slow dissolve into an image of a quartz cube fig. 1.[87] It is placed on a black background as if to emphasize its appearance out of the depths. The cube is fissured and marked. The chemical composition of the elements that comprise quartz (SiO_2) forms a fractured structure that obscures a transparent view through the mineral. Even if one does not know that quartz was considered by ancient Greeks to be a kind of gelid ice crystal, transformed by an aeonic period spent in super cool temperatures, the viewer is acutely aware that this object looks not unlike the frozen cubes found in many freezers.

[87] Patricio Guzmán, *El Botón de Nácar*, DVD (First Run/Icarus Films: 2015).

Fig. 2.1: The Quartz Cube from *El Botón de Nácar*

Soon a hand picks up the quartz and turns it slightly to the side, and we are given a new perspective. A dark object appears inside the mineral but remains indecipherable. Meanwhile, the narrator—Guzmán—informs the viewer that this quartz, discovered in the Atacama desert, is 3000 years old and contains one small drop of water. The following scene transports us back to the Atacama, the setting of *Nostalgia de la Luz*, and we see an array of telescopes rhythmically oscillating side to side, mirroring the hand tilting and turning of the quartz in the previous scene. This poetic prologue transitions the viewer from contemplation of desert to ocean—indeed, the telescope scene fades out to the glistening waves of the ocean—but, as the diegetic movements suggest, it does so within the same paradigm of looking that dominated *Nostalgia.*

The central premise of *Botón* is that in Chile the ocean has been an object of historical and ontological neglect. The film posits that the disavowal of the ocean is connected to the disavowals of the *long durée* of indigenous genocide and the violent legacy of the Pinochet regime. To connect these disavowals, the film mobilizes water as

a physical and metaphorical mediator. As narrator, Guzmán makes the mediating quality of water explicit: "The ocean contains the history of all humanity. The sea holds the voices of the Earth and those that come from outer space. Water receives impetus from the stars and transmits it to living creatures" [my translation].[88] For the Selk'nam, Kawésqar, Yamana, and Yagan—groups from the archipelagic Southwest Patagonia—water was and continues to be central to their way of life despite European and Chilean state colonial practices that included but were not limited to execution, dislocation, and religious conversion.[89] By reminding the viewer of alternative conceptions of the ocean, the film posits that other practices of attunement are necessary to more adequately attend to the scales of oceanic history and temporality.

Consider the 3000-year-old quartz cube that contains one tiny drop of water. Ancient Greeks like Pliny considered quartz to be a phase of water found only in places where "the winter snow freezes with the greatest intensity." If we play along with this notion for a moment: how could a water droplet remain in its liquid state if it underwent excessive congelation? The quartz lends a temporal and physical stability to the water drop inside of it. Water is known for its capacity to phase—to change into liquid or solid or gas. The chemical composition of water—the positively charged hydrogen molecules and negatively charged oxygen—allows for a plethora of chemical

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[88] Guzmán, Patricio. *El Botón de Nácar*, DVD. First Run/Icarus Films, 2015.

[89] A plethora of sources have documented these genocidal practices. For a contemporary look at the importance, vitality, and efficiency of Indigenous Southern Patagonia's relationship to water, especially in regards to transit see: Maximiano Castillejo, Alfredo. "From Virtual Survey to Real Prospection: Kawésqar Mobility in the Fuego-Patagonia Seascape Across Terrestrial Passages." *Quartenary International* 435, no. Part B (2017): 114–27.

reactions that make water such a malleable solvent. In the film, the narrator reflects that water is all over the universe, and that comets from distant galaxies likely brought it to Earth billions of years ago. In sum, water is runny and slippery from the molecular to the cosmic to the phenomenological. We know this intuitively, which lends the water-filled quartz an uncanny sense. In the context of the film, the static water might be read as a symbol of the suppressed dynamism of the ocean and the related disavowed histories of colonialism and state-sanctioned terrorism. Or in a more object-oriented inflected approach, we can see how the quartz negates the dynamism of the water. The quartz reifies water into one of its stages, providing a false sense of scalar permanency.

In a later scene from *Botón,* the camera travels through the fjords of Southern Patagonia showing a panoply of water phenomena. In the first several shots we see water moving around the shallow riverbed. Light and clouds (or light that looks like clouds) play off the surface of the water. As if shoving off from shore, the next shot takes us to the center of a river, where the boat's wake creates a vortex that distends the reflection of the clouds and mountains above. Distinct phases of water, liquid, gas, and solid are seen here in one shot, but only via a medium of distortion. In this vortex-like reflection (fig. 2), we see not only other phases of water but also a hint at another kind of *phase space,* a term Timothy Morton uses to define Hyperobjects: "they occupy a high-dimensional *phase space* that makes them impossible to see as a whole on a regular

three-dimensional human-scale basis."[90] The curvature of the water creates a dark chasm at the lower left-hand corner of the screen, which evokes an inaccessible yet physically palpable other-dimensionality of water. This reading might explain the following shot, which is probably the most disorienting of the series. Here the camera appears to be upside down, behind the boat following the wake. The dark-blue bubbling wake water directly behind the boat appears on the upper part of the screen while the "sky" appears on the bottom. If you look closely, the sky appears reflected as if shot with a fish-eye lens. It is as if we have followed the water down its dark vortex to glimpse it in a higher-dimensional phase space. In other words, the film makes use of obscure camera angles and editing to imply that scaling—from the minuscule to the cosmic—not only de-racinates space from familiar coordinates but also appeals to what lies beyond language and representation.

[90] Morton, *Hyperobjects*, 70.

Figure 2.2: The Vortex

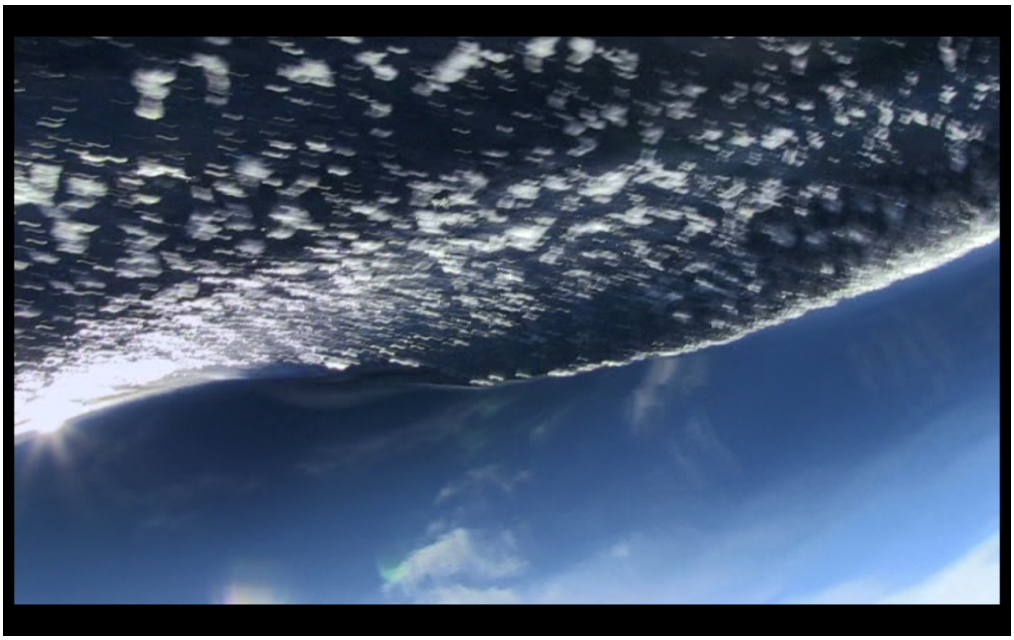

Figure 2.3: Down the vortex into a "Higher-Dimension" Phase-Space

It is possible to conclude that instead of making water more legible the film makes water all the more distant. The canoe-eye view allows for an increased intimacy with the water yet produces an estrangement, not simply for the viewer but for the

objects themselves. And yet this rupture of identification has a way of liberating the inassimilable reality of the phenomena. Just as the "broken-tool" allows a different potency of the tool to appear for Heidegger, so this intimate-distancing allows water to appear "as" it is. After a long take of the sky-blue glacial ridges, the camera pans downward to the lower front of the glacier. Exposure to direct contact with water has carved glassy warps into the azure wall. The camera pans clockwise and slowly retracts, but it is difficult to orient the camera because the curved glacial walls impede depth perception. When water appears at the lower right of the screen, the previous camera movement becomes clear, but the disorientation caused by this shot delays recognition (fig. 3). Water surreptitiously sneaks into the shot and passes as glacier ever so briefly, just as the droplet appears a seamless whole in the quartz cube. Taking on the perspective of the glacier, this scene suggests an alienation of objects from themselves. It is as if the glacier also briefly mistook the water for itself, falsely translating the water into its own Arctic coordinates. In this sense, when objects translate they create fractal networks with other objects—infinite false translations of other objects—at all different scales.

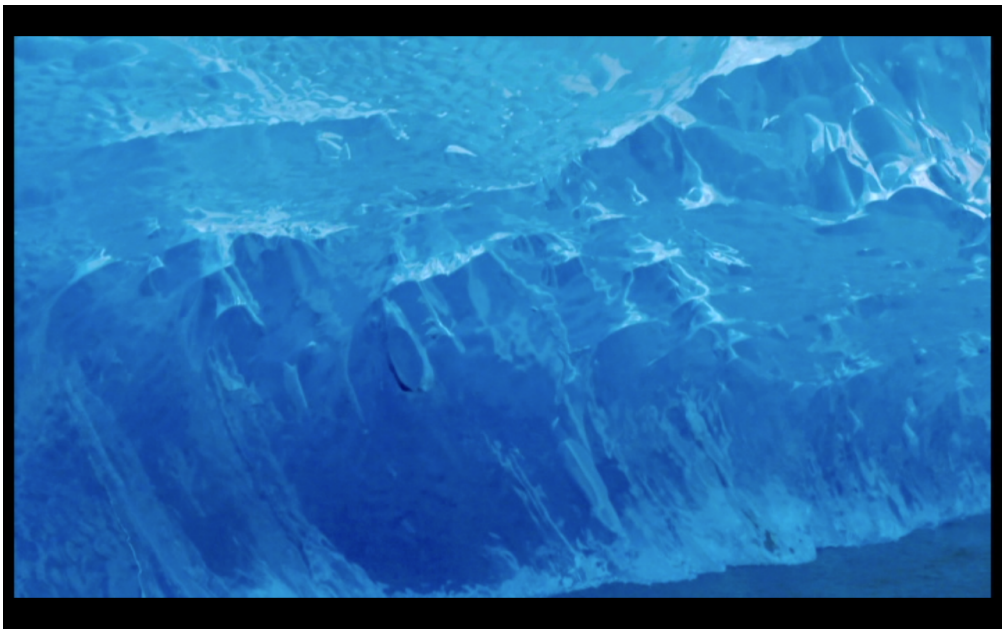

Figure 2.4: The Glacier-Water Optical Illusion

The point here is that the materiality of water *also* makes historical signification possible. Reading the aquatic-filled scenes in terms of *la mirada escalar*—with the tools of visual analysis—allows the phenomena to appear in ways they cannot to the naked human eye; namely in translation, relation, and mediation at various scales. In other words, water in the film is agential. It works as material cipher of forces. Water occupies different planes of being not just for the human but for water itself. Neither the human nor the object encounters other objects fully or as Harman writes, "one entity always encounters another from a certain standpoint, only liberates some of its energies" (Harman, 59). The film cuts the oceanic and aquatic into various scales that reorder the sensible along the lines of what Jane Bennett calls for when attending to *vibrant matter*, "a fuller range of the nonhuman powers circulating around and within bodies"

(Bennett, ix). The filmic form is scalar: it creates fractals, territories, zones, and trajectories at various levels, tiny and awesome, inside and outside, etc.

The film's title entendre comes from Jemmy Button, a Yámana man named by colonizers after he was sold into slavery on Fitzroy's Beagle for the price of a pearl button.[91] While the authority of Guzmán's non-diegetic poetic narration is undermined throughout the film, the director asks questions of the film's Kawésqar interviewees in the manner of an early twentieth century anthropologist. In one scene, Guzmán prompts Gabriela Prieto, one of the few Kawes'qar people with full linguistic fluency, to translate English words into her native tongue. Prieto obliges and translates words like "boat," "mussel," "clam," and "storm" into Kawésqar, eventually narrating how she used to dive for *cholgas* along archipelagic inlets.

These scenes can be read as yet another example of the settler colonial imaginary, with Guzmán playing the role of the melancholic romantic, fantasizing about the tragic elimination of a people and culture while simultaneously documenting its supposed final demise. The fact that the film appears to connect the disavowals of indigenous and dictatorial violence to the contemporary moment *without* any attention to the multifarious, vociferous, and diverse indigenous coalitions that continue to resist today: the Mapuche and their non-indigenous allies contesting neo-extractivist projects like hydroelectric development in Patagonia is of of particular relevance to water would

[91] Jemmy Button met and knew Charles Darwin, and Button plays a not insignificant role in Darwin's reflections. For Darwin's writings on Button, see Darwin's *Correspondence* vols. 8 and 15.

seem to be sufficient evidence to read this film as yet another example of how settler colonialism manages the conditions from which the "subaltern" might speak.[92]

In yet another scene, the camera pans over a group of middle-aged adults, former inmates on Dawson Island during the Pinochet regime, imprisoned for their supposed ties to the Allende government, and confined to the same barracks built by the Chilean state in the nineteenth century to inter, "educate," and "civilize" Southern Patagonian indigenous peoples. Guzmán asks the group of former inmates *how many years* they spent confined on the island. Juxtaposed scales make the viewer intensely aware of the choice to scale, of what thinking in certain scales make possible. The film shows a history of indigenous subjects as political subjects deprived of rights and legitimacy, but moreover, how the structures of thinking these problems are constitutive of Chile itself. In lieu of offering a messianic, hopeful, or conciliatory reading of Chile's violent past, the scale of historical and contemporary wrongs remains an open question, subject to scalar "cuts" in the material world. The map remains partial, open to different cartographies or non-cartographic representations, while matter becomes mobile, intense, and rife with mediating possibilities.

When Guzmán asks twice for the translation of "botón," Gabriela's answer is "nácar"—evidence of the colonial process literally imprinted on the language. Later in the film, scuba divers discover a pearl button adhered to a barnacle-covered railroad tie

[92] See for instance: Silvana Buscaglia, "Materiality and Indigenous Agency: Limits to the Colonial Order (Argentinean Patagonia, Eighteenth-Nineteenth Centuries)," in *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 21, no. 3 (2017): 641–73.

at the bottom of a shallow bay—a remnant from the so-called "death flights" of the Pinochet regime where prisoners were attached to railroad ties, encased in plastic, and thrown into the ocean from a helicopter. El botón de nácar—the pearl button—then is a highly condensed synecdoche for the processes of state violence in the southernmost portion of Chile (which, following the logic of the sign, is representative of the whole of Chile). The tiniest material fragment radiates significance across vast swaths of historical processes.

The example of the pearl button begs the question, what cannot be scaled? Is there anything that refuses or resists scaling? *La mirada escalar* divides, cuts-up, and splits ontological assumptions as well as *ways* of looking at space, place, and material. A veritable infinity of scalar operations displaces stable junctures of subjectivity and geography. In other words, scale emerges from these voids or non-places as a kind of abstract epistemic threshold. Along these lines, Nilo Couret argues that scale in *Nostalgia* presents novel approaches to visualizing concealment and discovery:

> The intersection of cinema and astronomy as forms of spatio-visual epistemic knowledge suggests a different avenue for positing and answering these questions pertaining to the past and to totality by offering a model of visualization less indebted to the figures of concealment and discovery than to the figures of scale and conversion. The image becomes the site not for unearthing and making the past co-present but instead for orienting and making the past intelligible through the projection of our body's spatial and temporal coordinates onto the image (Couret, 69).

Couret argues that "nostalgia manifests in visual form through plays of scale" so that "the image becomes a site not for discovering the past but instead for employing ourselves through scalar conversion along spatio-temporal coordinates belonging

elsewhere" (70). For Couret, scale becomes the manner to narrate history and subjectivity—in short, a metonym for ontology: "we do not live in layers of time but rather scales of time" (80).

VII: Intermission: Scalar Regimes of Visuality

What we have here is something of a conceptual takeover by scale—and in the films, a regime of visuality—that we would do well to question before conceding it as quasi-foundational for all thinking.[93] There is an odd disavowal of the relationship between this all-encompassing scalar thinking and the persistent absence of capital in all these films. In other words, what does "scale" suppress in its conceptual excess and exigencies? Does not the abstraction of scale disavow labor and, more specifically, the mode of production that underpins its regime of visuality?

There is a concordance between the operations of scale and the rise of abstract relations between capital and labor that characterizes late capitalism. In terms of contemporary modes of production, we might say that vision adds value to visual objects. We can envision this in terms of surplus value. The more that images circulate and pass through perceptions, the more value they accrue. The image acquires the quality of commodity fetish precisely because we cannot envision all of these other

[93] Dipesh Chakrabarty also notes that in the so-called Anthropocene specificities of scale tend to get overlooked in intrahuman (in)justice: "We now also have a mode of existence in which we […] are 'indifferent' or 'neutral' to questions of intrahuman justice […]. This is why the need arises to view the human simultaneously on *contradictory* registers: as a geophysical force and as a political agent, as a bearer of rights and as author of actions; subject to both the stochastic forces of nature (being itself one such force collectively) and open to the contingency of individual human experience; belonging at once to differently scaled histories of the plane, of life and species, and of human societies" ("Climate,"12).

perceptions, "this abstracted existence, which exists only in the socially mediated and imagined summation of the work of art's meaning (value) for everyone else (society), accounts for the fetish character of the unique work of art" (Beller, 19). In contemporary society where there is no aura associated with the uniqueness of images, it is not the work of art that accrues value but rather the multimedia platform and its capital investors, share-holders, etc.

For each mode of production, there are also modulations in regimes of perception, or what Beller coins in terms of cinema as "scopic regimes." It is not just that time spent looking is literally labor time of the viewer but that the form of the image undergoes changes so that it is more amenable to accruing attention. Concomitantly, then, we can say that sensoriums are interpolated to "work" and add value in the informal economy of viewing. This process also opens more sites for productive exploitation, extending the space of labor to a multitude of previously unheralded locations.[94] Audio-visual technologies—cinema certainly chief among them—direct, navigate, and channel perception. They interpellate not only at the Althusserian level of identification but also through micro-alterations and "calibrations of the practices of concrete bodies […] as fashion, as sexuality, as temporality, as desire" (Beller, 53). In other words, interpellation also occurs at the level of patterns, flows, and tempos that

[94] This kind of visuality can be contrasted with Nicolas Mirzoeff's "right to look" that takes inspiration from Derrida's phrase "The right to look. The invention of the other." For Mirzoeff this allows for a complex playful intersubjective exchange that does not necessarily operate by creating surplus, "This invention is common, it may be the common, even communist. For there is an exchange, but no creation of a surplus" (Mirzoeff, 1).

hail affects and desires. In the last instance, alterations in the perceptual sensorium reshape consciousness. Brian Massumi echoes Beller's argument when he writes, "A body's relative social position is defined more by *how* money flows through it, not how much money flows through it, and by *what kind* of surplus value its flow allows the body to accumulate, not whether it accumulates any" (Massumi, 203).

If scale implies the delineation of space, trajectories, and intensities that are *made* and inhabited, then *la mirada escalar* in these films should also be read in terms of the labor and consumption process. This ocular regime exploits the technological possibilities of modern cinematography to make palpable forces that are not visible on their own in order to repartition the sensible. The technological *raison d'être* of this mode of visuality is to expand and multiply the sensorium through a potentially infinite series of repartitions. However, it should not be dismissed that visuality is always tied to authority—whether in favor of or in resistance to. As Nicolas Mirzoeff argues, "This ability to assemble a visualization manifests the authority of the visualizer. In turn, the authorizing of authority requires permanent renewal in order to win consent as the 'normal,' or everyday, because it is always already contested" (Mirzoeff, 2). As bodies are built into deterritorialized agents in the new age of media, they become extensions of the technological sensorium, just as the reverse is also true.[95] The image in circulation, Beller writes, "will cary the logic of exhange-value, but for capital" (Beller,

[95] It is not therefore simply a one-way street of deterritorializing liberation or capture in the inter-mixing of bodies and technology. We have to look at specific instances, and pay attention to how and in what ways deterriorialization occurs alongside territorialization.

52). Visual scaling also regulates the sensations, but does so at the cost of fetishisizing a kind of vision/image that in the end may "serve as a support system for our reality itself: an illusion which is structuring our effective, real social relations and which is masking thereby some insupportable, real, impossible kernel" (Zizek, 205).

VIII. Act Three: Todo se vuelve rentable or *Cordillera de los Sueños*

Cordillera takes off from the same structural premises that guide the trilogy. The Andes mountains have been an object and space of calculated societal neglect. One of the recurring allegorical references from interviewees like the sculptors Francisco Gazitúa and Vicente Gajardo, as well as Violeta Parra and Jorge Baradit—artists, we might say, who have also suffered a certain cultural neglect yet are often defined in terms of the national—is how the Andes make Chile not unlike an island—protected, surrounded, and isolated by the vast mountain chain that makes up eighty percent of the country's territorial mass. Judging from my own experience, similar comparisons are commonly voiced throughout Chile. According to many, the "unique" isolation and protection of the Andes explains Chilean idiomatic phrases, linguistic cadence, poetic expression, culinary peculiarities, and cautious cultural embrace of foreign trends. It is therefore somewhat odd to utilize celebrated artists to expound such familiar excursuses as evidence for the film's structuring hypothesis that the Andes are either misunderstood or understudied in popular culture. Vicente Gajardo, for instance, emphasizes the *enclosing* physical and cultural ramifications of the mountain chain, "La

cordillera es un gran cerco horizontal más largo que alto pese a sus 8 mil metros, 6 mil metros que alcanza aquí en Chile. Está allí presente ese reference, pero más que físico yo también creo que es un referente cultural […] que no puedo definir, lo respiro." Jorge Baradit, punk-rocker turned writer and now member of the Constitutional Convention suggests "me gustaría sentir que la cordillera es como un mar que nos convierten en Isla […] me gustan las Islas porque crean culturas que son cerradas y poderosas…con mucha identidad local."

Perhaps unintentionally, the repetition of Andes as geographically deterministic of Chilean identity dovetails with the proliferation of mimetic representations of the landscape. The aesthetic renderings that give Guzmán, as director and subjective narrator, the most pause are popular depictions—the tiny matchbox "Andes" and the expansive murals in the Santiago metro. The former are framed in isolation—the colorful iterations of the unchanged design appear on a black background. The latter are always shown situated—as they are—in areas of transit, constantly passed by and ignored. Here, too, there is a juxtaposition of scale, whereby the enormousness of the physical phenomena of the Andes is posited as so omnipresent that it overwhelms the valences of its micro-physics and, of course, micro-politics. The Andes become a visual and virtual commodity with their own set of ostensible material enclosures—seen and consumed on matchboxes and subway stations. In other words, they becomes a spectacle, excessively referential but lacking, in a sense, referent.

The middle portion of the film takes what at first appears to be an unrelated detour through the biographical recollections of Patricio Guzmán—his childhood home, where he lived when he filmed *La Batalla,* the National Stadium where in 1962 he witnessed Chile finish third in the World Cup and in 1973 was imprisoned; and extensive footage, mostly taken by Pablo Salas, of brutal police violence and pacific resistance in the streets of Santiago. The film toggles between Guzmán's exilic absence from Chile and the footage from the dictatorship era filmed by Salas—showing how the feminist, popular, university, and theatrical public protests and demonstrations are met again and again with the logic of the state and police. The violence of the latter contrasts with the silence of the dictatorship and the transition: "Siempre ha sido un exceso" says Salas, "nunca ha habido una mea culpa y eso es lo peor y lo más grave que nos pasa ahora." Worse, rather than a mea culpa, the transition sold out the country to private interests and speculators so that, according to Baradit, "todo se vuelve rentable," including of course, the Andes themselves.

Here the film reorients the viewer's gaze back to the mountains by tying together their neglect and commodification through a historical account of the dictatorship—the 1980 Constitution, and the economic model of neoliberalism. In short, the Andes work as allegory for the privatization of the country writ large. "Ghost trains" carrying copper from across the enormous mountain chain run at all times and on all days through shanty towns with no names. The most immaculate "natural" areas have been

wardened off from the public, owned and accessed by a select few. Private infrastructure connects these McMansions—not shown in the film—to the airport and the most privileged *comunas* of Santiago. The rich, in other words, set foot on what they can own. In a later scene the camera pans above the hollowed-out and waste-filled armatures of houses in an old neighborhood of Santiago while a military parade marches through the streets for the annual Independence Day celebrations. The names of the disappeared, some of which are emblazoned into the Andean stone cobbles that still line downtown streets of Santiago, are walked over (pisado) and ignored by a society still dominated by the military and economic elite that have carved out their own private Chile.

In *Cordillera,* the last film in the triptych, it is as if the ineluctable realities of neoliberal Chile have hit the narrator the hardest. While filming the now empty former offices of Pinochet's generals, Guzmán wonders out loud if neoliberalism heralds the only universal future, "Uno por uno, arrasaron con todo. Eso fue el principio del fin del país que yo amaba. Hoy otros economistas neoliberales siguen presentes en cada gobierno chileno. Me temo que el fenomeno es planetario." From the wandering camera angles of the former ex-Pinochet offices overlooking the streets and skyscrapers, the camera, somewhat predictably over out the window to the streets below and pans over various scenes of detritus—trash, scrap metal, cast-off cars. With more than a touch of romanticism, the filmmaker ends by positing his own desire to start anew in contrast to

the historical heaviness of the past and its seemingly unending repetition of violence, shown again and again not only in Salas's old footage but in footage of Salas himself filming contemporary skirmishes between the military and civilians.

From whence does Guzmán, narrator and filmmaker, suggest that this imagined site of new beginnings can emerge? The answer, of course, is predicated on and is predictably scalar: astronomical fragments. First, the camera returns to Guzmán's childhood home, panning from the detritus that fills the interior then to the exterior awash in afternoon sunlight, as if touched up by visual enhancements. As the camera moves across the interior of the home, focusing on the waving geometrical patterns that light leaves on the floor—a scene reminiscent of the nostalgic beginning of *Nostalgia*—two quick photographs of the director's mother flash onscreen. After several long takes of the cordillera the narrator informs the viewer that his mother used to tell him that meteorites—"small pieces of the universe"—had the special ability to grant wishes. The final filmic adieu is a wish that Guzmán places upon these meteorites—that Chile recover its youth and joy. That is, from the ruins of the *oikos*—both familiar and national—the narrator locates the promise of another order, but one that resides on the material virtuality of an outside animated by an interior. There is an admixture here of the Freudian primal scene (the childhood home, the mother, and related affects, etc.) and the Kantian sublime. In other words, the film imagines a kind of time-space that is unbounded (or unbinds)—pre-symbolic or unrepresentable, yet mediated by a fragment

that throws into relief the structural antagonisms of society (inside, outside, personal, national, etc.). Looking in is again looking out, as a kind of abstract, free-ranging, and unbound consciousness. In short, the ending of *Cordillera* presents the viewer with a tableaux of what I have been elucidating as *la mirada escalar.* The meteorite fragment is but one scalar husk or coil of the national. But, what this solution fails to *see* is how precisely this kind of visuality—and the concomitant unstable and transversal subjectivity—is already bound up in the coils of the neoliberal order. While *Cordillera,* perhaps more directly than the previous two films, locates the political ailments of the twenty-first century in the various privations and privatizations of life, it does so in and by a scopic regime that, as I have hoped to show, conforms to dominant contemporary visual modes of control.

What the previous analyses suggest is that while the triptych films extend the archive within the film, the architecture and ordering of audio-visual material escalates —through whorls, twists, and involutions of scale—the epistemic modes of visuality that characterize late capitalism. Put differently, these films implicitly reiterate the "unrealities of visuality's authority" (Mirzoeff, 5) insofar as the conditions of thinking the latter go unthought and unchallenged. Instead, the rearrangement of space—the modes of visuality that rearrange space—do not necessarily provoke a *dissensus* in the spatial organization of the sensible, but paradoxically reflect the already established *consensus.* This analysis points towards the impossibility of conceiving autonomous

forms of art, further confirming Néstor García Canclini's thesis that "the interweaving of art practices with everything else throws doubt on the theoretical tools and methods that have been used to understand art in modern sociology and postmodern aesthetics" (Canclini, xvi).

The interweaving of art practices with everything else, the absence of the state and popular social movements, and the proliferation of melancholic visions of the past can all be read in these films as traumatic instances of lack in contemporary Chile. The scopic regime, *la mirada escalar*, devised in these films, sets out from absences to defraud any linear, synchronous, and ahistorical temporality by escalating the powers of the visible—i.e. the kino-eye—and making visible less visible powers. Less than a narration of Chilean history, I have attempted to read these films along the lines of what Paul Virilio in *War and Cinema* has called "the history of changing fields of perception" (7) and their dialectical relationship with late capital(ism). While the triptych films identify the historical structures of the past, an analysis of scale and la mirada escalar allows us to glimpse the present structures of visual modes. The horizon of the past appears as such an indelible concern for and in these films that the present horizon becomes effaced.

CHAPTER 2:

Images After the Accident: Plasticity and Process in New Argentine Cinema

> *This gradual existential and biological incline, which can only ever transform the subject into itself, does not, however, obviate the powers of plasticity of this same identity that houses itself beneath an apparently smooth surface like a reserve of dynamite hidden under the peach skin of being for death. As a result of serious trauma, or sometimes for no reason at all, the path splits and a new, unprecedented persona comes to live with the former person, and eventually takes up all the room. An unrecognizable persona whose present comes from no past, whose future harbors nothing to come, an absolute existential improvisation. A form born of the accident, born by accident, a kind of accident. A funny breed. A monster whose apparition cannot be explained away as any genetic anomaly. A new being comes into the world for a second time, out of a deep cut that opens in a biography.*—Catherine Malabou
>
> *Man is a slow being, who is only made possible by fantastic speeds.*—Henri Michaux

In a 1991 address, shown on the nationalized television channel just ten days before a visit to the United States, Argentine President Carlos Menem declared that "para beneficio principal para los más desposeídos […] a partir de hoy rompemos la telaraña del Estado prebendario, asfixiante e arbitrario que trabó la vida productiva nacional con un conjunto de innecesarias regulaciones."[1] In this speech, Menem attempted to re-signify Peronist policies of development directed towards the working class into a narrative in which over-regulation was preventing national economic growth. The goal of his neoliberal reforms was to minimize the presence of the State in order to manufacture the conditions for more dynamic movement of capital while at the

[1] Early reactions noted the ominous changes that economic deregulation portended. See for example: "Carlos Menem decreta una histórica liberalización de la economía argentina," by José Comas, published in *El País*.

same time maintaining a semblance of national sovereignty. Menem's executive decree attempted to do this by eliminating import and export quotas as well as professional fees and commissions, permitting the importation of cars and pharmaceuticals, and removing numerous government agencies from owning and regulating industries. Graciela Inda and Celia Duek describe the neoliberal reforms—undertaken during the dictatorship—and instituted under Menem as a *new* program:

> El nuevo programa neoliberal tenía objetivos mucho más amplios y radicales que los planes previous. No sólo se pretendía frenar la inflación sino también activar un conjunto de medidas que profundizaran o inauguran, según el caso, una *reforma estructural*. Esta reforma comprendía: privatización de empresas públicas, descentralización de las funciones del Estado, equilibrio de las cuentas fiscales, flexibilización laboral, desregulación y liberalización de la economía y apertura comercial y financiera.[2]

Here deregulation refers to a project of economic restructuring in which the regulating power of the State—at the level of labor protections, public-works projects, and nationalized industries—is dismantled.

In the same year, the World Bank published *Urban Policy and Economic Development: An Agenda for the 1990's*, a document that lauded the diminishment of the State and conceptualized the public sector as an "enabler" of the market. Cecilia Zanetta explains that "sound urban policies were now defined as those aimed at eliminating barriers that restricted the productivity of economic agents, both formal and informal, so as to maximize their contribution to the national economy."[3] Mike Davis points out

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[2] Duek and Inda, "La Argentina rentístico-financiera," 23

[3] Zanetta, *The Influence of the World Bank*, 194.

that the fetishization of urban productivity actually prompted and resulted in further privatization to basic services like utilities.[4]

The financial crisis that exploded the value of the peso and resulted in the sharpest fall in GDP of any capitalist country since World War II was one consequence of the Argentine economic restructuring in the latter half of the twentieth century.[5] While the cataclysmic results of the monetary crisis in Argentina were one of the most visible instances of the failed project of liberalism, they were reflective of a larger process of inequity writ large across the continent. In the 1980s poverty in Latin America rose fifty percent, and the average incomes of the working population in Argentina fell by thirty percent (Davis, 156). Modes and locations of production shifted. As Mike Davis notes, while East Asian urbanization "preserves a quasi-classical relationship between manufacturing growth and urban migration […] since the mid 1980's the great industrial cities of the South — Bombay, Johannesburg, Buenos Aires, Belo Horizonte, and São Paolo — have all suffered massive plant closures and tendential deindustrialization" (13). Davis also points out that the process of globalization is equatable to over-urbanization which is "driven by the reproduction of

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[4] Davis, *Planet of Slums,* 140-1.

[5] Stites Mor writes, "While the Argentine government undertook highly controversial policies to limit the macroeconomic impact of the banking system's impending insolvency, individual citizens faced first restricted access to their own savings and then a dramatic devaluation of the Argentine currency. Pensioners watched their life savings disappear just weeks after investment bankers had successfully sent their own assets overseas. Vast portions of the middle class began to struggle to meet daily needs, and many quickly fell beneath the poverty level. Protesters filled the streets banging on pots and pans, some even vandalizing and setting fire to buildings housing banks and foreign companies, such as the Bank of Boston and McDonald's" (Stites Mor, 2).

poverty not the supply of jobs" (16). One of the consequences of this process in Latin America is the emergence of "peri-urbanization" or a process in which the distinction of urban and rural is eroded, "lower rates of metropolitan growth have coincided with a more intense circulation of commodities, people, and capital between the city center and its hinterland with ever more diffuse frontiers between the urban and rural, and a manufacturing deconcentration towards the metropolitan periphery, and in particular beyond into the peri-urban spaces or penumbra that surround mega-cities" (11).

Over a century ago, Marx predicted how the logic of capital movement would erode spatial barriers:

> *Circulation time thus appears as a barrier to the productivity of labour* = an increase in necessary labour time = a decrease in surplus labour time = a decrease in surplus value = an obstruction, a barrier to the self-realization process [*Selbstverwertungsprozess*] of capital. Thus, while capital must on one side strive to tear down every spatial barrier to intercourse, i.e. to exchange, and conquer the whole earth for its market, it strives on the other side to annihilate this space with time, i.e. to reduce to a minimum the time spent in motion from one place to another. The more developed the capital, therefore, the more extensive the market over which it circulates, which forms the spatial orbit of its circulation, the more does it strive simultaneously for an even greater extension of the market and for greater annihilation of space by time.[6]

Another way to put this would be to say that capitalism deterritorializes its spatial conditions. Here "deterritorialize" should not be read as always an avenue of escape or resistance but rather as the transformation of a particular phenomenon via its decontextualization: "the multinationals fabricate a kind of deterritorialized smooth space in which points of occupation as well as poles of exchange become quite

[6] Marx, *Grundrisse*, 32.

independent of the classical paths to striation" (Deleuze and Guattari, 492). This is not to say that the traditional hierarchical relationships of capital and labor have been abolished, but rather that surplus labor is no longer localizable strictly in labor relations, "it is as though human alienation through surplus labor were replaced by a generalized 'machinic enslavement' such that one may furnish surplus-value without doing any work" (ibid). Capitalism in its neoliberal late-capitalist iteration abolishes distance to alter the means of producing surplus wealth.

I. Introducing Destructive Plasticity: Technology and the Integral Accident

In his formulation of the dialectical relationship between technology and the accident, Paul Virilio proposes a temporal chronology in which the latter is both unforeseen and integral to the process of transformation.[7] In an elusive way, technology pre-destines the future but in such a way that it cannot be explained beforehand.[8] The accident allows "one to see the advent of something in what seems to happen unexpectedly" (Armitage, 171). Technological innovations, particularly those of the war-machine (i.e., the nuclear bomb, carbon production, and ecological disaster) present the inevitability of the global accident: "With the current world-wide revolution in communication and telematics, acceleration has reached its physical limit, the speed of

[7] Derrida writes, "between the invention that finds what was already there and the one that produces new mechanisms or new spaces" (Derrida, 1984: 21)

[8] "The accident is an inverted miracle, a secular miracle, a revelation. When you invent the ship, you also invent the shipwreck; when you invent the plane you also invent the plane crash; and when you invent electricity, you invent electrocution…Every technology carries its own negativity, which is invented at the same time as technical progress" (Virilio, 89).

electromagnetic waves. So there is the risk not of a local accident in a particular location, but rather of a global accident that would affect if not the entire planet, then at least the majority of people connected by technologies" (Virilio, 92-93).[9] For Virilio, accidents are characterized by speed and the scale of its integration (the effects). The Y2K bug and the 1987 stock-market crash represented global computer network accidents, and should be read as symptomatic of a transformation within the order in which the accident occurs —the "integral accident" happens, in a sense, *in* technological time rather than in local geographical space.[10]

The profound changes in technology and lived environments necessarily produce accidents at speeds that disrupt the coordinates of being in the world. The task of contemporary theory, for Virilio, is to account for the "morphological irruptions" in physical consciousness implied by the speed of modern society.[11] Half a century earlier, Walter Benjamin diagnosed a similar problematic. Benjamin saw in modern society a form of social organization that causes traumatic experiential shocks in quotidian

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[9] "With the tele-technologies of general interactivity we are entering the age of the accident of the present" (Virilio, 1997: 14).

[10] John Armitage suggests that "the weapons of the military-scientific complex are not merely responsible for integral accidents like the 1987 world stock market crash, accidents brought about by the failure of automated program trading, but also for the fact that in the very near future, it will no longer be war that is the continuation of politics by other means, it will be the integral accident that is the continuation of politics by other means" (4-5).

[11] Armitage, John, editor. *Paul Virilio: From Modernism to Hypermodernism and Beyond*. Sage Publications, 2000.

activities like walking through crowds,[12] amusement parks, or casinos. Buck-Morss illuminates Benjamin's thesis:

> Being "cheated out of experience" has become the general state, as the synaesthetic system is marshaled to parry technological stimuli in order to protect both the body from the trauma of accident and the psyche from the trauma of perpetual shock. As a result, the system reverses its role. Its goal is to numb the organism, to deaden the senses, to repress memory…In this situation of "crisis in perception," it is no longer a question of educating the crude ear to hear music, but of giving it back hearing. It is no longer a question of training the eye to see beauty, but of restoring "perceptibility."[13]

The concept of "aesthetics" is corporeal in origin, though this genealogy is often repressed. Following Terry Eagleton, "Aesthetics is born as a discourse of the body,"[14] but the concept has since taken a circuitous route to becoming solely about art. Frederic Jameson quipped that aesthetics occupies a place in discourse as "a kind of sandbox to which one consigns all those vague things […] under the heading of irrational […] [where] they can be monitored and, in case of need, controlled (the aesthetic is in any case conceived of as a kind of safety valve for irrational impulses."[15] The historical corollary to the the daily "shocks" of life, according to Buck-Morss, was anesthetics which took the form of drugs and other intoxicants that produce biochemical transformations as well as phantasmagoria, the glowing, glittering, fantasy spaces of sensual pleasure that Benjamin writes about in his Paris shopping-arcades pieces.

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[12] "The shock experience which the passer-by has in the crowd corresponds to what the worker 'experiences' at his machine" (Benjamin, 1968: 176).

[13] Buck-Morss, Susan. *Aesthetics and Anaesthetics, Part I*. 11 Dec. 2013, https://www.susanbuckmorss.info/text/aesthetics-and-anaesthetics-part-i/#fnref:56.

[14] Eagleton, "The Ideology of the Aesthetic," 327.

[15] Fredric Jameson. *Late Marxism: Adorno, or, the Persistence of the Dialectic* (New York: Verso, 1990), p. 232

For both Benjamin and Virilio,[16] the modern morphological irruption par excellence is picnolepsy (from the Greek, *picnos*: frequent)—a condition of constant interruption that causes lapses in consciousness, gaps in time, "fleeting instances of life escaping." Virilio describes a typical picnoleptic moment at breakfast:

> The lapse occurs frequently at breakfast and the cup dropped and overturned on the table is its well known consequence. The absence lasts only a few seconds…The senses function but are nevertheless closed to external impressions. Conscious time comes together again automatically, forming a continuous time without apparent breaks.[17]

Interruptions punctuate the sensory experience of subjectivity through deprivation causing the picnolept to "make equivalents out of what he has seen and what he has not been able to see" (Virilio, 8). In this way, picnolepsy precludes and demands a way to smooth over the relentless interrupting intrusions of modern society, so that "the unprecedented limits imposed on subjective vision" become a universalizing phenomenon, "merely the reproduction of an intense blindness that will become the latest and last form of industrialization: the industrialization of the non-gaze."[18]

Due to its market dominance and ideological influence, Hollywood cinema ends up being an ideal medium to assess the picnoleptic situation. Examples abound, but one

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[16] John Armitage writes, "Important here is that Virilio's concerns about the aesthetics of disappearance and the crises of the physical dimension are not exercised by the textual construction of totalizing intellectual 'explanations'. Rather, they are exercised by the strategic positioning of productive interruption and the creative dynamics of what he, following Churchill calls the 'tendency'. As Virilio maintains in *The Lost Dimension,* the rule in the overexposed city is the disappearance of aesthetics and whole dimensions into a militarized and cinematographic field of retinal persistence, interruption, and technological space-time" (Armitage, 6).

[17] Virlio, Paul. *The Aesthetics of Disappearance*. Semiotext(e), 2009, p. 1

[18] Virilio, Paul. *The Vision Machine*. Translated by Julie Rose. Indiana University Press, 1994, p. 73.

way to gain appreciation for dramatic historical transformations of speed is through attention to trends in cinematic editing. David Bordwell tracks the average shot length (ASL) of American films from roughly the classical Hollywood era (1930-60) up until the turn of the millennium. What he finds is that "far from rejecting traditional continuity in the name of fragmentation and incoherence, the new style amounts to an intensification of established techniques" (Bordwell, 16). In Bordwell's estimate the ASL of most classic films hovered around eight to eleven seconds whereas by the turn of the century it is not uncommon to find ASL average closer to two seconds. Overall run-times have not varied nearly as much, meaning that contemporary films often have upwards of 3,000 shots, whereas classical films typically range between 400 and 700. Bordwell's broader point here is that the rapid cutting and fast dialogue implied by such procedures do not cause some breakdown of spatial or temporal continuity but rather require that image sequences "be even more unambiguous" (17). This intensification of speed and minimal equivocation are part of the same process.

Generally speaking, in Hollywood-style cinema the rules of narrative coherence, shot/reverse shots, and continuity editing are rarely violated so that the artifice may be enjoyed without forcing the viewer to confront the film's artificiality. These principles stipulate that the film's stylistic features ought to be subsumed to the narrative structure. In other words, style is only present insofar as it enhances the comprehension or entertainment value of the film product. Therefore, shot composition, sound

distribution, and editing tend to create recognizable spatio-temporal coordinates. Bordwell shows that these techniques work just as well sped up; the image just has to been even more recognizable.

What is important to see here is how this kind of editing process tends towards the disavowal of the accidental as the ontological structuring possibility of transformation. Hollywood cinema edits out its own possibility, *any* possibility, by denying the *negative* potential immanent to the accident. In other words, cinema works like the consciousness that returns to the spilled coffee mug to construct an absent temporal continuum, except that Hollywood cinema does the work of "forming a continuous time without apparent breaks" (Virilio, 1) for the viewer in fast unambiguous images. This technique is not in essence ideologically reactionary, however it does establish the illusion of spatial and temporal continuity. Put differently, there is no "telaraña" that obstructs the relatively easy passage from one space to the next. Therefore, even if a film's narrative content suggests limited spatial access for the viewer, formal mechanisms of cutting or shot composition create the illusion of seamless transition.[19] There is a way to understand shorter and less ambiguous shots as confirmation of Virilio's thesis that "people no longer believe their eyes…their faith in

[19] Consider the shot/reverse-shot structure. The establishing shot shows two characters sitting across from each other at a table in a diner. The next shot shows a close-up of one of the characters speaking to the camera. The viewer knows that the character is speaking to the person across the table not only because of the shot that established their locations, but because of the convention to cut to the listening character in the subsequent shot.

perception [has become] slave to the faith in the technical sightline."[20] This of course is precisely the process that Catherine Malabou proposes to understand through the concept of "plasticity" when she asks: "what should we do so that consciousness of the brain does not purely and simply coincide with the spirit of capitalism?"[21]

Following Spinoza and recent trends in neuroscience Malabou proposes that the brain is an affective "plastic" organ that "gets formed, and is formative" (Malabou, 20). When a traumatic or accidental experience occurs, neural circuits can deform: "the path splits and a new, unprecedented persona comes to live with the former person."[22] In *Ontology of the Accident,* Malabou suggests that neurological traumas—brain injury, Alzheimers, dementia, PTSD, etc.—are all species of the accident.[23] The difficulty in philosophizing the accident is that it is a law that is "simultaneously logical and biological, but a law that does not allow us to anticipate its instances" (ibid). Neurobiology tends to treat injury events "as contingent facts, subject to chance, with no existential potential for the subject" (29-30). What this approach obscures is the immanent transformative potential that subtends the accident—"the ability to

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[20] Quoted in Armitage, p. 7.

[21] Malabou, Catherine. *What Should We Do With Our Brain?* Translated by Sebastian Rand. Fordham University Press, 2008, p. 12.

[22] Malabou, Catherine. *Ontology of the Accident: An Essay on Destructive Plasticity*. Translated by Carolyn Shread. Polity Press, 2012, p. 1.

[23] "The individual's history is cut definitively, breached by the meaningless accident, an accident that is impossible to re-appropriate through either speech or recollection" (Malabou, 29)

transform oneself under the effect of destruction is a possibility, an existential structure" (ibid).

Pushed to its limit, Malabou's concept of "destructive plasticity" envisages a "perpetual deconstruction of (former) *forms* of being/becoming."[24] Plasticity flourishes in the neither here nor there dusk of destruction and invention.[25] Neither one nor an other, "Plasticity is a "smuggler" (8), in Malabou's exposition, alive as both concept and its persistent, transformative movement that gives and receives form, that annihilates itself, and that spontaneously (re)organizes its fragments."[26] For Malabou, plasticity differs from flexibility in that the former does not merely adapt—to, say, conditions of liberal governmentality and economic crisis—but produces and invents new forms.[27]

II. Returns of the Reel: Theories of Cinema and Destructive Plasticity

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[24] Judy, Ron. Review of *The Ontology of the Accident* by Catherine Malabou. no. 1, Dec. 2017, pp. 155–60.

[25] According to Malabou, plasticity invites misinterpretations along the lines of liberal labor flexibility, "We are entirely ignorant of plasticity but not at all of flexibility. In this sense, plasticity appears as the coming consciousness of flexibility" (What, 12). Rather, "Acknowledgment of the role of destructive plasticity allows us to radicalize the deconstruction of subjectivity, to stamp it anew" (37).

[26] Bhandar, Brenna, and Goldberg-Hiller, Johnathan. "Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing: Dialectic, Destruction and Deconstruction (Review)." *Theory & Event*, vol. 14, no. 1, 2011, https://doi.org/doi:10.1353/tae.2011.0008.

[27] Plasticity is post-human in that it implies the (always already) destabilization of the category of the human. Slavoj Zizek notes, "the rise of posthuman agents and the Anthropocene epoch are two aspects of the same phenomenon: at exactly the time when humanity becomes the main geological factor threatening the entire balance of the life of Earth, it begins to lose its basic features and transforms itself into posthumanity" (46).

What kind of form might a cinema of destructive plasticity take?[28] We might begin by taking clues from film critic André Bazin,[29] who argued that the camera and by extension cinema are inherently realist mediums. In "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," Bazin proposes that film is the only art form that replaces the artist as the prime mediator between the object and the representation: "All the arts are based on the presence of man, only photography derives an advantage from his absence" (Bazin, 8).[30]

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[28] For Deleuze, cinema functioned not unlike Malabou's concept of cerebral plasticity. "The brain is the screen," Deleuze quipped, [and] "the circuits and links of the brain do not pre-exist the stimuli, granules or corpuscles which trace them…Cinema, precisely because it puts the image in movement, or rather endows the image with a self-movement, never ceases to trace and retrace the circuits of the brain" (1998: 49).

[29] There has been somewhat of a Bazinian revival in the past decade. Bazin rose to prominence after WWII and was considered a renowned film critic in France. He was one of the founders of *Cahiers du Cinéma* where he published film reviews and theoretical essays most of which can be found in his two volume edition *What is Cinema?* Though Bazin has been inducted into the pantheon of Film Studies, until recently he was thought of as a "naive literalist" (Lowenstein, 55). This version of Bazin was criticized—especially by theoreticians in the post 1970s mold of psychoanalytic film theory—for missing the ideological underpinnings of cinema. It is true that Bazin favored realism or filmic objectivity over other forms of cinema. For instance, Bazin distrusted montage on the grounds that its dynamic juxtaposition of images hurtles the viewer along a predetermined path, the aim being to construct a synthetic reality in support of a propagandistic or partial message. Instead he preferred "[the] long uninterrupted take for its capacity to simulate the most elemental aspect of nature—its continuousness" (Cardullo, 9).

Recently, however, a different Bazin has begun to emerge in Film Studies circles. Many scholars suggest that Bazin has been the victim of a reductive and selective reading. Dudley Andrew and Justin Horton point to Bazin's statement in "An Aesthetic of Reality" that "realism can be achieved in one way: through artifice." As Horton writes, "here…Bazin is anything but naive; in fact he explicitly acknowledges the constructedness of cinema" (Horton, 27). Bazin's larger point is not that cinema captures reality transparently but rather that methods of realism and neorealism introduce ambiguity into the image, causing "a more active mental attitude on the part of the spectator" (Bazin, 36). This re-appraisal of Bazin is at least in part attributable to Deleuze who not only praises Bazin in his Cinema books, but shares his opinion that neorealism represented a break in the history of cinema. For critics like Deleuze and Bazin, neorealism marked a major rupture in cinematic expression because, "this is the cinema of the seer no longer the agent […] What defines neorealism is the build up of purely optical situations which are fundamentally distinct from the sensory motor situations of the action-image in old realism" (Deleuze, 5).

[30] For a more thorough discussion see Horton, Justin. "Mental Landscapes: Bazin, Deleuze, and Neorealism (Then and Now)." *Cinema Journal*, vol. 52, no. 2, Winter 2013, pp. 23–45, https://doi.org/doi:10.1353/cj.2013.0005.

Though the photographer or filmmaker sets up the shot(s), the filmstrip mediates between reality and art, "For the first time, between the originating object and its reproduction there intervenes only the instrumentality of a nonliving agent" (Bazin, 13). Writing about Italian neorealist films Bazin famously quipped, "Neorealism […] tends to give back to the cinema an ambiguity of the real" (Bazin, 37). This ambiguity of the real is related to the capacity of the non-human camera to pick up the contingent and aleatory. "The photographic encounter with the world," writes James Lastra, "is always a gamble of sorts through which traditional representational forms like the portrait open themselves structurally to the aleatory, the idiosyncratic, the unintelligible" (Lastra, 2).

Deleuze argues that, though often criticized for his objectivist readings of neorealism evident in lines like "The photographic image is the object itself" Bazin presents an alternative reading of neorealism as a technique that makes the "real" indeterminate: "Against those who defined Italian neorealism by its social content, Bazin put forward the fundamental requirement of formal aesthetic criteria. According to him, it was a matter of a new form of reality, said to be dispersive, elliptical, errant or wavering, working in blocs, with deliberately weak connections and floating events. The real was no longer represented but 'aimed at.'"[31] The revolution of neorealism for Bazin, here interpreted by Deleuze, was not so much its capacity to capture the veracity

[31] Deleuze, *The Time-Image*, 1.

of the real but rather the obverse: its resistance to cinematic actualization. Instead of classical techniques of shot reverse shot or Eisenstinian montage, the viewer of the neorealist film must decide for herself what is relevant onscreen. As Bazin says, "since everything in the film frame can be seen with equal clarity, the audience has to decide for itself what is meaningful or interesting" (Bazin, 39).

It is precisely in the neorealist treatment of the city and space that Deleuze sees the possibility of the mutation of the image: "In the city which is being demolished or rebuilt, neorealism makes any-space-whatever proliferate—urban cancer, undifferentiated fabrics, pieces of waste-ground—which are opposed to the determined spaces of the old realism."[32] Deleuze borrows the concept "any-space-whatever" from Pascal Augé and develops it alongside an analysis of the close-up in the affect-image chapter in *The Movement-Image*.[33] In films like *Pickpocket* (1959), Deleuze identifies a transformation of cinematic space characteristic of postwar modern cinema:

> Longchamp and the Gare d'Lyon are vast fragmented spaces, transformed through rhythmic continuity shots which correspond to the affects of the thief. Ruin and salvation are played on an amorphous table whose successive parts await the connection which they lack from our gestures, or rather from the the mind. Space itself has left behind its own coordinates and its metric relation. It is a tactile space…[34]

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[32] Deleuze, *The Movement-Image, 212.*

[33] Deleuze relates both terms to what Peirce called "firstness" which, due to its nature, is notoriously difficult to define: "It is not a sensation, a feeling or idea. Firstness is thus the category of the Possible: it gives a proper consistency to the possible, it expresses the possible without actualizing it, whilst making it a complete mode" (98). By contrast, secondness is on the order of the actualized "in particular states of things, determinate space-times, geographical and historical milieux, collective agents or individual people. It is here that the action-image is born and developed" (98).

[34] Deleuze, *The Movement-Image,* 109.

In these any-space-whatever(s) [*espace quelconque*], space becomes no longer and not yet comprehensible under the dominant hermeneutic procedures. For this reason, Deleuze identifies this cinematic technique as privileging the possible. Characters in the films Deleuze cites tend to be passive, overwhelmed, and reactive. They inhabit sensory-motor schemas that break-down, presenting the characters and audiences with "a pure optical and aural image." Put differently, we might say that what Deleuze identifies is a cinema concerned primarily with emergence: "Any-space-whatever is not an abstract universal, in all times, in all places…It is a space of virtual conjunction, grasped as our locus of the possible" (109).

A. Negativity in New Argentine Cinema

The films explored here demand to be read within the traditions of cultural critiques of capitalism that can be traced back to the nineteenth and twentieth century literature, New Latin American Cinema (NLAC), as well as European (neorealism, new wave, dogme) and Soviet film traditions.[35] What coheres this constellation of films is the relationship between technology and commodification over-and-against the individual and social body. In other words, the films present confrontations with late capitalist "machinic enslavement" (Deleuze) through figurations of technology (and accidents), commodities, and bodies. While critics have focused on axiomatics of loss (e.g. discourses of melancholia), this constellation of films is arranged along the lines of what

[35] This list is not meant to be exhaustive. The critical positioning towards capitalism adopted by many of the films analyzed here is at work in a range of cultural processes and products.

is emerging. More broadly, this section proposes destructive plasticity as a paradigm to understand New Argentine Cinema (NCA).

There is an overwhelming sense of spatial discontinuity and temporal violence that pervades the films chosen for this chapter. Space undergoes transformations becoming no-longer and not-yet comprehensible. Time—time that is not so much embodied but rather that measures according to speculative accounts of the market—outstrips geographical space in a schizophrenic conquest of territory. Speed thus becomes a vector by which processes of neocolonialism can be viewed with particular intensity. Not surprisingly, NCA shows a marked interest in quotidian activities and daily struggles of life forms pushed to the edge of this bio-political process. Often called a cinema of idleness, NCA is characterized by long, drawn out shots, irrational cuts, and loosely developed plots. These techniques tend to emphasize the singularity and endurance of the body, in that they are opposed to an editing velocity that disavows the accidental as transcendental horizon for emergence. Instead, the films in this section linger in the break or the extended long take as if capturing the indeterminacy of the accidental as a possibility for emergence.

NCA films depict a world(s) that is becoming more and more commodified, technologically atomized, and disparate. It is more than just the black-and-white images in *Mundo Grua* (1999), or *El Asadito* (2000) of a city under construction (or destruction) that recall the images of bombed-out Berlin in Rossellini's *Germany Year Zero* (1948).

Images of any-space-whatever(s) populate the cinema of Albertina Carri, Lucrecia Martel, Adrián Caetano, Gustavo Postiglione, Pablo Trapero, and Alejandro Agresti. Real and discursive spaces become foreign and estranged from themselves, like memory in Albertina Carri's *Los Rubios* (2003) or the café as allegory for the nation in *Bolivia* (2000). The standardization and homogenization of the world as seen in the globalizing process of commodification do indeed result in loss. Life forms, traditions, and language all undergo significant changes, if they do not disappear altogether. Displacement and instability are the norm rather than the exception. Destructive plasticity becomes an operative order of the day—the regulating mechanism of the image.

This chapter attempts to locate *how* forms are produced in this period of cinematic production. One of my central concerns is to locate how films position themselves vis-à-vis the conditions from whence they (the films) emerge. The emphasis here lies along the lines of plasticity rather than flexibility. The filmmaking *process* as method and arrangement of filmic material is situated as a site of overdetermination, difference, and repetition, yet what dominate the ethos of the film images studied here are the metamorphosing possibilities of change. Possibilities are not always actualized, they can run aground or get reterritorialized along the lines of fixation, a term Joan Copjec defines through the figures of Antigone and Creon.[36] Fixation is the drive to

[36] "Antigone's *Haftbarkeit,* her perseverance to the end or to the momentous conclusion of an act that will necessarily overturn her, is contrasted to the *Fixierarbeit* of Creon as conversion, or self-rupture, to modern progress" (Copjec, 45).

transcendence—Creon's insistence on the laws of the state—underwritten by the superego. As Copjec says, "He [Creon] remains glued to an ideal he will never attain, since it is derived from his nostalgia for something he never possessed" (46). By contrast, Antigone's act "in conformity with the real of desire" undoes the ties of community and herself, "raising herself out of the conditions of naked existence to which Creon remains bound" (47). The latter does not *only* and *always* represent lines of flight, avenues of resistance or practices of dissensus. There is always reterritorialization. In *Bolivia,* for instance, metamorphosis—a change in the situation—is in tension with the violent event(s) that founded the (im)possibility of communal space in Argentina. *Bolivia* shows "an Event disavowing itself, erasing its own traces, as the ultimate indication of its triumph."[37] Similarly, in *Liverpool,* the picnoleptic Farrell is buoyed through life on waves of self-destruction, exemplifying the paradox of the death drive: "the death drive achieves its satisfaction by *not* achieving its aim."[38] In *Mundo Grúa,* however, the mechanical reproduction of destruction gets re-signified into a contingency-making machine not unlike Bazin's conception of cinema as capturing the "ambiguity of the real."

III. Context(s): New Argentine Cinemas

It is necessary to contextualize turn-of-the-millennium Argentine cinema and the general consensus that this period marks a major shift in filmmaking aesthetics, within

[37] Zizek, *In Defense of Lost Causes*, 393.

[38] Copjec, Joan, *Imagine There's No Woman*, 30.

this history of cinematic production and scholarship.[39] This is the case not only to qualify what is "new" in "New Argentine Cinema," but, more productively, to question basic teleologies and narratives of rupture and continuity. More recently, even the aesthetic uniqueness of the NLAC has been complicated by lesser-known predecessors and contemporaries in experimental cinema.[40] Jesse Lerner and Luciano Piazza write, "Even before there was Latin American experimental cinema, the endless possibilities and radical potentials of film beckoned the first generation of the Latin American avant-garde" (6).[41]

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[39] One of the challenges of studying Latin American cinema outside of Latin America is the hyper-mediated circulation of film. Although certain internet servers like Vimeo have permitted more geographically diverse audiences more access, by and large, most Latin American films do not get seen outside of the country in which they were made. In fact, most Latin American films do not even get seen in their own country, with the exception of several showings at film festivals. This is a historical truth of Latin American cinema, and it has elicited varied, complex, and creative responses at the levels of film aesthetics and production. One of the reasons that Latin American cinema is widely regarded as sophisticated and experimental is because of its positional awareness vis-à-vis the Hollywood entertainment apparatus that dominates the majority of shares in the film market, delimiting the field of possibilities for local productions. For example, the vast majority of cinemas in Argentina are "Cine Hoyts," a subsidiary to a conglomerate that develops commercial real-estate worldwide. These theaters, often neatly tucked into a recently constructed suburban malls, show an extremely limited number of Argentine and Latin American films. Non-conglomerate-owned theaters that attempt to show more local productions are often forced to meet the reality of the market and show more widely appealing films that are inevitably films made by United States-based media that use a pricing and selling structure that forces theaters that want to show one blockbuster film to put several on the marquee.

[40] Piazza, Luciano, and Lerner, Jesse editors. *Ism, Ism, Ism: Experimental Cinema in Latin America*. University of California Press, 2017.

[41] They continue, "In the silent era, cinematic montage and the temporal and spatial manipulations it made possible (exemplified by the experiments of Soviet and European vanguards) inspired radical poets, thinkers, writers, and artists. The recognition by early twentieth-century Latin American vanguards of the new medium's power is evident in their poetry and prose. In his 1923 volume of avant-garde verse, *Esquina,* the Mexican poet and dandy Germán List Arzubide, a principal figure in the *Estridentista* movement, wrote of the convergence of modernity, new sensations, desire, commerce, and the moving image: Mientras en el mostrador de los cines/Venden la noche el menudeo/Un Beso de celuloide/Se escurre en tu recuerdo/While at the cinemas the box office/Sells the night retail/A celluloid kiss/Drains in your memory (Quoted in Lerner and Piazza, 9).

Argentine film production at the turn of the millennia had limited State and international funding opportunities.[42] It was only in 1983 that Argentina transitioned from dictatorship to constitutional democracy. Ruby Rich describes cinematic production in this period:

> The 1980's were a time for optimism regarding the revision and reinvention of the New Latin American Cinema in a contemporary guise. The breaking of taboo and prohibition, the freeing of the imagination to fantasy, a respect for the mundane and everyday, the introduction of humor and music, the construction of new narrative strategies, and the reconsideration of the relationship to the audience, have all contributed to what I've defined as the monumental task of forging a new "collective subjectivity."[43]

During this period, then president Raúl Alfonsín leveraged the Instituto Argentino de Cinematografía to promote Argentine films as "tool to refashion a new national image […] and thus convince the international community that the country was once again open for business" (Stites Mor, 89). The results were mixed. Several films caught national attention, including Luis Puenzo's 1986 *La historia oficial* which was nominated for best foreign film at the Oscars as well as films like *Camila* by Maria Luisa Bemberg, *Hombre Mirando al sudeste* by Eliseo Subiela, and *Tangos, el exilio de Gardel* by Fernando Solanas. These films were less popular abroad, but they demonstrated high degrees of technical prowess and were widely screened throughout Argentina.[44] They are the

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[43] Rich, "An/Other View of New Latin American Cinema," 23.

[44] Foster, *Contemporary Argentine Cinema*, 3.

exceptions that prove the rule. By the second half of the 1980s economic problems began curtailing the production of Argentine films once again.[45]

That the national cinema increased fourfold from 1994 to 2004 is extraordinary considering the economic context. Argentine film production benefitted from the Ley 24.377, implemented in 1995, which increased taxes on video sales and rentals as well as box-office prices. Audiovisual production in Argentina was essentially financing itself, and the result was a significant rise in film productions (in 1992 there were 12 local productions; in 1995 there were 35). In addition, the 90s saw a boom in film schools, mostly in Buenos Aires, as well as more media and critical coverage in the form of *ciné-clubs* and magazines.[46] Argentine film festivals like the Mar del Plata, as well as grants from INCAA (Instituto Nacional de Cine y Artes Audiovisuales) and international organizations gave films financing and exposure.[47] Nevertheless, there is little evidence

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[45] Foster writes, "One dimension of economic circumstances in Argentina, alongside the rise of video clubs and home viewing, was the drastic reduction in the number of movie houses. According to statistics released by the Sindicato de la Industria Cinematográfica Argentina, in 1970 there were over 2,000 movie houses in Argentina; by the 1980-82 period, the number had dropped to 900; in October, 1991, there were 427; and in January, 1992, there were approximately 380" (ibid).

[46] As is noted in further detail below, Argentina has a long history of ciné-clubs in and outside of major movie metropolises like Buenos Aires. The first moving images seen in Argentina was the Lumiére *Cinématographe* in a Buenos Aires screening in July of 1896. The University of Buenos Aires began offering degrees in film for the first time in 1984, and in 1989 the "Image and Sound" section was established in the Faculty of Architecture (Badlley, 131).

[47] Randal Johnson has noted the importance of state support for the success of Latin American national film. See Johnson, Randal. *The Film Industry in Brazil*. University of Pittsburgh Press, 1987.

that suggests that the model of international co-productions are sustainable for national production.[48]

If there was a "rupture" in Argentine cinema at the turn of the millennia its genealogy could be traced to the screening of *Historias breves* (1995), a compilation that brought together nine short films by directors who would help define Argentine cinema for the next decades, among them, Daniel Burman, Adrián Caetano, Lucrecia Martel, and Bruno Stagnaro.[49] Only 12,000 spectators saw the original run of *Historias Breves* at the film competition, but the event facilitated more funding opportunities for then-emerging auteur projects. It was at the competition that Lucrecia Martel secured funding for *La Ciénaga* (2001), and where Stagnaro and Caetano began conceptualizing *Pizza, Birra, Faso*. Jens Andermann describes the emergence of New Argentine cinema:

> A very different kind of estrangement had been at the root, some twenty years earlier, of an emerging constellation of filmmaking practices that would soon be hailed, both locally and on the international festival circuit, as "the New Argentine Cinema" […] In a context of catastrophic socio-economic decline around the millennium after decades of dictatorship and neoliberal adjustment policies (a situation to which Argentina seems today to have returned full circle, following a brief period of stability and moderate redistribution under the Kirchner administrations), the film industry had paradoxically been one of the few sectors to experience a boost, due in part to increased state subsidies following the passing of a national film law in 1994 as well as to a more intense but also diversified relation to the transnational funding and festival system and the consolidation of training institutions and infrastructures for film and audiovisual media professionals. One of the unforeseen side-effects of the spread of private cable TV and the neoliberal dismantling of the industrial sector in the 1980s and 1990s had been the

[48] As of today, some of the largest benefits that INCAA doles out are in the form of credits and exemptions to international film productions for shooting in Argentina.

[49] Jaime Peña by contrast locates the arrival of New Argentine Cinema in 1999 at the presentation of Pablo Trapero's *Mundo Grúa* in the Buenos Aires International Festival of Independent Cinema (Bafici). Peña, Jaime Pérez. *Historias Extraordinarias: Nuevo Cine Argentino*, 1998-2008. T&B Editores, 2009, p. 11.

> emergence of Argentine as a prized low-wage, high-competence shooting location for commercial ads and even the odd blockbuster.[50]

Tamara Falicov describes the broad thematic and stylistic characteristics of NCA as presenting "gritty, working class" perspectives, and working to "deconstruct and disrupt the middle or middle upper class family."[51] Other criticisms note that New Argentine films problematize an ethnographic gaze that tends towards aesthetic transparency, nostalgia, and emptiness. Sergio Wolf notes the difference between this generation of filmmakers and their predecessors in terms of scale: "To limit, to lighten, to subtract, those are the verbs that energize these fictional worlds."[52] Castagna argues for instance that "no tiene planteos estéticos de importancia ni una cámara con la cual se percibe la presencia (y la autosuficiencia) de un director" (Castagna). Joanna Page argues, "But the films of the New Argentine Cinema invariably hesitate at the point of locating their individual studies within a larger ethnographic narrative" (Page, 52).[53] For Page, films like *El Bonarense*, *Bolivia*, and *Libertad* establish a distance with representative regimes of art yet recognize the crisis of the social. As she says, "these

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[50] Andermann, Jens. "Argentine Cinema after the New: Territories, Languages, Medialities." *Senses of Cinema*, vol. 89, December 2018. See also: Andermann, Jens. *New Argentine Cinema*. I.B. Tauris, 2012, pp. 1-22

[51] Falicov, Tamara. "Los Hijos de Menem: The New Independent Argentine Cinema, 1995-199." *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media*, vol. 44, no. 1, 2003, pp. 49–63.

[52] Wolf, "The Aesthetics of the New Argentine Cinema," 36.

[53] Gonzalo Aguilar also notes this ethnographic style in the films of New Argentine Cinema, "Ya no es entonces el ingreso de un mundo autónomo, sino la búsqueda de los lazos con lo real, y de ahí también que los filmes en tercera persona hayan hecho un uso cada vez más intenso del documento, de la imagen como documento" (Aguilar, 91).

films testify to an urgent need to reconstruct a social and cultural imaginary in the context of national crisis…on the other hand, they recognize the impossibility of doing this without recourse to delegitimized discourses and theories" (Page, 52).

Importantly, Page notes that the observational style "draws attention to itself" as a mode of documentation: "by staging the disappearance of the political, and by commenting (explicitly or through formal means) on their own position as cultural texts and commodities within a global market, these films do present possibilities for political readings, but ones that would be more properly regarded as reflexive than allegorical" (196). In the case of *Mundo Grúa* specifically, Page finds traces of nostalgia on par with traditional ethnographies that conjure a "zoological gaze":

> Russell notes the nostalgia implicit in the zoological gaze, arguing that the zoo "constitutes another instance of the salvage paradigm: it emerges at the moment when animals begin to disappear from daily life, and species become extinct". Many recent films in Argentina are governed by a similar impulse to catalogue and preserve an ever-shifting conglomeration of marginalized, migrant figures, particular trades that are becoming obsolete in the context of rapid technological advance, or traditional neighborhood and ways of life under the threat of extinction.[54]

In a similar vein, Gonzalo Aguilar has argued that the political of the New Argentine Cinema can be read in terms of community and emptiness: "*nothingness* replaces the people because the public scenario in which the actors operate, as well as the very concept of *pueblo,* have been thrust into crisis."[55] It thus seems that both Aguilar and Page frame the delegitimized discourses of making and unmaking community in New

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[54] Page, *Crisis and Capitalism,* 53.

[55]Aguilar, Gonzalo. "New Argentine Cinema: The People's Presence." *ReVista: Harvard Review of Latin America*, vol. VIII, no. 3, Oct. 2009, https://revista.drclas.harvard.edu/new-argentine-cinema/.

Argentine film into a trajectory of what Maristela Svampa calls the "inédito proceso de descolectivización de vastos sectores sociales."[56]

The heterogeneity of films produced in the 90s and early aughts defies stringent categorization, especially to something as diffuse as a movement. For one, filmmakers in this period explicitly refused to be labelled as such or produce a coherent set of principles a la filmic manifesto. Further, it is equally incongruous to apply the label "generation" to filmmakers of such diverse ages. Finally, though numerous thematic and stylistic comparisons are evident, it is difficult to imagine categories that could account for the varying budgets and production protocols on shooting sets as diverse as *El Asadito* (2000), *La Ciénaga* (2001), *Los Rubios* (2003), and *Nueve Reinas* (2000). My approach to this period of cinema is contextualized in relevant scholarship that by and large approvingly sanctions the delimitations implied by New Argentine Cinema. This chapter also sanctions the moniker insofar as the selection of films analyzed here do not drastically differ from the traditional lists of films found in the best secondary literature. My intention in reiterating the term is not to re-entrench the canon of films studied but rather to remain faithful to the tension between films and the conditions from whence they emerged and are received.

Ironically, one of the reasons for the relative success of New Argentine Cinema—or films associated with this moniker—stemmed from the ability to overcome financial

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[56] Svampa, Maristela. *La Sociedad Excluyente. La Argentina Bajo El Signo Del Neoliberalismo.* Taurus, 2005, p. 47.

barriers by the use of low-budget filming techniques and stylistic marketability, popularized and sensationalized under the sobriquet "dirty realism". Recent criticism has argued that the aesthetic tendencies that New Argentine films share with neorealism are tendentious, exaggerated, or superfluous to their signifying operations. However, films and television shows like *Rapado, Picado Fino, Mundo Grua, Bolivia, Okupas, Pizza Bira Faso, El Asadito,* and *Libertad* (to name some of the most cited audiovisual products) appear as genealogically and thematically indebted (films are inescapably indebted to the archive of images that preceded them) not only to earlier Latin American films like Fernando Birri's *Tire Dié* (1959) and *Los Inundados* (1961), but also to contemporary film movements in Europe and Asia. Filmmakers in the 90s looked inward to their own national and continental film archive as well as outward towards international cinema. Citational use of film techniques or intertextual references vary widely in New Argentine Cinema.[57]

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[57] Here we could list numerous filmic dialogues that New Argentine cinema created with other filmmaking traditions, films, and directors from around the globe. The French New Wave of course is often cited, for instance in Martin Reitman's *Rapado,* as well as, Dogme 95, a film style fomented by Danish directors Lars von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg. Myrto Konstantarakos writes, "Lars von Trier's *The Idiots* (1998) and its making-of-documentary were screened at the first Buenos Aires Independent Film Festival and were followed by a teleconference with the writer/director. A workshop led by the film's assistant director and lead actor helped local students — including Gregorio Cramer — to make their own Dogma films, shown at the end of the festival. A fierce debate raged in *La Nación* newspaper, where Eliseo Subiela wrote a harsh article containing such inanities as 'the rules of the Dogma movement prevent us from being free.' The response in the same paper from Alejandro Maci (director of *El Impostor,* 1997) two days later pulled no punches. A new generation had been born that, along with Dogma, extolled the virtues of a more natural style of filmmaking, although in Argentina this is determined more by scarcity of means rather than by the Danish movement's rigid rejection of Hollywood commercial cinema" (Konstantarakos, 137).

If it is now *de rigueur* to mention neorealism alongside NCA, as David Oubiña has pointed out, it is not just because thematic similarities like economic crisis and precariousness are often "misread" as intertextual references.[58] Deracinated from its origins in Europe and New Latin American Cinema (NLAC), neorealism understood broadly as a film movement (with its attendant theorizations) can provide instrumental insights to Argentina cinema at the turn of the millennium. In other words, the specific history of neorealism in Argentina merits close attention, not in order to pigeonhole NCA into unified aesthetic formulas but rather to pin point the significance and signifying mechanics of certain film-making mechanisms. The use of specific neorealist techniques in films like *Mundo Grúa* reveal how the film self-reflexively locates itself and the structures of its emergence as film. From a basic scaffolding of neorealist concepts, we can see how *Mundo Grúa* proposes an aesthetic *process* that privileges the contingent and accidental.

A. Neorealism(s) and New Latin American Cinema(s)

Neorealism as a film style emerged out of the historical, cinematic, and theoretical milieux of postwar Italy, which witnessed the production of a cinema captured in deep-focus and long, drawn-out shots in films like *Rome Open City* (1945),

[58] Beceyro et al., "Estética del cine, nuevos realismos, representación," 3.

Umberto D (1952), *Bicycle Thieves* (1948), and *Germany, Year Zero* to name but a few.[59] The term was first used by Antonio Piertrangeli to describe Luchino Visconti's *Ossessione* (1943), but it was popularized by Cesare Zavatinni, who wrote of neorealism, "the camera has a hunger for reality, […] the invention of plots to make reality palpable or spectacular is a flight from the historical richness as well as the political importance of actual everyday life."[60] The emphasis on the everyday contrasted with the so-called "White Telephone" films of escape that characterized the Mussolini era.[61] According to Bert Cardullo,

> With minimal resources, the neorealist filmmakers worked in real locations using local people as well as professional actors; they improvised their scripts, as need be, on site;

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[59] There is still much debate within Italian cinema studies about whether or not films like *La terra trema* (1948) by Visconti, *Roma cittá aperta,* and *Paisá* by Rossellini, and *Umberto D* and *Ladri di biciclette* by De Sica amounts to forming a coherent neorealist archive. Lorenzo Fabbri sums this up: "On the one hand, it is impossible to define neorealism and constitute a neorealist archive; on the other hand, it is impossible to give neorealism up. While the invocation of neorealism is the inaugural speech-act in any discourse on Italian cinema, it is very arduous to grasp what neorealism is after all" (Fabri, 186).

[60] Zavattini, Cesare. "Some Ideas on the Cinema." *Sight and Sound*, translated by Pier Luigi Lanza, vol. 23, no. 2, Dec. 1953, p. 64.

[61] Here it cannot be underemphasized that "this hunger for reality" often occluded and ignored some of the greatest disasters of the 20th century. At times, neorealism films appear in Italy as structurally incapable of identifying fascism as inherent, rather than an aberration of Italian modern society. For John Hess, neorealism was ideology: "The ideology was that of the Popular Front, which the European socialist and Communist movements established in order to defend themselves against Fascism. Playing down traditional Marxist notions such as class struggle and internationalism, the Popular Front called for a cross-class alliance and nationalism and proposed a vague humanism that set good versus evil and freedom versus oppression. Thus contradictions disappeared in the face of an intense sympathy for the poor and the wretched. This ideology helps explain why so many neorealist films represent life as viewed from the point of view of children and why none of the films examines the Fascist past" (Hess, 106). And further, "Certainly, Italian Fascism was less pernicious than German Nazism, but it did rule dictatorially over Italy for over two decades at the point of a gun. Rossellini, and the rest of the neorealist film-makers, evade this history" (108). Similarly: "Italian anti-Fascists tended to see Fascism as an aberration in their history, as something they really had nothing to do with and that needed no explanation because it was not part of the continuum of Italian history" (ibid).

> and their films conveyed a powerful sense of the plight of ordinary individuals oppressed by the political circumstances beyond their control. Thus Italian neorealism was the first postwar cinema to liberate filmmaking from the artificial confines of the studio, and by extension, from the Hollywood originated studio system.[62]

In the 1950s Latin American directors and writers looked to Italian neorealism as a model to adapt, rework, and innovate:

> Committed to a rejection of Hollywood, the film-makers of what would later be known as the New Latin American cinema looked to Europe for alternatives in the 50s and found in Italian neorealism a viable cinematic model for a different kind of national cinema. In the classical sense of the term, Neorealism constituted an epistemological break for international filmmaking by representing the formerly unrepresented. It explicitly rejected the Hollywood mode of production with its low budgets, non-actors and location shooting; demanded an awareness of the links between cinematic production and expression; and upheld in Rossellini's words 'a moral position from which to look at the world.[63]

Most Latin Americans were first exposed to Italian neorealism on the screens, but some, like Fernando Birri, Tomás Guttierez Alea and Julio García Espinosa, found it directly in Europe.[64] They studied at the Centro Sperimentale in Rome—an innovative site for filmmaking in Europe perhaps only then rivaled by Paris. In the end, neorealism as a

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[62] Cardullo, *André Bazin and Italian Neorealism*, 19.

[63] López, Ana. "An 'Other' History: The New Latin American Cinema." New Latin American Cinema: Theory, Practices, and Transcontinental Articulations, edited by Michael T. Martin, Wayne State University Press, 1997, p. 142.

[64] *Cinéclubs* were instrumental in the promulgation of cinema across Latin America. They played an outsized role in screening avant-garde films. Jesse Lerner and Luciano Piazza write in *Ism, Ism, Ism* "An emergent network of cine clubs across Latin America imported and shared the latest works of an international avant-garde. In 1929, Horacio Coppola co-founded the *Cine Club de Buenos Aires*, which began screening the films of Vertov, Man Ray, and Charlie Chaplin. Four years later, Coppola was in Berlin, studying at the Bauhaus and directing with Walter Auerbach a surrealist short, *Traum* (Dream, 1933). In 1931 a group in Mexico City, led by Lola and Manuel Álvarez Bravo, Guatemalan expatriate Carlos Mérida, the modernist poet Bernardo ritz de Montellano, and the painters María Izquierdo and Roberto Montenegro, joined together to form the *Cine Club Mexicano*. Their goal was "the exhibition of good European, American, and Asian films, and avant-garde movies" as well as scientific films, retrospectives surveying film history, and the presentation of lectures about cinema. Many more cine clubs followed throughout Latin America, from Cuzco to Santiago de Chile, sharing alternative films of all sorts" (Lerner and Piazza, 10).

mode of production and its aesthetic tenets were adapted in Latin America to the particulars of the nation. Heliodoro San Miguel describes the situation in Brazil:

> [As in] Latin American countries, the adoption of neorealist tenets was formal, and not based on mere imitation. The themes were purely Brazilian, but neorealism provided a method and a tool to depict and denounce the different social conditions of the country. It also opened the doors for the possibility of making low budget artisan films that could be made in the streets without professional actors, and that could address popular themes and social problems, making clear their author's political inclinations and intentions.[65]

In other words, it would be much more accurate to speak of neorealisms in the plural rather than the singular. In Latin America in the 1960s the form that many of the NLAC films took was oriented around discussions of dependence theory and Third World revolutions.[66] Two of the most prominent filmmakers and theorists in this period were Nelson Pereira dos Santos and Fernando Birri. In different historical contexts, Pereira dos Santos and Birri fomented ideologically committed cinema that sought to depict

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[65] San Miguel, Heliodoro. "Rio 40 Graus." *The Cinema of Latin America*, edited by Alberto Elena and Mariana Díaz López, Columbia University Press, 2003, p. 72.

[66] Tzvi Tal succinctly summarizes this period in Brazil and Argentina: "El alza de la movilización popular en los países latinoamericanos durante la década del sesenta, motivada por la imposibilidad de solucionar problemas estructurales de subdesarrollo e injusticia social, encontró su expresión en las Teorías de la Dependencia y en los discursos de la Revolución Tercermundista. La crítica a las consecuencias culturales del neocolonialismo fomentó búsquedas de la expresión auténtica de la cultura popular y la situación de los oprimidos. La Nación era un existencia irrefutable, a la que se intentaba explicar desde el punto de vista opuesto al de las hegemonías europeizantes y los aliados de la penetración económica foránea" (Tal, 11).

"nuestra gente" with films about marginalized social actors often in situations of inner city and rural poverty.[67]

Pereira dos Santos, who spent two months in Paris studying film and neorealism alongside John Grierson and Joris Ivens, said of neorealism in Latin America, "The influence of neorealism was not of a school or ideology, but rather as a production system. Neorealism taught us, in sum, that it was possible to make films in the streets; that we did not need studios; that we could film using average people rather than known actors; that the technique could be imperfect, as long as the film was truly linked

[67] Tal makes the comparison between Argentine and Brazilian cinema at this historical moment the major theme of his book *Pantallas y Revolución: Una Visión Comparativa del Cine de Liberación y el Cinema Novo* (2005). He writes, "Durante los años 50 comenzaron jóvenes cineastas latinoamericanos a expresar su disconformidad con las imágenes neocolonialism y sus significados ideológicos. La exhibición del neorrealismo italiano—producido entre 1945 y 1955—y el retorno de quienes habían viajado a estudiar cinematografía en París y Roma, encendieron la rebelión contra las convenciones vigentes en las industrias locales. Fernando Birri, retornado de sus estudios realizados en el centro Experimental de Roma, cuna del neorrealismo, fundó en 1956 la primera Escuela de Cine Académica en Santa Fe, que proclamó su compromiso con el testimonio social desnudando la pobreza y la marginación de los desposeídos. Simultáneamente surgía una Nueva Ola cinematográfica argentina, apreciada mucho más en las cinematecas y los clubes de cine que en las salas populares. En Brasil surgieron cineastas que, frustrados ante la preferencia por los técnicos europeos en las producciones de los modernos estudios de la empresa Veracruz, ante la falta de representación de los conflictos sociales en sus filmes, y su quiebra en 1954, proclamaban la necesidad de un cine nacional y popular" (Tal, 18).

to its national culture and expressed that culture" (122).[68] Pereira dos Santos returned to Brazil with an invigorated sense that Brazilian cinema ought to reject Hollywood conventions and find ways to represent the reality of Brazil, "from the poverty of the favelas to the drought of the sertão."[69] *Rio 40 Graus,* his first major film, was met with wide critical acclaim after initially being banned by Brazilian authorities for showing an "unrealistic" Rio de Janeiro, different from the colorful and carnivalesque postcard depictions. It had an unusual cinematic structure with few cuts, many long shots, and slow pacing. Robert Stam describes this style in *Vidas Secas:*

> Their slow approximation suggests the cultural distance between the peasant characters and the middle-class urban spectators who constitute the audience. At the same time, the quite unconventional prolongation of the shot in time (four minutes) serves as a warning to the spectator not to expect the fast pacing and density of incident that characterizes most fiction films.[70]

As Rachel Price points out, there is a tendency to read *Vidas Secas* "as depicting the bestialization of impoverished humans, and the humanization of Baleia" (Price, 147). In

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[68] "The first international meeting place for the young filmmakers was a film festival in Montevideo set up in 1954 by the SODRE, Uruguay national radio station and a progressive cultural promoter. Among the film makers attending in 1958, when John Grierson was the guest of honour, were Chambi from Peru, Nelson Pereira dos Santos from Brazil, and Fernando Birri from Santa Fe. A film by Pereira dos Santos, Rio zona norte (1957), established a new paradigm of fictional narrative, in the form of a neorealist tale of the *favelas* (shanty towns) of Rio Janeiro; in the years that followed, Pereira dos Santos became the presiding spirit and 'conscience', as Glauber Rocha put it, of Brazil's *cinema novo*. The film exhibited by Birri and his students, *Tire Dié* ("Throw us a dime"), a collaborative social inquiry into the shanty towns around the city of Santa Fe, later came to be celebrated as the founding social documentary of the new film movement. Known simply as the New Latin American Cinema (*el nuevo cine latinoamericano*), the term dates from a meeting in 1967 of filmmakers from across the continent hosted by a film club in the Chilean seaside town of Viña del Mar, which had been running a festival of 8 and 16mm since 1963" (Michael Chanan, 1).

[69] San Miguel, "Rio, 40 Graus/Rio, 40 Degrees," 72.

[70] Johnson, Randal, and Robert Stam. "The Cinema of Hunger: Nelson Pereira Dos Santos' Vidas Secas." *Brazilian Cinema*, Columbia University Press, 1995, p. 126.

contrast, Price reads both the novel and cinema novo version of *Vidas Secas* as "genre-bending…attempts to depict a subjectivity beyond humanism, beyond the human" (ibid). Price convincingly argues that both novel and film grapple with "species-subverting" reflections through confrontations in and through realism.[71]

Fernando Birri returned to Argentina in 1956, after a stint at the Centro Sperimentale where he worked with Vittorio de Sica and Cesare Zavatinni on *Il Tetto* (The Roof), to film and work at the Institute of Sociology of the National University of the Littoral in Santa Fe.[72] Birri saw in neorealism the skeleton of a form that, in a sense, performed ideological critique. Birri writes:

> What I wanted was to discover the face of an invisible Argentina — invisible not because it couldn't be seen, but because no one wanted to see it...It is my belief that the first step to be taken by an aspiring national film industry is to document national reality...Neo-realism is the cinema that discovers the Italy of underdevelopment, discovers in a country that apparently has the clothing, the tinsel, and what's more, the rhetoric of development, another reality, a hidden one, that of underdevelopment ... it was the cinema of the humble and offended. It was possible everywhere.[73]

Popular and art cinema were scorned by Birri, because they "present no real image of our people at all, but conceal them. So, the first positive step is to provide such an image […] How does documentary provide this image? By showing how reality *is*, and in no

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[71] Price, Rachel. "Bare Life, 'Vidas Secas': Or, 'Como Se Morre No Cinema.'" *Luso-Brazilian Review*, vol. 49, no. 1, 2012, pp. 146–67.

[72] Birri's *Los Inundados* is set in the lowlands of Santa Fe. It follows the misadventures of Dolorcito Gaitán, his family, and neighbors who are forced to evacuate their shacks on the flooded river banks. Their attempts to carry on with daily life are frustrated by indifferent politicians and bureaucrats. Only an unforeseen train trip to the northern part of the province breaks the dreariness. Finally, Dolorcito and his family return to rebuild their home on the river bank. In spite of the wretched fate of its characters, the film highlights individual and collective tenacity.

[73] Hess, John. "Neorealism and New Latin American Cinema: Bicycle Thieves and Blood of the Condor." p. 110.

other way."[74] In the context of a hegemonic "escapist cinema," Birri posited a cinema of transparency that would show the truth of Latin American underdevelopment: "the cause of underdevelopment is also well known: colonialism both external and internal" (ibid). For Birri, documentary realism provided a unique cinematic technique to show the "real" conditions of coloniality constitutive of Latin American modernity.

Greg Cohen has suggestively argued that the outsized canonical importance of a small selection of NLAC films has foreclosed more productive readings for today.[75] For instance, the most cited scene of Birri's *Tire Dié,* the Eisenstenian montage of children running beside the train, belies how, "Consciously or unconsciously, the design of the film points up a confrontation with received ideas about the nature of modern space at the dawn of the 60s."[76] The tendency, therefore, is to read neorealist film in Latin

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[74] Birri, Fernando. "Cinema and Underdevelopment." New Latin American Cinema: Theory, Practices, and Transcontinental Articulations, Wayne State University Press, 1997, p. 93.

[75] Cohen, Greg. "New Takes on the 'New.'" *ReVista: Harvard Review of Latin America*, vol. VIII, no. 2, Winter 2009, https://revista.drclas.harvard.edu/new-takes-on-the-new-the-cinemas-of-1960s-latin-america/.

[76] Birri made films up until his death in 2017, but is most recognized for his role in the formation of the Santa Fe Film School and theorization of New Latin American Cinema (Gabriel Garcia Marquez famously dubbed him the "Gran Papa del Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano). On Birri's role in this period of Argentine filmmaking, Cohen writes "Thus, the Argentine films most frequently associated with the canon of the NLAC are often the least "typical" of Argentine cinema from the period. To wit, Pino Solanas and Octavio Getino's *La hora de los hornos* (1969) may certainly stand as the founding work of "Third Cinema." Yet its radical sound track and barrage of agitprop slogans flashing in big, bold-face letters between swarms of appropriated images—closer to the militant films of French activist Guy Debord than to other works of Argentine national cinema—produced few imitators beyond the members of its own Grupo Cine Liberación. The same might be said of Fernando Birri, the aforementioned "pope" of the NLAC. Though he did establish the legendary Escuela de Cine Documental de Santa Fe, with its orthodox neo-realist agenda, it would be difficult, in hindsight, to list the adherents to any kind of "movimiento birriano" within or beyond Argentina" (Cohen).

America as an inauguration of authentic expression, "La visión predominante tiene el siguiente presupuesto implícito: la historia empieza con el cine de los años sesenta, lo anterior es apenas una prehistoria, con aislados pioneros en el mejor de los casos" (Paranaguá, 170).[77] Pre-sixties examples of neorealism are more abundant than this predominant classification suggests.[78]

Laura Podalsky has provided a novel approach to neorealist and modernist NLAC films through the conceptual apparatus of affect. Her principal assertion is that NLAC scholarship has over-emphasized the film movement's rational, dialectical, and experimental aspects to the detriment of affect, and the emotional appeals these films make to viewers, "Scholars have considered the consciousness-raising impulse of the

[77] Nevertheless it is also the case that the heterogeneous movement of NLAC that followed the first neorealist films in the late 50's and early 60's did mark a significant break in Latin American cinema. While the NLAC production models and aesthetic techniques varied, Ana López argues that the NLAC categorization implies a socio-political attitude that "can be summarized as a desire to change the social function of the cinema, to transform the Latin American cinema into an instrument of change and of consciousness-raising" (López, 139).

[78] One example: Released in August of 1948, Leopoldo Torres Rios' *Pelota de Trapo* is a filmic manifestation of Peronist populism through what might be called "seamless realism". "Seamless realism" attempts to give a direct expression of 'real life' through classical cinematic techniques that disguise the aesthetic mediation to produce a more 'authentic' expression. In other words, 'seamless realism' uses classical techniques that are not 'self-aware' to explore social issues. However, *Pelota de Trapo* does not merely imitate classical cinema techniques, it also incorporates the most palatable aspects of 'neorealism' to further the impression of 'authenticity'. As I have shown, neorealism had an important impact in Latin American cinema, however the list of so-called 'neorealist' films usually includes roughly twenty films from the 50's to 60's. While neorealism tends to be associated with social critique, in *Pelota de Trapo* it is used as an aesthetic mechanism for ideological homogenization. The film incorporates local spaces and popular practices into a National state project of modernization. Or, if we follow Canclini's definition of hybridization as "socio-cultural processes in which discrete structures or practices, previously existing in a separate form, are combined to generate new structures, objects, and practices" then what the film performs is a hegemonic hybridization (Canclini, xxv). In the film, the particularities of the local are subsumed by the national in so far as the local is made to be the reservoir of the national. The specificity or uniqueness of the local that we might expect to see with 'realist' techniques is deprived of any non-state temporality. Put differently, the dialectical power of the local is only dialectical because it is national.

NLAC to be a result of the films heightened engagement with the rational" (Podalsky, 30). Fernando Birri and Nelson Pereira dos Santos broke from the Hollywood studio model and its aesthetics by using neorealist production and aesthetic techniques to respond to adverse economic conditions, but they also used montage editing strategies to "move our investment in the personal anguish of individual characters toward a felt realization of structural inequalities experienced by particular social classes for whom the protagonists serve as representatives" (35).

Writing on the importance of affect in the films of Guttiérez Alea, director of *Memorias del Subdesarrollo* (1968), Podalsky argues, "For Alea, the productivity of this dyad in a work of art is made possible only when the techniques outlined by Eisenstein ("ecstatic" emotional engagement) and Brecht (distantiation) are placed in dialectical relationship to each other to force spectators to synthesize what they experience in the movie theater in ways that move them beyond those confines and influence their engagement with 'reality'" (Podalsky, 44-45). NLAC auteurs like Alea saw in cinema a didactic form of entertainment that should "elevate the viewer's revolutionary consciousness and…it should also contribute to their enjoyment of life" (Alea, 110). The question of how to achieve this type of cinema, for Alea and others, was often framed in terms of mediation—"communication began to be seen more as a process of mediations than of media, a question of culture, and therefore, not just a matter of cognitions but of re-cognition" (Martín-Barbero, 2). In revolutionary Cuba, for instance, a visit to the

cinema entailed being exposed to newsreels, documentaries, and feature fiction films all in the same sitting so that "viewers can experience various levels of mediation which bring them closer to or farther away from reality, and which can offer them a better understanding of reality" (Alea, 118).

Podalsky argues that films like *El Chacal de Nahueltoro* (1969), by Miguel Littin and *La Hora de los Hornos* (1968), by Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, mobilize affect to produce syntheses of reality. She reads a tactical use of affect in Littin's and Solanas's films as a strategy to engage viewers, but also points out how "affective engagements exceed the politicizing function ascribed to them" (Podalsky, 55). For instance, Podalsky analyzes a scene from Solanas and Getino's *La Hora de los Hornos* in which a close-up shot of a cow's face the moment before the animal slaughtered is interspersed with ads of white people drinking Coca-Cola as a solidifying affective mechanism to the analogy "being drawn between the cattle (Argentina's top export item to the First World) and the Third World laborers whose blood-work sustains the global flow of goods aimed not at themselves, but rather at lighter-skin folk living (and consuming) elsewhere" (ibid). She writes, "In my experience with university audiences over the years, the sequence has never failed to draw an immediate visceral response […] In encouraging/forcing audience members to recognize the violence of neocolonialism in ways that are deeply felt, the film naturalizes its critique; viewers understand their own response as authentic, true, and profound" (ibid). In short,

Podalsky underscores the passionate sentiment this type of scene creates to enable and punctuate the analytic voice-over narration allowing audiences to not only understand neocolonialism but also to feel the urgent need for social change.

Similarly, in their filmic manifesto "Towards a Third Cinema," Solanas and Getino recognize the importance of stirring the spectators' sensibilities, but situate affect in a preliminary stage of radicalization underscoring the authoritative aspects of the Argentines' project, "The hierarchical model subordinating the sensorial to the rational is revealing and suggests that in order to reach a 'higher plane' of understanding, audience members need a guide or mediator to help them synthesize their sensorial impressions into more abstract frameworks that serve as a gateway to revolutionary action" (Solanas and Getino, 43). The hierarchical subordination of affect in scholarship is in some instances reflected in the hierarchical model privileged by films. But according to Podalsky's reading, affect is too excessive to be contained by the authorial narration, as "the film's sensorial charge often exceeds its intention to move spectators toward a particular form of political praxis" (Podalsky, 56).

Podalksy provides one model of using affect theory to read film: namely, to locate and analyze various techniques aimed at charging the senses. Perhaps another way to situate Podalsky's insight—and to suggest further lines of research, beyond the scope of this chapter—is along the lines of destructive plasticity. Massumi defines affect in terms of visceral perception and bodily responses, that are in excess of conscious

states.[79] Affect is not merely empirically measurable bodily responses like the dilation of pupils. It encompasses autonomous and emergent phenomena, pointing to the material indeterminancy of the body, and perhaps of matter in general. Consciousness and affect are in a loop of the virtual and the actual, whereby consciousness reduces the virtual complexity of affect into emotion—what Massumi calls, "narrating affect." Put differently, emotion is the domestication of affect, as power is of force.[80]

Affect and plasticity are not merely synonyms. "One cannot be without being affect" Malabou writes, because "reason and cognition cannot develop or exercise their functions normally if they are not supported by affects" (Malabou, 22). Destructive plasticity sits alongside affect, hidden "beneath an apparently smooth surface like a reserve of dynamite hidden under the peachy skin of being for death" (1). The theory of destructive plasticity "undermines the philosophical model of auto affection by showing how the subject is, at its core, not an 'affected subject' but encrypted in a potential for disaffection to be a non subject."[81] What destructive plasticity "invites us to consider is the suffering caused by an absence of suffering" (Malabou, 18). In other words, the work of destructive plasticity is always already at work, subsuming and undoing subjectivity:

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[79] Massumi, Brian. *A User's Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Deviations from Deleuze and Guattari*. The MIT Press, 1992.

[80] Massumi writes, "Force is not to be confused with power. Power is the domestication of force" (6).

[81] Dionne, Emilie. "A Materialist Theory of Affect" *Reviews in Cultural Theory* Vol. 5, Issue 1. 2014.

> This recognition reveals that a power of annihilation hides within the very constitution of identity, a virtual coldness that is not only the fate of the brain injured, schizophrenics, and serial killers, but is also the signature of a law of being that always appears to be on the point of abandoning itself, escaping. An ontology of modification must shelter this particular type of metamorphosis that is a farewell to being itself.[82]

What cannot be contained by *La Hora de los Hornos* is not only the affect invoked by Podalsky but the law of the accident, "a law that is simultaneously logical and biological, but a law that does not allow us to anticipate its instances" (Malabou, 30). The "imagined synthesis" risks obviating the ontology of the modification, the ontology of the accident. Detailing the history of the accident, for instance, in the NLAC might open up novel connections and insights that more properly reflect the historical variability of cinematic expression in Latin America.

B. Picnoleptic Imminence: From NLAC to NCA

Argentine directors at the turn of the millennium did not hold to the same aesthetic dictums as their predecessors.[83] Many of the critical Marxist premises of NLAC were abandoned by 1990s filmmakers, and it is difficult to square Marxist teleology—in which the working class is pushed towards correct insight and transformation of society's basic antagonisms because of its objective social position—

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[82] Malabou, *Accident*, 37.

[83] Joanna Page writes on Fernando Solanas's *La Nube,* "Although Solanas's critique of capitalism and modernity finds echoes in films more typical of the post-1995 period, he employed in *La nube* a certain aesthetic that is rejected by other, often younger, filmmakers as epitomizing an outmoded cinematic language of the 1980s" (Page, 23). For Page, the post-1995 cinema shirked clear political messaging at the same time establishing "much more convincing aesthetic relations with the radical cinema of the 1960s" (33).

with the loosely organized plots of the post 1990's films.[84] To read the NCA films in the radical tradition of NLAC is not to obviate the economic relation but rather to read "a continuum of variation" realized by capitalist relations, as "a body's social position is more a vector (an immanently determined direction and mode of movement) than an enduring state of being correlated to an enduring consciousness (a transcendent quality belonging to a self-same identity" (Massumi, 203). Put differently, while the NCA films operate using conceptual tools distinct from their predecessors—adapted to different historical necessities—the best nevertheless retains from the NLAC tradition(s) the capacity for imminence. By imminence I mean what Canclini calls "the experience of perceiving in the existing reality other possible ways of being that make dissent, not escape, a necessity" (Canclini, 168). Is Canclini not advocating here for locating the accident precisely as an immanent (and imminent) possibility? In other words, an artistic mode that would make visible the division of consensus and dissensus—Ranciere's "politics and police"[85]—through the annihilation of forms and the attention to metamorphosis? Such an orientation, despite melancholic readings that suggest

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[84] At the same time, if there is a leveling of art—the agit-prop masterpiece is just one not particularly privileged mode of approaching politics through art—most of the foundational NCA films echo NLAC films in their prolific use of Brechtian *verfremdungseffekt*. Variously translated as "distancing effect," "estranging effect," and "alienation effect," *verfremdungseffekt* was developed by Brecht in relation to the theater. NLAC auteurs and theorists found in Brecht a useful ally to conceive of spectatorship and revolutionary filmmaking.

[85] Ranciere, Jacques. "Wrong: Politics and Police." *Dis-agreement: Politics and Philosophy*, University of Minnesota Press, 1999, pp. 21-43.

otherwise, are decidedly oriented to the future infinite, 'a venir'. I argue that this chapter's films mobilize this orientation through destructive plasticity.

IV. Imaging the Accident: Filmmaking and Embodied Process in *Mundo Grúa*

Shot in 16 mm black-and-white film (and later blown up to 35mm), *Mundo Grúa* was made on a budget of twenty thousand dollars from the Rotterdam Film Festival's Hubert Bals Fund, based on the critical success of Trapero's *Negocio.*[86] *Mundo Grua* tells the story of Rulo (Luis Margani), a rotund underemployed handyman training to work as a crane operator on a Buenos Aires highrise. After finishing the training process, Rulo laboriously ascends the building to begin his first day of work only to find the crane occupied by another man. It turns out Rulo failed to pass his medical screening. He subsequently travels to Patagonia to work as an excavator in pipe-line construction, but the job does not last long. When the film ends, Rulo is once again on the move, this time in the back of a pickup truck. The film ends with Rulo's profile flickering into darkness under the gaze of street lights. Rulo is continuously displaced, constantly on the move, and denied any possibility of staying put. He travels all over but appears to go nowhere. He persists in a world—an economic order—that does not value him or his mode of living. Rulo encounters and is dismissed from orders of instrumentality that

[86] "In reference to Latin American cinema, the expression, 'Imperfect Cinema,' is usually understood to mean certain films that have a rough, unfinished quality as opposed to the dominant forms of European and Hollywood cinema. It generally implies that the former films communicate a more direct social and political statement than is customary in film language. It evokes the image of films that have a rugged, grainy appearance due to the use of low-quality film stock and a documentary shooting style. Imperfect Cinema further suggests such characteristics as crude shot and sequence transitions, or naturalistic representations of the violence of everyday life" (Taylor, 26).

are governed by speed and ease of movement. Instead, he operates in the friction-filled world that makes possible the fantasies of free movement imagined in the discourses of Menem and the World Bank. In a way, the freedom of movement is emblematic of the discourses and practices of neoliberalism, which the viewer infers in *Mundo Grua* through its onscreen negation.[87]

Figure 3.1: Pipe-laden infrastructure in *Mundo Grúa*

[87] Some critics have put these techniques under the generic head of "slow cinema" and credit Andre Bazin's writings on realism and neorealism for many of its theoretical conceptions. Though scholarship has only recently coined the term, "slow cinema" does not usually refer to a historical film movement. Directors as diverse as Tarkovsky, Bresson, Ozu, Antonioni, Miklós, Janscó, and Chantal Akerman all could be said to have a taste for "slow cinema." Harry Tuttle has four criteria for slow cinema: plotlessness, wordlessness, slowness, and alienation, or in the words of Paul Schrader "stripped of aesthetic jargon…[slow cinema is] making something take longer than we have been conditioned to expect" (Schrader, 11).

Mundo Grúa documents a differentiated field of emergent and materializing exhaustion. It can be read as a work in progress that is paradoxically about work not-in-progress. It flouts the paternalistic fantasy that projects limited agency onto marginal subjects—so often imagined outside of time and history—by displacing that fantasy altogether. Along the way, it provincializes a logic of eventfulness. Contextualized in the most protracted years of economic deregulation, the film creates anxiety and expectation for an identifiable cataclysmic event that never occurs. This functions not only to question teleologies of pre and post crisis but to substantialize the ontological eventfulness of the accident. The film traces mutations of late capitalism in Argentina by underlining relations with capital at the level of the film itself. If the aesthetics of hunger made poverty into a signifier,[88] then in a peculiar way *Mundo Grúa* makes the material film the signifier.

In the following section, I want to sketch out a reading of *Mundo Grúa* that illustrates the complexities of this negation writ large in the film. In an effort to self-reflexively locate itself and the structures of its emergence as film, *Mundo Grúa* proposes an aesthetic *process* that privileges the contingent and accidental. The ubiquity of the commodity form and the individual transience that it implies appear in *Mundo Grua* as the determining general situation [*situation d'ensemble*]. The forces implied by such a situation impinge just as much on the narrative and thematic diegesis of the film as they

[88] Xavier, Ismael. Allegories of Underdevelopment: Aesthetics and Politics in Modern Brazilian Cinema. University of Minnesota Press, 1997.

do on its formal structure, to the point that some critics have emphasized melancholy as the film's predominant mode. What I am suggesting here, in turning this argument around, is that we read the film as an imminent process of filmmaking itself. Canclini writes,

> An aesthetic of imminence isn't an aesthetic of the ephemeral. At least not a melancholy sort of ephemeral—that feeling of always thinking about what's been lost and living from an always inadequate recollection of memories. If imminence has anything to do with the ephemeral it is with the ephemeral as an affirmation of life. Not in the Nietzschean sense, as an acceptance of the fickleness of life, but as a disposition toward what might come, as paying attention and waiting (Canclini, 184-85).

Mundo Grúa calls attention to the relation between apparatus and material conditions. Its cinema ideas emerge through a confrontation with what Alain Badiou calls non-art.[89] Central to this confrontation is the status of film as commodity in a world system. The paradox of putting Badiou in the context of *Mundo Grúa* is that one of the possible critiques of Badiou's thought is its fetishization of the event. As Tweedie says "Badiou's work obscures the everyday labor involved in preserving and extending the moments possibilities" (Tweedie, 101). If anything, *Mundo Grua* emphasizes that the events of labor are omnipresent capturing "life at its least controllable and most

[89] More recently, Alain Badiou has suggested a different schema for how cinema constitutes itself, "artistic activity can only be discerned in a film as a process of purification of its own immanent non-artistic character" (Badiou, 84). For Badiou, cinema is "impure," and its immanent process is never-ending: "Pure cinema does not exist, except in the dead-end vision of avant-garde formalism" (Badiou, 84). Cinema confronts non-art in its mode of production and in its engagement—borrowings—from other art forms. Non-art is both the limit and the possibility for cinema, and the "artistic" character of cinema stems from its immanent critique. The "common-imagery" that constitutes the basis for such critique is also what makes cinema a mass art and lends it a universal message. In a sense, it is the subversion of these "dominant formal tendencies within current production" such as the dialogue and background noises in Godard or the car, speed, and slowness in Kiarostami, that constitute the artistic operations of cinema and as such cinema-ideas.

unconscious moments, a jumble of transient, forever dissolving patterns accessible only to the camera."[90] This happens through what Badiou would call a process of "purification" of the image of speed and the event that might best be understood through the figure of the accident.

The early shots of *Mundo Grúa* set up the dichotomy between distinct yet co-constitutive forms of labor and capital accumulation. The first shot is a slow montage of cranes followed by a street-level shot of Rulo. In the subsequent sequence, we witness a conversation between Torre, an independently contracted construction worker, and the site supervisor, who criticizes him for not adequately repairing and maintaining the construction equipment. Later, while Torre checks one of the misfiring machines—only to find that it is functioning perfectly—the camera cuts to a low-angle shot up the metal cantilevered foundation of a crane, and then into several long panning shots of Buenos Aires, accompanied by Francisco Canaro's tango waltz "Corazón de Oro." It soon becomes clear that these shots are crane shots—quite literally shots with the camera atop the crane jib.

The shot composition of the initial crane montage points to deterritorialized capital accumulation as well as to the (inverted and deterministic) relation between technological progress and surplus labor. The counterweight, jib, and trolley are framed with voluminous clouds in the background while the diegetic sound of the trolley

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[90] Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 31.

moving across the jib dominates the soundscape. It is as if we witness capital take flight, departing from the terrestrial airstrip of production into the ethereal atmosphere of speculative accumulation. The crane shot is also a self-reflexive allusion to the film industry, here clearly aligned with the technological and spatial mobility of capital. Is the "zoological gaze" also operational here in this self-reflexive moment?

A. Repair and Cosificación

The answer to this question hinges on the contingent and accidental in *Mundo Grúa*. What insists on being looked at in the film—in a sense, the *only* thing to look at—is a process of metamorphosis, a process that implies loss. It is a loss of singularity, but from a perspective that such a thing never existed as stable to begin with. In *Ontology of the Accident*, Catherine Malabou describes the plasticity that undergirds subjective change:

> As a result of serious trauma, or sometimes for no reason at all, the path splits and a new, unprecedented persona comes to live with the former person, and eventually takes up all the room. An unrecognizable persona whose present comes from no past, whose future harbors nothing to come, an absolute existential improvisation. A form born of the accident, born by accident, a kind of accident. A funny breed. A monster whose apparition cannot be explained away as any genetic anomaly. A new being comes into the world for a second time, out of a deep cut that opens in a biography (1-2).

In the narrative diegesis of the film, it is Rulo's body in crisis and under repair—the body as both the site of degradation (cosificación) and resistance—that is, under the duress of metamorphosis. This duress is tied to Rulo's resistance. It is a process that seems to pit the person against the machine, but more fundamentally what is threatening Rulo is the possibility of being reduced to a thing. Ultimately, what guides

the plot is Rulo's resistance to becoming is a fungible thing. He only stops resisting when the film ends.

In his short book "Las personas y las cosas," Roberto Esposito shows how the spheres of philosophy and law have sought to maintain a strict determination between persons (conceived of as rational beings) and things (inert objects). Esposito illustrates the extension of the Roman juridical definition[91] of personhood into contemporary discourses and posits the body as the vector dissolving the binary person-thing that is so central to bio-political power:

> Con respecto a la persona, ya el término griego del que proviene explica la brecha que la separa del cuerpo viviente. Así como una máscara nunca se adhiere completamente al rostro que la cubre, la persona jurídica no coincide con el cuerpo del ser humano al que se refiere. En la doctrina jurídica romana, más que indicar al ser humano con tal, *persona* se refiere al rol social del individuo, mientras que en la doctrina cristiana la persona reside en un núcleo espiritual irreducible a la dimensión corpórea. Sorprendentemente, a pesar de las metamorfosis internas de lo que bien podríamos definir como "dispositivos de las persona," ésta nunca se libera de la fractura original. El antiguo derecho humano fue el primero en crear esta escisión en la especie humana, dividiendo a la humanidad en umbrales de personalidad decreciente que iban desde el estatus de *pater* hasta el cosificado del esclavo […]. El resultado es una dialéctica entre personalización y despersonalización que de cuando en cuando ha sido reelaborada en formas nuevas (Esposito, 11).

For Esposito, it is precisely because the body can be instrumentalized that it can also be affirmed—it is both object of exploitation and form of resistance.

What my argument hopes to make clear is the formal congruences (and conflations) between the body of Rulo (in that specific diegetic film world) and the

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[91] Esposito shows how "things" in Roman law were defined through negation as non-persons, "persona no era lo que uno es, sino lo que uno tiene, como una facultad que, precisamente por esta razón, también se puede perder" (Esposito, 33-34).

material film itself *as a specific process of filmmaking*. By conflating the two—it is not a coincidence that the end of the film marks the disappearance of Rulo—both are positioned in and through their "cosificación." "Mundo Grúa," of course, refers both to the diegetic premises of the film (i.e., late capitalist Argentina) and the film as art and commodity (recall the imbrication between cranes and film). In this way, the film imagines and images itself in a material process that is structurally alienated from the forms that it represents, but finds in the aesthetics of the accident a form/process that valorizes the contingent within over-determining structures. Read in this way, the film *films* its own limitations as possibilities.

Rulo's metamorphosis is characterized by near-constant interface with fragments, residues, and remainders. On the way back from his first day of training on the crane, his car breaks down. His mother—played by Trapero's grandmother—calls him to repair the metal bars on her house window. Rulo attends to the decomposition of his daily environment with great care. He tinkers, aggregates, and assembles with the cast-off. The film emphasizes Rulo's obsession with repairing a small power generator. It is barely powerful enough to turn on a light or two, but he devotes a great deal of labor to the task. Rulo's love interest, Milly, is the owner of a small corner store close to the construction site. She makes, according to Rulo, "milanesas con conciencia." In the beginning of their courtship, Rulo offers to fix the iron gate of Milly's shop, which lethargically screeches when opened or closed. During this scene, Rulo describes how

he used to play bass for a popular band in the 1960s and 70s, El Septimo Regimento. Milly had been a regular at the band's concerts, and in astonishment responds to Rulo, "¡Pero tu eras flaco!" (But you were skinny!). As it turns out, Luis Margani, the actor who plays Rulo, was the bass player of El Septimo Brigada, which enjoyed relative success in the late 60s with "Paco Camorra," a song that tells the story of Paco, a brawny, curly-haired man who defends the neighborhood's weak from bullies. The first refrain of the song goes: "Sale a la calle con su remera/y el pecho afuera/el lleva un pucho en su bocaza/parece un auto feo(viejo) y pesado cuando camina/el es mi amigo y me defiende de los demas."[92] Here, if it was not clear enough already, Rulo is both machine (car) and mechanic (writer of song). Yet like his well-remembered and discarded song, Rulo (and Margani) are discarded members of society, fondly remembered but anachronistic to the dimensions of the extractive and exhaustive mechanisms of control in contemporary Argentina.

Figure 3.2: Rulo and the small power generator, from *Mundo Grúa*

[92] "He goes out on the street with his hat/and his chest puffed out/he's got a cigarette in his mouth/he looks like an old and ugly car and is heavy when he walks/he is my friend and he defends me from the rest" (my translation).

II. Movement

Rulo's interface with repair is also conjugated with the fantasy of movement. The crane appears as an augur of economic mobility. Over dinner, Rulo tells his son Claudio about his new job: "I'll be way up high, all alone, you see? I can listen to the radio, read my book, if I want to fart, I fart, you see?" The height of the crane suggests the possibilities of economic ascension. It is a fantasy space of individual free movement—even at the level of the bowels. It is telling that Rulo imagines the crane as a space of leisure given that leisure correlates to surplus value not to underemployment. Capital finds ways of extracting surplus value when it evolves from the Fordist model. The laborer is now a constant laborer even when not working, producing value as a consumer in a debt economy. When Milly comes over to visit, Rulo proudly shows her how he has equipped his small television set with a swiveling undercarriage that allows

him to watch from his bed or the living room. Confronted with the interminable blockages of day-to-day life, free movement is appealing.[93]

For Rulo, the crane suggests the possibility of a different relationship to the world. Rulo is constantly confronted and interrupted by a world that is "unready-to-hand," to use Martin Heidegger's terminology. In his hammer analysis, Heidegger describes the "ready-to-hand" as a transparent phenomenological experience of the world. When the hammer is working for the carpenter, the hammer, the workbench, and the nails all seamlessly withdraw. When the hammer breaks, however, it becomes "unready-to-hand." The seamless flow of work is interrupted and the carpenter is required to engage the object independently of its normal use. The "unready-to-hand" is caused by an interruption, or crises, and it is interruption and crises that structure Rulo's existence. It is not simply that tools break down in Rulo's life—his car breaks

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[93] In his chapter on walking in the city, Michel de Certeau describes looking down on NYC from the World Trade Center. For Certeau, this perspective lifts him out of the city's grasp and "transfigures him into a voyeur." The panopticon-like view of the city is an imaginary totalization. It cannot account for the everyday tactics of urban dwellers, even as it attempts to objectively calculate, differentiate, and manage the landscape. To counter these tactics, strategies utilize discourses to solidify their legitimacy and obscure their pervasive effects. They "conceal beneath objective calculations their connection with the power that sustains them from within the stronghold of its own 'proper' place or institution." In other words, neoliberal projects of modernization hide their complicity in disarticulating stable forms of labor and promoting unequal flows of capital in the well-worn discourse of progress.

The opening sequence of the film is a low-angle montage of several cranes pivoting side-to-side followed by an eye-level shot of Rulo standing on the street, toolbox in hand, waiting to start his first day of training. This sequence sets up an important distinction between two modes of seeing and operating, similar to what Certeau describes as "strategies" and "tactics." A strategy "assumes a place that can be circumscribed as proper and thus serve as the basis for generating relations with an exterior distinct from it" (Certeau, xix) whereas tactics operate on and with an imposed terrain. They are, in a sense, means of making-do and adapting to the strategic environment imposed by the law. In short, Certeau writes, "a tactic is an art of the weak" (37). Rulo, standing on the street and operating in and through striated space, reflects the difficulty and exhaustion implied by "tactical" movement. That is, just as "tactics" can be conjugated with lines of flight and resistance, they can also imply endurance, exhaustion, and destruction.

down, the small generator he obsessively attempts to repair refuses to work, his mother's house is in constant need of repair. Rulo himself is breaking down. As a result, Rulo always confronts and moves through striated and crisis-ridden spaces that, following Certeau, he is forced to engage tactically.[94]

The film creates the sense of spatial viscosity not only via Rulo's constant interface with repair but through the *mise-en-scène*. Every time Rulo trains on the crane he climbs the stairs to the top of the building. The film never fails to follow this arduous task. Just before climbing the ladder to the roof, Rulo must step over a hip-high pipe that divides the passageway. It would be easy enough to cut from the stairs to the top of the building, but the film frames this sequence to underline the contrast between the free movement of capital and the arduous labor that belies deregulation. *Mundo Grúa* shows how the infrastructure of capital ensures its liberated movement at the same time it creates a viscous, pipe-laden architecture for labor. After moving to Patagonia, Rulo's friends come for a brief visit and take him on a quick trip out to the "Valle de la Luna." Upon arrival, the friends look at one another in morose boredom, as if on lunch break at the construction site. Even this trip, which appears to be one of Rulo's first freely chosen spatial adventures, to a desert landscape that symbolizes affirmative possibility of

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[94] Certeau recognizes the use of tactics in the process of colonization in the Americas, writing in regards to contemporary consumption: "The cautious yet fundamental inversions brought about by consumption in other societies have long been studied. Thus the spectacular victory of Spanish colonization over the indigenous Indian cultures was diverted from its intended aims by the use made of it […] they remained the within the system which they assimilated and which assimilated them externally. They diverted it without leaving it. Procedures of consumption maintained their difference in the very space that the occupier was organizing" (31-32).

movement—the desert as generally thought of as "flat" and "empty" with the exotic distance implied in a name like "Valle de la Luna"—results in utter despondency. Even here where space would seem to be the most radically available, there are blockages and friction. Or as Dean MacCannell has noted in relation to the use and signifying force of huge spaces in contemporary art, "The earth, the ground, only appears to provide reference points for the sedentary" (quoted in Canclini, 41).

These quasi-events, to borrow from Elizabeth Povinelli, are made palpable by never actualizing a moment of cataclysmic crisis.[95] Rulo laboriously walks up the long flight of stairs but never has a medical attack. He awkwardly shimmies his way over the pipe but never falls. He is a novice working the crane and the extractor yet never destroys anything. Crisis is always on the edge of actualization in the representation of everyday life in order to call attention to the mediation and event(s). The movie seems to ask, what "event" is the viewer waiting for when the film is replete with events? Put differently, the film challenges viewers to reflect on the traumatic "event" that never occurs to adjust perceptions of crisis in late capitalism, a period in which crisis and precarity are the norm, not the anomaly.

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[95] Put differently, what the film strives to do is register what Elizabeth Povinelli has called 'quasi-events', "If events are things that we can say happened such that they have a certain objective being, then quasi-events never quite achieve the status of having occurred or taken place. They neither happen nor not happen. I am not interested in these quasi-events in some abstract sense, but in the concrete ways that they are, or are not, aggregated and thus apprehended, evaluated, and grasped as ethical and political demands in specific liberal markets, publics, and states as opposed to crises and catastrophes that seem to necessitate ethical reflection and political and civic engagement" (Povinelli, 13-14).

After another long march up the stairs and awkward shimmy over the pipe, and a climb up the ladder to the top of the building, Rulo listens as his friend Torre advises him to be careful: "acá lo que tenés que hacer es tener cuidado." We see the two men in a medium shot as Rulo inches over to the edge of the roof and gazes down to the city streets. The camera does not follow with a reverse shot but instead maintains its gaze on Rulo. What is out of frame in this shot is the event of crisis. A shot of the city streets would have given a consistency to the danger of the construction site, but the idea here is that danger, precarity, and crisis permeate the space represented onscreen. The camera does not cut to Rulo's point of view because doing so would reduce the friction-filled space of cinematic expression. This is the space of the accident.

III. The Accident

What exists out of frame is not merely Rulo's point of view, but also the privileged moment that would *speed up* the film. Instead of punctuating time with the pose, the film dilates time and movement through the quotidian moments in Rulo's life. The emphasis falls on the "unready-to-hand" tactics that Rulo employs to persist in a world that no longer values him—in a world in which he is disappearing. The pose—emblematized in the absence of the point of view shots, for instance—is incapable of representing the speed at which Rulo moves and operates. "Man is a slow being who is only made possible by fantastic speeds," wrote Michaux.[96]

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[96] For a more detailed discussion of Michaux's quote see Kerslake, Christian. *Deleuze and the Unconscious*. Continuum, 2007. p. 184

Rulo's world is not marked by identifiable dramatic accidents. Rather, accidents are interspersed at every level of existence, down to his own body. He is diagnosed with Pickwickian syndrome, a condition that overloads the pulmonary system and disrupts breathing, causing among other things excessive daytime drowsiness. This syndrome is driven at least in part by Rulo's physical condition, which does not conform to the ideal of a perfectly maintained body in an economy in which personal health is a job. Of course, this is precisely the point. Precarity is rationalized and normalized by the dissemination of market logics into every sphere of life, often under the aegis of "personal responsibility." Put differently, Rulo's heaviness should be read in relation to the how bodies materialize under the regulatory mechanisms of late-capitalist Argentina.

Neorealism, according to Deleuze and Bazin, made the real indeterminate. By this they meant that time was no longer subordinate to movement—the etiological linkages between images dissolved—in favor of purely optical and sonic scenes, sequences of images that did not obey a logic of actualization. *Mundo Grúa* makes of the resistance to actualization a signifier in its own right by presenting "wreckage" in the present progressive rather than the past or future perfect. In so doing it gives an account of wreckage itself—that is, a process of materialization in pre-formed and in-formation

capitalist infrastructures. In the final instance, this account is inscribed in the body of the film, through both the protagonist Rulo and in the "accidental" film material.[97]

Gonzalo Aguilar notes how the improvisational character of the film footage structured Pablo Trapero's editing process in *Mundo Grua:*

> Se sabe que Trapero llegó a la mesa de montage con muchísimo material y que a partir de allí comenzó a estructurar un relato: aunque tuviera un guión, la unidades intimas del relato eran también las situaciones muchas veces improvisadas que habían captado con su cámara. Lo que quiero señalar es la apertura de los directores (y Trapero sería un ejemplo más) a las situaciones, las improvisaciones, las invenciones de los actores o a los acontecimientos que se van dando a lo largo del rodaje.[98]

This gloss gives a completely different impression of the citational neorealist style in *Mundo Grúa*. Realism is too often characterized as something like naturalism in literature, and is thus tied to naive notions of aesthetic transparency and objectivity. Though aesthetic categorizations ("isms," eg., Minimalism, realism, etc.) seem to connote the duration and repetition of forms, it is clear that adherence to form can itself

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[97] Sharon Marcus and Stephen Best have argued "surface reading" attends to "What lies in plain sight" which "is worthy of attention but often eludes observation—especially by deeply suspicious detectives who look past the surface to root out what is underneath it." For Best and Marcus, "deeply suspicious detectives" attempt to read the latent rather than manifest aspects of a text in the false belief that "the most interesting part of a text is what it represses." For Marcus and Best, the hermeneutics of suspicion (Marxist and psychoanalytic readings) assume that domination and ideology are always veiled, hidden from plain sight. While not entirely dismissing this tradition, they advise the critic to attend to the surface, "what insists on being looked *at* rather than what we must train ourselves to see *through*" (9).

While this turn towards "surface reading" is salutary in the way it questions what proponents call the "heroic" role of critique and critic, the problem with Best and Marcus's argument, following Merleau Ponty, is that "surface" is only legible as "surface" with depth; and abstracting the former from the latter requires a disavowal of how these concepts are interrelated and immanent to perception—"this being simultaneously present in experiences which are nevertheless mutually exclusive, this implication of one in the other, this contraction into one perceptual act of a whole possible process, constitute the originality of depth" (Merleau Ponty, 308). *Mundo Grúa* provides an inflection point for this type of reading because the film reveals not how depth constitutes surface but how the two enfold each other in corporeal experience.

[98] Aguilar, *Más Allá,* 82.

produce novelties and contingencies. Without a doubt "New Argentine Cinema establishes a much clearer dialogue with the theory of neorealism than with its praxis" (Page, 37). Clearly improvisational allowances were central to the conception of the film image as such in *Mundo Grúa.* In Aguilar's telling, the improvised and invented are not extraneous to the diegetic plot of the film. We should keep in mind here what Adorno said about "isms": "a faint contradiction is inherent in the linguistic use of ism insofar as in emphasizing conviction and intention it seems to expel the element of involuntariness from art."[99] It is precisely through the direct citations of a neorealist style that *Mundo Grua* devises an aesthetics process (a kind of "ism" if you will) that produces the accidental.

Paul Virilio noted that with increased reliance on technology there is a correlated propensity and possibility of the "integral accident." The latter is simultaneous and universal, subtended by the political economy of speed—"dromology" for Virilio distinguishes contemporary capitalism—and the scale of its integration (its effects).[100] Crisis capitalism, disaster capitalism, and other similar terminologies are semantic approximations of the precipitant rise of "integral" global catastrophes. The 2008 so-called housing crisis, nuclear disasters like Fukushima, and the 2010 eruption of Eyjafjallajökull in Iceland, which paralyzed global movement are all recent examples of the integral accident. In a sense, technological innovations invent their own modes of

[99] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory,* 24.

[100] "The progress of speed is nothing other than the unleashing of violence" (Virilio, 2005, 45).

unforeseen events: "As soon as something is well established (a substance), it is necessarily accompanied by something unreliable, which can trigger off forces difficult to contain at any moment" (Virilio, 92).

Following Virilio and Malabou, the accident can be conceived as occupying a space of passage between one state and another. It is a condition of possibility that haunts every moment, in the sense that its always an outstanding (ex-istential) possibility; and it lives on because like trauma, it cannot be fully appropriated. Malabou writes, "This is why recognizing the ontology of the accident is a difficult task: it must be acknowledged as a law that is simultaneously logical and biological, but a law that does not allow us to anticipate its instances" (Malabou, 30).

Later in the film, Rulo and Milly attend a film screening. Afterwards, Rulo stops and expresses his admiration for a large film projector. On the one hand, the projector represents an inverse reflection of Rulo's lebenswelt, his lifeworld. The frictionless movement and metaphorical promise of leisure time that the moving-image (emphasis on moving) represents are anathema to Rulo's moment-to-moment existence. Here the gap expands between the representational apparatus—the film industry writ large—and the signified. And it is in this sense that the title of the film, *Mundo Grúa*, or Crane World, can be read as a self-reflexive reference to the ironic distance between the film industry and the worlds it represents onscreen.

On the other hand, Rulo is interpolated by the projector through a screen—in this case a window—as if he were identifying with a film character. It might be said that the structure of this identification occurs not on the level of representation, but rather at the level of production. Just as Rulo has diminishing value in a world where economic and technological changes have altered the modes of production, so the black-and-white analog film is marginalized vis-à-vis the speed of international digital production and distribution. There is an indecipherable relation in the film between Rulo and Margani, between fiction and non-fiction. Where one ends and the other begins is unclear. The same can be said of Trapero, who knew Margani through his father, and cast his grandmother in the role of Rulo's mother. The film contains a mix of fictionalized fragments that underline the traumatic cut in the linearity of autobiographical narration in favor of a fractious and mobile sense of identity. In a sense, Rulo and the film slip in and out of another in a mini signifying circuit, Rulo as film and film as Rulo (Rulo/Margani creating film and film creating Rulo/Margani). The film is almost but not quite about Rulo. It is almost but not quite about Margani too. Neither is it altogether Trapero's. Rather, it is the ensemble of elements organized around a procedure that valorizes the unintentional and unexpected that generate the accidental as destructive *and* productive. The latter is not the extraneous property of a substance, as Aristotle proposed the accidental to be, but rather becomes the imminent molder of substance, of difference itself, even as it is eventually captured within the strictures of bio-political

economies of exclusion.[101] Rulo and the moving picture *Mundo Grúa* only *move* in and through filmic accidents, dysfunction, and repair. In opposition to the smooth-functioning spaces of commercial cinema and "frictionless capitalism,"[102] *Mundo Grúa* proposes an aesthetic of destructive plasticity that molds and is molded through the auto-poetic reorganization of accidents. Viewed from this perspective, *Mundo Grúa* can be understood to be operating in the temporal adverbial of "to come," even if or especially when what's to come resembles (again) the end of the world.

IV. Coffee Hour: Temporal Transformations in *Bolivia*

The first scenes of Adrián Caetano's *Bolivia* overlay what appear to be familiar images of a typical Argentine café, with an offscreen voice dictating the operating hours.[103] The camera shows a clock—this will be a key interpretative element—an espresso machine, various cooking utensils, and a grill with a sign posted next to it that says "Choripan $1." While the café owner, Enrique, explains to Freddy—the recently

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[101] We can conceive of this production in terms of Deleuze's virtual and actual. Zizek writes, "The proper site of production is not the virtual space as such, but, rather, the very passage from it to constituted reality, the collapse of the multitude and its oscillations into one reality—production is fundamentally a limitation of the open space of virtualities, the determination/negation of the virtual multitude" (Zizek, 366).

[102] Zizek writes, "When Deleuze and Guattari write in Anti-Oedipus that, by striking to reach the furthest limit of deterritorialization, a schizophrenic "seeks out the very limit of capitalism: he is its inherent tendency brought to fulfillment," do they thereby not confirm that their own socio-political project is a desperate attempt to realize capitalism's own inherent fantasy, its virtual coordinates? Is communism thereby not reduced to what none other than Bill Gates called "frictionless capitalism," capitalism elevated and intensified to the infinite speed of circulation? No wonder that Negri has recently praised 'postmodern' digital capitalism, claiming that it is already communist and that it needs just a little push, a formal gesture, to openly become such" (Zizek, 352).

[103] Enrique says, "los fines de semana estamos abierto toda la noche."

hired cook—his schedule and duties, we see several high-angle shots that show the layout of the café followed by close-ups of photographs of famous football players, including a photograph of the Argentine soccer team embracing after a goal. At the end of this montage sequence, Enrique asks Freddy "Y dónde aprendiste hacer asado, ¿en Perú?" to which Freddy responds, "No, yo soy Boliviano." This opening scene introduces the main themes of the film: time, labor, space, nationalism, and reification. Joanna Page reads this sequence as according a "poetic grandeur" to the cooking tools, which are "patiently awaiting human use for productive labor," and as an introduction to the film's homage to labor in the Argentine economic context of the 21st century (60-61). Christian Gundermann reads the tools as a critique of commodification and consumption. The proliferation of commodities and the lack of stable labor opportunities is reflected in "the desolation of objects in disuse" (244). Put slightly differently, what Gundermann points to is the hyper-reification of objects in late-capitalist commodity fetishism. That is, objects are viewed purely as commodities. For Gundermann, the cast-off tools that open the first sequence of *Bolivia* undermine the aura of the commodity fantasy by showing the object in disuse. Taken together Page and Gundermann exemplify a productive tension in the film between images of dignified labor and a critique of reification. Freddy's insistence to Enrique that he is Bolivian congeals these two readings: Freddy is accorded dignity and agency through resisting the racist, objectifying stereotype.

While I agree when Page suggests that, in certain sequences, the film "lends an epic, lyrical quality to the everyday tasks depicted" and that these moments suggest that "it is manifestly honest labor that lends Freddy dignity" (Page, 61), the film also shows how Freddy's dignity is constantly challenged by racist clients, and circumscribed by the State and international political and economic structures of violence. Freddy has come to Enrique's café after being forced to move from Bolivia to Buenos Aires because American soldiers torched his coca fields. As an "illegal immigrant," Freddy is exposed to economic and State exploitation that forces him to occupy a liminal space, in the sense of being excluded by inclusion. In the café, Freddy is subject to the clock, which Enrique utilizes to regulate labor. The breaks that Freddy and his coworker Rosa take are regimentally ordered by Enrique, despite the fact that the clock is constantly broken.

Refracted through the early images of the clock, we can see here a cinema of idleness. The precarity, unemployment, and displacement that surround and inhabit the café announce that the space is soon to be if it is not already anachronistic to turn of the millennium Argentina.[104] In the café, the connection between time and labor becomes unglued. The taxi drivers, whose ideological confusions serve as allegorical stand-ins for, among other things, Menem's politics of Argentine exceptionalism, exemplify the transient, constantly-in-motion state of labor and time. Just because there *is* time, does

[104] Indeed, cursory walks around Buenos Aires as recently as 2019 would suggest that local cafés like this one are rare. They are more likely to have been replaced by swanky bistros and bars, which are on some level indistinguishable from others like them in major cities across the globe.

not mean it is paid time. The montage of the 1996 football match between Bolivia and Argentina that intercalates the opening credits also cannot be contained by the time parameters of the match. It spills over into the social relations in the café. This sequence is overlaid with the extra-diegetic song "Condor Mallku," by Los Kjarkas, which so dominates the soundscape it undermines the power hierarchy iterated throughout the introductory sequence. As we will see, a pitched antagonism is precisely what punctuates the dramatic finale of the film. Viewed in this light, rather than a stable place of repose, the café becomes the site of anxiety, decay, and transformation.

Fig. 3.3: *Bolivia* Film Poster

After his first night of low-paid work, Freddy gets scammed by a local telephone operator and is left with a meager five pesos. Wandering the streets in search of a place to sleep, he encounters suspicious and abusive police. His movements are delimited by the threat of violence inside and outside the café. In the climatic scene of the film, Freddy is violently slapped to the ground by Oso, a drunk taxi-driver that frequents the café. As Oso leaves, Freddy lingers at the doorway and is shot. He dies on the threshold, neither inside nor outside, as if to evoke his own placelessness. Freddy is a person the system cannot do without, and that thing that can never be incorporated. The economic system is built on Freddy's body in two senses: his body provides cheap labor, and it is killable when social antagonisms peak. His body is made fungible to the economies of displacement and elimination that characterize late capitalist Argentina. He is a placeless person faced with violent inclusion or elimination.

The café in *Bolivia* is an "any-space-whatever" insofar as it is not yet or no longer comprehensible in the familiar coordinates of nationalist economic liberalism. Or rather, it is only a space comprehensible as such through acts of foundational violence. At first glance, Enrique's café appears prototypical. It is filled with all the familiar paraphernalia—the grill for choripan, the espresso machine, the football posters—that we associate with an Argentine café. Amanda Holmes has argued that the nationalist iconography in the café is designed to evoke a nostalgia for a past now challenged by "foreigners"—embodied in characters like Freddy, the Paraguayan-Argentine Rosa, and

the gay taxi drivers, and that nostalgia is what ultimately drives Oso to kill Freddy. In other words, *Bolivia* can be read as mobilizing nostalgia to critique the café as space of limited community.[105] For Holmes, the broken clock tells the viewer how to read the film in relation to time: the time of the patrons compared to that of the workers, as well as the desire to return to a different time. I agree insofar as the film foregrounds the importance of time as a necessary condition to reconsider how national spaces become national. However, we can read the film beyond the logic of a politics of representation that would attempt to expand the archive of the café in a post-national register. Whether post-national archive or international *hermandad*, what undergirds both interpretive operations is the unfigurable real point of the film—the clock—that in the dramatic final, appears precisely *as* unfigurable, as it does not appear on screen at all.

If we continue to insist on the clock, it is not without reason. Its importance is pronounced not only in the introductory and ending sequences, but even in the film's publicity, where it appeared on movie posters in a sequence of photos—arranged as on a film strip—alongside human characters in the film, as an equal player in the diegetic unfolding of events.[106] Page notes that "the clock on the wall of the bar marks out the beginning and the end of the long workday, measuring its quieter periods and busier ones. The length of the shots will decrease as work picks up and increase again at times of rest" (Page, 59). While Page's insightful correlation between the clock and

[105] Amanda Holmes has an insightful reading of the café as a museum, repository of the national archive.

[106] See image 1.1

filmmaking is here invaluable, she underemphasizes perhaps the most fundamental aspect of *this* clock: it is broken.

What is broken here is also time as discourse, time mobilized in narrative to symbolize history and power relations. The taxi drivers approach to the café is characterized by misogyny, homophobia, and racism. They sexually harass Rosa, berate their homosexual colleagues, and scapegoat their economic woes onto Freddy. Their cognitive map of social relations resembles discourses about the "barbarous," "foreign," and indigenous threats to national unity that characterize foundational narratives of Argentine nationalism. Put differently, these men fill the temporal gap, the problem of time, by harkening back to the teleological discourses of progress that justified the nineteenth and twentieth century indigenous genocides and in so doing foreshadow Freddy's death. In Argentina, indigenous subjects have often been construed in relation to two poles of elimination: the need to eliminate a "backwards" populace who are holding the country back from progress, and invisibilization, the refusal to recognize the ongoing indigenous presence or its folklorization. For Oso, Freddy is overly visible—excessively so because, in addition to his sheer presence, Freddy has adapted better to the economic model. Unlike Oso, who is deep in debt and cannot control his consumption, as evidenced by his drinking and cocaine addiction, Freddy is frugal and hardworking. In this sense, what drives Oso is the classic concept of *jouissance,* where the subject fantasizes about the Other's infinite enjoyment, which appears as

threatening to identificatory stability and must be destroyed. How to read this process in the film, as either deterministic and inevitable or through the frame of the potentially liberating forces of routine, around which inhere *hermandad* and labor, divides many critics.

In addition, the clock points to the changing economic conditions of late-capitalist labor time. The forces of globalization have produced the conditions for labor flexibility and hyper-mobility. Enrique's employees are a Paraguayan-Argentine and a Bolivian immigrant who serve an underemployed Bonarense taxi driver clientele. Even though almost the entire film takes place in the relatively static space of the café, every element—from the characters to the globalized television content—point to a precarity and mobility that the old temporal system cannot map. That is, it is not merely a new labor time that the clock fails to register but the spatio-temporal matrix of material relations, including and beyond labor time. As the film emphasizes again and again, the clock is out of sync with the space of the café precisely because spatial transformations have been outpaced by abstract temporal coordinates governed by speed.

The soccer sequence that follows the introductory montage of the café shows Argentina playing a 1996 World Cup qualifying game against Bolivia. In the game, Argentina's many goals are enumerated by announcers Mariano Closs and Fernando Niembro, who trade off proclaiming Argentine physical and tactical primacy. Niembro's announcements are charged with a teleology that projects Argentine spatial and

temporal superiority. The "albiceste" dominates the ground of the football pitch because of their temporal primacy. Argentina is "ahead" of Bolivia in the score but more importantly, the announcers seem to suggest, in time and history. This sporting spectacle turned teleological-project is broadcast nationally in spaces like Enrique's café and serves to project a homogeneity onto the heterogeneity on the field, and by extension the spaces of viewership.[107]

At the same time, Caetano takes pains to show game footage that includes numerous shots of Diego Simeone, an Argentine midfielder nicknamed "El Cholo." Of course, "cholo" is a term created by the colonial Spanish *criollo* class to designate a lower class of people with a "mixed-race" complexion. By foregrounding the narrative film with Simeone's presence in the archive footage, *Bolivia* suggests that national space has always already been heterogeneous, classist, and racist. The archive footage itself (the football game) undermines the signification ascribed to it by the commentators.

The film's circular narrative further undermines the teleology of progress and national (read racial) superiority. The film ends with the café unchanged. It is as if we witnessed the quotidian activities and dramas that occurred there in between the

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[107] Marie-Eve Monnette convincingly argues: "If the spectacle "is a social relation between people that is mediated by images," as Guy Debord claims (2009: 427), then the visual message conveyed by the soccer game is that the social relation between Argentineans and Bolivians is unequal, and is based on race and nationality. However, the song "Condor Mallku," expressing a desire to emerge from dreams, beyond all reality, in order to bring a message of brotherhood and seeking to encounter its freedom, evokes the hope of transcending racial oppression, as it accompanies the racially charged images of the football game. In doing so, it points to the potential articulation of new relations between Bolivians and Argentineans that will not be based on divisions, but on similarities founded on brotherhood, and therefore equality" (10).

movements of the hands of the clock. The diegetic events of the film occur in between the *tick* and the *tock,* as it were. In the beginning, we see Enrique take down the sign that reads "se necesita cocinero," and at the end we see him put the identical sign back up in the window. Isn't it the case that this job posting resemble the title cards that bookend films? Far from progress, the narrative of *Bolivia* points to the repetition of the same with its concomitant disavowal of the past and the possibility of difference. The almost mechanical reproduction of this procedure—the event's illegibility to the traditional levers of power and the ease with which the law erases Freddy—is perhaps the dominant underlying *routine* that is repeated in the film. Is not what we have here an endless recycling (mimeticism) of the act of foundational violence that, like trauma, returns again and again to deracinate temporalities that *sui generis* reproduce (and represent) that same violence? To put it in slightly Bergsonian terms, if time as duration occurs in the break—between the *tick* and the *tock*—it nevertheless must confront, as if in a circuit, the violent inevitability of the clock's time.

What I am proposing here is that with its tragic denouement, *Bolivia* provides us with an abstract representation of time which inhabits and deregulates the chronological runtime of the film. What holds together the dialectical movement of routine in the film is paradoxically the always-already occurring deregulation of time. As such, a film and a viewing of film can also be seen here through the prism of routinization (scenes get acted more than once, films are viewed over and over, etc).

Freddy's assassination occurs simultaneously with the break in the sensory-motor schema of the film. The point-and-shoot of the gun coincides with the break-down of the point-and-shoot mechanisms of the camera. We might go further and suggest that with the assassination of Freddy the non-representable temporal opening that makes relations possible is also eliminated, sublimated into the destructive accumulating routine of clock time. If there is a liberatory possibility accorded to the routines of labor, it is opposed by a terrifying routinization and normalization of violence. The film seems to be structured to suggest that the same could be said about the act, the routine, of film viewing itself. Is this not precisely Deleuze's point when he writes, "The only rejoinder to the harsh law of cinema — a minute of image which costs a day of collective work — is Fellini's: 'When there is no more money left, the film will be finished'" (Deleuze, 76)? If Oso cannot understand the café in terms other than the teleological discourses that reify the café and its inhabitants into classifiable and knowable entities, *Bolivia* seems to prod its viewers into asking themselves what kind of *routine* they are participating in when watching. The film shows how the co-constitutive ideologies of racism and nationalism obscure differential social relations at the same time it suggests how these structures rely on the disavowal of time as producer of difference. But, more, it seems to me that *Bolivia* asks to whether the inevitability of clock-time (and the spectacularization of violence) produce a coeval operation in the spectator not

dissimilar from Sadiyya Hartman's concerns regarding uncritical reproductions of Fredrick Douglass's account on Aunt Hester:

> At issue here is the precariousness of empathy and the uncertain line between witness and spectator. Only more obscene than the brutality unleashed at the whipping post is the demand that this suffering be materialized and evidenced by the display of the tortured body or endless recitations of the ghastly and terrible. In light of this, how does one give expression to these outrages without exacerbating the indifference to suffering that is the consequence of the benumbing spectacle or contend with the narcissistic identification that obliterates the other or the prurience that too often is the response to such displays?[108]

For Hartman, it would seem that performance is rarely, if ever, outside the economy of reproduction of anti-Black violence.

If this reading seems farfetched, consider the scene where Freddy is shot dead. As Freddy falls to the floor, neither outside nor inside the café, Enrique looks up to his right. The viewer is given no justification for why Enrique looks up instead of down towards Freddy, but we can intuit what is offscreen: it is the clock—Enrique's ultimate object of concern. We can speculate as to why Enrique looks up. Perhaps he heard the gunshot and thought the clock broke, or perhaps he wanted to note the exact time Freddy was shot to inform the police. Just as likely, he looked up to note when Freddy clocked out so would not have to pay him. However, none of these speculations consider *why* the clock is out of frame. When the camera cuts from Freddy's dying body to Enrique gazing up at the out of frame clock, the viewer is invited to reflect on the act

[108] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 4.

of viewing itself. How does *this* representation of violence differ from the multimedia spectacles of violence constantly on show in the café?

The difference, of course, lies in the image—specifically, in the relation between past and present that is posited by an image "that fuses the pastness of the recorded event with the presentness of its viewing."[109] Here the primal scene of Freddy's murder, and the abstract non-cut towards the clock, should be read not in isolation, but rather as montage. The structure of the latter is aporetic. Fred Moten writes:

> Montage renders inoperative any simple opposition of totality to singularity. It makes you linger in the cut between them, a generative space that wills and erases itself. That space is, is the site of, ensemble: the improvisation of singularity and totality and through their opposition. For now that space will manifest itself somewhere between the first lines of tragedy and the last lines of elegy.[110]

Clock time and (labor) time as duration demand to be read together, in montage, "a generative space that wills and erases itself" (ibid). What produces the opening of time in *Bolivia* is the alternating forces of remembering and forgetting, repetition and difference, which appear as an (en)closing breach in time. The gambit of the film, then, is to make viewers reside in the break—exemplified in the non-cut toward the clock—differently. This too ends in tragedy. The tragedy of the film resides in the instant of deregulation that enacts the viewer's failure, the film's failure, and the failure of the gaze itself to produce a metamorphosis in form—to break the cycle of violence.

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[109] Totaro, Donato. Gilles Deleuze's Bergsonian Film Project: Part 2. no. 3, Mar. 1999.

[110] Moten, *In the Break*, 89.

Figure 3.4: Enrique looks up to the clock

Figure 3.5: Freddy on the café threshold

VI. A Picnoleptic Odyssey: Working on Forgetting in *Liverpool*

In a 2015 interview with *Extra Extra Magazine* about his film, *Jauja* (2015), Lisandro Alonso said: "Places are like characters to me." Alonso describes the methods he used for *La Libertad* (2001), *Los Muertos* (2004), and *Liverpool* (2008): "When I begin a project the first thing that comes to my mind is an image of a place, a particular region of Argentina, such as the pampas outback, the jungle, or the Argentine south." Each film focuses on a lonely male figure in identifiable geographic locations. *La Libertad* takes place in the outback, *Los Muertos* in the jungle along the Paraná, and *Liverpool* in frigid Patagonia. Even *Fantasma* (2006), which features Misael Saavedra and Argentino Vargas (protagonists of *La Libertad* and *Los Muertos),* occurs in the well-known Centro Cultural General San Martin, Buenos Aires. As Francisco Brignole argues, part of Alonso's project centers around the theme of forgetfulness, and by focusing on the underrepresented areas of Argentina, "Alonso reclaims (as he had done in *Los Muertos*) the forgotten peripheral regions as part of the national territory" (Brignole, 46).

These "forgotten" areas of Argentina resist being exposed because in Alonso's films there is always tension in voyeurism. Aguilar has argued that what is redeemed in Alonso's films is the autarky of filmmaking labor, "así como el protagonista se aleja del pueblo ahogado por un medio en el que el único contacto con los demás hombres o mujeres es el de la transacción económica, el realizador sale intencionalmente en su búsqueda para hacer un cine diferente, lejos del cine-institución" (quoted in Page, 64). Mainstream culture is not denigrated, but there is a marked preference for representing time independent from the techno-scientific fast cuts that dominate commercial cinema. In *Libertad* and *Los Muertos* numerous long takes follow the arduous labor of cutting down trees, chopping up a honeycomb, slaughtering a goat, roasting an armadillo. The rhythm of shots combined with the expertise of the actors executing complex manual tasks at times lends an unexpected sensuality to these sequences. It is not so much viewing comfort or discomfort that this operation produces; instead it highlights the variable distance between viewing and laboring.

Alonso's *Fantasma* (2006), which documents the screening of *Los Muertos* in Buenos Aires, complicates this distance. As noted, Misael and Vargas—protagonists of *Libertad* and *Muertos*—were invited to attend. The film consists of Vargas and Misael independently wandering around, *looking at* the lesser-visited areas of the ornate Centro Cultural San Martín, and the film screening, where we witness several patrons move

uncomfortably in their seats. Vargas and Misael celebrate, but on their own, away from the adornments of the high-class institution. Joanna Page convincingly argues:

> What are the ethics of transplanting Misael and Vargas from their rural environment to place them under observation in a temple to high urban art? How can we maintain a vision of their hermit-like existence, close to nature and untouched by consumer society, when we know that these protagonists have been contracted to act on film, offered wages as an incentive to leave their usual jobs aside for the duration of the shooting? By turning his documentary subjects into actors, Alonso acknowledges as impossibilities two paradigms that seemed to underpin his filmmaking: first, that the camera simply observes without constructing (the documentary illusion) and second, that film can step out of the market (the autarkic reading).[111]

If film is the "Kingdom of Shadows," as Maxim Gorky famously said in 1896, then the shadows that stalk the cinematic halls in *Fantasma* are Misael and Vargas. The *mise-en-abyme* structure of *Fantasma* works to make visible the various specters of contradiction that haunt the film industry writ large. As Derrida notes, "That is why the experience of seeing a film is so rich. It lets one see new specters appear while remembering the ghosts haunting films already seen."[112] If individual self-reliance as a mode of survival and creation is vindicated in Alonso's first films, in *Fantasma* individuality is mobilized to dissolve whatever imagined social bonds are projected onto the screen. Vargas and Misael do not obtain any kind of star aura that distinguishes or elevates them socio-economically. They are viewers like the rest of the public. We see that, and "With that knowledge comes the recognition that Vargas, although physically inhabiting the same

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[111] Page, *Crisis and Capitalism*, 67-8.

[112] Derrida, *Cinema and Ghosts*, 27.

space that we inhabit, belongs in social, cultural, and economic terms to a very different world" (Page, 66).


Fig. 3.6 and 3.7: Argentino Vargas sitting at the movies, from *Fantasma*

Several other sequences from *La Libertad* and *Los Muertos* also highlight the structural difference between observer and observed. In the former, the camera drifts away from the scenes of labor towards open space—the sky and the land beyond the fence enclosing the forest—in an expressive, almost dreamlike movement. In the latter, the camera does not follow Vargas' viewpoint (that is, it does not follow the line of sight) but instead appears to meander autonomously to objects of its own interest. Both *Los Muertos* and *La Libertad* are punctuated by extra-diegetic contemporary electronic and punk rock music: "As Aguilar notes, the contemporary, urban sound of electronic music used […] immediately highlights the difference between the observer (to whose urban world such music belongs) and the observed" (Page, 67).

Brignole argues that the manipulation of temporality in Alonso's films rebuff commercial cinema's demands for a passive audience: "Alonso manipulates both temporality and plot to ensure that spectators are never subjected to a bombardment of images and actions that would render them immobilized, passive, and uninvolved" (Brignole, 49). Instead, Brignole envisions a "dynamic between film and viewers," in which the viewer "fills in gaps […] and assign[s] meaning" to the fragmented, aporetic, or unclear portions of the film. Whether and how this proposed dynamic occurs is anyone's guess. The least that can be said is that in *Fantasma* the relationship between viewer and viewed is imagined as unsettled and constantly shifting, so that by the end "we might ourselves be the ultimate object of Alonso's parody" (Page, 68). *Fantasma* imagines the audience as suffering from inattentiveness for the parodic kind of self-reflexivity that turns the tables on the viewer. Some decide to leave the theater all together.

Even though *Liverpool* followed *La Libertad, Los Muertos*, and *La Fantasma,* it can be read as another installment in the series about isolated and forgotten geographies in Argentina.[113] The film follows a sailor named Farrell, who takes a brief vacation from

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[113] In an interview with Cinema Scope, Alonso makes a similar connection:

SCOPE: Your other features have been shot almost entirely outdoors. Was it a challenge to shoot in your normal style in the claustrophobic interiors of the freight ship at the beginning of the film?

ALONSO: Actually, we already had some experience on shooting these claustrophobic places from the time we shot *Fantasma* inside a movie theatre in Buenos Aires. That's why I am always saying that if I hadn't made *Fantasma*, *Liverpool* would have been a very different movie. *Liverpool* is the result of throwing the ingredients of *Fantasma* into *La libertad* and *Los muertos*.

work on an international container ship to visit his mother and daughter who live Tolhuin, a remote town in Argentine Tierra del Fuego, close to Ushuaia. The screenplay of the film is relatively simple if we only take account of what moves the diegesis forward. Farrell works on the ship. He asks the captain permission to go ashore to visit his mother. He takes leave of the ship in Ushuaia, visits a restaurant and then a brothel. He passes out drunk, wakes up in an abandoned bus, and hitchhikes to Tolhuin on a lumber truck. He arrives, eats, gets drunk, and passes out in an outhouse. No one in town recognizes him except for Trujillo, a wiry old man who cares for Farrell's mother and daughter. When Farrell wakes up from his evening binge he briefly speaks to his mother and his daughter Analía (His mother, it turns out, suffers from advanced Alzheimers disease). Before leaving, he gives Analía some money and a gift. The film continues for a short period after Farrell leaves as Trujillo and Analía gather pelts and hunting traps. At the end, Analía reveals Farrell's gift: a large keychain emblazoned in red with the word "Liverpool."

Figures 3.8 and 3.9: Medium close-up of Analía with the Liverpool keychain from scene in *Liverpool*

Liverpool foregrounds some of Alonso favorite themes, including "the materiality of daily life, the physical situatedness of characters, and the everyday actions that define all of us" (Brignole, 48). Yet it differs in several important respects from Alonso's other films. While Misael and Vargas are shown interacting with their environment with skill and expertise, Farrell appears exposed and alienated from the corporeal processes that "make ends meet" (Page, 66) in Tolhuin. If Misael and Vargas move deftly out of necessity to survive, Farrell moves because he cannot sit still. If anything, Farrell resembles a victim of shell shock. He moves sporadically, appearing largely indifferent to the instability of his day-to-day existence. One is reminded once again of Malabou: "As a result of serious trauma, or sometimes for no reason at all, the path splits and a new, unprecedented persona comes to live with the former person, and eventually takes up all the room" (Malabou, 1).

There is a kind of asphyxiating spatio-temporal pressure that impinges on Farrell's movements, stifling the emergence of the unprecedented persona. Instead, Farrell is trapped in a state of "picnolepsy" a condition of constant interruption that causes lapses in consciousness, gaps in time, and fleeting instances of life escaping. In this way, Farrell embodies the "morphological irruptions" in physical consciousness implied by the speed of modern society that so concerned Benjamin and Virilio. For both, the profound changes in technology and lived environments risk changing the coordinates of being in the world. Farrell's apparent indifference to self-harm can be

read in this vein. Malabou observes, "This recognition reveals that a power of annihilation hides within the very constitution of identity, a virtual coldness that is not only the fate of the brain injured, schizophrenics, and serial killers, but is also the signature of a law of being that always appears to be on the point of abandoning itself, escaping" (37). We can imagine the Farrell of *Liverpool* attending the screening of *Los Muertos* in *Fantasma:* he would have walked out. Why not conceive of *Liverpool* as an addendum to Alonso's trilogy, as a film about the viewer? Or better, the afterlife of the viewer?

Such a reading provides a consistent explanation for many elements of the film. *Liverpool* begins with a medium shot of two young men playing a football video game. Farrell is seated silently behind them in a dark corner of the room. While the young men banter about the game, Farrell fidgets but observes silently. Many scenes follow the same pattern: when Farrell takes leave of the ship; when he drinks and watches the strippers in Ushuaia; and when he silently observes two men playing cards while waiting for a ride to Tolhuin. He is always sidelined from sociability, paralyzed in the act of watching and being watched. Farrell is ostensibly much more "connected" to the world—to the immediacies of international commodity circulation—and yet he is more isolated than anyone in Tolhuin or the shipping frigate. Alcoholism is an anesthetic pharmakon, symptom and cause—a structural inevitability—of the annihilating force that governs Farrell's lifeworld. What alcohol promises to relieve—the indecipherable

and unbearable fact of life unraveling—is, of course, what it ultimately causes. To paraphrase Jack London, alcohol "refuses to let the dreamer dream." In effect, Farrell's drinking is an ineffectual disappearing act. Alcohol is to Farrell as the beetle is to Gregor, in Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*. Blanchot's description of Gregor could easily be Ferrel:

> The state in which Gregor finds himself is the same state as that of a being unable to quit existence, one for whom to edit is to be condemned to always fall back into existence. Becoming vermin, he continues to live in the mode of degeneration, he digs deeper into animal solitude, he moves closer still to absurdity, and the impossibility of living. But what happens? He just keeps on living […].[114]

Neither labor nor respite from labor provides Farrell with the comfort of being present. He tries *to disappear* but cannot, until the end of the film.[115] Brignole identifies the object cause of this discomfort as "cinematic excess," "the sailor starts showing visible signs of restlessness, as if he were somehow also able to notice the excess in the take's duration" (Brignole, 49). In his vindication of excess, Brignole fails to see that excess can only be deemed as such from a stable understanding of the essential. There is no such stable place in the film to determine what is excessive and contingent. The two scenes where Farrell is actually working are telling in this regard, because they focus on

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[114] I am following Catherine Malabou's translation here (p. 15) of Blanchot's *De Kafka á Kafka* (1981).

[115] Recall Deleuze's point on the "international conspiracy which conditions it from within". Is it not Farrell who most directly suffers from this conspiracy? No doubt Farrell would be relieved that, to quote again Fellini through Deleuze: "The only rejoinder to the harsh law of cinema — a minute of image which costs a day of collective work — is Fellini's: "When there is no more money left, the film will be finished." Money is the obverse of all the images that the cinema shows and sets in place, so that films about money are already, if implicitly, films within a film or about a film (Deleuze, 77).

the interruption of labor. When Farrell is painting anchor ties—the function of which are of course to *halt* and interrupt movement—a colleague invites him to take a coffee break; when Farrell steers the ship, he pauses to ask the captain if he can take leave once ashore. Even at the strip club, the shots—of Farrell drinking and of the girls sitting down looking at their phones—emphasize the break as Farrell's mode of existence.[116] If there is consistency to the latter, it is in inconsistency.

Numerous critics have pointed out that Alonso's films lack a straightforward narrative. The film starts in media res and provides minimal information for making sense of the narrative diegesis. Often narratives that begin in the middle fill in the past —whether it be through flashbacks or dialogues about memories of the past—while moving the plot forward. *Liverpool* provides neither. It is unclear why Farrell took the job on the container ship, when and why he left his mother and daughter or what brings him to return to visit them. The best we can surmise is that Farrell visits Tolhuin out of convenience—the ship stopped in Ushuaia—but the film leaves a great deal unsaid. What we glean about the various relationships comes just as much from the mise-en-scène as from the minimalist dialogue. It is not clear what relationship Farrell has to Analía, but the careful attention with which Farrell watches her suggests

[116] In the original version of Alonso's *La Libertad,* the film ended with Misael looking directly into the camera and laughing. This breaking of the fourth wall of course underlines a particular type of relationship between observer and observed. We might imagine a similar ending to *Liverpool,* where after taking yet another break from work, Farrell turns towards the camera and asks Alonso if he can please leave the shoot now, please.

something more than disinterested curiosity.[117] Rather than aporias that demand to be filled in by the attentive audience member, the gaps, fissures, and cleavages that characterize the filmic world of *Liverpool* seem to constitute the world as such for Farrell. This is why the film begins in media res: because interruptions are the phenomenological bedrock of understanding *after* some undefined (but inductively necessary) traumatic accident. Rather than merely reproducing the neorealist trope of loosely arranged narrative, the narrative moves in the only way it can—through a set of breaks, interruptions, and pauses.

By locating Farrell along the lines of Malabou's destructive plasticity we can see what is universal in this recondite film that takes place in the extreme conditions of Argentine Patagonia. Malabou writes that, "We must all of us recognize that we might, one day, become someone else, an absolute other, someone who will never be reconciled with themselves again, someone who will be this form of us without redemption or atonement, without last wishes, this damned form, outside of time" (Malabou, 2-3). What shows itself in Alonso's dilated, pseudo-neorealist shots is "the distancing of the individual who becomes a stranger to herself, who no longer recognizes herself, who no longer remembers her self" (ibid, 6). Put another way, the structuring narrative device of *Liverpool* is the impossibility of narrative, if narrative is understood as etiological links (cause and effect) between actions.

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[117] Eventually, Trujillo tells Farrell that Analía was born several days after he left, presumably to work on the container ship.

As in his other films, Alonso uses the fixed or long shot prolifically. These shots establish a place before a character enters and the linger several seconds after the character has left. As Paul Schrader has said, "film techniques are about 'getting there'—telling a story, explaining an action, evoking an emotion—whereas the long take is about 'being there'" (Schrader, 8). The fixed camera, or "static frames," *appears* to elude character interiority because "it doesn't direct the viewer's gaze; it frees it to wander" (ibid, 12). This has the effect of creating tension and the sense that there is either an excess or a paucity of meaningful information on screen. Alonso employs other techniques to similar ends: wide angles, which offer more vantage points to observe the action; "minimal coverage," or limiting the number of edits and angles that direct the viewer's attention (eg., cutaways, two-shot, close-up, etc.); off-set edits or edits at the "wrong" time—either too early or too late. In all these cases, the result is that the viewer has minimal clues through *angles* and *editing* about *what* is important onscreen. The viewer is left to decide what and how to accord meaning while watching Farrell struggle with the same conundrum.

Liverpool contrasts Farrell's life on the container ship—symbol of globalized networks of distribution—with the town of Tolhuin, which appears to only be affected by a trace of the globalized market. The local industries of logging (the sawmill) and fur-trapping are remotely connected with the global supply chain, and many of the customs of Tolhuin appear relatively unaffected or untouched by the intrusion of

neoliberal governmentality. One of the central concerns of the village is the lack of lumber to cut at the sawmill, due to its remote location and often inclement weather. There appears to be an informal local economy. Most of the town dines at Torre's restaurant—Analía picks up dinner there every evening—but the film doesn't show any money exchanged. There is minimal infrastructure in and out of town. Farrell finds a free lift from a logging truck in Ushuaia and Tolhuin is one of the few places where we see people working. There is always labor to do in Tolhuin—logs to be cut for the fire, bread to be kneaded and baked, dinner to be cooked, the walkway to be shoveled, etc. The breaks from labor tend to revolve around food and sleep as well as climatic and diurnal conditions, precisely the kind of biorhythms that are foreign to Farrell's existence. If there is anything on the order of economic surplus in Tolhuin, it is not visible.

The long shots of daily activities in Tolhuin suggest alternative temporalities to those governed by the rapid flux of global commodity exchanges. While the economy of Tolhuin is based on self-sufficiency—meeting basic needs to ensure economic security—the economic logic that governs the container ship is based on the globalized-scale circulation and sale of commodities. Marginalized from the economic centers—which *Liverpool* intentionally displaces—of the global and national economy, Tolhuin maintains a semblance of the commons. The film ascribes a dignity to the labor and co-habitation in Tolhuin, perhaps best evidenced by Trujillo's care for Analía and her

grandmother. At the same time, there are very few sequences from inside the ship that are not single medium shots of Farrell or the tectonic-sized boat interior. It is a decidedly isolated space. We cannot help but notice the complete absence of the State as well as the temporal disjunction between Tolhuin and the global market.[118] That is, Tolhuin maintains itself with minimal circulation of commodities and capital in a world where for every dollar exchanged, fifty-five dollars are invested into global stock markets (Marazzi, 29). Violeta Kovacsics and Adam Nayman put it nicely, "That it seems impossible to reconcile Liverpool—the fact of it or the idea of it—with a snowy, out-of-time corner of Tierra Del Fuego is both Alonso's point and the sort of thinking […] that this film seeks to correct. No, we're not all connected, but we are all here—wherever and however difficult 'here' might be."[119]

Two contrasting movements characterize *Liverpool:* on the one hand, the disjointed, amnesic interruptions exemplified in Farrell and, on the other, the symbiotic organicity of Tolhuin. Their interaction at the discursive level is often mediated by long, dilated, and fixed shots. Brignole rightly argues that "the workers of Tolhuin skillfully and painstakingly transform raw materials into goods with their own hands […] but only to ensure the well-being of their *community*" (Brignole, 55). Indeed, but the community is always already marked by the intrusion of the global market. Farrell's

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[118] It is true that Trujillo and Torres communicate on the radio to get the weather conditions or order petrol.

[119] Nayman, Adam. "Shore Leave: Lisandro Alonso's *Liverpool*." *Cinema Scope*, Aug., 2009.

brief visit to town exemplifies this disruption, and his absence has already left marks on the functioning of the community. The western, for Deleuze, is often characterized by the arrival of a stranger—a disruption in the established order—and the departure, resulting in a changed situation.[120] It is in this sense that *Liverpool* can be read as Alonso's take on the Western.[121] On John Ford's westerns, Deleuze writes, "It is as representative of the collectivity that the hero becomes capable of an action that makes him equal to the milieu and re-establishes its accidentally or periodically endangered order" (Cinema 1, 146). How this structure is maintained or subverted in *Liverpool,* depends upon how we read the end of the film, when the camera opts for filming the town instead of following Farrell.

If *Liverpool* details the return to and estrangement from home, it does so by undermining rather than affirming genealogical ties. Farrell seems to desire a certain recognition from his mother and daughter, but he is too impatient, too ashamed, or too drunk to spend sufficient time with them. Only traces of Farrell's presence register to his family. For her part, Analía appears wary of Farrell, recognizing him only as a

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[120] Deleuze gives the example of *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance:* "It is an ethical rather than an epic form. In *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* the bandit is killed and order re-established: but the cowboy who has killed him allows us to think that it is the future senator, thus accepting the transformation of the law which ceases to be the tacit epic law of the West in order to become the written or novelistic law of industrial civilization. In both cases Ford invents an interesting procedure, which is the modified image: an image shown twice, but the second time, it is modified or completed in such as a way as to make us feel the difference between S and S'. In *Liberty Valance* the end shows the true death of the bandit and the cowboy who shoots, whilst awe had previously seen the truncated image which the official version would stick to (it is the future senator who killed the bandit)." (Deleuze, 147).

[121] Ibid.

source of money. When did he leave and why? How many times has he returned and left? Analía refuses to verbalize her feelings. In his time away, Farrell's mother's Alzheimer's has worsened.[122] Picnolepsy in a sense has beget more of the same. While attempting to make conversation with his mother, who no longer recognizes him, Farrell aimlessly picks up, examines, and sets down an array of objects. In this balanced medium shot, the viewer follows Farrell's gaze as it alights on the bits and bobs around room. But the shot depth and angle prevent any coherent rendering of the significance of specific objects. This, of course, is precisely the point. What object might prove to be a stable point of reference in the meeting of two characters who are strangers to themselves?[123] Paradoxically, if there is an inheritance that Farrell gleans from his family, it is in the form of a general disorientation that resembles Alzheimer's and dementia.

Perhaps, then, the chintzy keychain emblazoned with the word "Liverpool" should be read in this same vein. In the last scene in which he appears, Farrell passes Analía the keychain and marches off through the snow, deftly followed once again by one of Alonso's dilated fixed shots. Another fifteen minutes pass filled with the routines of Tolhuin—shoveling snow, cutting wood, and picking up fur traps—until the viewer

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[122] It is a disease ensconced in the ontology of the accident that causes the breakup of etiological links to past and future.

[123] "…all of a sudden these people became strangers to themselves because they could not flee"? (Malabou, 13).

sees Analía unveil the red keychain inscribed with "Liverpool."[124] The shot that begins this sequence is an elevated long shot that frames the barn between the fading sunlit hills and the snowy ground below. The barn is positioned to screen right, and a fence runs alongside it to the left, all the way to the edge of the screen, so that the barn and the fence form a line bisecting the frame. From the perspective of framing, then, when Analía and Trujillo emerge from lower screen left and walk towards the barn they enter a liminal zone (at dusk, between earth and sky). After Trujillo racks and un-racks several pelts, Analía returns outside—this time in a medium shot—to feed the sheep. In an interlude to her labor, the camera moves to a medium close-up of Analía's torso as her hands search for and retrieve the keychain.

There is a hint of subversion here enhanced by the suggestive poses of Analía (Giselle Irrazabal). Analía turns her back to the barn entrance and glances around nervously in case someone is looking. She says something inaudible and examines the keychain thoroughly enough that the viewer, too, gets a sense of the object's heft, color, and texture. If the keychain here is a signifier of Farrell (and by extension the endless distress of contemporary capitalism), then Analía can nevertheless make the signifier's logic work against itself by opposing to the "morphological irruptions" an alternate way of seeing, looking, and holding. In other words, Analía here can construct her own

[124] Commentators read this sequence along the lines of tragicomedy: the keychain is a linguistic misnomer; what it symbolizes is the impossibly comic relation of Liverpool the city, the idea, with Tolhiun and its inhabitants.

genealogy (of the object, her family, etc.) from the fragmented lives of her close relatives. To read destructive plasticity in *Liverpool* is to read it in the hands of Analía.

CONCLUSION

Deregulated Cinema seeks to understand the interrelationships between modes of production and modes of cinematic expressions in post-transition Argentine and Chilean cinema. "Space, Scale, and the Coils of Control" and "Images After the Accident" explore the image as a site of regulation for the circulation of capital, "the paradigmatic social relation."[1] The chapters use the films to tell stories of space and power, subjection and subjectivity, and repetition and difference, using overwhelmingly audiovisual cues (*la mirada escalar*, neorealism, etc.) to propose interpretative paradigms for post-dictatorship cinema. In theoretical terms, I read cinema along the lines of what Paul Virilio in *War and Cinema* has called "the history of changing fields of perception" (7) and its dialectical relationship with late capital(ism). I have tried to trace the changing field of perception through cinema, an aesthetic technology that simultaneously expands sensorial capaciousness to further subjugation, not unlike Deleuze's prescient proclamations on "Societies of Control" in 1990.[2] Jonathan Beller historicizes this arrangement of power in the following manner:

> As a partial result of cinema and early screen cultures, human life and its entanglements have been increasingly organized and then enclosed by apparatuses: cameras, data screens, cellphones, geo-locative devices, and other information machines. In leaving the factory floor and becoming screen, the interface between worker and machine extended itself into visual, social, physical, and communicative-discursive spaces, that is, into the

[1] Beller, *Cinematic Mode,* 5.

[2] "…like a self-deforming cast that will continuously change from one moment to another" (Deleuze, 1).

> everyday life-world. In retrospect, we realize that the analog methods for extracting labor, value, and information were being extended, flexibilized, and "dematerialized," even as their command over material organization and the enclosure of species-emergence was being expanded and intensified. So too, then, was the struggle with capital, waged on an expanding field.[3]

Throughout this project, I restage the oft-repeated scene(s) of Latin American modernity —in which cinema technologies are seen to have profoundly restructured spatial and temporal sensoriums in the form of "prosthetic sensory organs, and the new modes of mass production, distribution, and consumption" (Lastra, 3)—not to "measure […] the cultural distance […] that was assumed to exist between the West and the non-West"[4] but rather to view again, as Chiampi says, "the condition of a continent that could not be assimilated by the Enlightenment."[5]

One of the basic premises of this project is that cinema emerges from an industrial process that produces images according to the object logic of capital circulation, and participates in the process of capturing, regulating, and devising sensorial trajectories: "television, video, computers, and the internet are deterritorialized factories in which spectators work, that is, in which we perform value added labor" (Beller, 1). Cinema is an extension of capital circulation in all senses. A fully deterritorialized version of Adorno and Horkheimer's culture industry, images

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[3] Beller, *The World Computer,* 257.

[4] Chakrabarty, *Provincializing,* 7.

[5] Chiampi, *Barroco,* 17.

and imaging are vectors of dispossession.[6] Exchanging time for image is an embodied performative process that generates value, and is indicative of the generalized economization of cultural life. Many of the films that offer opposition to this process are rarely, if ever, *made* let alone made available in Latin American movie-theaters or on Latin American screens. This is Julio García Espinosa's point about the elitism of mass art that still holds for cinematic production in Latin America today:

> Perhaps film is the most elitist of all the contemporary arts. Film today, no matter where, is made by a small minority for the masses. Perhaps film will be the art form which takes the longest time to reach the hands of the masses, when we understand mass art as *popular* art, art created by the masses. Currently, as Hauser points out, mass art is produced by a minority in order to satisfy the demand of a public reduced to the sole role of spectator and consumer.[7]

While the films analyzed here received funding either from small State sources or through international co-productions, the underlying conditions for cinematic production in Latin America remain prohibitive and "elitist" as Espinosa says.

The post-transition films in Argentina and Chile studied here emerge from an intense period of neoliberalization of society. In Latin America, the appropriation and administration of space by capital continues as technology inserts "the temporal exigencies of the First World into Third World bodies, altering proprioception, infusing new aspirations and desires, proposing new groupings […] through what a century ago

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[6] Adorno and Horkheimer write that capital "Brings culture within the sphere of administration…by subordinating in the same way and to the same end all areas of intellectual creation [and] by occupying men's senses from the time they leave factory in the evening to the time they clock in again the next morning with matter that bears the impress of the labor process they themselves have to sustain throughout the day." Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectics of Enlightenment*, 131.

[7] García Espinosa, "For an Imperfect Cinema," 76.

was called, [by Marx], 'the civilizing effect of foreign trade.'"[8] Such dynamics are at work in many Latin American countries, for instance, in the support of neoextractivist projects—projects that are capital intensive but not labor intensive and demonstrate the scale at which capital regulates consensus. Maristella Svampa describes the state of the extractivist paradigm:

> Whether in the crude language of dispossession (liberal neodevelopmentalism), the current development model is based on an extractivist paradigm. It draws from the idea of "economic opportunities" or "comparative advantage" provided by the commodities consensus and deploys social imaginaries (the vision of El Dorado) that overstep the political-ideological borders constructed in the 1990s. These positions reflect the tendency to consolidate a model of appropriation and exploitation of the commons, which advances on populations through a top-down logic, threatening the improvements in the field of participatory democracy and inaugurating a new cycle of criminalization and violation of human rights.[9]

The point is that late-capitalist Latin America continues to move toward forms of communal dispossession. What I am indexing here is the *longue-durée* of processes of imperialism and colonialism that were always implicated in the colonization of the visual—by the visual—in Latin America, or what Aníbal Quijano has called in reference to the geo-symbolics of world capitalist power inaugurated in the sixteenth century, "la colonialidad del poder":

> Las culturas dominadas serían impedidas de objetivar de modo autónomo sus propias imágenes, símbolos y experiencias subjetivas, es decir, con sus propios patrones de expresión visual y plástica. Sin esa libertad de objetivación formal, ninguna experiencia cultural puede desarrollarse. No podían ejercer sus necesidades y facultades de objetivación visual y plástica, sino única y exclusivamente con y por medio de los patrones de expresión visual y plástica de los dominadores. Fueron obligadas a abandonar bajo represión las prácticas de la relación con lo sagrado propio, o a

[8] Beller, *Cinematic Mode,* 74.

[9] Svampa, "Commodities Consensus," 67-8.

> realizarlas solo de modo clandestino con todas las distorsiones implicadas. Fueron llevadas a admitir o simular frente a los dominadores la condición deshonrosa de su propio imaginario y de su previo universo de subjetividad (1999, 140-141).

Following lines of post-colonial critique, the historical arc I propose here similarly posits continuity within rupture. The veritable whirlwind expansion of capital into the sensorium by the image that continues the appropriation and privatization of the commons occurs concomitantly with historical developments of extraction and confinement, or what Derek Gregory calls "the serial spacing of the exception."[10]

Post-dictatorship Southern Cone film—the films of Guzmán and the New Argentine Cinema analyzed here—can be read within a genealogy of art forms and media that problematize the image as a site of capital and colonial regulation.[11] I read the period of Southern Cone cinema following the return to ostensible democracy as a renewed confrontation with the "capitalized machinic interfaces […] [that] prey on visuality" (Beller, 2) installed during the dictatorships and strengthened by transition governments in Chile and Argentina. Guzmán's films are instructive here because they span the period in question.

The problem Guzmán faces after the transition is how to "hacer la memoria de Chile" through a medium (the image) that has transformed the vectors of material

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[10] Gregory writes, "We need to remind ourselves that camps like these have their origins in the European colonial wars of the late nineteenth century. In such conditions, now as then, the 'external' and the 'internal' are articulated not to erase the 'outside' but to produce it as the serial spacing of the exception, for ever inscribing exclusion through inclusion" (258).

[11] For instance, according to Julianne Burton NLAC took "as its point of departure not simply the introduction of new content or the transformation of cinematic forms, but the transformation of the subjective conditions of film production and film viewing" (181).

dispossession. In a sense, this was the problematic the successors of NLAC and the post-dictatorships inherited.[12] The masses, understood as heterogenous multitude, appear otherwise because the montage of capital—Beller argues that the process of capital is cinematic—has eviscerated the commons. This intense neoliberalization of society produced radical transformations in the Global South—"not all people exist in

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[12] For instance, Robert Stam notes about the use of the "Biography" film in Glauber Rocha's *Terra em Transe* (1967)*:*

> The dialectical juxtaposition of two kinds of political film brings out the strengths and weaknesses inherent in each. The "Biography" is direct, "effective," but also unsubtle, manipulative, and slick. *Terra em Transe* as a whole is complex, all nuance and subtle contradiction, but at the same time it is difficult of access, full of subjectivity, somewhat confusing. Thus the film within the film serves as a critique of the totality of the film, and the film as a whole points up the limitations of the film within the film.

"Biography" in some ways demystifies the relations between film and money, but viewed from the perspective of the end of the diegesis of *Terra em Transe*—and the film starts from the end, forcing the viewer to take such a perspective—"Biography" ends up putting in motion the set of events that lead to Diaz dawning the adornments of the crown. It turns out, that the limitations of "Biography" are just another vector for power. In fact, we might say that what makes "Biography" effective is also what makes Diaz an effective (and victorious) politician. Xavier points out that Diaz wins, "not because he is on the side of reason but because he has charisma and is thus the most effective agent" (88). The rote manipulation of affect is here aligned with structures of colonial power. After all, it is the spectacle of Diaz—the orgiastic excesses, rhetorical flourishes, and menacing charisma—that fascinates Paulo. The failure of "Biography" is that it *has* created a spectator for its form of art—Paolo himself is the allegorical representative—so that we can say along with Guy Debord, "the alienation of the spectator to the profit of the contemplated object is expressed in the following way: the more he contemplates the less he lives" (22-23). For this reason, Paulo cannot bring himself to look at the coronation ceremony on the beach—he too has made Diaz into a spectacle. The proscriptions and logistics of policy or the management of the conditions for dispossession—as Fred Moten and David Harvey would have it—have overridden the planning of popular resistance as cyphered through the mytho-poetic constructions of Paulo's consciousness. The transformation that "Biography" promises has "merely transformed perception by means of the police." And yet, off-set and looking *away* from the scene on the beach—that will repeat in Diaz's subsequent post-coup coronation—Paulo here practices what Rei Terada calls the phenomenophilia of looking away, "Phenomenophilia is looking away at the colored shadow on the wall, or keeping the head turned to the angle at which the sunspot stays in view" (4). Here, the film stages the dialectic of the spectacle, carving open a "space before the acceptance of any perceived fact" (Terada, 5) for a different relationship of affect and embodied viewership.

the same now," wrote Bloch[13]—so that in neoliberal Latin America, "la dinámica de polarización y fragmentación social adquirió tal virulencia que durante gran parte de la década de los 90 hubo grandes dificultades en dotar de un lenguaje político a las experiencias de descolectivización."[14] The post-transition films in Argentina and Chile discussed here testify to the changing conditions of visuality—and thus for a critical visual language—in what Svampa calls "la sociedad excluyente."[15]

I. Notes on *No*: Pablo Larraín and Capitalism of the Senses

Because of their imbrication in the commodification of the senses, films like *El Chacotero Sentimental* (1999), *Machuca* (2004), *La Sagrada Familia* (2005), *Play* (2005), *Tony Manero* (2008), *Turistas* (2009), *No* (2012), *Neruda* (2016), and *Una Mujer Fantástica* (2017) demonstrate the intense interest that Chilean cinema has maintained in mediation as a site of sociopolitical importance. As previously mentioned in "Space, Scale, and the Coils of Control," recent Chilean cinema often laments its status within the proprietary logic of cinema, divorced from the social-constructivist ends it once proffered vis-à-vis society. This has prompted critics of Chilean *novísimo*—a term born of recent attempts to categorize a new generation of Chilean filmmakers—to frame their interpretations through the prism of individualism,[16] "tal gesto de ensimismamiento no tendría que

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[13] Bloch, "Nonsynchronism and its Obligations to Dialectics," 22.

[14] Svampa, *La Sociedad Excluyente,* 11.

[15] Ibid., 12.

[16] "Ni locales ni globales, estos filmes apuestan por reconocimientos restringidos solamente al ámbito del individual." Póo, Ximena, et al, "Políticas de La Subjetividad En El Novísmo Cine Chileno," 7.

interpretarse como un signo rupturista; por el contrario, repetiría ciertos vicios solipsistas […] como un regreso conservador."[17] The problem with reading tendencies of de-contextualization and affective immediacy as aesthetically reactionary is that it disregards the commodification of the sensorium in which cinema participates and to which it responds. Instead, we ought to consider contemporary Southern Cone cinema as responding to the image-as-dispossession—the image as imposing another dimension to the category of labor[18]—as a site of continued struggle with capitalism of the senses.

Pablo Larraín's "dictatorial trilogy"[19] stars the unforgettable Alfredo Castro as the allegorical failed image (violence in and by a failed imitation) of U.S. imperialism. In *Tony Manero,* Castro plays Raúl Peralta, an itinerant sometimes dancer, obsessed with John Travolta's performance (his image) from *Saturday Night Fever* (1977). *Tony Manero* is set at the beginning of the entrenchment of neoliberal governance in Chile (the period when the constitution was rewritten), and follows Raúl's violent, murderous, and infantile interactions as he attempts to win a TV contest of John Travolta lookalikes. Larraín comments that, "Raúl represents our irrepressible craving for the modern world while we're singing into poverty […] Raúl's actions are also the actions of the system

[17] Ibid, 10.

[18] "Shifting labor itself toward the province of mediation" (Beller, 77).

[19] *Tony Manero* (2008), *Postmortem* (2010), and *No* (2012).

that has taught him to base his expectations on everything that is alien to him—to us."[20] Raúl's frenetic, violent actions are mirrored by the camera. Amanda McMenamin points out that "the velocity with which the camera chases after Rául becomes symbolic of time in 'overdrive' or the 'tyranny of velocity' that high density capitalism fosters" (McMenamin, 50).

Similarly, Larraín's *No* stages the violent consolidation of neoliberalism through an allegory about the sleek, snazzy, and upbeat ad campaign of the 1988 plebiscite. The point in *No* is, of course, that no really means yes. The No campaign functions like a Trojan Horse through which Pinochet is defeated at the plebiscite, but the ruling regulations of neoliberalism end up ensconced at the levers of power in and through the power of the image.[21] The false shift from totalitarianism to democracy is conceived of in *No* as a shift in the subject, in the subject's experiential sensorium and relation to political life. Unearthing the glossy images of the transition serves to critique how the latter obscured rather than clarified the generalized system of relations (and its antagonisms), but the image here does not only work as a sleek ideological veil over social relations. Even more, *No* signals a shift in power arrangements to the site of the image—how the image comes to mediate and organize society as a site of political-

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[20] Larraín, "Fear and Oblivion," 47.

[21] As if more confirmation of this thesis were needed, Sebastián Piñera used the "Chile, la Alegría ya viene" theme from the 1988 ad-campaign in his presidential run for office in 2010. Larraín comments on Piñera: "Piñera watched *No* and says that the movie was too entrenched in marketing, such that he did not really like it […] It's based on marketing because from there it seemed an interesting way to see the allegory. He [Piñera] was a rich person in '88. Now he is a billionaire. What did he not understand?" (51).

affective exchange. It is also in this sense that the coup was a coup against representation. No wonder then that "the boom in memory becomes indistinguishable from the boom in forgetting" (Fornazzari, 69). With the deregulation of the economy comes the regulated (but deterritorialized) image. To approach both, it is necessary to conceive of the visual as a realm of political economy.[22] Thus, we can position post-transition cinema as critically responding to deterritorialized modes of production—the full commodification of the image—and the expansion of sites of exploitation.

II. Enveloped by the Image: The Films of Patricio Guzmán

One of the productive aporias of Guzmán's documentary triptych is the references to *other* cinematic images.[23] The generalized historical crisis that pervades Guzmán's documentaries—what Fornazzari calls "the boom in forgetting"—can be viewed from the perspective of other film images. In *Cordillera de los Sueños*, Pablo Salas's film material becomes an allegory for the extinction of the image. Like the Andes themselves, the "collective" image faces ecological devastation wrought by profit and commodification—confronted from all sides by the logic of police and capital. Images of

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[22] Here we can recall the distinction that Beller makes between information and capital in *The World Computer:* "Capital, we could say, is the metabolism of value while computation is the metabolism of information. Value mediates social wealth while information mediates the cosmic, yet the cosmic is known through the framework of the social and is incorporated in the sociality of wealth, which is to say that 'the cosmic' is mediated by value and thus capital" (38). In short, "information" replaces "image" in Beller's current assessment of the M-C-M' formula. Beller continues: "Information becomes the secret ingredient that liquefies ontologies by rendering them computable, while providing liquidity by making their now-informatics being into work sites; computational racial capital is, among other things, the processor of our time and times, our thought and thinking, our metabolic unfolding in relation to information—our becoming cyborg that results in our "being," such that it is" (33).

[23] See Vania Barraza's article "El Reverso de la Fotografía en *El Botón de Nácar.*"

the people, the film seems to suggest, have been forced into obsolescence, and with them so have the people themselves. But perhaps the problem is in reverse: the people have not disappeared, but rather have been enveloped by the image. This process is especially poignant in the case of Guzmán, where it is not so much that the people have disappeared, but the image of the people as it *appears* in *La Batalla de Chile* has been irreversibly transformed vis-à-vis its relation to time and the commodification of life. In short, historical antagonisms rendered nostalgic idealization.

As I argue in chapter one, what seems to persist in Guzmán's documentaries is *la mirada escalar,* a scopic regime that escalates the powers of the visible—à la the Kino-Eye —making forces visible at all different scales. These aesthetics are additive rather than subtractive, yet restrictive in their abstraction. Deleuze, following Kracauer, points out that the frame already performs abstraction: "The frame ensures a deterritorialization of the image […] [it] gives a common standard of measurement to things which do not have one — long shots of the countryside and close-ups of the face, an astronomical system and a single drop of water."[24] The scopic mode here is posited along the lines of expansion and multiplication of the sensorium through a potentially infinite series of repartitions. What Guzmán's elegiac scenes of material-becoming risk is a visual mode that "perfectly parallels and indeed extends the principle of equivalence implied by exchange-values."[25]

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[24] Deleuze, *The Movement-Image,* 14-15.

[25] Beller, *Cinematic Mode,* 105.

III. New Accidental Cinema: NCA and Destructive Plasticity

Post-dictatorship cinema like *Cordillera de los Sueños, Mundo Grúa,* and *Liverpool* can also be read as filmic orthographies of disaster.[26] As we have seen, the aesthetics of films like *Liverpool* underline the lived time of "spectacular disaster"—understood as the effects of an ongoing disaster that "escapes the very possibility of experience" (7)—whereas Guzmán's films probe this representational excess through reference to scale. The Argentine films studied in "Images After the Accident" emerge decades after Guzmán's first films, but insofar as they are concerned with the cinematic retooling of consciousness, the films of New Argentine Cinema (NCA) elucidate similar historical processes of late-capitalist dispossession.

"Images After the Accident" strives to provide a consistent explanation for the "accidental" elements in NCA because there are too many accidents and too many images put in motion by accidents in NCA to ignore.[27] This point resonates with Gonzalo Aguilar's observations on narrative and performance in NCA:

> Pese a ser—como ya dije—el medio artístico menos espontáneo, en los últimos años hay una tendencia muy fuerte a poner en escena el accidente (aunque ya acá hay una contradicción entre "poner en escena" y "accidente"). Es decir, tramas muy errantes que cambian a partir de lo imprevisto o lo inesperado. Hay ahí, me parece, una estructura de

[26] "The disaster ruins everything, all the while leaving everything intact […] When the disaster comes upon us, it does not come. The disaster is its imminence, but since the future, as we conceive of it in the order of lived time belongs to the disaster, the disaster has already withdrawn or dissuaded it; there is not future for the disaster, just as there is not time or space for its accomplishment" (Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster,* 1-2).

[27] It should be emphasized here again that the thematic development of NCA coincides with the institutionalization of film in the form of film schools in Buenos Aires. The early 1990s saw a boom in film schools. Aguilar notes that the two most well-known were the Fundación Universidad del Cine and the Escuela Nacional de Experimentación y Realización Cinematográfica.

> nuestra vida cotidiana que desea ser sacudida desde el afuera para ser revelada en toda su precariedad.[28]

Broadly, the accidents in NCA refer to how the conditions of life are managed and distributed in late-capitalist Argentina. In this way, the accident is shorthand for the spectacular disaster of neoliberalism "that escapes […] experience" but also the *spectacular* disaster in terms of the spectator, which Debord recognized as the tendency of consciousness to coincide with commodities. Garcia Canclini lays out similar stakes for understanding contemporary Latin America: "Societies may have reached a historical threshold in which it is not longer possible to think such ideas as citizenship and democracy in the absence of consumption."[29]

I explore the *double entendre* of the "spectacular disaster" in the unactualized workplace accidents that perforate *Mundo Grúa.* Rulo is proud of his innovation that allows his television to swivel, yet it is the moving and flickering image that ends up interrupting his sleep. As a diegetic element in the film, the lack of sleep causes Rulo to lose his job, but this formulation has it backwards. Watching the television, Rulo is clocked in to work. The television is just one of many elements that stage the omnipresence of the image making process as a vector for dispossession in Rulo's life. Even Rulo's interface with Milly, the owner of the shop that makes "milanesas de conciencia," is mediated by nostalgic commodified images of the past. However, it is

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[28] Aguilar, "Conversación con Gonzalo Aguilar," paragraph 3.

[29] Canclini, *Consumers and Citizens,* 20.

precisely this condition of (over)determination that opens up filmic space for the plastic reorganization of visual forms. In this way, some NCA films recuperate a different logic of the accident—the logic of destructive plasticity—than the one posited by neoliberal futures.[30]

IV. An (Un)exceptional Accident: Lucrecia Martel's *La Mujer Sin Cabeza*

One exceptional example of a NCA film in which the accident appears is Lucrecia Martel's *La Mujer Sin Cabeza* (2008). At issue in *La mujer* are structures of sovereignty and genocide rather than hegemony and alienation that we see in films like *Liverpool* and *Mundo Grúa.* Rather than a structuring absence, here the accident structures absence. In *La Mujer,* bourgeois visuality manufactures reality, making accidents legible only as accidents rather than the necessary effects of structural forms of inequity and social difference. By working to make the spectator a "troubled viewing subject" Martel's films call attention to how the historicity of the visual is tied to power and

[30] It is not difficult to imagine that financial models of massive-scale capitalist enterprises commodify, securitize, and profit from what from a market perspective is perceived as an "accident." Here is how Morgan Stanley framed the accident in a 2017 investment letter by Dave Janny in which the author introduces his subject with reference to Elvis Costello's 1979 song "Accidents Will Happen." Janny writes: "The song was an early 'new wave' hit that established Costello as one of the early standard bearers of 'new wave' music invasion. Yes, 'accidents will happen,' but critically, if one is able to recognize the potential for an 'accident' prior to its occurrence, I'd argue that there is much benefit to be garnered. This fact is particularly true in investing. First you avoid the undesirable effects of any downturn and secondly you put yourself in a position to take advantage of the opportunities that the 'accident' creates. When it comes to investing, how do you know that an 'accident' is about to happen? I say you 'listen to what the man said" (1-2).

authority.[31] Deborah Martin writes: "Martel's cinema attempts to counter the domestication of perception, and younger characters experiment with their perception, producing images which suggest opportunities for perceiving the world anew" (56).

La Mujer Sin Cabeza, Martel's third installment of the Salta trilogy, allegorizes the accident—the perception of an accident—to the key of socio-political violence.[32] When Vero (María Onetto) hits something—and when her head hits the steering wheel—her structural relationship to the world does not change but her sensual relationship does. The moment Vero *looks* down for her ringing telephone—and takes her eyes off the road—the car lurches forward twice kicking the sunglasses from her eyes, dust now swirling outside the driver's side window that is still marked by the ghostly imprint of a child's

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[31] In *Niña Santa* Amalía (María Alché) is anything but an untroubled viewing subject. Martin agrees: "the film renders Amalia fundamentally ambivalent, uncanny and strange; subtly creepy, neither completely frightening nor completely apathetic" (57). Bathed in affective resolve, Amalía's initial stance to Dr. Jano can be framed in terms of a Levinasian interdependence taken to its extreme. According to Critchley: "[Levinas] makes the extreme claim that my relation to the other is not some some benign benevolence, compassionate care or respect for the other's autonomy, but is the obsessive experience of a responsibility that persecutes me with its sheer weight. I am the other's hostage, taken by them and prepared to substitute myself for any suffering and humiliation that they may undergo. I am responsible for the persecution I undergo and even for my persecutor" (60-1). Amalia responds to what she appears to interpret as the "infinite demand" of the word of God by traversing the viewer's fantasy that she is in any way responsible for the intrusive and abusive actions of Dr. Jano. Martel's cinema takes a normalized act of gendered violence like this one and deracinates it from the spectacular visual economy. Here, Amalia does more than refuse to become the object that will fulfill the lack in the other. Throughout the diegesis Amalia spies on Dr. Jano, turning the objectifying gaze back at the Doctor while simultaneously engaging and experimenting with a broad range other sensations like sound, touch, and smell that contribute to undermining the medical gaze.

[32] David Melville points out that road accidents in Spanish-language film—he mentions *Muerte de un Ciclista* (1955), *Nadie oyó Gritar* (1972) and *Manchas de Sangre en un Coche Nuevo* (1974)—have been used as a metaphor for bourgeois guilt before: "Flawed yet undeniably chilling, each of those earlier films is told with a psychological and narrative precision that allows us to empathize (if not sympathize) with the callous bourgeois protagonists. Clearly, these people feel they have no choice but to behave as despicably as they do. It is precisely this vein of middle-class guilt that has been mined by Argentine film since the '50s [in such films as Leopoldo Torre Nilsson's *La casa del angel* (1957)]."

hand (from an earlier scene). As Martin notes, "rather than *seeing* it from a more omniscient position outside the car, we *feel* and *hear* the accident rather as two violent jolts or collisions; crucial information is delivered through sound."[33] The film proceeds to work through the third-person structure of feeling that is implied by such a sensual rupture in cinematic space. The camera stays with Vero until the end of the film as if observing how the accident both destabilizes perception and undergoes a fierce logic of denegation. As Lucrecia Martel herself has commented, the question is not *if* Vero killed someone but how she reacts to the knowledge that she might have (Martin, 82).[34]

Figure 4.1: Vero looking in the mirror after the accident

Figure 4.2: Vero puts on her glasses

Before the accident occurs—before we encounter "la mujer sin cabeza"—the film begins with open spaces and an occluded gaze. The beginning shots of *La Mujer* show three boys and a German Shepherd dog playing alongside a canal. Here, the boys jog

[33] Martin, *The cinema of Lucrecia Martel*, 82.

[34] Vero becomes obsessed with the idea that she has committed murder. "Maté a alguien en la ruta. Me parece que atropellé a alguien" she says to her husband while at the department store. In hushed tones, barely audible because of the sounds of cashier register, Marcos (César Bordón) suggests that Vero *saw* something that was not—that she hallucinated and rewrote history. The cash register here has a haunting quality—one of many sonic traces that diffract the cinematic space—reminding both Vero and the viewer of the an underlying excess from the car accident that cannot be contained in the visual frame. Does she not know what she hit? Did we—the spectators—*also* make a mistake by looking away at the wrong moment? What makes the visual and the memory of the visual so uncertain and unstable?

through space in a logic other than the dominant modes of movement. They playfully cross the road, and nearly get hit by a bus, climb decaying billboards, and somersault into concrete canals. Their movements suggest an autonomy not governed by the reigning infrastructure. More than precarity, this gives them spatial priority. But the logic of this chase is obscured for the viewer: the circumstances by which Changuila's (Catalino Campos) bicycle has been (playfully?) taken from him remain occluded for the spectator. The act of chasing after something that is extra-diegetically inaccessible to the viewer gives these characters an autonomous priority to the subsequent events of the film. When one of the boys gets separated from the group, the camera cuts to him hiding behind a tree, putting his fingers to his lips. This gesture to the audience, Martin argues, "is the first, vivid instance of a repressed and partially occluded gaze, which is looking at us, and which will return throughout the film" (81). This occluded gaze works to frame the subsequent events of the film—the accident and its repercussions.

Figure 4.3: Vero framed as *acephalic*

After the accident, Vero is "una mujer sin cabeza"—her head is literally offscreen in the diegetic preamble to the title screen of the movie. There are multiple valences of meaning to this suggestive shot, including how images have historically been "cut to the measure of [male] desire" as Laura Mulvey argues.[35] In a similar way, one can read Vero as *acephalic*, headless, in the way that psychoanalysts must become "headless" in relation to their analysands. In both senses, Vero's metaphorical position offscreen invites viewers to see, as Frank Wilderson says, "what they are depositing at the place

[35] We should here acknowledge the white supremacy and the (neo)colonial ordering of life that inheres around the "blondness." In the opening essay of *Outlaw Culture* on Madonna, bell hooks writes that "Within white supremacist culture, a female must be white to occupy the space of sacred femininity, and she must also be blond" (22).

of the analyst."[36] Such a reading would need to come to terms with the the end of the film, by which time we are left to surmise that Juan and Marcos—Vero's sometimes lover and husband, respectively—have scrubbed the hospital, police station, and crime scene of evidence, literally working as the policemen of the archive, henchmen editors of death and disappearance on the filmic reel of life.[37] The conditions for such a coup of

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[36] This is Frank Wilderson's formulation of the relationship between analyst and analysand in Lacanian psychoanalysis: "For Lacan, the analytic encounter must bring analysands to a place where they are able to see what they are depositing at the place of the analyst. If the analyst's ego is present, if the analyst is not an empty mirror, then analysands will not come to understand where they are in relation to the analyst. The place of the analyst will not become what, for Lacan, it should become, the symbolic Other through which analysands can hear their own language. For this to happen, the analyst must become "headless," or *asephalic,* subject; a subject that mirrors nothing other than a void. In this way, and in this way only, will analysands come to understand themselves as a void papered over by language" (Wilderson, 348, f. 29).

[37] Mirzoeff describes the techniques of visibility as classifying, separating, and the aesthetics of power. It is notable that in Martel's films all of these classic ocular strategies of authority are problematized by some aesthetic strategy or narrative device. Perhaps most importantly is the way that Martel thinks about and utilizes sound. Critics have noted this orthopedic gesture in Martel's cinema, though perhaps not in these terms. In Martel, it is not so much *what* one hears, but *what place (*one occupies) allows or makes one obliged, to hear. Gabriela Halac writes, "[En Niña Santa] se hace evidente la imposibilidad de percerbir el todo" (100). Along these lines, the final scene of *La Niña Santa* shows the two girlfriends Amalia and Julieta (Julieta Zylberberg) swimming in the hotel pool before the narrative denouement and fallout from Dr. Jano's sexual assault. The scene begins in a medium-shot; Amalía's face protrudes from the pool (screen right) while Josefina emerges onto the screen left. Only the lower half of Josefina appears as Amalía, visibly delighted to see her friend asks: "¿Qué hacés? Crees que dejan meterte?" The indeterminate third person plural here suggests the miasma of the patriarchal adult world, but also interpolates the camera and viewer. Will *they* let her get in to the pool? Will *you*? Josefina responds while undressing, "¿Quieres que me meta?" The voyeuristic is here transformed into a negotiation between friends. The water is warm, and the girls dive in and emerge in a close-up, pushing back hair from their eyes and glancing at one another. "¿Te sentís ese olor?" Josefina asks, "Es azahar" [orange blossoms]. While floating in tandem, ears submerged beneath the water (submerged in the screen) Amalía reiterates Josefina's directive (to both Amalía and the viewer) to open and extend their sensual capacities, "¿Escuchas? ¿Me escuchas?" This is the orthopedic gesture of the film. It asks what it means to listen, and what listening might make possible. To do so, the film posits the ear as a sensual and erotic appendage. In between sharing whispers and inside jokes with Julieta in Bible study, Amalía is struck by the command to: "Estar alerta al llamado de Dios." Offscreen sound and onscreen intrusions also emphasize that there is a reality obscured from us—the image here mobilizes desire to imagine what this beyond is even though the film's subtext affirms that what is at stake is precisely the play of surfaces, sonic or otherwise.

representation are always-already inscribed in the logic of film—or in the logic of film that appears in the diegesis of *La Mujer*.

In an important scene, Josefina (Claudia Cantero), Vero, and Tia Lala—played by the extraordinary María Vaner—rewatch Vero's wedding video. To properly frame this sequence, it is useful to recall how Brian Massumi describes marriage as an incorporeal transformation:

> "I do" is a connector: it binds two bodies. And it is a component of passage: it transfers those bodies into a new network of power relations, in a kind of leap in place. Before you open your mouth you are one thing. By the time you close it you have landed in another world. Nothing touched you, yet you have been transformed. "I do" effects an "incorporeal transformation" (another name for event).[38]

The nostalgic rewatching of the wedding video in some sense attempts to capture this ineffable process, which is above all a socio-economic transformation. Tia Lala curates the watching experience by commenting on the guests' appearances, their family relationships, and dancing styles. In other words, she comments on the political and socioeconomic status of everyone at the wedding—"qué familia de delincuentes" she says about some of the groom's friends. Here the screen serves as a mode of coloniality, a "patrón de dominación entre los colonizadores y los otros sobre la base de la idea de 'raza,' […] relaciones históricamente necesarias y permanentes, cualesquiera que fueran las necesidades y conflictos originados en la explotación del trabajo."[39]

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[38] Massumi, *Capitalism and Schizophrenia,* 28.

[39] Quijano, "Colonialidad del poder," 139.

Figure 4.4: Vero watching the wedding video from a scene in *La mujer sin cabeza* (2008)

As a spectacle of social reproduction, the wedding video registers the investiture of power and privilege to the white heterosexual couple (Marcos and Vero) sanctioned by the appearance of the provincial Senator—"Todos parientes tuyos mama," Josefina says to Tia Lala. The repressed of this bourgeois fantasy comes through in Lala's sense of genealogical superiority—she sees the crowd as "amaderado"—as well as when she asserts that one of the guests that appears in the video had died before the wedding. Put differently, Lala experiences the video through the perspective of what Moten and Harney suggestively call (with Parenti) the upside down and the surrounded:

> In Michael Parenti's classic anti-imperial analysis of Hollywood movies, he points to the 'upside down' way that the 'make-believe media' portrays colonial settlement. In films like *Drums Along the Mohawk* (1939) or *Shaka Zulu* (1987), the settler is portrayed as surrounded by 'natives,' inverting, in Parenti's view, the role of aggressor so that colonialism is made to look like self-defense. Indeed, aggression and self-defense are reversed in these movies, but the image of a surrounded fort is not false. Instead, the false image is what emerges when a critique of militarized life is predicated on the forgetting of the life that surrounds it. The fort really was surrounded, is besieged by what still surrounds it, the common beyond and beneath—before and before—enclosure. The surround antagonizes the laager in its midst while disturbing that facts on the ground with some outlaw planning.

The cinematic ghosts that haunt the wedding video as well as the initial framing of the accident suggest that the structural position occupied by the three wedding video

spectators is indeed surrounded—surrounded by a grammar of dispossession that is not subsumable to visuality.[40] When Tia Lala fast-forwards the video tape, she does so with the assistance of a domestic helper, one of a multitude of unnamed darker skinned workers. This context serves to lend an element of humor to Lala's impossible quest for ocular and ontological security. White bourgeois spectatorship is thus rendered as *completely dependent* upon the ontological obviation of the other. At the same time, this wedding scene underlines the dominant logic of capitalist transformation: the wedding (and the accident) in *La mujer* work as interpersonal social functions of (white) heterosexual bourgeois hegemony—"a kind of leap in place" at the touch of a button. The film works to move the cinematic ground that surrounds this technological fast forwarding and metaphorical jump by making Vero's imagined subjective disposition, and the visual authority that underwrites it, untenable in the face of "the common beyond and beneath—before and before—enclosure."

Near the end of the film, Candita (Inés Efron) obliges Vero to drop her off at Changuila's family home. Candita gets out and is ushered into the house while Vero stays in the car, presaging and reinforcing Vero's subjective denouement—the acquiescence and alliance to white patriarchal structures of power, her "leap in place." In the drive up to the house, the cinemascope camera takes up a position between Vero and Candita so that the road appears blurry through the windshield framed by the two

[40] In an early scene after the accident, a kitchen conversation between Vero and Marcos gets drowned out by the sound of one of the domestic staff sharpening knives.

women's heads.[41] With her window down, Candita honks and waves while giving directions to Vero, who meanwhile has picked up a telephone call. The camera captures iterations of bourgeois enclosure, positioning Vero as once again comforted by the privatized modes of transportation and communication that were forces of estrangement after the accident. Here, they insulate her from the outside world. Throughout the drive, the *surround* remains blurry and sonically-obscured by the noise of the car on the dirt road. More offscreen than Vero, Candita is allied with the visual and sonic space outside the car—her movement and the movement of her *motochorra* friends suggest a kind of gleeful "fugitive planning" that the spectator, who is obliged to stay behind with Vero, cannot fully visualize. The various obscure allusions to movement—Changuila's bicycle—in the first scene of the film are also suggestive of occupying space in an inverse relationship to the visual sovereign order.

By now a "troubled viewer" who has nonetheless been sutured back into the fold of the bourgeoisie, Vero listens to directions that she cannot hear to drive out of the neighborhood. Guided more by what Malabou calls "unconsciously calculated

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[41] Martin writes: "It is important that Candita is represented as diseased, as contaminated by Hepatitis C, an illness which her mother mentions continually, and which is represented by yellow make-up. Hepatitis C generates a physical resemblance between the white bourgeois Candita and her darker-skinned, working-class girlfriend Cuca. As a disease caused by contact with contamination (dirty water for examples), it represents Candita's sexual and social contamination by 'undesirable' elements (Cuca, the 'leidis'), her abject status in the eyes of bourgeois society, just as other possible contaminants hover on the edge of the world of *La mujer sin cabeza,* sources of threat obsessively discussed by the bourgeois characters, like the turtles housed at a local vet's, which it is feared might escape into the neighboring swimming pool. As a virus which transforms her body into a rhizome, a connection with another organism, or organisms, Hepatitis suggests Candita's as a body which is literally 'becoming-other,' one which is hybrid and in a process of perpetual transformation" (96).

blindness"[42] than sense of direction, the car passes Changuila—the camera allowing just enough time for his accusatory gaze to register onscreen—while Vero, sunglasses back on, tries to look only straight ahead. In this scene, "the right to look" disturbs the naturalized suturing of authority to power and opens on to an ensemble of questions that are not ocular-centric.

Whatever opening the accident produced for Vero's subjective possibilities is not only underwritten by a grammar of violence. Its summarily closed by the end of the film. The accident becomes another way in which civil society (white, heteronormative) redraws the lines with the other through gratuitous violence. That is, Vero's subjective change—ostensibly the interest of the film—is presupposed by the genocidal violence of disappearance. Consumed, processed, and produced as a contingency rather than as "an existential structure," as Malabou has it, the bourgeois accident is a bourgeois cover-up.

[42] Malabou, *Accident*, 89.

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