

**Body/Memory/Identity:  
Contemporary Argentine and Brazilian  
Women's Film**

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## ABSTRACT

### **BODY/MEMORY/IDENTITY: CONTEMPORARY ARGENTINE AND BRAZILIAN WOMEN'S CINEMA**

by Charlotte Elisabeth Gleghorn

This thesis explores the different ways in which Argentine and Brazilian women directors conceptualize the body in contemporary film (1989-2007). The study argues that, as an intensely corporeal medium, cinema is the privileged site for the playing out of anxieties regarding the representation of the body, illuminating the processes of identity formation and memory politics in light of the recent histories of authoritarianism and neoliberalism in both Argentina and Brazil. Specific understandings of the body arise from the legacy of the Dirty War in Argentina (1976-1983), the military dictatorship in Brazil (1964-1985), torture, and social marginalization, all of which have continually crafted women's cinematic responses.

The Introduction outlines a dual methodology to interpret the body both as a tool in film criticism and as a marker of socio-political context. This is followed by the core of the thesis which comprises four chapters, each offering an in-depth analysis of an Argentine and Brazilian film in comparative perspective. Divided into two parts, the first part of the thesis deals specifically with four films which engage with the politics of self-representation. Chapter I discusses how the Brazilian film *Um Passaporte Húngaro* (Sandra Kogut, 2001) and the Argentine film *Los rubios* (Albertina Carri, 2003) both use the family as their departure point to explore notions of identity and memory, particularly questioning the directors' positioning towards their ancestors. Chapter II considers the tortured and distressed figure as presented in *Que Bom Te Ver Viva* (Lúcia Murat, 1989) and *La fe del volcán* (Ana Poliak, 2001), both partially autobiographical films which reference the impact of the recent dictatorships on the representation of the body. The second part of the thesis examines four fiction films which deal with the representation of marginal figures. Chapter III explores the intersection of the body with the institutions of mental health and medicine by analysing the representation of madness and intersexuality, respectively, in *Bicho de Sete Cabeças* (Laís Bodanzky, 2001) and *XXY* (Lucía Puenzo, 2007). Finally, Chapter IV investigates the relationship between the body and urban space as portrayed in *Um Céu de Estrelas* (Tata Amaral, 1996) and *Vagón fumador* (Verónica Chen, 2001).

This thesis illustrates the variety of representational strategies that women directors draw on in order to explore notions of identity and memory. Diverse in approach, the films selected propose the body as a site of convergence of power relations and cultural encodings, and provide potent comments on the complex interrelationships between corporeality, identity, and societal forces. By offering a polyphonic reading of the body, the study enables a fuller understanding of women's cinema at the interface of authorship, representation and politics.

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## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

### The Body Function in Postdictatorship Argentine and Brazilian Women's Film

*'The body is [...] directly involved in a political field;  
power relations have an immediate hold upon it;  
they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it'.<sup>1</sup>*

- Michel Foucault

*'Female authors, female directors,  
do not owe their importance to a militant feminism.  
What is more important is the way they have  
produced innovation in this cinema of bodies,  
as if women had to conquer the source of their own attitudes  
and the temporality which corresponds to them  
as individual or common gest'.<sup>2</sup>*

- Gilles Deleuze

The cinematic revivals which emerged in Argentina and Brazil during the 1990s have both been marked by the increased participation of women directors. Record numbers of female directors released films in the year 2005 in Argentina, constituting approximately twenty per cent of national releases for that year.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, in Brazil it is estimated that approximately twenty per cent of the productions released from the mid- to late- 1990s were directed by women.<sup>4</sup> In addition, it was Carla Camurati's film, *Carlota Joaquina, Princesa do Brazil* (1995), which ushered in the latest period of revived cinematic production in Brazil, dubbed the *retomada*.<sup>5</sup> In this respect, the present study was borne out of a desire to interrogate the emergence of this 'new' generation of women filmmakers in Argentina and Brazil, in light of the societal shifts which have marked both countries over recent decades, namely, dictatorship and neoliberalism.

<sup>1</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin Books, 1991), p. 25.

<sup>2</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema II: The Time-Image*, trans. by Hugh Tomlinson & Robert Galeta (London: The Athlone Press, 1989), pp. 196-197.

<sup>3</sup> Of the 64 Argentine releases that year, 13 have a woman director or co-director. See Daniela Vilaboa & Santiago García, 'El año de las directoras', <<http://www.artemisianoticias.com.ar/notas.asp?id=40&idnota=1150>> [accessed 23 March 2007].

<sup>4</sup> Schild states that 'dessas cinco dezenas de títulos que compõem o quadro do renascimento, pelo menos dez vêm assinados por mulheres, ou seja, uma respeitável cota de 20% do total. Desse contingente feminino, uma boa parte (cerca de dois terços) refere-se a cineastas estreantes em longa-metragem'. See Susana Schild, 'Cinema Feminino: um Gênero em Transição?', *Cinemais*, 9 (January – February 1998), 123-128 (p. 125).

<sup>5</sup> For reasons of consistency I will use the dates given on the Internet Movie Database (IMDB), where possible, for all films referenced throughout the thesis.

Simultaneously, however, this study attempts to engage with cinema as a corporeal medium, an art form that brings the body to the forefront of representation. The body here appears as the privileged site for the interrogation of official discourses regarding memory and identity, in these cases often informed by the context of violence and marginalization, either as a result of dictatorship or neoliberal restructuring. The last military dictatorships in Argentina (1976-1983) and Brazil (1964-1985) profoundly and violently altered societal structure, signifying an 'epochal transition', to borrow Idelber Avelar's turn of phrase.<sup>6</sup> Whilst there are notable differences between the two historical contexts, the respective regimes' gendered discourse and systematic human rights abuses have rendered the cinematic body a prime vehicle with which to explore resonances of the past in the present and discuss broader socio-political concerns.

The authoritarian regimes' discourses targeted women as wives and mothers, as the last bastion of society through which to reinstate the conservative and patriarchal values of family, religion and *Patria*. However, whilst the military 'exalted motherhood and femininity', promoting the national security doctrine in the domestic sphere, it simultaneously subjected women to extreme forms of violence premised on the specificities of female sexuality.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, the gendered aspects of the torture and abuse, which victims suffered at the hands of the repressors, underline the particular role women's bodies played in both the execution and mapping of military power. As Diana Taylor's work on the Argentine dictatorship attests, the enemy was often imagined as a feminine construct: 'Deviance, associated with femininity, was constructed as "monstrous" and turned into a national spectacle'.<sup>8</sup> Accounts of female 'subversion' were particularly compelling to the military's discourse, and the feminine characteristics of the *subversivos* were accentuated in order to demonize the enemy and simultaneously heighten the regime's virility.<sup>9</sup> In light of the varied and particular experiences of the dictatorship from both male and female points of view, then, women's responses become vital to understanding their positioning vis-à-vis the dictatorial state.

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<sup>6</sup> Idelber Avelar, *The Untimely Present: Postdictatorial Latin American Fiction and the Task of Mourning* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1999), p. 59.

<sup>7</sup> Sonia Álvarez, *Engendering Democracy in Brazil: Women's Movements in Transition Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 9.

<sup>8</sup> Diana Taylor, *Disappearing Acts: Spectacles of Gender and Nationalism in Argentina's "Dirty War"* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 1997), p. 80.

<sup>9</sup> For an account of the spectacle of masculinity and femininity during the Argentine *Guerra Sucia*, see Taylor, *Disappearing Acts*, pp. 59-89.

Furthermore, the continuities and resonances of the authoritarian regimes in contemporary Argentina and Brazil are a haunting reminder, and remnant, of the military's radical restructuring of society at the cultural and economic level. The promise of democracy rapidly crystallized into dissatisfaction with escalating marginalization, poverty and violence. This undermining of the promise of democracy was further exacerbated by the impunity of a number of the prime repressors from the dictatorship eras, epitomized in the *Lei da Anistia* (1979) in Brazil and the succession of laws in Argentina, such as the *Ley de Punto Final* (1986) and the *Ley de Obediencia Debida* (1987) and, under President Carlos Menem, the blanket pardon granted to those who had been convicted in 1989.<sup>10</sup>

How, then, does the portrayal of the body on film intersect with concerns of identity and memory, given the intimate relationship that the body holds with concepts of nation? In what ways does this intimate relationship between body and nation, identity and memory, manifest itself in a variety of films directed by women? In order to frame the following analyses of eight films, and their exploitation of the body to discuss broader socio-political concerns, it is first necessary to outline some of the key themes which feature throughout the thesis, notably film and women's authorship, the cinematic revivals of the *Nuevo cine argentino* and the *retomada*, and their relationship to women directors in particular, and most importantly the body and its specific connotations in countries which have experienced extremely violent and repressive military regimes, and a fierce and unforgiving form of late capitalism.

#### FILM, FEMINISM AND WOMEN'S AUTHORSHIP

Women's cinema is an undeniably controversial category of filmic production. The term is used to refer to a number of different characteristics - thematic interest, the protagonist's perspective, the gender of the director and the film's perceived target audience - and as such it is slippery and ambivalent towards its subject matter. The category of women's cinema has been widely disputed and discussed by critics and film practitioners alike, who debate the validity of a term which embraces diverse

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<sup>10</sup> It is worth noting that these laws were officially declared unconstitutional in Argentina under President Néstor Kirchner in 2005. In Brazil there has recently been a huge debate regarding the application of the Amnesty Law to charges of torture against the military, which has culminated in the first sentence passed against a former military officer, Coronel Carlos Alberto Brilhante Ustra, in October 2008, for torture and human rights abuses during the dictatorship era. See the following website and its archive of articles on torture and the Amnesty Law for more information: <<http://www.desaparecidospoliticos.org.br>> [accessed 12 November 2008].

filmic tendencies under the same sign, whilst not constituting a specific genre or movement. Numerous studies and anthologies of essays illustrate the ongoing preoccupation with the term 'women's film', and the association of feminism with filmic practice.<sup>11</sup> Many of these discussions are not exclusively based on the gender of the director, however, but rather on the *representation* of women in cinema, and filmic conventions which are regarded as pertaining to a patriarchal order.

Film studies has particularly engaged with women's cinema and questions of women's representation since the early 1970s when the second wave of feminism, in a psychoanalytic turn, led theoreticians to question the cinematic apparatus in terms of its accompanying phallogocentric techniques, amongst which the gaze emerges as the primary subject of inquiry. Early perspectives from the intersection of feminism and film emphasized woman as object on the screen, a signifier of absence, in classical Hollywood cinema, and the trope of the objectifying male gaze as intrinsic to the cinematic apparatus. Claire Johnston's *Notes on Women's Cinema* (1973) and Laura Mulvey's seminal article, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' (1975) paved the way for such approaches informed by psychoanalysis, whilst on the other side of the Atlantic debates revolved around the social role of feminist film and its role in visualizing previously invisible subjects.<sup>12</sup> Since the 1980s, however, countless challenges have been made to the assumption that 'woman' is a monolithic, passive construct and spectator in the cinema, incapable of reacting to what she sees on the screen. These perspectives have made strides in the development of theories of spectatorship, where for a long time the spectator was entirely absent from film criticism.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> See Annette Kuhn, *Women and Film* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982); E. Ann Kaplan, *Women & Film: Both Sides of the Camera* (New York: Routledge & Methuen, 1983); Patricia Erens, ed., *Issues in Feminist Film Criticism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990); Alison Butler, *Women's Cinema: The Contested Screen* (London: Wallflower Press, 2002); and Geetha Ramanathan, *Feminist Auteurs: Reading Women's Films* (London: Wallflower Press, 2006).

<sup>12</sup> B. Ruby Rich, in an article which discusses the trajectory of perspectives on feminist film, describes these differing approaches as, on the one hand, 'fundamentally phenomenological' (the US approach) and on the other, 'fundamentally analytical' (the British approach). See Rich, 'In the Name of Feminist Film Criticism' (1978), reprinted in *Issues in Feminist Film Criticism*, ed. by Patricia Erens (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), pp. 268-287 (p. 278).

<sup>13</sup> Key to these developments, in my mind, is the essay 'Rethinking Women's Cinema: Aesthetics and Feminist Theory', by Teresa de Lauretis. See de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), pp. 127-148. See also Jackie Stacey, 'Desperately Seeking Difference', *Screen*, 28.1 (1987), reprinted in *Feminism and Film*, ed. by E. Ann Kaplan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 450-465.



The common and vague usage of the term 'women's cinema' is often mobilized in studies which consider films or genres deemed of interest to women or championing women's concerns. For instance, melodrama is seen as the women's film genre *par excellence*, depicting domestic lives which reflect the realities of many women and which supposedly appeal to their emotional character. For reasons of space I will not rehearse the reasons for which the term 'women's cinema' has been associated with certain genres such as melodrama for, I believe, this has been amply covered elsewhere.<sup>14</sup> Suffice to say, however, that the application of the term to particular narrative themes and film genres poses severe problems in light of the move away from essentialist and unifying concepts of woman, women's interests and feminism. It is self-evident that women do not share the same concerns around the world, although some of their interests may overlap; to declare a film of women's interest is thus to assume a culturally specific standpoint.

Whilst studies increasingly use the term 'women's cinema' to discuss women's authorship, very little scholarly work has been dedicated to understanding the dynamics of women's filmmaking in non-Euro-Anglo contexts. Indeed, in spite of the fact that the discussion of women directors and their relationship to *auteur* theory has proved pivotal in the development of theories of feminist, or even feminine, film aesthetics, women's authorship in film has not yet given rise to sufficient theoretical debate in historical context. Although a number of studies have been published which focus on specific women directors, such as Dorothy Arzner and Agnès Varda, to name but two directors who have received particular attention, there are relatively few in-depth analyses of women's film and authorship. Indeed, as Judith Mayne bemoans, 'theoretical discussions of female authorship in the cinema have been surprisingly sparse'.<sup>15</sup>

Since Roland Barthes's famous proclamation on the 'Death of the Author' (1968), *auteur* theory more generally has been the target of criticism in light of its dismissal of social and collaborative factors in filmmaking. According to Judith Mayne,

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<sup>14</sup> See the following scholarly texts on melodrama and women's film: Christine Gledhill, ed., *Home is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Women's Film* (London: BFI, 1987); Annette Kuhn, 'Women's Genres', *Screen*, 25.1 (1984), reprinted in *Feminism and Film*, ed. by Kaplan, pp. 437-449; and Pam Cook, 'Melodrama and the Women's Picture', in *Gainsborough Melodrama*, ed. by Sue Aspinall & Robert Murphy (London: BFI, 1983), pp. 14-28.

<sup>15</sup> Judith Mayne, *The Woman at the Keyhole* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 90.

Auteurism has been criticized as a perspective that tends both to fetishize the director as a lone creator and to valorize formal innovation at the expense of all other concerns. In a way, auteurism has become such an ingrained notion in the understanding of film that it is impossible to dispense with it, but, of course, what matters is how the notion is used in the first place. Some filmmakers - many of them women - have been excluded from critical consideration because their work is not seen as measuring up to the standards of auteurism (needless to say, those standards are usually defined by male critics). And auteurism can place such an emphasis on the coherence of one artist's vision that significant changes and contradictions are ignored in the name of a single, overarching auteurist perspective.<sup>16</sup>

Indeed, when *auteur* theory first truly became critical currency, it was primarily a masculinist construction of authorship, as the French *Nouvelle Vague* practitioners and theorists demonstrate.<sup>17</sup> According to Diana Holmes, 'New Wave film theory is unconsciously but unmistakably gendered masculine. The film director is imagined as a solitary hero, in Oedipal revolt against his filmic fathers, scornful of the latter's appeal for a mass market which is represented, implicitly, as feminine'.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, although there is increasing discontent with the potency of the *auteurist* model, it is not sufficient to dismiss *auteur* theory in its entirety as a debased and outmoded perspective on film production. Of course, it must be adequately problematized with respect to the many levels of film production and the collaborative process which it entails, but this does not mean that the author has disappeared altogether. Certainly the cult of the *auteur* survives strongly to this day, particularly in studies of national cinemas. This issue becomes all the more pressing in the case of women's cinema since women's directorial contributions have not yet been sufficiently acknowledged. Indeed, as previously stated, there remains much work to be done regarding modes of authorship in films directed by women.

Where accounts of women's authorship in cinema have emerged, it has often been as a result of the very evident presence of the filmmaker in the film text. As Angela Martin surmises,

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<sup>16</sup> Judith Mayne, *Claire Denis* (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005), p. 22.

<sup>17</sup> See Diana Holmes, 'Sex, Gender and Auteurism: The French New Wave and Hollywood', in *World Cinema's 'Dialogues' with Hollywood*, ed. by Paul Cooke (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 154-171; Geneviève Sellier, *La Nouvelle Vague: un cinéma au masculin singulier* (Paris: CNRS, 2005); and Angela Martin, 'Refocusing Authorship in Women's Filmmaking', in *Auteurs and Authorship: A Film Reader*, ed. by Barry Keith Grant (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), pp. 127-134 (pp. 128-129).

<sup>18</sup> Holmes, pp. 157-158.

Strictly speaking, there are two definitions of the word 'authorship': one concerns the (legal) ownership of an idea or its mode of expression, the other concerns the act and the occupation of writing. But female or feminist authorship tends to be sought in what can be identifiably linked to the filmmaker (as woman): a film's autobiographical reference, a filmmaker's actual presence in the film, the evidence of a female voice within the narrative (however located).<sup>19</sup>

Whilst it is understandable that films with an autobiographical impulse be interpreted in light of the director's gender, a move which analyses *only* those films deemed formally feminist or feminine according to specific cultural perspectives, glosses over the differences which characterize women's experiences throughout the globe. Moreover, such a move neglects women's varied colonization by masculine structures of power over the centuries. It is thus necessary to address the issue of authorship in a variety of films directed by women, including those which do not bear any obvious authorial hallmark, nor autobiographical input. This study's corpus, then, presents a cross-section of films which reflect the diversity of approaches in women's cinema from Argentina and Brazil and their contrasting perspectives on the body. Its central preoccupation, however, is with heterogeneity not homogeneity, thus heeding Stephen Heath's suggestion that 'films by women cannot be pushed together in a simple equivalence, nor can those by men. To do so seems to deny difference'.<sup>20</sup>

This quest to remain alert to difference is not intended to present one more example of the general trend to classify women's cultural production in terms of its marginalized status. Frequently classified as a mode of production which acts *counter* to the so-called mainstream, women's cinema is often situated within a centre-periphery framework, assumed as a medium which necessarily contests the male-dominated and hegemonic universe of celluloid. Studies of women's cinema that invoke this framework habitually raise questions about aesthetic and narrative choices in films directed by women in a search for a specifically feminine form of expression. However, in many ways, the very suggestion that women's cinema is by nature a 'counter-cinema', to borrow Claire Johnston's famous formulation of the category in the early 1970s, is an essentialist supposition which groups together

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<sup>19</sup> Martin, 'Refocusing Authorship', pp. 130-131.

<sup>20</sup> Stephen Heath, 'Difference', in *The Sexual Subject: Screen Reader on Sexuality* (London & New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 47-106 (p. 91).

diverse accounts of women as directors and citizens in the same category.<sup>21</sup> Thus, while discussions of female authorship in film generally arise in tandem with a director's perceived feminist leanings or questioning of the hegemonic patriarchal order, it remains imperative that *all* women's filmic production should be studied, irrespective of its political and aesthetic leanings, to gain a fuller understanding of the director-gender-film nexus.

Over the past decades a canon of women's *auteur* cinema has emerged, dominated by a series of North American and European directors such as Dorothy Arzner and Chantal Ackerman. This canon, or established genealogy of women's cinema, incorporates the names of a few prominent Latin American women directors, notably María Luisa Bemberg (Argentina), María Novaro (Mexico), Sara Gómez (Cuba) and Suzana Amaral (Brazil). However, these names, although irrefutably important in the history of Latin American and women's cinema, are cited time and again as the prime exponents of a feminist aesthetic, relegating countless other women directors who work in the region, and who exploit extremely varied aesthetic strategies and thematic interests, to oblivion. Moreover, where discussions of women as *auteurs* have arisen they have also worked to the detriment of the recognition of women's roles in cinema in positions other than that of director.<sup>22</sup> This is particularly salient in the Latin American context, where *auteur* theory and its attendant gender imbalance have ensured that women practitioners, in varied capacities, have been silenced in the cinematic historiographies of the countries in the region.<sup>23</sup> In this respect, women directors from Latin America could be understood as occupying a doubly-marginalized status: as women, and simultaneously distanced from access to the global (read Northern) histories of cinema. Thus, even as this study attempts to problematize the discourses which determine that women's cultural production should always be interpreted as resisting patriarchal logic, it also seeks to confront the marginalization of Latin American women directors and redress the imbalance outlined above in terms of who has access to the cinematic canon. This thesis, then, interpolates the Euro-Anglocentric discussion of women's cinema with an examination of some key contemporary

<sup>21</sup> Claire Johnston, 'Women's Cinema as Counter-Cinema', in *Notes on Women's Cinema*, ed. by Claire Johnston (London: Society for Education in Film and Television, 1973), pp. 24-31.

<sup>22</sup> Judith Mayne, 'Female Authorship Reconsidered (The Case of Dorothy Arzner)', in *Auteurs and Authorship*, ed. by Grant, pp. 263-279 (p. 266).

<sup>23</sup> Catherine Benamou, 'Notes toward a Memography of Latin American Women's Cinema', *Symposium*, 48.4 (Winter 1995), 257-269 (p 258).

women directors from Argentina and Brazil and their films. Furthermore, my discussion of the directors' manipulation of the body relates concretely to the socio-political contexts which inform the films' production. In so doing, I hope to offer detailed analyses of selected films at the crossroads of *auteur* theory and politics, thus encouraging further research into women's cinema in both countries and advancing the debates surrounding women's cinematic authorship in these contexts.

The films analysed in this thesis all intersect with feminist concerns in the democratization of responses, subjectivization of history, and contestation of strict identity dyads which are regulated through varying ideological constructions of the body. Moreover, the mere feat of accessing the industry, and directing in a milieu which has long been the stronghold of men, may be perceived as a feminist act.<sup>24</sup> The films, however, are not easily categorized into existing frameworks that have been created in order to understand women's cinema. By contrasting different optics on the celluloid body, informed by the socio-political contexts of Argentina and Brazil, the thesis testifies to the wide range of strategies which women directors exploit, and thus problematizes the neat categorization of women's films into distinct formal features.

In order to address the heterogeneity of women's cinema this study juxtaposes different approaches to authorship in the works of a cluster of Argentine and Brazilian women directors by exploring their films along two lines. The first part of the thesis, 'Autobiographical Self-inscription', deals with those films which specifically address the experiences, body, voice and role of the director in the film text. The second part, 'Inscribing the Other', continues to explore the pivotal role of the body in the discussion of identity and memory in films directed by women, but does not intentionally map the director's identity onto the films concerned. However, whilst this study will engage with some of the issues inherent in any discussion of female-authored cultural production, it is not an attempt to write a general history of women's filmmaking in Argentina and Brazil, nor to suggest a unified feminist or feminine aesthetic in the works of these directors. Indeed, I have selected the films to be analysed as a result of their foregrounding of corporeal dynamics which are in dialogue with the recent histories of dictatorship and neoliberalism, torture and

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<sup>24</sup> The renowned Argentine producer-director Lita Stantic expressed this same view in interview with Viviana Rangil, *Otro punto de vista. Mujer y cine en Argentina* (Rosario: Beatriz Viterba, 2005), pp. 155-156.

marginalization in both countries, but there are countless others which could have been included on the same grounds. Furthermore, whilst I contextualize each film with respect to other filmic outputs by the same director, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to offer an account of the cinematic *oeuvre* of, say, Albertina Carri or Lúcia Murat, to give but two examples of directors studied here who have a distinctive body of work. Moreover, two of the directors considered in this study do not yet have an *oeuvre* of which to speak. Instead, by focusing specifically on the trope of the body in a number of works, this thesis elucidates the varied representational strategies employed by women directors in the light of the postdictatorship neoliberal context in both countries.

### LATIN AMERICAN WOMEN'S FILM: AN INTERRUPTED HISTORY

Women have been involved with the cinematic apparatus since its inception in Latin America. Whilst their roles and responsibilities have not always been recognized, a number of studies have highlighted the importance of women screenwriters, producers and directors at different historical conjunctures.<sup>25</sup> Early women directors such as Emília Saleny (*La niña del bosque*, 1917; *Clarita*, 1919) and María V. de Celestini (*Mi derecho*, 1920) from Argentina; Cléo de Verberena (*O Mistério do Dominó Negro*, 1931), Gilda de Abreu (*O Ébrio*, 1946) and Carmen Santos (*Inconfidência Mineira*, 1948) from Brazil; and Adela Sequeyro (*La mujer de nadie*, 1937), and Matilde Landeta (*Lola Casanova*, 1949; *La negra Angustias*, 1950) from Mexico, have all received attention in histories of Latin American cinema.<sup>26</sup> In fact, these pioneers are cited as being key players in the development of cinema in their respective countries, and their names often feature in general histories of national cinemas in the region.<sup>27</sup> However, whilst the female pioneers are partially recognized, the historiography of the period of the 1960s and 1970s, associated with

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<sup>25</sup> Gita de Barros was only recognized as the scriptwriter for her husband's films in 1941, when it emerged that she had, in fact, written them since 1914. See Benamou, p. 262; and Elice Munerato & Maria Helena Darcy de Oliveira, 'When Women Film', in *Brazilian Cinema*, expanded edition, ed. by Randal Johnson & Robert Stam (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), pp. 340-350 (p. 343).

<sup>26</sup> Here I only refer to the women pioneers of cinema in the stronger film industries of Mexico, Argentina and Brazil. These three countries have consistently produced more films than other Latin American nations and are all experiencing periods of cinematic vitality at present. Evidently, women were involved in film in other Latin American countries. See Plazaola for an overview of the involvement of women in the silent period of cinema, and from 1929 to 1990. Luis Trelles Plazaola, *Cine y mujer en América Latina* (Río Pedras, Puerto Rico: Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1991).

<sup>27</sup> See the inclusion of a section on the women pioneers of Brazilian cinema in Lisa Shaw & Stephanie Dennison, *Brazilian National Cinema* (Abingdon & New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 55-69.

what has been termed the New Latin American Cinema, displays remarkably little concern with the efforts of women filmmakers in the region. B. Ruby Rich's 1991 article, 'An/Other View of New Latin American Cinema', points to the silencing of women filmmakers in the writing of New Latin American Cinema, and suggests a revisionist history which would accommodate women filmmakers into the movement, otherwise perceived as an 'all-male pantheon'.<sup>28</sup> In this respect, the writing of a male-centred canon of filmmakers from Latin America during the 1960s and 1970s bears striking resemblance to the male star directors of the *Nouvelle Vague*, but also to the exclusively male membership of the Latin American Boom.

Notwithstanding the omission of women's contributions to the respective cinemas of the 1960s and 1970s, certain key directors have received critical attention. For the purpose of this study, I will here limit my discussion of precedents of women directors to the cinemas of Argentina and Brazil, which form the crux of my analysis throughout the thesis.<sup>29</sup> Since the late 1970s in Argentina and Brazil two women directors have monopolized criticism, namely María Luisa Bemberg and Ana Carolina Teixeira Soares, from Argentina and Brazil respectively, both of whom have significantly advanced the concerns of women filmmakers and paved the way for future generations of women in film. Bemberg in particular has received a great deal of international attention and deservedly so, for she has been, at least until recently, perhaps the most consistent woman director to focus on women's concerns.<sup>30</sup> Ana Carolina, for her own part, is often regarded as the veteran of women's cinema in Brazil, and respected for her pointed criticism of the patriarchal state in her famous trilogy of the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>31</sup> In this thesis, however, I am

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<sup>28</sup> B. Ruby Rich, 'An/Other View of New Latin American Cinema' (1991), reprinted in *New Latin American Cinema, Vol. I: Theory, Practices and Transcontinental Articulations*, ed. by Michael T. Martin (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1997), pp. 273-297 (p. 278).

<sup>29</sup> More generally three key critical works have moulded discussion of women directors in the Latin American context: Plazaola, *Cine y mujer*; Elissa J. Rashkin, *Women Filmmakers in Mexico: The Country of Which We Dream* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001); and Patricia Torres San Martín, ed., *Mujeres y cine en América Latina* (Mexico: Universidad de Guadalajara, 2004).

<sup>30</sup> See John King, Sheila Whitaker & Rosa Bosch, eds., *An Argentine Passion: María Luisa Bemberg and her Films* (London: Verso, 2000), for a comprehensive overview of Bemberg's work. In 2002 an entire issue of a major scholarly journal was dedicated to Bemberg criticism, evidence of the director's impact. See the special edition of *Revista canadiense de estudios hispánicos*, 'María Luisa Bemberg: Entre lo político y lo personal', ed. by Rita de Grandis, 27.1 (October 2002).

Also see Claire Taylor, 'María Luisa Bemberg Winks at the Audience: Performativity and Citation in *Camila* and *Yo la peor de todas*', in *Latin American Cinema: Essays on Modernity, Gender and National Identity*, ed. by Lisa Shaw & Stephanie Dennison (Jefferson, NC.: McFarland & Co., 2005), pp. 110-124.

<sup>31</sup> Ana Carolina's famous trilogy *Mar de Rosas* (1977), *Das Tripas Coração* (1982), and *Sonho de Valsa* (1987) are briefly analysed in Chapter II of this thesis.

concerned with mapping more recent filmic explorations of the body, and thus, with the exception of one film, *Que Bom Te Ver Viva* (1989), all of the films date from the 1990s and 2000s. Whilst it would be unjust to play down the achievements of earlier women directors from either country, the increased visibility of women directors in these national cinemas in recent years demands acknowledgment and further analysis.

#### THE SPECTRE OF THE FEMINIST GHETTO: RESISTANCE AND REACTION TO LABELS

Irrespective of the seemingly gendered concerns which these directors explore in their films, however, it must be observed that then, as now, women directors display a rejection of, or at best an ambivalence towards, the concept of women's cinema and specific, 'gendered' categories of film in competitions. When asked by Luis Trelles Plazaola about her opinion on the separation of women's cinema in festivals and on the use of the term 'cine de mujeres' and 'cine feminista', Ana Carolina replied:

La hallo repugnante. Te aclaro que el movimiento feminista de los años sesenta, desde el punto de vista político, fue importante e hizo una contribución formidable. Lo que yo repudio es una diferenciación absurda, abstracta, reaccionaria y limitadora, porque una feminista tiene menos oportunidades que un ciudadano común y corriente. Por eso prefiero ser un ciudadano. Esto de feminista es demasiado chato, demasiado mediocre. Yo no me considero menos que un director, y, por ello, no incursiono permanentemente en el *ghetto* del feminismo.<sup>32</sup>

In the context of Latin American women's film this vehement rejection of the term is not an unusual response to the labelling of women's cultural production. Julia Tuñón, reflecting on the 'Encuentro de Mujeres y Cine en América Latina', organized by Patricia Torres San Martín in Guadalajara in 2002, remarks on the 'paradoja de que la mayor parte de las cineastas convocadas negaba tener una perspectiva pautada por su género y declaraba que su ambición era ser consideradas cineastas, más allá de su sexo'.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, many women directors from all parts of the world shy away from a gender specific category for their works.<sup>34</sup> Rather, they wish to be viewed first and foremost as *cinéastes*, irrespective of their status as women.

<sup>32</sup> Ana Carolina Teixeira Soares in interview with Plazaola, p. 97.

<sup>33</sup> See Julia Tuñón, 'A favor de los puentes: un alegato a favor del análisis', in *Mujeres y cine en América Latina*, ed. by Torres San Martín, pp. 17-28 (p. 17).

<sup>34</sup> Judith Mayne writes of Claire Denis and her reticence to consider herself a 'woman filmmaker'. See Mayne, *Claire Denis*, p. 27.



Whilst in some cases this may seem to contradict the efforts of directors to reveal the complex realities which face women today in the region, it also acknowledges the reticence of women directors to wholeheartedly assume a role which may contest the masculine universalizing ideal, epitomized in the figure and theory of the *auteur*. Furthermore, it exemplifies a woman director's right to deal with any theme in film, not just those themes which the community deems worthy in light of the director's gender. The desire to render their gender position oblique when questioned about its influence in filmic production thus signals a reluctance to be partitioned off into a section of creativity independent of male-authored works. At the same time as these attitudes continually return to the persistent problem of viewing the filmmaker as an 'untrammelled artist' and as the sole determining factor in the representation,<sup>35</sup> they also reveal the systematic denial of the women's 'othering' and their collusion with an all-encompassing male interpretation of authorship. Making gender-themed films and denying their positioning vis-à-vis a masculine universal ideal are thus not necessarily two mutually exclusive notions. Rather, asserting oneself above all as a 'director', and not a 'directora', means assuming by default the generalized 'neutral' perspective which in fact linguistically legitimizes man's authority over creativity. Furthermore, it reveals the loaded interpretation of the words *feminismo* and *feminista*.<sup>36</sup>

This problematic continues to persist with respect to contemporary women's filmic production. Indeed, as Viviana Rangil notes on the Argentine context, 'the up-and-coming Argentinean women filmmakers have an ambiguous and ambivalent relationship with feminism and gender issues. Even if they acknowledge the gains obtained by the feminist movement, they generally do not want to be considered (or labelled) as feminist'.<sup>37</sup> Jessica Stites Mor consolidates this point:

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<sup>35</sup> Robert Stam, *Film Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2000), p. 90.

<sup>36</sup> This aversion to identifying with feminism is not only apparent in the realm of cinema; it applies to other forms of cultural production but also, critically, to women who are engaged in politically committed social movements. As Gabriela Castellanos reflects on the situation in Colombia, 'Con mucha frecuencia, las mujeres que desde el estado, desde las ONGs o desde grupos de base trabajan por mejorar la condición de las mujeres, se creen en la obligación de aclarar que "ellas no son feministas", como si serlo fuera un verdadero estigma'. See Gabriela Castellanos, 'Un movimiento feminista para el nuevo milenio', in *Sujetos femeninos y masculinos*, ed. by Gabriela Castellanos & Simone Accorsi (Cali: La Manzana de la Discordia/Universidad del Valle, 2001) pp. 31-53 (p. 37).

<sup>37</sup> Viviana Rangil, 'Changing the Face of Argentinean Cinema: The Vibrant Voices of Four Women', *Afterimage*, 28 (May/June 2001), 7-9 (p. 9).

La lectura más obvia sobre las directoras cinematográficas contemporáneas en la Argentina es la falta de identificación con el lenguaje del feminismo político. La mayoría de las directoras de la generación contemporánea no se definen a sí mismas como feministas y, aunque agradecidas a sus predecesores, ven a la vieja generación como demasiado polémica y a la noción de directora cinematográfica, como un gueto que ellas prefieren evitar.<sup>38</sup>

In Brazil, directors such as Lúcia Murat and Tata Amaral, both seemingly committed to themes of social marginalization and politics, also refuse the feminist label. Amaral unequivocally states that *Um Céu de Estrelas* (1996), one of the films analysed in Chapter IV of this thesis, presents ‘uma visão feminina, não feminista’.<sup>39</sup> In a similar vein Murat, paraphrased in an article and referring to her own work, suggests that ‘tanto ela como seu trabalho não são feministas, mas femininos’.<sup>40</sup> Seemingly, then, whilst there has been a greater presence of women directors in the recent cinemas from both countries, this does not appear to have brought about a radical change in how the majority of women directors speak about their films, particularly concerning the issue of feminism.

#### THE *NUEVO CINE ARGENTINO* AND THE *RETOMADA*: TWO CINEMATIC RENEWALS WITH INCREASED FEMALE PARTICIPATION

The filmic contributions of female directors from Argentina and Brazil in recent years have attracted much critical attention, not to mention prizes at festivals. Moreover, when viewed within the parameters of the film revivals in both countries, the increased visibility of women directors is, in fact, one of the few discernible features of these umbrella movements, which otherwise display a vast array of aesthetics and themes. Thus, names such as Lucrecia Martel and Carla Camurati have become synonymous with the journalistic use of the terms *Nuevo cine argentino* and the *retomada*.<sup>41</sup> However, whilst the presence of women directors in

<sup>38</sup> Jessica Stites Mor, ‘Transgresión y responsabilidad: desplazamiento de los discursos feministas en cineastas argentinas desde María Luisa Bemberg hasta Lucrecia Martel’, in *El cine argentino de hoy: entre el arte y la política*, ed. by Viviana Rangil (Buenos Aires: Biblos, 2007), pp. 137-153 (p. 144).

<sup>39</sup> Amaral cited in *Cinema Falado: 5 Anos de Seminários de Cinema em Porto Alegre*, ed. by Fernando Rosano (Porto Alegre: Unidade Editorial, RS & Secretária Municipal de Cultura, 2001), p. 197.

<sup>40</sup> Lúcia Murat paraphrased in Carlos Alberto Silva, ‘Lúcia Murat: as Veias Abertas de uma Diretora’, *Correio Brasiliense* [Brasília], 7 March 1990.

<sup>41</sup> Neither of these directors feature in this thesis. Whilst their work could have been incorporated, I chose to focus on films which related explicitly to my chosen axes of comparison as outlined below in my detailed breakdown of the structure of the thesis.

these national film industries is repeatedly cited as one of the key features of these two periods of production, little in-depth analysis of these films, many of which are *opere prime*, has been undertaken, with the exception of investigative interviews, resulting in a general appraisal of the notable presence of women directors, coupled with a lack of close readings of their films.

Film has taken different trajectories in both countries, yet both the *Nuevo cine argentino* and the *retomada* evoke a sense of cinematic renewal after a period of stagnation in productivity. This stagnation was, in the Argentine case, in part due to the economic crisis of the early 1990s and the rejection of existing modes of film production,<sup>42</sup> and in the Brazilian context, President Collor de Melo's destructive dismantling of Embrafilme in the early 1990s. The year 1992 constitutes a landmark moment in both countries; in Argentina only ten films were produced, the lowest figure since the 1930s;<sup>43</sup> in Brazil, only three domestic films were released, evidencing the severity of the crisis following the retreat of state-sponsored support for the industry under Collor de Melo's government.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, the laws which were then passed to resuscitate cinema production, the *Ley de cine* (Argentina, 1994) and the *Lei do Audiovisual* (Brazil, 1993), both represent a renegotiation of state involvement, however partial, coupled with private investment, in the national film industries.

The two movements, whilst distinctive in some respects, bear a number of commonalities additional to the increased participation of women directors. Both the *Nuevo cine argentino* and the *retomada* seemingly dialogue with earlier periods of film production in their respective countries, specifically the *nuevo cine* of the 1960s in Argentina and the *cinema novo* of the 1960s and 1970s in Brazil. The recent cinematic interventions are variably defined as both homages to these earlier movements and rejections of their ideology. The return of a neorealist aesthetic and the prominence of the non-professional actor in recent Argentine cinema has become the site of much discussion regarding the recent cinema's relationship to the *nuevo*

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<sup>42</sup> In many ways the new directors from Argentina reject the previous cinema, just as the Young Turks in France rejected *le cinéma du papa* in the *Nouvelle Vague*.

<sup>43</sup> Tamara Falicov, *The Cinematic Tango* (London: Wallflower Press, 2007), p. 84.

<sup>44</sup> Different sources give the number as two or three films in the Brazilian case. Here the figure is cited from Randal Johnson's account, who obtained statistics from *Filme B*. See Johnson, 'TV Globo, the MPA and Contemporary Brazilian Cinema', in *Latin American Cinema*, ed. by Shaw & Dennison, pp. 11-38 (p. 19).

*cine* of the 1960s.<sup>45</sup> Similarly, the presence of ‘landscapes of poverty’ in Brazilian *cinema da retomada* has elicited a number of comparisons between the contemporary representation of the *sertão* and the *favela* and that of the *cinema novo* films.<sup>46</sup> The revival of film production in both countries begs further comparison, given their perceived rejection of the political ideology of the socially committed cinema of the 1960s and 1970s, and their similar moments of collapse and revitalization as a result of state and private sector interventions.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, the postdictatorship neoliberal context of both countries informs the films’ production and reception, underlining the recurrent themes of violence and marginalization of people who have often been rendered invisible in society. The conjunction of the Argentine and Brazilian cases here, then, has a two-fold purpose; first, it attempts to contribute to the growing body of works in comparative perspective, particularly in the Latin American context where the term ‘Latin American’ is all too often used to the exclusion of Brazil; secondly, by placing the different films in dialogue with each other in each of the comparative chapters, I seek to further elaborate on the debate surrounding the dictatorships’ official discourses and their impact on representation, particularly given the numerous echoes of the patriarchal dictatorial state which resurface in recent fiction and documentary films. In this way, the emphasis on women’s filmic production offers an exploration of one facet of the multiple possibilities of comparison and dialogue between the two cinematic revivals.

Increased women’s participation in both movements has been associated with the measures taken by the state to promote cinematic production in adverse circumstances. The administration of Brazil’s first elected president in three decades, Fernando Collor de Melo (1990-1992), proved devastating for the film industry. The abolishment of the Sarney Law and dissolution of the state-sponsored film company,

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<sup>45</sup> See, for example, Fernando Martín Peña, ed., *Generaciones 60/90: cine argentino independiente* (Buenos Aires: Fundación Eduardo F. Constantini, 2003); and S. Díaz, ‘La construcción de la marginalidad en el cine argentino: la generación del 60 y el cine de los 90’, in *Civilización y barbarie en el cine argentino y latinoamericano*, ed. by A. L. Lusnich (Buenos Aires: Biblos, 2005), pp. 111-123.

<sup>46</sup> Ivana Bentes cited in Randal Johnson, ‘TV Globo, the MPA and Contemporary Brazilian Cinema’, p. 34. For further discussion on the *sertão* and *favela* in the cinema of the *retomada* see Ivana Bentes, ‘The *sertão* and the *favela* in Contemporary Brazilian Film’, in *The New Brazilian Cinema*, ed. by Lúcia Nagib (London & New York: I. B. Tauris, 2003), pp. 121-137.

<sup>47</sup> It is also worth noting that both film revivals bring questions of realism and observation to the forefront of debate, as an interesting comparative project entitled ‘Recoveries of the Real: New Argentine and Brazilian Cinema in a Global-Image World’ attests. See <<http://www.bbk.ac.uk/cilavs/research/cinema-network>> [accessed 21 November 2008], for more information.

Embrafilme, all but halted the production of films in Brazil during the early 1990s. However, following Collor's impeachment for corruption, his successor, President Itamar Franco, implemented the *Lei do Audiovisual*, which, whilst passed in 1993, did not seriously make its impression until 1995, when production resumed with some vigour to coincide with President Fernando Henrique Cardoso's first term (1995-1999). Whilst a number of established filmmakers have continued making films throughout the 1990s and have certainly consolidated the new wave of filmmaking from Brazil, one of the most discernible features of this heterogeneous cinema is the emergence of new directors, who had previously only worked on short-films. Moreover, the incentives for *opere prime* have had a particularly noticeable effect on levels of women's participation as directors, thus consolidating the image of the 'presença feminina' in the *retomada*. According to statistics given in Maria do Rosário Caetano's survey of filmmaking in Brazil from 1990-2002, 41 women directed debut feature films during this period.<sup>48</sup> Indeed, *Um Céu de Estrelas* (Tata Amaral, 1996) and *Bicho de Sete Cabeças* (Lais Bodanzky, 2001) are both *opere prime* which will be analysed in this thesis. Lúcia Nagib, in her collection of interviews from *retomada* directors, also remarks on the new women directors,<sup>49</sup> and José Álvaro Moisés celebrates the *Lei do Audiovisual* when he comments, 'look, for example, at the number and diversity of talents, many of them women, making directorial debuts in the last four or five years, due to a more democratic and widespread use of the Audiovisual Law'.<sup>50</sup> In fact, the increased visibility of women directors in the panorama of national filmmaking is one of the defining features of the *retomada* films, along with a greater diversity of locations on film, exploring the incredibly varied cities and landscapes of the country, and an 'international flavour', often signalled by the incorporation of foreign/actors in the films themselves.<sup>51</sup> With

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<sup>48</sup> Maria do Rosário Caetano, 'Cinema Brasileiro (1990-2002): da Crise dos Anos Collor à Retomada', *Alceu*, 8.15 (July-December 2007), 196-216 (p. 208).

<sup>49</sup> Lúcia Nagib, 'Introdução', in *O Cinema da Retomada: Depoimentos de 90 Cineastas dos Anos 90*, ed. by Lúcia Nagib (São Paulo: Editora 34, 2002), p. 15.

<sup>50</sup> José Álvaro Moisés, 'A New Policy for Brazilian Cinema', in *The New Brazilian Cinema*, ed. by Nagib, pp. 3-22 (p. 11).

<sup>51</sup> The diversity of the *retomada* cinema, as a number of critics have remarked, makes it difficult to group the films together under a formal series of aesthetic, generic and thematic traits. However, irrespective of this diversity, the return of the *sertão*, the international flavour, the increased levels of production in areas of the country other than the São Paulo-Rio de Janeiro nexus, and the presence of women directors are all factors which are repeatedly cited as characteristic of the *retomada* films. For an overview of cinematic production during the 1990s in Brazil see Stephanie Dennison & Lisa Shaw, *Popular Cinema in Brazil: 1930-2001* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), pp. 204-

the exception of Lúcia Murat, whose film *Que Bom Te Ver Viva* (1989) barely managed to escape the crisis in production of the early 1990s and which is included in the corpus for its explicit dealing with torture and the body in a postdictatorship context, all the directors in this thesis belong to this new generation of filmmakers. In this sense, the recent revivals in film production in both countries have consolidated discussions of generational shifts regarding memory, identity and aesthetics.

In Argentina, whilst the 1980s witnessed a revival in production following the dearth of national productions under dictatorship rule, the early 1990s once again marked a crisis in the industry.<sup>52</sup> The Instituto Nacional de Cine y Artes Audiovisuales (INCAA) was created in 1994, replacing the former Instituto Nacional de Cinematografía (INC). As part of its 1994 *Ley de cine* legislation, the INCAA formed a fund for low-budget film production and introduced competitive categories for first-time filmmakers. These incentives account for many of the filmic interventions of the 1990s, coupled with the surge in attendance at film schools. One of these categories includes a prize for *opera prime* by women directors. However, whilst a number of the new women directors have competed in this category, there is a noticeable unease with the separation of women's filmic production from other sections. As Viviana Rangil notes in the introduction to her collection of interviews with Argentine women directors, 'si tal iniciativa abrió puertas y ofreció nuevas oportunidades a las jóvenes cineastas, también existe la percepción de que una categoría separada constituye un instrumento de segregación cuyo efecto negativo es clasificar al cine hecho por mujeres como un género cinematográfico en sí mismo, y eso resulta inaceptable'.<sup>53</sup> Other incentives regarding the visibility of women's cinema in Argentina include the reinstatement of the Mar del Plata international film festival, which relaunched the 'La mujer y el cine' competition in 1996, thus

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232; Shaw & Dennison, *Brazilian National Cinema*, pp. 101-104; and *The New Brazilian Cinema*, ed. by Nagib.

<sup>52</sup> During the dictatorship Argentina imported the majority of its films and the repressive climate stifled national film production. However, it did produce its own home-grown light sexual comedies termed *comedias picarescas*. Whilst in Brazil film production remained relatively high during the 1970s and 1980s, and some allegorical criticism of the authoritarian state slipped the regime's notice, the period was also marked by the protagonism of *pornoanchadas*, soft porn packaged in a comedic style. See Falicov, *The Cinematic Tango*, pp. 44-45, for information on the Argentine film industry under the dictatorship and Randal Johnson, 'The Rise and Fall of the Brazilian Cinema', in *Brazilian Cinema*, ed. by Johnson & Stam, pp. 362-386, on the Brazilian context.

<sup>53</sup> Rangil, *Otro punto de vista*, pp. 8-9.

providing an international platform for women filmmakers.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, as a reflection of the increased participation of women directors in the industry the Asociación de Directores Argentinos Cinematográficos (DAC) has, since 2005, encompassed the specific Comisión de La Mujer.

## MEMORY AND IDENTITY

The films discussed in this thesis, however, are bound together not only by the gender of their 'official' director, as evidenced by the above survey of women filmmakers, but also by their exploration of memory and identity. These themes are intimately linked to the periods of dictatorship and processes of democratization in both countries. Indeed, during and following the periods of transitional politics which took place in the early 1980s, the cinematic renewals evidence a great deal of production in fiction and documentary modes which deals precisely with the dictatorship eras and their legacy. The cinematic perspectives on the dictatorships proffered in the 1980s have now ceded to an intensification of modes and methods of representation, pointing to the increasingly contested nature of memory in both countries. This has been particularly noticeable in Argentina, where countless films have been produced which intersect with national debates on memory in light of the dictatorship, particularly from the younger generations who grew up during the *Guerra Sucia*. However, recently a few critics have remarked upon the increasing profile of the dictatorship in Brazilian films.<sup>55</sup> The 1990s in Brazil actually offered relatively few cinematic meditations on the dictatorship, with *O Que É Isso, Companheiro?* (Bruno Barreto, 1997) and *Ação Entre Amigos* (Beto Brant, 1998) being the most obvious exceptions. This could be viewed as an indicator of the climate of amnesty and forgetting which had seemingly set in during those years. Indeed, the initial spirit of, and interest in, political testimonialism, as Rebecca Atenció documents, had lost momentum by the late 1980s, possibly signalling the public's unwillingness to confront the past during this period.<sup>56</sup> However, in recent years a number of films have returned to the dictatorship in order to explore the

<sup>54</sup> Rangil, 'Changing the Face of Argentinean Cinema', p. 8.

<sup>55</sup> See Júlio Bezerra, 'O Cinema em Armas', *Revista de Cinema*, 5.50 (December 2004), 22-24; and Fernanda Bonadia, Julia Alquéres & Natalia Manczyk, 'A Ditadura no Cinema', *Esquinas*, 43.1 (2008), 64-67.

<sup>56</sup> Rebecca Atenció, 'Imprisoned Memories: Trauma and Mourning in Brazilian Testimonials of Political Violence', (Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Wisconsin - Madison, 2006), p. 118. Available through ProQuest [accessed 12 February 2008].

wounds of the repression.<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, many other films, whilst they do not make direct reference to the most recent period of dictatorship repression, allude to torture and the distressed body, elements which are evidently central to the discussion of the cinematic body in this instance. In addition to the theme of dictatorship, however, recent films from Argentina and Brazil demonstrate a marked interest in exploring the nation and its multifaceted identity. Often this reveals the continuities of dictatorship discourse in contemporary society, but it also makes visible the harmful effects of neoliberalization, drawing attention to the uneven processes of democratization in societies where marginalization walks hand in hand with the impunity of those responsible for human rights abuses during the military regimes. The films selected for analysis in this thesis are representative, then, of the desire to unpack national stories through varied perspectives: personal, political and indisputably corporeal.

Memory and identity are central to these filmic representations, appearing as closely linked concepts which are constantly in dialogue with each other and the historical contexts of dictatorship and neoliberalism. Indeed, as John Gillis notes:

The parallel lives of these two terms alert us to the fact that the notion of identity depends on the idea of memory, and vice versa. The core meaning of any individual or group identity, namely, a sense of sameness over time and space, is sustained by remembering; and what is remembered is defined by the assumed identity. That identities and memories change over time tends to be obscured by the fact that we too often refer to both as if they had the status of material objects – memory as something to be retrieved; identity as something that can be lost as well as found. We need to be reminded that memories and identities are not fixed things, but representations or constructions of reality, subjective rather than objective phenomena.<sup>58</sup>

Moreover, these concepts are given corporeal shape and form in radically distinct ways. Accordingly, then, the themes of memory and identity are explored in this thesis as unstable phenomena, constantly in flux. Their imbrication in specific sites of the nation demands an analysis of the dynamics of space and how this relates to

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<sup>57</sup> Júlio Bezerra explores this renewed interest in his article, 'O Cinema em Armas', citing *1972* (José Emilio Rondeau), *Araguaya, Conspiração do Silêncio* (Ronaldo Duque), *Cabra Cega* (Toni Venturi), *Quase Dois Irmãos* (Lúcia Murat) and *Tempo de Resistência* (André Ristum) as examples of this trend in 2004. See Bezerra, 'O Cinema em Armas', 22-24.

<sup>58</sup> John Gillis, 'Introduction. Memory and Identity: the History of a Relationship', in *Commemorations: the Politics of National Identity*, ed. by John Gillis (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 3-24 (p. 3).



memory and identity in the situations both surrounding the production of films, and represented on screen within the narratives.

### THE BODY AND DICTATORSHIP LEGACY

The analysis of the body as physical and social construct has become one of the most fruitful areas of research in recent years. Spanning such diverse yet interconnected disciplines as architecture, philosophy, literary studies, development studies and geography, the analysis of the body explores its construction and *constructedness* from different perspectives. The overarching framework of this thesis, then, exploits the body as the means through which to simultaneously decipher cinema *and* socio-political concerns.

The body, understood as a vehicle of expression for cultural, biological and political interests, is here fundamental, as many of the directors whom I will consider exploit its myriad interpretations in their films. The importance of the body as a locus of cultural expression in Argentina and Brazil bears poignant relevance, not least because of its strategic role in the structures of repression instigated by the authoritarian military regimes in both countries and culminating in the vicious neoliberalism which characterized the regimes and their subsequent democratic governments. The experience of torture informs a number of these films, in different contexts, always alluding to the violent repression of the dictatorships in both Argentina and Brazil. Furthermore, the disenchantment with the promise of democracy and economic stability comes to the fore in the figure of abandoned or forgotten bodies, bodies which in their own way have been disappeared from the nation's view.

The most recent dictatorships of Argentina and Brazil have had irrevocable consequences for society. Whilst they overlapped in time frame, Brazil's dictatorship (1964-1985) is frequently remarked for its longevity where Argentina's *Guerra Sucia* is noted for its massive human loss, with upper estimates of *desaparecidos* at 30,000 victims. Both dictatorships were firmly entrenched in Cold War paranoia, seeking to annihilate the subversive elements which were threatening the Christian, Western values of the respective nations. Moreover, both military dictatorships mapped their concerns onto the societal institution of the family, upholding the

figure of the mother as cornerstone of the patriarchal institution in order to monitor the children who may resist the regimes through political activism.

The history of Argentina during the twentieth century is marked by interrupted and violent dictatorial rule with intermittent periods of democracy. The most recent military dictatorship (1976-1983) launched its *Proceso de reorganización nacional* following a tumultuous period of violent societal unrest, propelled by the breakdown of the unity of the Peronist Party during Juan Domingo Perón's exile in Spain, and besieged with conflict following the surfacing of both *guerrilla* and paramilitary groups. The government of María Estela Perón, Perón's third wife, who stepped into the breach following her husband's death in 1974, was deposed by a military coup led by Jorge Videla. It was thus that a succession of military juntas would rule the country from 1976-1983 when democracy was finally restored, although plagued by the recent and chilling accounts of state terror.

During the seven years of dictatorial rule in Argentina it was the first period, under the rule of Jorge Videla, which was the most brutal in terms of the widespread use of torture and disappearance, horrifically reflected in the regime's manipulation of language. Indeed, as has been amply discussed, the shift in connotations of existing terminology is one of the most enduring legacies of the Dirty War. Marguerite Feitlowitz's in-depth study of the vocabulary of the regime, *Lexicon of Terror* (1998), provides an unsettling and compelling account of the warped discourse of the military generals and their calculated use of certain words to evoke the terror and torture which would ensue in one of the 651 clandestine detention centres throughout the country.<sup>59</sup> It is estimated that during the peak of the repression, the regime was responsible for approximately 30 disappearances per day.<sup>60</sup> The military's fierce conviction that Argentina was losing its way, falling out of line and favour with the most advanced nations as a result of its entertaining Leftist ideas, masked the illegitimate methods which characterized the dictatorship, and resulted in the death of 30,000 individuals. The enemies of the regime, the so-called *subversivos*, were effectively anyone who opposed the conservative and repressive ideals of the generals. They were certainly those members of the armed

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<sup>59</sup> It is worth noting that the original number of concentration camps included in the CONADEP report was 340. This was later revised and augmented to 651 in 2001. The full *Nunca más* report can be consulted at <<http://www.nuncamas.org>>.

<sup>60</sup> Marguerite Feitlowitz, *A Lexicon of Terror: Argentina and the Legacies of Torture* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 25.

*guerrilla* groups, such as the Montoneros or the Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo (ERP), but they were also professionals aligned with liberal arts such as journalists, writers, or psychiatrists; they were family members associated with political activists and those who had nothing to do with resistance; the subversives were effectively any member of the population who was seen to act against the regime's interests. Indeed, as General Ibérico Saint-Jean, then Governor of Buenos Aires, stated in May 1977, 'primero mataremos a todos los subversivos, luego a sus colaboradores, después a sus simpatizantes, luego a los indiferentes, y por último, a los tímidos'.<sup>61</sup>

By contrast, Brazil's dictatorship was responsible for only 125 deaths, according to the figures cited in the *Brasil: Nunca Mais* report (1985), whilst 136 victims were officially declared *desaparecidos políticos* by the state in 1995.<sup>62</sup> The experience of torture, however, and the witch-hunt for subversives were defining aspects of the repression and equally widespread in their reach. Yet, whilst the dictatorship in Brazil constitutes the longest military authoritarian regime in South America, it has received relatively little critical attention in comparison with the cases of Argentina, Chile and Uruguay, all of which have many more confirmed victims in terms of deaths.<sup>63</sup> This is one of the most striking discoveries that has come to light whilst researching this thesis; although there is indeed a critical bibliography on cultural production which escaped censorship under the regime and provided veiled critiques of the military, the Brazilian dictatorship does not seem to have generated the diversity of themes which are evidenced in the Argentine bibliography. Furthermore, given the country's devastating human rights record in terms of summary executions on the part of both the military and civil police in

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<sup>61</sup> This famous declaration is included in the *Nunca más* report in the appendix from the Comisión Bicameral - Tucumán 1974-1983. See

<[http://www.nuncamas.org/investig/nmastuc/nmastuc\\_informe2.htm](http://www.nuncamas.org/investig/nmastuc/nmastuc_informe2.htm)> [accessed 21 March 2008].

<sup>62</sup> The website for the Comissão de Familiares de Mortos e Desaparecidos Políticos (CFDP) currently lists 380 victims of the dictatorship as either *morto* or *desaparecido*. See <<http://www.desaparecidospolitic.org.br>> [accessed 12 December 2008], for more documentation on the dictatorship era. This organization's publication, the *Dossiê dos Mortos e Desaparecidos Políticos a Partir de 1964* (Recife: Companhia Editora de Pernambuco / Governo do Estado de Pernambuco, 1995), has consolidated and expanded the analysis and figures offered in *Brasil: Nunca Mais* (Petrópolis: Vozes: 1985).

<sup>63</sup> As Alfred Stepan notes in his study of the Brazilian military regime, 'in all three of the Latin American bureaucratic-authoritarian regimes [referring here to Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay], prisoners "disappeared" or died while in custody of the armed-forces security apparatus. Thus legal reprisals for human-rights abuses were an issue from which the military wanted to protect themselves after the transition. In quantitative terms, however, the saliency of the issue was least intense in Brazil. On a per capita basis, for every person who disappeared or died in official custody in Brazil, ten died in Uruguay, and over three hundred died in Argentina'. See Stepan, *Rethinking Military Politics: Brazil and the Southern Cone* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 69.

recent years, including special task forces and death squads, research into torture and disappearances invariably recovers more critical work on the *contemporary* environment than on the military dictatorship era. The attempt to draw parallels between the *desaparecidos* of 'then' and those of 'now', in the form of the street children who were massacred outside the Candelária church in Rio in 1993, for example, is also echoed in the suggestion that Argentina's contemporary disappeared are the unemployed.<sup>64</sup> These allusions to the past in the present are a recurrent theme of this thesis as a whole, and reference the impossibility of suppressing and overcoming the trauma the individual and social body experienced under dictatorship rule in both countries. However, in their levelling of atrocity, these analogies do much to undermine the historical specificity of the dictatorships in their given socio-political conjuncture.

The dictatorships of Argentina and Brazil sought to mark their power on the bodies of the victims, both visually and psychologically, and simultaneously eradicate any remnant of the bodies which bore witness to their horrific human rights abuses in the systematic 'disappearing' of people. This process, as Débora C. D'Antonio states, exemplifies the fact that 'the military built a social consensus around the logic of: "there is no body nor body of evidence"'.<sup>65</sup> The erosion of citizens' rights and liberty, epitomized in the vicious techniques of torture, scaremongering and death, effectively dismantled the existing societal structure in an

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<sup>64</sup> The Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo suggested that the unemployed were the latest disappeared: 'Creemos que los desocupados son los nuevos desaparecidos del sistema. El trabajo digno es un derecho que nadie nos puede quitar y por el que debemos luchar hasta las últimas consecuencias'. Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo, cited in Héctor Becerra, 'El piquete, metamorfosis de la subjetividad', *Página 12* (2001) <<http://www.pagina12.com.ar/2001/suple/Madres/01-10/01-10-05/index.htm>> [accessed 21 August 2008].

It is also worth noting here the division of the Madres in to two factions in 1986. The two groups of Madres which now exist are the Asociación de Madres de Plaza de Mayo, headed by the founder of the greater organization, Hebe de Bonafini, and the Madres de Plaza de Mayo: Línea Fundadora. The latter is the more traditional of the two groups, focussing principally on recovering remains of the disappeared and on bringing ex-officials to justice, whereas the former is more radical in its aims and protests, expanding its work to fighting against other social injustices as evidenced in the above quotation. The two factions were created as a result of disputes regarding the presidency of the organization in 1986. The Línea fundadora has since accepted financial reparations from the state for the injustices carried out during the dictatorship, whereas the Asociación refuses these reparations, criticizing them for they obscure their greater project of justice and accountability. For further information on the Madres, see Jo Fisher, *Mothers of the Disappeared* (London: Zed Books, 1989); Marguerite Guzmán Bouvard, *Revolutionizing Motherhood: The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc, 1994); and Ulises Gorini, *La rebelión de las Madres: historia de las Madres de Plaza de Mayo* (Buenos Aires: Grupo Editorial Norma, 2006).

<sup>65</sup> Débora C. D'Antonio, 'Controversial Images of Women during the Last Argentinian Military Dictatorship', *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies*, 13.3 (December 2004), 375-396 (p. 376).

attempt to build anew Christian, Western nations. In this respect, there is a clear analogy to be made between the dismemberment of the individual body and the body of the nation. The overtly medical vocabulary of the regime in Argentina, for instance, clinically ‘othered’ those sectors of society which the Junta believed to be obstacles to their mission of societal reorganization. This exact, scientific language was also used in the Brazilian regime’s own record of the cases presented to the military tribunals during the dictatorship, and which later became the material for the compilation of *Brasil: Nunca Mais*.<sup>66</sup> The rationalist scientific impulse significantly reflects the discourse of the regimes and their desire to classify, diagnose and ‘cure’ the illness which hampered progress.<sup>67</sup>

In the division of society into ‘healthy’ and ‘sick’ components, and the ‘othering’ of subversion, the Argentine dictatorship discourse,

led to undifferentiation in terms of ‘real’ material bodies. The military’s habit of throwing the corpses into the ocean or unmarked graves signaled the ultimate obliteration of individuality and differentiation. As bones mingled indiscriminately in common pits or on the ocean floor, the military reduced all difference to sameness; it undermined bodily boundaries and covered up distinctions of gender, class, ethnic origin, religion, and age. These absented bodies, *theoretically*, no longer existed, told no story.<sup>68</sup>

This ‘undifferentiation’ of bodies has been reversed in the postdictatorship period with a multiplication of perspectives on the dictatorship and the realization of different interpretations of events. Thus, cultural production provides a vital corrective to the dictatorship’s homogenizing discourse with the acknowledgment of diverse accounts of the regime. Furthermore, as B. Ruby Rich relates, the immediate postdictatorship period saw a renewed interest in the body as a site to expel the demons of the past. Rich gives the example of ‘an Argentine actress at the women’s symposium of the International Festival of New Latin American Cinema in Havana in 1986 [who] told of the explosion of new body workshops and body-therapy classes then taking place, as people tried to discharge the years of repression literally, physically, from their bodies’.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Atenció, pp. 58-59.

<sup>67</sup> The power of these medical interventions, and their overlapping with concerns relevant to the cinematic apparatus, becomes the subject of inquiry in Chapter III, in my discussion of *Bicho de Sete Cabeças* (Lais Bodanzky, 2001) and *XXY* (Lucía Puenzo, 2007).

<sup>68</sup> Taylor, *Disappearing Acts*, p. 150.

<sup>69</sup> Rich, ‘An/Other’, p. 283.

In Brazil, the *desaparecidos políticos* are not the foremost experience of the dictatorship years. Indeed, when President Cardoso passed the *Lei dos Desaparecidos Políticos* in 1995 it recognized just 136 individuals as having been disappeared at the hands of the dictatorial state. This law only admits the role of the latter in the illegitimate disappearances which occurred between 1964 and 1979, since 1979 constitutes the year when the *Lei da Anistia* was passed. Moreover, the *Lei dos Desaparecidos* has been severely criticized as the responsibility for investigating the crimes committed by the regime during the period 1964-1979 rests with the family members and not, as would be expected, on the state. Unlike in Argentina, the democratic transition did not create an official state commission to investigate the human rights abuses of the regime. It has thus fallen on family members who form the *Comissão de Familiares de Mortos e Desaparecidos Políticos* and the *Nunca Mais* groups based in a number of cities to insist upon the recognition of the crimes committed by the dictatorial state.

All of the films examined in detail in this study are postdictatorship; that is, they were conceived and produced since the return to democracy in Argentina and Brazil, in 1983 and 1985, respectively. As such, they often make explicit or tangential reference to the mechanisms of repression and violence which characterized the military dictatorships in both countries. This period of repression, I argue, has had a profound effect on the perception of the body, accentuating its role as a locus for socio-political concerns. The remnants and resonances of the dictatorships in these films also frequently relate to the context of late-capitalism and neoliberalism which has characterized both Argentine and Brazilian societies since the rise of the military to power. Necessarily, then, this study engages with the socio-political climate and relates the filmic narratives to shifts in the cultural field.

## THE BODY AND CINEMA

In film studies, research on the body has most clearly been addressed in feminist and predominantly psychoanalytic terms. Most studies which address the body in film deal with its representation as a social construct, building on the important contributions of Michel Foucault, Monique Wittig and Judith Butler to the notion of the performative. Moreover, whilst I would not like to suggest its insignificance, the predominance of gaze studies in criticism has led to an over-preoccupation with the

visual within the cinematic realm. Indeed, cinema has at its disposal auditory techniques which are of equal importance to the visual and it is vital to address the significance of sound within the filmic text itself. Recently, scholars have begun to consider the timbre of the voice in film and other aural strategies which are available to the filmmaker.<sup>70</sup> These contributions are felicitous at a moment when the supremacy of the visual seems to have taken a hold over what is generally considered to be Euro-Anglo culture. Moreover, an analysis of sound and voice in film urges us to rethink the terms in which the cinematic body is considered in light of the fact that the supposed unity of diegesis and sound with the image is frequently undermined. Indeed, as Kaja Silverman has argued regarding the female voiceover,

To permit a female character to be seen without being heard would be to activate the hermeneutic and cultural codes which define 'woman' as 'enigma,' inaccessible to definitive male interpretation. To allow her to be heard without being seen would be even more dangerous, since it would disrupt the specular regime upon which dominant cinema relies; it would put her beyond the reach of the male gaze [...] and release her voice from the signifying obligations which that gaze enforces [...] Finally, to disembody the female voice in this way would be to challenge every conception by means of which we have previously known woman within Hollywood film, since it is precisely *as body* that she is constructed there.<sup>71</sup>

In this way cinematic sound has become a crucial factor in the study of the body on film, and as such constitutes a key area of focus in the present study.

In recent years, however, the study of the body has come to explore the embodied senses, to borrow Laura Marks's term, and embodied reception. Moving beyond the perspectives on the gaze that were so revolutionary in their time, film studies may now draw on diverse interpretations of the corporeal encompassing author, film and spectator. A first move towards the bodily theorization of cinema was the concept elaborated by Linda Williams on 'body genres'; that is, those genres of film which actively mark the body of the spectator through mechanisms of affect and terror.<sup>72</sup> Additionally, the pioneering work on the haptic in cinema, led by Laura

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<sup>70</sup> See, for example, Michel Chion, *La voix au cinéma* (Paris: Éditions de l'étoile/Cahiers du cinéma, 1982); Michel Chion, *Audio-vision: Sound on Screen*, ed. and trans. by Claudia Gorbman, with a foreword by Walter Murch (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994); Mary Ann Doane, 'The Voice in the Cinema: The Articulation of Body and Space', *Yale French Studies*, 60 (1982), 33-50; and Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988).

<sup>71</sup> Silverman, p. 164.

<sup>72</sup> Linda Williams, 'Film Bodies: Gender, Genre and Excess', *Film Quarterly*, 44.4 (Summer 1991), 2-13.

Marks and Vivian Sobchack, amongst others, has been fundamental in my formulation of the cinematic body at the intersection of history, memory and identity.<sup>73</sup> As Marks writes,

Drawing from other forms of sense experience, primarily touch and kinesthetics, haptic visuality involves the body more than is the case with optical visuality. Touch is a sense located on the surface of the body: thinking of cinema as haptic is only a step toward considering the ways cinema appeals to the body as a whole.<sup>74</sup>

It is at this juncture that I wish to develop my own perspective on the use of the body in cinematic texts, developing a polyphonic understanding of the term. A multifaceted exploration of the body considers the corporeal both as a representational device, as signifier of society at large, and conveyor of bodily experience, memories and sensations. To borrow the words of Marks: 'How [...] does cinema mediate the place of the body in culture, and of culture in the body?'.<sup>75</sup> The body here becomes a trope to decipher all the levels of a film: authorship, narrative, aesthetics and its economy of spectatorship.

#### STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

The guiding principle of this thesis, then, is the body as outlined above, and its representation in selected filmic narratives by women. Whilst the study revolves around the theme of the body, and its central role in these narratives of identity and memory, it is perhaps worth stating from the outset that I am not suggesting a unified response by these women directors to the issues of power, identity and memory, or a feminist, or even feminine, aesthetic concerning the portrayal of the body on film. Even as the body instigates an interrogation of systems of power, violence and marginalization in these films, there is no unifying aesthetic in the works *because* they are directed by women. Rather, these directors exploit varied narrative and

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<sup>73</sup> Studies which have explored and developed this concept in cinema include Steven Shaviro, *The Cinematic Body* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993); Laura Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment and the Senses* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2000); Giuliana Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture and Film* (New York: Verso, 2002); and Vivian Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (Berkeley, CA & London: University of California Press, 2004). These studies are closely related to Deleuze and Guattari's differentiation between the haptic and the optic in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987) and Deleuze's own, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, trans. by Daniel W. Smith (London: Continuum, 2004).

<sup>74</sup> Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, p. 163.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 211.



technical strategies to suggest the ongoing concern with control, marginalization and dichotomies. Instead of transferring an expectation of a feminine or feminist aesthetic onto these films, I study each in turn, its relationship with the body, and the issues it elucidates regarding societal transformation, the legacy of the dictatorships and each country's ongoing neoliberalism.

The thesis is divided into two parts, each comprising two chapters and the detailed analysis of four films. Many of the films are in some way autobiographical in nature and I thus undertake an extended discussion of the incursion of the director's life, body and voice into the cinematic realm in Part I of the thesis, 'Autobiographical Self-inscription'. These subjective narratives destabilize a notion of a concrete identity, drawing on multiple aesthetic strategies to represent selfhood. Part II, 'Inscribing the Other', also exploits the body as an optic to decipher complex negotiations of the personal with the national, this time with an emphasis on narratives which bring marginalized sectors of the population to the forefront of representation. Each chapter considers the body along a particular axis, bringing a wealth of perspectives to the corporeal motif in the thesis as a whole. The four axes of comparison are thus: Body/Family [Chapter I: Genealogies of the Self]; Body/Torture [Chapter II: Body Memories: Legacies of Torture]; Body/Medicine [Chapter III: Bodies in Rebellion] and finally Body/Space [Chapter IV: Body and Cityscape].

#### **PART I: AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SELF-INSCRIPTION**

The first part, entitled 'Autobiographical Self-inscription', brings together four films which all relate to the exploration of selfhood on the part of the directors. As Alison Butler notes, 'in its most sophisticated manifestations, the purpose of self-inscription is not the construction of a coherent subject position for the author, but the construction of a viable speaking position which, nonetheless, mirrors and enacts the author's experience of selfhood and embodiment as multiple and fragmented'.<sup>76</sup> The films *Um Passaporte Húngaro* (Sandra Kogut, 2001) and *Los rubios* (Albertina Carri, 2003), *Que Bom Te Ver Viva* (Lúcia Murat, 1989) and *La fe del volcán* (Ana Poliak, 2001), all perform the identity of their respective directors in different ways, frequently having recourse to hybrid strategies of fiction and documentary film.

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<sup>76</sup> Butler, *Women's Cinema*, p. 61.

Indeed, whilst the autobiographical impulse has often informed *auteurist* approaches to film, mapping the director's identity and concerns onto the characters and thematic of the film as a whole, these films beg further analysis with respect to their unveiling of the director *within* the fabric of the film, either physically, audibly or thematically.

Chapter I, 'Genealogies of the Self: Heritage and Identity in Sandra Kogut's *Um Passaporte Húngaro* and Albertina Carri's *Los rubios*', builds on the Foucauldian concept of genealogy as a disruption of linearity and origins in order to question two recent subjective documentaries which both problematize a return to the past. Both Sandra Kogut's *Um Passaporte Húngaro* and Albertina Carri's *Los rubios* refute the notion of a stable identity by disrupting and destabilizing autobiographical discourse. Both films are constructed in the first person, bringing the body, memory and identity of the filmmakers to the fore of their representation. Whilst they converge in their undermining of a pure and originary identity, these films present radically different tones and aesthetics. After an initial introduction to the theme of the family and its relationship to nation, memory and dictatorship in Argentina and Brazil, the chapter examines each film in turn, highlighting the corporeal presence of the director and how this presence illustrates a profound mistrust in the indexicality of the image. In so doing both films illustrate the intersection of the three defining themes of this thesis, body/memory/identity, and portray a quest for origins in conflict with contemporary notions of fractured selfhood. Both films undermine nationalist discourses on family and race, and map new subjectivities on screen which relate to the dissolution of hopes and desires in the postdictatorship, postmodern era.

Chapter II, 'Body Memories: Legacies of Torture in *Que Bom Te Ver Viva* and *La fe del volcán*', also considers films which bring autobiography to the screen in narratives which intercept the discourses of amnesia in Argentina and Brazil. Lúcia Murat's film, *Que Bom Te Ver Viva* explicitly relates to the filmmaker's experience of torture and repression during the most recent Brazilian dictatorship by contrasting testimonial accounts of women who survived state violence with a fictional enactment of hysteria performed by an actress. Indeed, in its projection of an actress to relay concerns which bear strong comparison with the director's own experience of torture, this film shares some formal features with Albertina Carri's performative documentary. Murat's film is here placed in dialogue with *La fe del*

*volcán*, a film which evolves from an intimate autobiographical portrait of the distressed director, Ana Poliak, to a meditation on the marginalization and desolation of the postdictatorship period in Buenos Aires. In its depiction of the desolate landscape of the Argentine capital, and the limited opportunities which are available to the characters of Ana and Danilo, the film suggests the continuation of the dictatorship in the present.

Drawing on Elizabeth Grosz's concept of authorship, which integrates text, author and reader – in this case spectator – this second chapter demonstrates how the two films relate to the body of their respective directors, and how this resonates throughout both the documentary and fictional elements of the films. Moreover, the films demand a reassessment of the promise of democracy in light of the injustices which continue in present-day Argentina and Brazil. In the case of Murat's film, this relates to the general climate of amnesty in Brazil, a climate which robs the victims of their agency, language and memory, and in many cases relegates them to silence as damaged citizens. As *Que Bom Te Ver Viva* makes patently clear, this is particularly salient in the stigmatization of women who suffered torture at the hands of the regime. *La fe del volcán*, for its own part, initiates a dialogue between the era of uncontrolled marginalization and neoliberal policy and the era belonging to Danilo and the director, the dictatorship.

## PART II: INSCRIBING THE OTHER

The second part, 'Inscribing the Other', considers four films which, unlike the aforementioned films of Part I, do *not* visually, aurally or narratively reference the director behind the camera. *Bicho de Sete Cabeças* (Lais Bodanzky, 2001) and *XXY* (Lucía Puenzo, 2007), *Um Céu de Estrelas* (Tata Amaral, 1996) and *Vagón fumador* (Verónica Chen, 2001) all have the body at the centre of their narratives, in highly different but complementary ways. In an attempt to problematize the often short-sighted labelling of women's authorial cinema, applied only to those films which exploit the director's identity for the subject of the film, the focus on more overtly fictional narratives in Part II of the thesis highlights these women directors' attention to micro-narratives which make up the fabric of the macro, the nation. These films, moreover, bring the 'disappeared' subjects of contemporary Argentina and Brazil to the fore, in their examination of madness, intersexuality, the popular classes and

prostitution, thus consolidating the themes of identity and memory established in the autobiographical narratives of Part I, by underlining their interrogation of the other's body.

Chapter III, 'Bodies in Rebellion: Medical Interventions and the Cinematic Gaze in *Bicho de Sete Cabeças* and *XXY*', offers a critique of the intersecting technologies of cinema and medical reason. As João Luiz Vieira writes,

Parece, ainda que de forma bastante intuitiva, haver muitas semelhanças entre o olhar anatômico, próprio da medicina e o olhar cinematográfico, no sentido em que ambos dissecam o corpo, movimentando-se por meio dele em profundidade, mergulhando no espaço, atravessando-o. Essa forma corpórea de visualidade molda os efeitos de prazer proporcionados pelo aparato cinematográfico.<sup>77</sup>

*Bicho de Sete Cabeças* adapts the experience of Austregésilo Carrano Bueno, who was forcibly admitted to psychiatric hospital during the 1970s and administered countless bouts of electroshock therapy in order to tame his rebellious nature. The film, however, sets this story of abuse in twenty-first century São Paulo, marked by a youthful urban aesthetic. In its updated setting and references to generational miscommunications, the film allegorizes the dictatorship violence of the past in the present.

*XXY*, for its own part, narrates the story of Alex, an intersexual adolescent who is struggling with her identity. The possible intervention of medicine in the guise of a male doctor haunts the film and persistently highlights the institution as a male, violent and narrow-minded phenomenon. Moreover, the echoes of the surgical vocabulary used during the dictatorship era underline the continuities between medical discourse under the military and in contemporary society. Both films, then, call attention to the collusion of the gaze, cinematic and otherwise, with discourses of power and violence which 'other' certain sectors of the population.

The fourth and final chapter, 'Body and Cityscape in *Um Céu de Estrelas* and *Vagón fumador*' considers the relationship between body, identity and space in the cities of São Paulo and Buenos Aires, making reference to the recent explosion of urban narratives from Brazil and Argentina. Indeed, cinema's relationship with the city was determined when it emerged as a primarily urban art-form in the late 1890s. These two films both consider the transactions between the body and the city in

<sup>77</sup> João Luiz Vieira, 'Anatomias do Visível: Cinema, Corpo, e Cultura Visual Médica – uma Introdução', in *Estudos de Cinema: SOCINE II e III* (São Paulo: Annablume Editora, 2000), pp. 80-85 (p. 84).

distinct ways. Tata Amaral's *opera prima*, *Um Céu de Estrelas*, narrativizes the experience of a lower-middle-class hairdresser, Dalva, in the confined space of the modest home where she lives with her mother. The city of São Paulo, however, despite the domestic setting of the film, erupts onto the *mise-en-scène* and is always present in the *off* space of the diegesis. Thus, Dalva is firmly rooted in the culture of the urban periphery and associated with elements of popular culture.

*Vagón fumador*, for its own part, highlights the subaltern cultures of prostitution in a nocturnal Buenos Aires, where the protagonist Reni is struggling to find her identity. Her encounters with a rent boy, Andrés, in the enclosed spaces of the cash machine cubicles in the city also point to the commodification of the body, where sex can be exchanged for money. The film's revisiting of sites of modernity, and undermining of the promise of the city, reflects the urban disillusionment typical of recent Argentine filmic production. Furthermore, Reni's encounter with the other, the taxi-boy, Andrés, who enjoys his life as a prostitute, provides a counterpoint, someone to measure herself against, as she is ceaselessly searching for her own identity on the streets of the city.

It is my contention that the crucial role of the body in these films is intimately linked to the process of negotiating state violence and control through dictatorship and neoliberalism. The body here emerges as a site, a place *through* which to attest to the ongoing collective working through of the traumas of the past. A damaged body is thus both individual and collective. However, in their renegotiation of power structures, and experimentation with filmic techniques which directly mark the spectator's body in varied and unpredictable ways, these directors reimagine the cinematic body as the privileged site to dispel the horrors of the past, using cinema to point to new directions in society and aesthetics. On the one hand the materiality of the body begs analysis in light of the socio-political circumstances which have given rise to a traumatized society. On the other, the cinematic body, as index of both real and imagined space, offers new possibilities for negotiating the past in the present.

## **PART I**

### **AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SELF-INSCRIPTION**

## CHAPTER I

### **Genealogies of the Self: Heritage and Identity in Sandra Kogut's *Um Passaporte Húngaro* (2001) and Albertina Carri's *Los rubios* (2003)**

#### **GENEALOGY, FAMILY AND THE STATE**

In his article 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History', first published in 1971 in *Hommage à Jean Hyppolite*, Michel Foucault discusses the notion of genealogy with respect to Nietzsche's consideration of the development of morals. In this essay Foucault suggests the significance of genealogical research, highlighting the interconnectedness of history, the body and the self. He states,

The body is the inscribed surface of events [...], the locus of a dissociated self [...], and a volume in perpetual disintegration. Genealogy, as an analysis of descent, is thus situated within the articulation of the body and history. Its task is to expose a body totally imprinted by history and the process of history's destruction of the body.<sup>78</sup>

The films to be considered in this chapter visualize the 'articulation' of which Foucault writes, highlighting the role of the filmmaker as corporeal historical subject and simultaneously questioning the significance of the directors' bodies and lives within the formal structure of their films. Whilst a plethora of academic texts use the theme of genealogy to explore specific histories and categories of belonging, the relevance of the term to my study is as a vehicle to discuss origins in a broader sense, and indeed question the notion of an origin in itself.

The genealogical impulse in the Argentine and Brazilian cases acquires special relevance as a result of the countries' respective histories of immigration and authoritarian regimes. Given the turbulent events of the twentieth century in both countries, the understanding of genealogy as a dialogue between personal and collective memory becomes a particularly useful vehicle here in my discussion of lineage and inheritance as a symbolic focal point for identity formation. Beyond a discovery of an individual's own past, genealogical research illustrates the influence of the nation-state on concepts of identity and the futility of searching for a *pure* origin.

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<sup>78</sup> Michel Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History', in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. by Paul Rabinow (London: Penguin, 1991), pp. 76-100 (p. 83).

The personal histories explored in this chapter in relation to *Um Passaporte Húngaro* (Sandra Kogut, 2001) and *Los rubios* (Albertina Carri, 2003) are largely prescribed by the *biological* family unit of the directors, although in many ways, they contest the importance of biological factors in questions of identity. Undoubtedly, however, it is the social construct of the family which provides the framework for the directors' investigations into the powers which affect their own, and others', identity. As a societal institution the family functions as a state judicial structure which determines names and citizenship and concomitantly influences the cultural and linguistic inheritance of any given individual. Indeed, in many respects, genealogy *as* enquiry into an individual's descent frequently involves a questioning of the significance of his/her 'native' tongue and nation.<sup>79</sup> Thus, a personal journey to one's 'origins' parallels socio-political changes in the nation-state, pointing to the overlapping of individual concerns with national identities and discourse.

In the context of the Argentine dictatorship, Judith Filc (1997) has written of the changing conceptualization of the division between the public and private spheres, in the light of the construct of the family. Filc's book, *Entre el parentesco y la política: familia y dictadura, 1976-1983*, thoroughly explores the breakdown of the presumed dichotomy established between public and private realms through a discussion of the family and its positioning vis-à-vis the dictatorial state in Argentina.<sup>80</sup> Filc suggests that,

cuando todas las relaciones son politizadas desde arriba, se desarrollan nuevos lazos que mezclan los mundos público y privado, revelando así la arbitrariedad de esta división [...] La familia como institución y como ideología resulta un sitio muy útil para el estudio de este proceso, puesto que es desde su origen en la cultura occidental una organización liminal que se halla entre lo 'natural' y lo 'cultural'.<sup>81</sup>

It is this very borderland, the 'in-between' space of which Filc writes, which makes the construct such a mobilizing concept from which to discuss the societal changes which have occurred in Argentina and Brazil, on the one hand as a result of the

<sup>79</sup> For an in-depth analysis of the spatial ramifications of the term 'native' see Arjun Appadurai, 'Putting Hierarchy in Its Place', *Cultural Anthropology*, 3.1 (1988), 36-49.

<sup>80</sup> For another interesting intervention in the critique of the public/private divide associated with the dictatorship eras, see Jean Franco, 'Going Public: Reinhabiting the Private', in *Critical Passions: Selected Essays*, ed. by Mary Louise Pratt & Kathleen Newman (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1999), pp. 48-65.

<sup>81</sup> Judith Filc, *Entre el parentesco y la política: familia y dictadura, 1976-1983* (Buenos Aires: Biblos, 1997), p. 32.



military dictatorships, and on the other, as a consequence, of unrestrained neoliberal policies which have led to dramatic and devastating social stratification.<sup>82</sup>

Besides the role of the state in terms of regulatory bureaucracy, the nation-state is also embedded within notions of a prescribed family unit. As Ana Amado and Nora Domínguez succinctly state in their Introduction to the anthology of essays *Lazos de familia: herencias, cuerpos, ficciones* (2004), 'imaginar una nación siempre implicó imaginar un tipo de familia: ésta ofrecería, según aquellos que forjaban su diseño, la versión idealizada de una ficción de por sí utópica'.<sup>83</sup> Moreover, the nation-state has long been a gendered construct, mapped onto the female body, rendering interpretations of the tensions inherent in the public/private divide and embodied in the framework of the family, particularly salient in women's cultural production.<sup>84</sup> As Anne McClintock fortuitously wrote:

A paradox lies at the heart of most national narratives. Nations are frequently figured through the iconography of familial and domestic space. The term 'nation' derives from 'natio': to be born. We speak of nations as 'motherlands' and 'fatherlands'. Foreigners 'adopt' countries that are not their native homes, and are 'naturalized' into the national family. We talk of the Family of Nations, of 'homelands' and 'native' lands [...] In this way, nations are symbolically figured as *domestic genealogies*. Yet, at the same

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<sup>82</sup> One need only see the effects of the Argentine economic crash of December 2001 and the Brazilian economic crisis of the late 1990s to understand how society has been radically transformed by free-market policies and the malevolent hand of the IMF. The pegging of local currencies to the dollar, implemented by the Real Plan in Brazil (1994) and the Convertibility Plan in Argentina (1991), may be seen as one of the many strategies of neoliberal economic policy in both countries. As Paul Cooney writes in his survey of neoliberal policy in Argentina, 'the pegging of the peso to the dollar, also known as a currency board, was a clear advantage for foreign investors that did not have to worry about instability or sudden devaluations causing major losses on their investments denominated in pesos. There was an increased confidence in the Argentinian bond market, as well as in the economy as a whole. The down side of convertibility was that Argentinian goods were more expensive on the world market and imports were cheaper for Argentinians, thus contributing to a worsening trade deficit'. See Paul Cooney, 'Argentina's Quarter Century Experiment with Neoliberalism: From Dictatorship to Depression', *Revista de Economía Contemporánea*, 11.1 (January-April 2007), 7-37 (p. 18).

In the Brazilian case, whilst the Real Plan, as in Argentina, stunted the alarming rate of inflation, it must be noted that it 'was not only an anti-inflation programme. It also included policies consolidating the neoliberal transition. These policies [...] included high interest rates, financial, trade and capital account liberalisation, the privatisation or closure of state-owned productive and financial enterprises, fiscal and labour market reforms, de-indexation, currency overvaluation and the closure of several state agencies and departments'. See Maria de Lourdes Rollemberg Mollo & Alfredo Saad-Filho, 'Neoliberalism and Economic Policies in Brazil (1994-2005): Cardoso, Lula and the Need for a Democratic Alternative', *New Political Economy*, 11.1 (March 2006), 99-123 (p. 103).

<sup>83</sup> Ana Amado & Nora Domínguez, eds., *Lazos de familia: herencias, cuerpos, ficciones* (Buenos Aires: Paidós, 2004), p. 20.

<sup>84</sup> For discussions of the gendered mapping of the nation see Doris Sommer, *Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); Anne McClintock, 'Family Feuds: Gender, Nationalism and the Family', *Feminist Review*, 44 (Summer 1993), 61-80; Taylor, *Disappearing Acts*; and Elizabeth Jelin, *State Repression and the Struggles for Memory* (London: Latin American Bureau, 2003), p. 78.

time, since the mid-nineteenth century in the West, ‘the family’ itself has been figured as the *antithesis* of history.<sup>85</sup> [emphasis in the original]

In this sense lineage provides a potent signifier for interwoven biological, social and political concerns.<sup>86</sup>

In the postdictatorship period of cultural production discussed in this thesis, many filmmakers have considered the concepts of self and nation through the prism of genealogy and cultural affiliation. Furthermore, these films, which frequently bridge the space between documentary and fiction, often illustrate an autobiographical impulse which has at its centre the director as subject of the film. In the Argentine and Brazilian contexts this questioning of family genealogy and memory may be considered along two main axes, at once distinguishable and interconnected.

The first is in the light of the repressive authoritarian regimes of both countries. The discovery, or in some cases *rediscovery*, of family ties and communities becomes particularly significant when we consider the fracturing of social networks during both the most recent Brazilian military dictatorship (1964-1985) and Argentina’s *Guerra Sucia* (1976-1983). The respective regimes targeted individuals deemed ‘subversives’ and their relatives, thus rendering the family structure a central objective of the dictatorial state. Many people were left without family members as a result of the systematic abduction of citizens; others were forced into exile due to their own, or their kin’s, political activity.<sup>87</sup> This interruption of the linear construct of the family, of the generational links which permit the transmission both of the blood line and memory, undermines the family’s discursive construction as a stable and safe ‘home’. Faced with the absence of relatives, the individual often asserts a desire to search for where and whom s/he is from, ‘construirse una existencia’, in an attempt to root him/herself in a specific genealogy of belonging.<sup>88</sup> To follow the Canadian critic Régine Robin, quoted in translation in the film *Los rubios*, ‘la necesidad de defender la propia identidad se desata cuando

<sup>85</sup> McClintock, p. 63.

<sup>86</sup> Ana Amado writes of how these concerns are woven together in ‘Herencias: Generaciones y duelo en las políticas de la memoria’, *Revista iberoamericana*, 69.202 (January-March 2003), 137-153 (p. 140).

<sup>87</sup> The film *Papá Iván* (María Inés Roque, 2004) is but one example of a family who was sent into exile as a consequence of the director’s father’s political activity. For more information on the *exiliados* and the impact of their status on their accounts, see Amy Kaminsky, *After Exile: Writing the Latin American Diaspora* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

<sup>88</sup> Alejandra Oberti, ‘La salud de los enfermos. O los (im)posibles diálogos entre generaciones sobre el pasado reciente’, in *Lazos de familia*, ed. by Amado & Domínguez, pp. 125-150 (p. 127).

ésta se ve amenazada'.<sup>89</sup> Additionally the 'disappeared' elements of the family unit may be reconstructed and reimagined in the memory of their relatives, friends and even in the public sphere of the streets, television and press.<sup>90</sup> Thus, the family provides a structure for the understanding of oneself, and the rupture of the linear continuity enforces a situation of disorientation.

Paradoxically, however, whilst the military rulers sought to literally dismember the family, they also turned their minds to the formation of the 'ideal' family. Concomitant to the radical fracturing of the family unit by way of the persecution of 'subversives' and of any of their sympathizers or relations, the military began to promote and instil a notion of the paradigmatic family, which would redeem the nation. Regime propaganda defined the norms to be obeyed in the family structure: 'fathers had to occupy their place of authority; mothers were responsible for household affairs; children had to respect and obey their parents'.<sup>91</sup> The dictatorships constructed the family as the 'célula básica', which must be protected from the harmful influences of the *subversivos*.<sup>92</sup> Indeed, the nation-state was discursively assembled as the sum-total of a number of different cells, which, 'de esta forma, estableció un vínculo directo entre la estructura social y su raíz biológica, naturalizando los roles y valores familísticos'.<sup>93</sup> This affirmation of the biological construct of the family is strongly questioned in both of the films analysed in this chapter, and also relates to the following delineation of genealogical enquiry in light of the ethnic fabric of the nation.

This second axis is more closely aligned with the preoccupations of how the nation is constituted ethnically and culturally. This perspective on genealogy is particularly flagrant in the persistent questioning of the hybridity of the Brazilian nation, where debates of this kind have often been flattened in Argentina as a result of the hegemonic perception of the country as a predominantly white, European

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<sup>89</sup> Régine Robin, cited in *Los rubios* (Albertina Carri, 2003).

<sup>90</sup> Indeed, in many ways the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo*, and their subsequent configuration as *Abuelas* or *H.I.J.O.S.*, exploited the paradoxical inscription of the family as both target of the state's repressive apparatus and as biological foundation for the nation, thus turning the dictatorship logic on its head. For more information on the *Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo*, see Rita Arditti, *Searching for Life: The Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo and the Disappeared Children of Argentina* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999).

<sup>91</sup> Taylor, *Disappearing Acts*, p. 104.

<sup>92</sup> Elizabeth Jelin, 'Víctimas, familiares y ciudadanos/as: las luchas por la legitimidad de la palabra', *Cadernos Pagu*, 29 (July-December 2007), 37-60 (p. 40).

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

nation.<sup>94</sup> In 1928, Oswald de Andrade, the Brazilian modernist poet, published the *Manifesto antropófago*, known as the *Cannibalist Manifesto* in English, which, like the Tropicalist movement of the late 1960s, which it heavily influenced, pointed to the idiosyncrasy of Brazilian identity in its ability to cannibalize foreign elements and make them its own. As Christopher Dunn notes in *Brutality Garden*, his study of the Tropicalist movement, the *Cannibalist Manifesto* ‘advanced a model for critically “devouring” cultural inflows from abroad’.<sup>95</sup> Whilst both Argentina and Brazil are built on immigration as a founding cornerstone of nation building, the latter’s experience of receiving different ethnicities and cultures has provoked several contributions to discussions of national identity, as, for example, the work of Robert Stam and Jeffrey Lesser, amongst others, has come to show.<sup>96</sup> *Mestiçagem*, as the racial and cultural embodiment of the hybrid, was initially conceived as a policy of *branqueamento*, whereby the non-white elements of Brazil’s population would eventually be ‘disappeared’ as a result of their dilution with white ones. This hybridization, however, has since been mobilized in the name of a tenuous claim to racial democracy.<sup>97</sup> As Robert Stam underlines, ‘hybridity [...] is power laden and asymmetrical. It is also co-optable. In Brazil, as in many countries in Latin America, national identity has often been *officially* articulated as hybrid and syncretic, through hypocritically integrationist ideologies that have glossed over racial hegemonies’.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> This ‘flattening’ is due, in no small part, to the ‘disappearing’ of non-European and Mediterranean ethnic groups in the construction of the modern nation-state of Argentina, whereas in Brazil the myth of the country as a ‘racial melting-pot’ endures to the present day. Argentina, does, however, have a distinctive history of discourses of hybridity and assimilation in its claim to being a ‘crisol de razas’. Moreover, Sarmiento’s famous views on the development of the ‘modern’ Argentine nation, encapsulated in the phrase ‘civilización y barbarie’, did not promote racial mixing but rather the eradication of those *bárbaros* by the *civilizados* (read white European). For more on the discourses of modernity and race in Argentina see Emanuela Guano, ‘A Colour for the Modern Nation: Discourse on Class, Race, and Education in the *Porteño* Middle Class’, *Journal of Latin American Anthropology*, 8.1 (2003), 148-171. Also see David Viñas, *Indios, ejército y frontera* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1982) on the dynamics of race and nation in the Argentine context.

<sup>95</sup> Christopher Dunn, *Brutality Garden: Tropicália and the Emergence of a Brazilian Counterculture* (Chapel Hill & London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), p. 6.

<sup>96</sup> See Robert Stam, *Tropical Multiculturalism: A Comparative History of Race in Brazilian Cinema*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997); Jeffrey Lesser, *Welcoming the Undesirables: Brazil and the Jewish Question* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994) and *Negotiating National Identity: Immigrants, Minorities and the Struggle for Ethnicity in Brazil* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999).

<sup>97</sup> Here it is worth noting the difference between discourses of hybridity and assimilation. The former promotes an active co-presence of racial and cultural influences which may produce a new, idiosyncratic identity, whereas the latter suggests an non-egalitarian subsuming of one ethnic group into a hegemonic other, a politics of renouncing the ‘originary’ culture and appropriating another in order to become accepted.

<sup>98</sup> Stam, *Tropical Multiculturalism*, p. 358.

Getúlio Vargas's authoritarian *Estado Novo* (1937-45) paradoxically co-opted elements of Afro-Brazilian cultural expression in the name of a nationalist project as it simultaneously closed its borders to Jewish migrants fleeing persecution in Europe.<sup>99</sup> Sandra Kogut's *Um Passaporte Húngaro* returns to the policies of Getúlio Vargas in its excavation of the director's family past.<sup>100</sup> Coinciding with the rise of Nazi Germany and the Second World War, this period was characterized by the influx of European immigrants, many of whom were seeking to escape the anti-Semitic regimes of Europe. The *Estado Novo*, however, was also markedly anti-Semitic. As is demonstrated in *Um Passaporte Húngaro*, many Jews fled to Brazil and on arrival were forced to change their names, and nominal faith, for fear of revealing their Jewish identity. The state's open acceptance of some migrants and ethnic groups, and rejection of others, once again evidences the importance of the desirable family in nationalist discourse. Thus, the role of names and lineage comes to the fore in the construction of the nation-state.

The two distinct, yet overlapping, approaches to genealogy outlined above - the dictatorial and the ethno-cultural - provide important viewpoints on the construction of history and particularly the role of women's voices in questioning the received history promoted in dominant discourse. Women's perspectives have often been repressed in official versions of events, and their experience of power dynamics muted by the hegemonic patriarchal order. Indeed, the confinement of women's voices to the domestic space of the home is in many ways one of the fundamental reasons for their silencing in the public sphere of politics. It is thus of vital importance that the filmic narratives constructed by women directors and screenwriters alike be made visible in order to seek new understandings of female subjectivity and identity politics. Whether the films to be discussed in this chapter do or do not proffer overtly feminist, or even feminine, perspectives on identity formation, memory and history, is of little importance here. The very fact that these

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<sup>99</sup> See Lisa Shaw's *The Social History of the Brazilian Samba* (Aldershot and Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, 1999) for a discussion of the impact of Afro-Brazilian musical traditions during the *Estado Novo*.

<sup>100</sup> It is worth noting that earlier periods of authoritarian rule often provide the material with which to subtly explore more recent episodes of terror in filmic production. See, for example, *Eternamente Pagu* (Norma Bengell, 1987), a film set during Getúlio Vargas's *Estado Novo* but released just two years after the most recent military dictatorship in Brazil came to an end. *Camila* (María Luisa Bemberg, 1984), set in the period of Juan Manuel de Rosas's regime in nineteenth-century Argentina, also dialogued with the Dirty War.

films should be produced provides reason enough to interrogate their perspectives as examples of women's filmic production and experience.

Both the Argentine genealogical impulse, more strongly characterized in recent cultural production by the experience of the Dirty War and disappearance, and the Brazilian interrogation of the ethnic fabric of the nation through family lineage, facilitate an inquiry into the nature of the use of genealogy in women's filmic production, emphasizing how it has become a paradigmatic resource to discuss identity and nation.<sup>101</sup> Moreover, the importance of this impulse to view history and the past and present through the trope of the family demands a discussion of the gendered implications of the law of the name. It is particularly noteworthy that a number of films which invoke, and often subvert, the documentary mode insist on the *daughter's* search for origins in the figure of the father. This is particularly salient in the case of *Papá Iván* (María Inés Roque, 2004), *Los rubios*, and a number of other films directed by women in Argentina. I will return to the gendered search for the father in my interpretation of *Los rubios*.

It is in this mark that I will discuss two recent 'subjective documentaries', *Um Passaporte Húngaro* and *Los rubios*, from Brazil and Argentina respectively, referencing other films which may be seen to inform the context of their production.<sup>102</sup> Both *Passaporte* and *Los rubios* take as their point of departure a journey into the memory of the directors' ancestors and simultaneously point to the impact of the state's censorship of memory, and citizenship, thus problematizing the influence of biological definitions of the family on the individual's identity.

*Um Passaporte Húngaro* subtly criticizes the banal categorization of identity and citizenship in the director's affirmation of her right to a Hungarian passport as granddaughter of Jewish Hungarian immigrants to Brazil. Yet simultaneously it establishes the ways in which the Brazilian nation-state has been constructed and imagined over time. For its own part, *Los rubios* explicitly contributes to the growing body of filmic works centred on the experiences of the generation of Argentines who lost their parents during the recent dictatorship, locating it in debates

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<sup>101</sup> See Julia Erhart, 'Performing Memory: Compensation and Redress in Contemporary Feminist First-person Documentary', *Screening the Past* (2001), <<http://www.latrobe.edu.au/screeningthepast/firstrelease/fr1201/jefr13a.htm>> [accessed 18 June 2008], on the rise of the autobiographical narrative and the role of the family in women's documentary filmmaking.

<sup>102</sup> I take the term 'subjective documentaries' from Jorge Ruffinelli's article 'Telémaco en América Latina: notas sobre la búsqueda del padre en cine y literatura', *Revista iberoamericana*, 68.199 (April-June, 2002), 441-457.

about what constitute appropriate and worthy representations of the atrocious crimes committed under the Junta.<sup>103</sup> Furthermore, Carri's intervention in the debates surrounding representations of militancy in the Argentine context has generally been interpreted as radically challenging in both content and aesthetics.<sup>104</sup>

Both *Passaporte* and *Los rubios* cross assorted imagined and geo-political boundaries in search of the directors' and their ancestors' identities, and illustrate many of the contemporary debates on identity and memory. Whilst there exist similarities between the two films, particularly in the use of the biological family as the 'ground zero' of their investigation into the directors' identities, Kogut and Carri approach their journeys into the significance of the family in rather different ways. Significantly, however, both directors appear to distance themselves from the personal nature of the family history, a decision which seems motivated by an attempt to demythologize the heroic status of her militant Montonero parents in the case of Carri,<sup>105</sup> and in the case of Kogut's film, by the ironic criticism of the regulatory aspect of the state on identity and citizenship. Moreover, this distancing echoes Foucault's suggestion that 'effective history studies what is closest, but in an abrupt dispossession, so as to seize it at a distance'.<sup>106</sup> In this way, both directors problematize the intimacy of first-person narrative, disrupting the autobiographical mode of address through the proliferation of filmic technique, and thus representing the past, and the present, in the margins between their selfhood and the linear elaboration of history.

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<sup>103</sup> See for example, the films *Papá Iván* and *(h)Historias cotidianas* (Andrés Habegger, 2001).

<sup>104</sup> The film critic Diego Lerer has stated, for example, that '*Los rubios* amplia el campo discursivo del cine político en la Argentina como ninguna película lo había hecho desde *La hora de los hornos*'. See Lerer, 'La fábula de la reconstrucción', *Clarín: Espectáculos*, 23 October 2003 <<http://www.clarin.com/diario/2003/10/23/c-00909.htm>> [accessed 21 April 2006]. Joanna Page has also written of the film, 'It represents a sophisticated and very contemporary contribution to post-dictatorship memory as well as a significant departure in political film-making'. See Page, 'Memory and Mediation in *Los rubios*: A Contemporary Perspective on the Argentine Dictatorship', *New Cinemas*, 3.1 (2005), 29-40 (p. 29). Finally, Horacio Bernades has described the film as 'indudablemente singular, tanto en su enfoque como por su significación'. See Bernades, 'Los desaparecidos, una investigación familiar', *Página 12: Espectáculos*, 24 April 2003 <<http://www.pagina12.com.ar/imprimir/diario/espectaculos/6-19225-2003-4-24.html>> [accessed 21 April 2006].

<sup>105</sup> The Montoneros were the largest active guerrilla group in Argentina during the 1970s and were pro-Peronist in political inclination. Initially fighting for the return of Perón from exile in Spain, they were collectively responsible for the kidnapping and assassination of the former anti-Peronist dictator, General Pedro Eugenio Aramburu (1955-1958) in 1970. The group was rapidly dismantled by the Alianza Anticomunista Argentina (AAA) under Isabel Perón's administration (1974-1976), and subsequently violently repressed by the military junta, which sought to 'cleanse' the Argentine nation of their presence.

<sup>106</sup> Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History', p. 89.

## AUTOBIOGRAPHY, TAKE 1

These films, then, constitute filmic autobiographies and at the same time carve out biographies of Kogut's grandparents and Carri's parents. They simultaneously present the directors as subjects of the narratives *and* visible and audible orchestrators of the filmic material. The corporeal intervention of the directors in the filmic realm makes explicit their enunciating position and simultaneously authenticates their family narratives. The films, however, emphasize their autobiographical aspects in different ways, not least in their questioning of first-person representation.

This leads us to a discussion of the autobiographical in film. Few studies predate the late 1980s on the difference of filmic autobiography when compared with its literary counterpart. Indeed, this could be attributed in part to the initial reticence of literary critics such as Philippe Lejeune and Elizabeth Bruss in the early 1980s to consider the possibility of filmic autobiography as a genre comparable to its literary equivalent. Bruss suggested that 'film makes us impatient for a direct inscription – an actual imprint of the person, unmediated and uncreated' and on the basis that this process was entirely different to that which occurs in the literary autobiography, vehemently opposed the use of the term autobiographical in relation to film.<sup>107</sup> In a similar move Lejeune, a prominent theorist of literary autobiography, asserted that 'it is not possible to be on both sides of the camera at the same time, in front of it and behind it, whereas the spoken or written first-person easily manages to mask the fact that...I am an other'.<sup>108</sup> The films to be discussed in this section of the thesis disavow this claim as the directors' presence is frequently felt on *both* sides of the camera. The directors' corporeality is inscribed in the films on both visual and aural levels, and discussed at a thematic level, thus emphasizing the multiple layers of cinematographic discourse.

Where early perspectives have surfaced on the legitimacy of the filmic autobiographical project it is mostly in tandem with the rise of *auteur* theory in France in the 1950s and the notion of the 'caméra-stylo' as an articulation of the

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<sup>107</sup> Elizabeth Bruss, 'Eye for I: Unmaking Autobiography in Film', in *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, ed. by James Olney (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), pp. 296-320 (p. 308).

<sup>108</sup> Philippe Lejeune, 'Cinéma et autobiographie: problèmes de vocabulaire', *Revue belge du cinéma* (1986), 8-10, quoted here in Rachel Gabara, 'Mixing Impossible Genres: David Achkar and African AutoBiographical Documentary', *New Literary History*, 34.2 (2003), 331-352 (p. 336).



director's personal vision.<sup>109</sup> As Truffaut himself once stated in an article published in *Arts* magazine, 'le film de demain ressemblera à celui qui l'a tourné'.<sup>110</sup> Recent documentary theory, however, has produced many interesting discussions of the autobiographical relevant to my analyses of *Um Passaporte Húngaro* and *Los rubios*, in what has been termed the 'subjective turn' in filmmaking.<sup>111</sup> Indeed, the relevance of the perceived distinction between documentary and fiction film comes to the fore in discussions of autobiography, particularly in these two films, as autobiography frequently explores the splitting of identities and, alongside this splitting, a formal experimentation with the boundaries of genre. According to Gabara in an article on African autobiographical documentary, 'autobiography is always a locus of contact among many different genres, at once representation and invention, nonfiction and fiction, in the present and the past and in the first and third persons'.<sup>112</sup> This blurring of genres and plurality of voices and temporalities is integral to the architecture of the films discussed here as they disavow the clear distinction between fiction and documentary, drawing the narratives of selfhood into a 'zona límite', a frontier of generic convention.<sup>113</sup> The interplay of past, present and future comes to the fore in a theatricalization of history and identity which rejects a linear teleology.

The work of Michael Renov and Stella Bruzzi is instructive in this context as both critics have considered the categories of first-person narratives and performative documentary. In an article entitled 'New Subjectivities: Documentary and Self-Representation in the Post-Verité Age', Renov traces the evolution of documentary film, convincingly arguing that the 1990s constituted a turning point in the genre's objective/subjective debate and illustrating the increased use of personal

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<sup>109</sup> The term 'la caméra-stylo' was coined by French critic and filmmaker Alexandre Astruc in his famous 1948 article, 'The Birth of a New Avant-Garde: La caméra-stylo', first published in *Écran*, 144, 30 March 1948 reprinted in *The New Wave: Critical Landmarks*, ed. by Peter Graham (London: BFI / Secker & Warburg, 1968), pp. 17-23.

<sup>110</sup> François Truffaut, 'Vous êtes tous témoins dans ce procès: le cinéma crève sous les fausses légendes', *Arts*, 619, 9 May 1957, 3-4 (p. 4).

<sup>111</sup> See Michael Renov, 'New Subjectivities: Documentary and Self-Representation in the Post-Verité Age' [n.d], <<http://www.yidff.jp/docbox/7/box/7-1-e.html>> [accessed 8 June 2007], for an overview of the developments towards more subjective documentary filmmaking. It is worth noting, however, as Renov himself remarks, that whilst the 1990s have demonstrated a marked shift towards more personal, subjective narratives, the documentary has never been a barometer of pure objectivity as many critics would have it.

<sup>112</sup> Gabara, p. 333.

<sup>113</sup> I borrow the term 'zona límite' from Ana Amado, 'Órdenes de la memoria y desórdenes de la ficción', in *Lazos de familia*, ed. by Amado & Domínguez, pp. 43-82 (p. 65).

stories in film to understand broader, more publicly historical contexts.<sup>114</sup> The inscription of filmmakers' identities in documentary, Renov suggests, reflects the fragmented world of the dawn of the twenty-first century, when the notion of a fixed and stable identity is increasingly being replaced by a multiplicity of identities. The individual's voice and body, then, come to represent the forces which have contributed to his/her subjectivity in its given socio-historical matrix and thus offer a window onto broader societal transformations.

The use of filmic autobiography, 'with its material, visible split between director or filmer and actor or filmed self bemoaned by Bruss and Lejeune, troubles our conventional notions of coherent identity and provides us with new forms in which to explore and represent fragmented subjectivity'.<sup>115</sup> Moreover, the implications of the hybridization of the documentary genre, long associated with objective truth, and the intensified participation of women documentary filmmakers should not go unnoticed.<sup>116</sup> As Barbara Kosta remarks on women's autobiographical filmmaking from Germany, 'autobiographical filmmaking engages in the process of "de-aestheticization" by breaking through the boundaries of the traditional fictional frame as well. The necessity of breaking through fixed conventions is axiomatic to the feminist project'.<sup>117</sup> Kogut and Carri's explorations of the family as a vehicle through which to interrogate notions of identity point to the questioning of one of the principal foundations of patriarchal society and its enduring use as a construct to circumscribe women's lives. Moreover, these filmic interrogations of the patriarchal state and the institution of the family employ generic hybridization as a means to break down fixed notions of identity and memory. Beginning with *Um Passaporte Húngaro*, then, this chapter traces the corporeal intervention of the director and considers how this affects the treatment of history, memory and identity in the films,

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<sup>114</sup> Renov, 'New Subjectivities'.

<sup>115</sup> Gabara, p. 337.

<sup>116</sup> It is striking, particularly in the Argentine case, how many directors of films which explore the family in terms of the dictatorship, are women. See, for instance, *Papá Iván* (María Inés Roque, 2004); *En memoria de los pájaros* (Gabriela Golder, 2000); *El tiempo y la sangre* (Alejandra Almirón, 2004); *Encontrando a Víctor* (Natalia Brusvhtein, 2005); *Panzas* (Laura Bondarevsky, 1999); *HIJOS* (Marcelo Céspedes & Carmen Guarini, 2002); *Pasaportes* (Inés Ulanovsky, 1997); and the short film *En ausencia* (Lucía Cedrón, 2002). In the Brazilian case the films are generally fictional features but equally place emphasis on the family and its intersection with the nation. See *Gaijin I: Os Caminhos da Liberdade* (Tizuka Yamasaki, 1980), *Quase Dois Irmãos* (Lúcia Murat, 2004), and the film which I analyse in this chapter, *Um Passaporte Húngaro* (Sandra Kogut, 2001).

<sup>117</sup> Barbara Kosta, *Recasting Autobiography: Women's Counterfictions in Contemporary German Literature and Film* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1994), p. 29.

emphasizing how both Kogut and Carri build filmic narratives which illustrate the frictions between private and public realms.

### *UM PASSAPORTE HÚNGARO*

*Um Passaporte Húngaro* follows the stages of an application for a Hungarian passport by the Brazilian director Sandra Kogut. As the granddaughter of Hungarian Jews, who both fled to Brazil in 1937, Sandra Kogut is able to apply for dual nationality, a process which is at the centre of this documentary.<sup>118</sup> The bureaucratic process which Kogut must complete is juxtaposed with the cultural implications of descending from Hungarian Jews and, simultaneously, with the director's identity as Brazilian. This coproduction between France, Belgium, Hungary and Brazil exploits language as a motif for identity and as an imaginary frontier which must be crossed in order to obtain citizenship.

Cited by eminent Brazilian filmmakers and critics as one of the most interesting directors of recent years, and associated with the 'geração vídeo',<sup>119</sup> Sandra Kogut (1965-) has established a name for herself.<sup>120</sup> As a student of Philosophy and Communications at the Pontifícia Universidade Católica (PUC) in Rio de Janeiro, she became interested in video and began working with the medium as early as 1984. Prior to *Um Passaporte Húngaro* she had produced a number of video-works, such as *Videocabines São Caixas Pretas* (1990), *Parabolic People* (1991), *Lá e Cá* (1995), and *Adieu monde* (1998), amongst other pieces. The first retrospective of her video art was held at the Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil in her native city of Rio de Janeiro in 1996, but her work has always been marked by a strong international flavour, with Kogut herself having spent long periods living in Paris and in the United States of America.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Kogut's other two grandparents are from Russia and Poland, respectively. See Ana Teresa Jardim Raymond, 'Brazilian Video Works: Diversity and Identity in a Global Context' (unpublished D Phil thesis, University of Sussex, 1998), p. 109. Available at <[http://tede.ibict.br/tde\\_busca/arquivo.php?codArquivo=173](http://tede.ibict.br/tde_busca/arquivo.php?codArquivo=173)> [accessed 2 March 2008].

<sup>119</sup> Daniela Name, 'Sandra Kogut Ganha o Visto para Seu Filme Sem Fronteiras', *O Globo: Segundo Caderno*, 25 August 2003, p. 2.

<sup>120</sup> Helena Solberg cites Sandra Kogut as one of her favourite directors of the 'new generation'. See Solberg in interview, <<http://www.mulheresdocinemabrasileiro.com/entrevistaHelenaSolberg.htm>> [accessed 13 March 2007].

<sup>121</sup> Gabriel Bastos Junior, 'Sandra Kogut Rompe Barreiras da Imagem', *O Estado de São Paulo: Caderno 2*, 20 July 1996.

Arlindo Machado, a critic of video art in Brazil, writes of her early work, ‘se for possível reduzir a uma palavra o projeto estético que está pressuposto na obra videográfica de Sandra Kogut, podemos dizer que se trata de uma procura sem tréguas dessa *multiplicidade* que exprime o modo de conhecimento do homem contemporâneo’ [my emphasis].<sup>122</sup> He continues, ‘o mundo é visto e representado como uma trama de relações de uma complexidade inextrincável, onde cada instante está marcado pela presença simultânea de elementos os mais heterogêneos’.<sup>123</sup> Whilst in this article Machado is writing specifically on Kogut’s earlier video art, these perceptions seem wholly applicable to the full-length feature documentary at hand, *Um Passaporte Húngaro*.

Other critics have highlighted Kogut’s propensity towards questions of multiplicity in their appraisal of her earlier work. In her video *What Do You Think People Think Brazil Is?* (1990) Kogut explored the exoticization and ‘othering’ of Brazil, a theme of manifest interest in writings on Carmen Miranda, just one example of the politics of self-exoticization from Brazil.<sup>124</sup> In this short video, interviews with people conducted in many different languages emphasize the presence of the foreign gaze on Brazil and on Rio de Janeiro in particular. Indeed, as Ana Teresa Jardim Raymond attests, Kogut’s ‘prolonged investigation of the status of “foreign” as a more permanent marker, the possible assimilation of a Jewish heritage conditioned by a culture formed in foreign lands, and the actual experiences of a wandering artist, living and working in a globalized world, are elements that we find reflected in her work’.<sup>125</sup> In this sense, Kogut’s voyage into the themes of bureaucracy, migration, identity and prejudice in *Passaporte* builds on topics which she has already explored in her earlier work.

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<sup>122</sup> Arlindo Machado, ‘As Três Gerações do Vídeo Brasileiro’, *Revista Sinopse*, 3.7 (August 2001), 22-33 (p. 30).

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>124</sup> See Jardim Raymond for a detailed analysis of this process of self-exoticization. It is also worth noting that the image of Brazil from the ‘outside’ has been a contentious issue in filmic production. The Hollywood musicals produced during the Good Neighbour Policy years are notoriously ignorant of regional and national specificities, and frequently painted Brazil with a Hispanophone brush. See Sérgio Augusto, ‘Hollywood Looks at Brazil: From Carmen Miranda to *Moonraker*’, in *Brazilian Cinema*, ed. by Johnson & Stam, pp. 351-361. Lúcia Murat’s documentary film, *O Olhar Estrangeiro* (Lúcia Murat, 2006), based on the work of Tunico Amancio, *O Brasil dos Gringos: Imagens no Cinema* (Nitéroi: Intertexto, 2000), also considers the image of Brazil from the point of view of foreigners.

<sup>125</sup> Jardim Raymond, p. 37.

## LANGUAGE AND FORM

The documentary itself is divided into sections, each detailing a separate part of the passport application procedure. Each section is named after one of the Hungarian questions on the form Kogut must complete, and appears with subtitles underneath: *Kérelem* (the application), *3/b./mellékletek* (related documents) and so on and so forth until the final two sections appear in French titles as the procedure comes to an end and Kogut is granted her passport. Thus, the film is linguistically and culturally hybrid, with much of the dialogue delivered in French with parts in English, Hungarian, Portuguese and written Hebrew, according to the people with whom Kogut interacts. This multiplicity of languages also reflects the film's funding as an international coproduction, and to this degree the form mirrors *Passaporte's* finance practices. Furthermore, its use of language and varied locations provides a continuum between Kogut's early video art and her more recent films. As has been suggested elsewhere, the plurality of language in the film is reminiscent of the Babel motif, referring to the literal use of different tongues in the film.<sup>126</sup> The film's Babelian quality, however, is also reflected in the many registers of cinematic representation which come to the fore in the film through video, Super 8 images, text, voice and music. Perhaps, then, the documentary's recourse to multiple locations and languages is also an indicator of Kogut's hybridity, as she delves into her multifaceted identity.<sup>127</sup>

In an interview with Gabriel Bastos Junior on Kogut's experience of filming in different locations and her interest for the plurality of identity, the director stated:

Gosto de estar em mais de um lugar. Isso me alimenta. Sinto-me confortável em qualquer ponto do mundo, assim como posso me sentir estranha no Brasil. Isso talvez tenha relação com minha formação multicultural. Em Moscou, fiquei surpresa de reconhecer músicas típicas que me foram apresentadas pelos meus avós. Na França morei em um bairro judeu e achava

<sup>126</sup> See Sabine Fabo, 'Arts and Media: Towards a Universal Understanding? The Myth of Babel Revisited: An International UNESCO Symposium', *Leonardo*, 26.4 (1993), 316-319.

Here Fabo writes 'A multiperspectival view of people from various cultural backgrounds was presented by Brazilian video artist Sandra Kogut. Her video *Parabolic People I* (1991) displayed a variety of cultural formulations achieved by a simultaneous presentation of different layers of experience, blurring the boundaries between text and image' (p. 318).

<sup>127</sup> Hybridity has, indeed, become one of the principal critical paradigms with which to approach Latin American identity, and more generally the postcolonial predicament. Néstor García Canclini and Roberto Schwarz are but two of the critics who have written on this concept in the Latin American context, overlapping with the concerns of iconic postcolonial thinkers such as Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. See Néstor García Canclini, *Culturas híbridas: estratégias para entrar y salir de la modernidad* (Mexico City: Grijalbo, 1995); and Roberto Schwarz, *Misplaced Ideas: Essays on Brazilian Culture*, ed. and trans. by John Gledson (London: Verso, 1992).

as lojas de comida típica tão familiares quanto um café brasileiro vendendo feijoada. Viajando percebi como sou brasileira, mas também as misturas que me formam.<sup>128</sup>

In accordance with the ideas expressed in the above interview, *Passaporte* brings to the fore discussions of language and national identity, questioning the relationship between language and citizenship, and affirming itself as a polyglot, multicultural and multimedia film.

This diversity and layering of filmic form present in the film is echoed in the director's concern with genre. *Passaporte* is generally considered a documentary, and indeed it certainly fits more comfortably into that generic category than in that of fiction. Yet in an interview with the Brazilian film critic José Carlos Avellar included on the DVD release of the film, Kogut explains that she does not understand people's obsession with separating documentary and fiction – 'a separação entre documentário e ficção não me interessa'.<sup>129</sup> The different technologies used in the film emphasize, then, how Kogut exploits varied media to produce a rich tapestry of images and simultaneously testify to her questioning of genre. As Jardim Raymond asserts, 'video is a hybrid cultural form - its complexity, fragmentation and tendencies towards appropriation of already existing imagery and cultural reworking make it especially appropriate for discussing the dispersal of fixed notions of culture and identity'.<sup>130</sup> *Passaporte*, as a film which explicitly discusses identity and its regulation, uses language – filmic, textual and oral – to delineate this thematic.

The film's preoccupation with language as a marker of identity is reflected in Kogut's inability to speak Hungarian. As the application process advances, it becomes increasingly obvious that this inability could, in fact, present an obstacle to her obtaining the Hungarian passport. Strangely, however, whilst in the Hungarian consulate in Paris passing a citizenship exam in Hungarian becomes a necessity for the completion of the process, in Brazil it poses no problem. In the film Kogut visits the Hungarian consulate in Brazil to ask whether she must pass the exam in order to obtain her passport. The response of the Honorary Consul is negative. Perhaps more interestingly, however, his response references the French Republic's belief in language as cornerstone of the nation, stating that 'os franceses são meio

<sup>128</sup> Bastos Junior, 'Sandra Kogut Rompe Barreiras da Imagem'.

<sup>129</sup> José Carlos Avellar interviews Sandra Kogut in the Extras of the DVD release.

<sup>130</sup> Jardim Raymond, p. 16.

complicados', and thus invoking an image of the French - who demand that she does pass the test - as bureaucratically stubborn, cultural snobs.<sup>131</sup> Rather ironically though, as is highlighted later in the film when Kogut pursues the idea that she may have to, or want to, learn Hungarian when in conversation with her surviving Hungarian relatives, many current citizens of Hungary do not speak Hungarian and many fluent Hungarian speakers from neighbouring nations take a long time to study the material in order to pass the exam.<sup>132</sup> The incoherence of state policy towards the importance of language is, then, revealed in the film's refusal to suggest a pure, stable identity. The positioning of minority/majority cultures and centre and periphery is put into question, thus emphasizing the world's complex geo-political structure.

The documentary's emphasis on multiple experiences, nations and languages has led it to be considered as an example of intercultural cinema as defined by Laura Marks in her 2000 publication, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment and the Senses*.<sup>133</sup> In his article 'As fronteiras intermediáticas do exílio no cinema intercultural', Hudson Moura draws on Marks's idea of intercultural cinema to analyse *Passaporte*, concluding that,

esse cinema que, por ora, defino como cinema intercultural, apresenta certas particularidades, como o uso intermitente de línguas estrangeiras, o deslocamento e o espaço estrangeiro. Demarcando assim tomadas de posições histórico-político-sociais concretas sobre a 'estrangeiridade' e a consciência da existência do 'outro' que a experiência aporta.<sup>134</sup>

On this basis, Kogut's film can be seen as an encounter between different identities in the framework of discoveries of self and other. Moreover, as numerous critics have remarked, the trope of the outsider and the foreign has been identified as one of

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<sup>131</sup> Indeed, the significance of language in the French context should not be understated, particularly considering the universalizing and homogenizing impulse that the state imposes on its citizens.

<sup>132</sup> Whilst I am not in a position to comment on the reasons behind the director's decision to pursue a passport from her mother's side of the family, Kogut's choice to focus on Hungary contributes to the film's destabilization of borders and citizenship as the Hungarian nation itself is representative of the changing logic and demands of the nation-state in its various permutations. Hungary has always been a nation in flux as its turbulent history evidences. Conquered as part of the Ottoman empire, a partner in the Austro-Hungarian empire, effectively dismembered in 1919-1920, and then part of the Soviet Union, the country has reconfigured its borders and status on a number of occasions.

<sup>133</sup> Hudson Moura, 'As Fronteiras Intermediáticas do Exílio no Cinema Intercultural: Glauber, Kogut e Egoyan', in *Olhar: Cinema*, ed. by Bernadette Lyra & Josette Manzani (São Paulo: Editora Pedro e João / CECH-UFSCar, 2006), pp. 250-259.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 255.

the principal characteristics of the films of the Brazilian *retomada*.<sup>135</sup> In an article entitled ‘A Meeting of Two Worlds: Recent Trends in Brazilian Cinema’, Stephanie Dennison discusses the early phase of the *retomada* films, 1995-1998, suggesting that one of the key elements of these films is their ‘international flavour’.<sup>136</sup> As the title of the article suggests, many early *retomada* films involve a meditation on the ‘foreign’, either through the use of foreign actors or by basing the films in a period which highlighted foreign influences in Brazil. Whilst a documentary – unlike the films Dennison makes reference to – *Passaporte* also highlights this dialogue with the ‘foreign’, digested components of Brazilian culture through the importance Kogut lends to her grandmother’s experience of migration to Brazil. In this way Kogut’s grandmother’s stories become representative of the film’s proclivity to discuss the encounter with the other.

#### TIME, SPACE AND MEMORY

*‘Eram tempos que você não pode imaginar...’*

- Mathilde, in *Um Passaporte Húngaro*

Kogut’s representation of a world which is linked by images and migration flows significantly emphasizes the importance of modalities of time and space. Indeed, as two, often compressed, concepts that organize our lives and the recent debates over globalization, they are highly symbolic in their evocation of hybridity and memory in the film.<sup>137</sup> As Myriam Moraes Lins de Barros attests, ‘as noções de tempo e de espaço, estruturantes dos quadros sociais da memória, são fundamentais para a rememoração do passado na medida em que as localizações espacial e temporal das lembranças são a essência da memória’.<sup>138</sup> The diverse locations and journeys which reference the past and the present of the director’s family point to the importance of memory as a structuring principle in the film.

<sup>135</sup> See Maria do Rosário Caetano for an overview of trends in the *retomada* and a breakdown of the films’ themes and styles. Caetano, ‘Cinema Brasileiro (1990-2002)’.

<sup>136</sup> Stephanie Dennison, ‘A Meeting of Two Worlds: Recent Trends in Brazilian Cinema’, *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Studies*, 6.2 (2000), 131-144 (p. 133).

<sup>137</sup> In Part III of *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1990), David Harvey offers a compelling survey of the ‘new world order’, structured around the concept of ‘time-space compression’. The acceleration of global capital, Harvey suggests, has produced a loss of the specificities of place in favour of an interconnected global space.

<sup>138</sup> Myriam Moraes Lins de Barros, ‘Memória e Família’, *Estudos Históricos*, 2.3 (1989), 29-42 (p. 30).



Kogut's grandmother, Mathilde – to whom the film is dedicated – provides much of the basis for Kogut's poetic representation of the past and memory. As Mathilde's stories navigate us through the rise of Nazism, the history of anti-Semitism, and her experience on arrival in Brazil, Kogut juxtaposes images, and music to create a rich texture of memory. The reconstruction of her grandmother and grandfather's stories on screen, using the technologies of the present, anchors the film within the realm of memory, underlining the ongoing repercussions of the past on the present and future as demonstrated in the voyage Sandra Kogut will undertake. Her grandmother, then, creates 'na lembrança, o espaço familiar, a representação da família e suas relações internas. A própria representação da família e do parentesco sofre assim a marca do tempo'.<sup>139</sup> This 'mark of time' is integral to the circular force which is present in the film, the reversal of Kogut's grandmother's journey – who travelled from Hungary to Brazil in 1937 – in the director's quest to obtain a Hungarian passport.

In the aforementioned interview with José Carlos Avellar included on the DVD of the film, Sandra Kogut explains that *Passaporte* is about 'transmissão' and 'identidade'. However, she refutes any suggestion that she is returning to her 'origens'. Rather, Kogut suggests, she constructs a present and a future from her exploration of the family's ancestral links with Hungary. So, whilst on the one hand Kogut films the stories and documents which have in some senses moulded her existence – in this particular instance they enable her to obtain European citizenship when Hungary enters the EU – her exploration of the country of her grandparents is not, in her eyes, a nostalgic search for roots. Instead she uses this journey to exploit the situations she comes across and narrate an encounter of bureaucratic structures and demands. Moreover, the notion that a passport should define one's identity is radically interrogated as once Kogut acquires the passport and attends the citizenship ceremony, it is revealed that it is not a permanent passport and that, furthermore, it does not give the bearer full rights as a citizen. Ironically, in this instance Kogut can become a Hungarian citizen for a probationary period of one year only. The director's 'espanto diante da suposta descoberta sobre a estreita ligação de identidade

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<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

com nacionalidade e de nacionalidade com a cidadania controlada pelo Estado', is thus a key component of the film's discussion of identity politics.<sup>140</sup>

This same issue is brought to the fore as the viewer realizes early on in the film that the director's grandmother, Mathilde, is in fact Austrian by birth: when she married Kogut's grandfather she took his name and her nationality changed accordingly. Thus, according to the authorities both of her grandparents were Hungarian whilst in fact they originally came from different nation-states. This flattening of identities by geo-political borders and political demands is, in fact, what Kogut's film seems to repel; the director exposes the mechanisms of official identity formation whilst simultaneously emphasizing the more personal aspects of her genealogical research.<sup>141</sup>

At times in the film there is an ironic tone to the camera and speech which criticizes the regulatory aspects of identity. At the centre of this perceived criticism is the fact that the journey Kogut's grandparents made in the 1930s located them in the marginalized population, on the periphery as it were, as Jews fleeing Europe to America in search of a new life. On arrival in Recife, Kogut's grandmother recounts how they had to change their name in order to conceal their Jewish identity in a state which would otherwise refuse their entry.<sup>142</sup> Administratively, obtaining a visa in Brazil was difficult on entry at Recife as the authorities in Pernambuco state required authorization from Rio. Furthermore, once settled in Brazil they were considered 'cidadão de segunda ordem'.<sup>143</sup>

By initiating her application, Kogut implicitly brings her grandmother's stories to the screen, at once highlighting the circumstances which led her grandparents to leave Hungary for Brazil, and the contemporary circumstances surrounding Kogut's demand for a passport. Moreover, there is a strong sense of circularity here: whilst her grandparents were once persecuted for being Jewish and

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<sup>140</sup> Cléber Eduardo, 'Um Passaporte Húngaro de Sandra Kogut', *Contracampo*, 53 [n.d], <<http://www.contracampo.com.br/53/umpassaportehungaro.htm>> [accessed 22 February 2007].

<sup>141</sup> It could, indeed, be argued that the film's overt highlighting of the inconsistencies in Hungary's regulatory bureaucracy has resonances with Latin American discourses on hybridity. Moreover, *Passaporte's* focus on the irregularities of state policy and practice reflects back on Brazilian discourses of hybridity and assimilation which have impacted upon Kogut's family's life.

<sup>142</sup> It is worth noting that the idea that a name may be a site of danger is also referenced in *Los rubios* when Carri states, 'En mi caso, el estigma de la amenaza perdura desde aquellas épocas de terror y violencia en las que decir mi apellido implicaba peligro o rechazo. Y hoy decir mi apellido en determinados círculos todavía implica miradas extrañas, una mezcla de desconcierto y piedad'. I will return to this quotation below in reference to the discussion of the law of the name in *Los rubios*.

<sup>143</sup> Mathilde, cited in *Um Passaporte Húngaro*.

marginalized on their arrival in Brazil, it now seems as though it is Sandra Kogut as Brazilian *and* Jewish who attracts suspicion when attempting to convince a future EU state of her blood relationship to her grandparents. This is emphasized in the different attitudes that her passport application provokes in the people she interviews. On a visual level, however, these parallel migrant situations are beautifully highlighted in the film as shots of boats approaching Recife and trains pulling in to Budapest station are interspersed with the footage of Kogut's grandmother. Moreover, the soundtrack, which can be heard every time these traveling images recur, resembles a traditional Jewish melody played on the oboe, thus associating the images of trains and water, and the migration which her grandmother undertook, with the history of the Jewish diaspora. Indeed, as a recurrent aural motif in the film this music suggests the passing down of memory through the generations and the legacy of cultural traditions. The juxtaposition of sound and visual tracks here creates an inscription of memory and the past which is placed in tension with the present of the film.

These images of journeys, both the journey her grandparents had to undertake when crossing the Atlantic and Kogut's personal journey into her family past, bring to mind Stella Bruzzi's discussion of the journey film. Bruzzi's analysis of this filmic sub-genre in her book *New Documentary: A Critical Introduction* (2000) could also prove valuable for *Passaporte's* comparison with *Los rubios*. In the chapter entitled 'Documentary journeys', Bruzzi considers the structural function of the journey film and the intervention of the director in this genre. Bruzzi writes,

Non-fiction films are now more likely to be constructed around such instabilities as memory, subjectivity and uncertainty. The new journey film is indicative of this trend, taking the traditional documentary concerns of enquiry (itself a trope of journey) and travel to create a loose subgenre of the observational mode, borrowing from direct cinema the key notion that a documentary and its thesis is directed by events as they unfold in the present and in front of the camera.<sup>144</sup>

Whilst *Passaporte* is more obviously a journey film in that it crosses borders and also represents travel motifs such as trams, trains and boats arriving and leaving, sections of the journeys integral to Kogut's grandparents' emigration to Brazil in 1937, both Kogut's film and *Los rubios* exploit the possibilities of location and

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<sup>144</sup> Stella Bruzzi, *New Documentary: A Critical Introduction* (London & New York: Routledge, 2000) p. 103.

travel for their discussion of identity and memory. The linear progression of conventional journey films, termed ‘chrono-logic’ by Brian Winston, where the encounter with people and places provides the narrative’s rhythm and closure, resonates with *Passaporte*’s narrative as Kogut’s ultimate acquisition of the Hungarian passport concludes the film which documented the application process.<sup>145</sup> Thus, the application process becomes the structural imperative of the film which narrates the ‘events as they unfold in the present and in front of the camera’.<sup>146</sup> The signs of memory, however, the musical *leitmotif* and the repeated and poetic images of the sea, reiterate the film’s dialogue with the past through the memories of Mathilde. Whilst the film ends with the acquisition of the provisional passport, providing closure to the film’s journey and quest, the circularity of the film’s structure, with its juxtaposition of past and present disrupts the film’s chronological impulse. The diverse locations used in the film, then, point to the interrelated nature of space, memory and identity.<sup>147</sup>

Consuelo Lins, in an article which considers *Passaporte* at the crossroads of intimacy and political cinema, argues that there are two temporalities in the film which coexist and continuously dialogue with each other, thus suggesting a conversation between individual experience and collective memory. Lins writes,

Em *Um Passaporte Húngaro* [...] há uma comunicação constante entre o que é do domínio privado e o que é do domínio público; o filme torna-se um espaço-tempo em que as idéias podem tomar forma como ‘bem comum’; pouco a pouco, extrai-se dos sofrimentos particulares de uma família e das questões em torno da identidade hoje, o que é e deve ser compartilhado para que seja possível a formação de uma memória e de um destino comum.<sup>148</sup>

This apparent preoccupation with the implications of personal narratives to collective memory is what, Lins suggests, sets this film apart from other first-person documentaries.<sup>149</sup> Whilst the term first-person documentary does, indeed, suggest an

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<sup>145</sup> Brian Winston, ‘Chrono-logic’, in *Claiming the Real: The Documentary Film Revisited* (London: BFI, 1995), pp. 105-112.

<sup>146</sup> Bruzzi, p. 103.

<sup>147</sup> The cities featured in *Passaporte* also highlight the interconnectedness of space, the transnational flows which characterize a global network. The bureaucratic transactions of Paris, Rio de Janeiro and Budapest underline Doreen Massey’s conceptualization of space as constituted ‘not only of internal interactions but also of relations with elsewhere. Not even islands are islands unto themselves. There is a constitutive interdependence. Space is relational’. See Doreen Massey, *World City* (London: Polity Press, 2007), pp. 20-21.

<sup>148</sup> Consuelo Lins, ‘*Passaporte Húngaro*: Cinema Político e Intimidade’, *Galáxia*, 7 (2004)

<[http://www.pos.eco.ufrj.br/docentes/publicacoes/clins\\_2.pdf](http://www.pos.eco.ufrj.br/docentes/publicacoes/clins_2.pdf)> [accessed 17 July 2008].

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*

overt preoccupation with the self (being, of course, the director of the film), many critics have noted the possibilities inherent in subjective narratives to convey collective concerns.<sup>150</sup> *Passaporte* does not provide us with a clear idea of who Sandra Kogut is, nor why exactly she wishes to obtain a Hungarian passport. Mathilde suggests, towards the beginning of the film, that it would be a good idea to apply for the passport in view of the fact that Hungary will shortly enter the EU, but Kogut's own reasons are never clarified. Indeed, the clouding of Kogut's reasons for obtaining the passport reflects the nebulous policies behind the control of Hungary's borders. Suffice it to say, however, that the journey and application process were always intended to be filmed as an encounter between the director's identity in its many senses and those around her. As a meditation on state bureaucracy from the director's point of view, the intimacy one would expect of an autobiographical documentary is largely absent from *Um Passaporte Húngaro*, if we limit our understanding of intimacy as introspection on the director's part, or the appearance of the body of the director in the film. The film is, nonetheless, entirely structured by Kogut's vision and presence.<sup>151</sup>

#### BODY, VOICE AND AUTHORITY

Although the spectator is continually aware that Kogut is the eye and the voice behind the camera, with her hand reaching out through doors and to receive papers, we are rarely privy to a picture of the director in her entirety. Indeed, she comments on this decision to omit her physicality from the film in interview; according to Kogut, 'colocar um rosto aí seria muito redutor'.<sup>152</sup> Furthermore, this distrust in the body to represent a fixed and 'knowable' identity is also reflected in the film's sparse use of archival documents. Whilst we have the impression of watching images from bygone eras in the nostalgic travel sequences, Kogut actually makes very limited use of photographic evidence from the past, the main exception being the passports of her grandparents. Nonetheless, the film is founded on family history and memory, and built around places which hold an importance in the director's life, and Kogut's scant appearances before camera do not, in fact, offer a sense of the film as

<sup>150</sup> See, for example, Renov, 'New Subjectivities' and Erhart, 'Performing Memory'.

<sup>151</sup> Lins writes, 'a subjetividade criada à medida que a narrativa avança é depurada dos seus aspectos mais íntimos, que só dizem respeito à própria diretora. As razões exatas pelas quais ela quer esse passaporte, por exemplo, se é que elas existem, não dizem respeito ao espectador'. Lins, '*Passaporte Húngaro*: Cinema Político e Intimidade'.

<sup>152</sup> Interview with Sandra Kogut included on DVD release.

objective. Rather, all the frames are constructed from her viewpoint, and it is her interactions with people which supply the personable interviews that appear in the film. Moreover, Kogut's voice, present from the very opening of the film, continuously emphasizes her role as the prime interlocutor, constructor and subject of the film. Indeed, the disembodied female voice, according to Kaja Silverman's theorization of the cinematic medium, is one of the fundamental ways in which female authorial subjectivity may mark itself on the film and spectator.<sup>153</sup>

The opening scene, whilst not presenting Kogut physically before the camera, both establishes the documentary's premise and asserts the director's identity through her voice from behind the camera.<sup>154</sup> Here the close-up shots of telephones ringing underline the globally communicated world in which many of us live, whilst at the same time placing Kogut's personal narrative within a more general context of searching for identity. Kogut's voice emerges from behind the frame, which rests on a close-up of a telephone, and she asks, 'une personne dont le grandpère est hongrois, peut avoir droit à un passeport hongrois?'. The response she gets, from different telephones, is varied. Moreover, whilst Kogut's voice lays claim to the identity of which she speaks on the phone, it is interesting to note that she speaks of this person in the third person, and not the 'je' which one would perhaps expect of a first-person documentary, thus underlining its disembodied status throughout the film. Hence, from the onset Kogut's identity is intimately linked to others who find themselves in a similar situation by way of a distancing of the intimate mode, which is said to characterize first-person documentary. This is underlined filmically as immediately following the phone-call opening, the film launches into the first of the travelling scenes, accompanied by extra-diegetic music, and shot from the back of a train, in this way evoking the theme of the past and memory which will link Kogut's personal journey to broader transformations in society.

However, there are significant moments where Kogut asserts her identity visually, and her physicality impinges on the edge of the frame. Built into the representation of Kogut's selfhood is the affirmation of her Jewish identity. Indeed, the story of her grandparents' migration to Brazil invokes the history of a persecuted and diasporic people. Moreover, the theme of anti-Semitism in Vargas's Brazil, as Mariana Baltar has noted, could be uncomfortable for the Brazilian public of the film

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<sup>153</sup> Silverman, pp. 141-186.

<sup>154</sup> José Carlos Avellar, 'Eu Sou Trezentos', *Cinémas d'Amérique Latine*, 12 (2004), 27-51 (p. 28).

as it disrupts the notion of Brazil's tolerance vis-à-vis other populations, and questions the image of Brazil as a racial democracy.<sup>155</sup> Beyond its charting of the history of anti-Semitic policies in Europe and Brazil, however, the film highlights Kogut's cultural identity as Jewish. There are two instances when discussions of Jewishness come to the fore. The first is during a trip to the Jewish cemetery in Hungary with her great-uncle and great-aunt, when stones are placed in memory of members of the Kogut family on her great-grandfather's gravestone. However, the most salient example of Kogut's affirmation of her Jewish identity comes when confronted with anti-Semitic comments from an employee of the archives of birth certificates in Budapest. Here, at the moment when the male administrator begins to question the director's Jewish roots, the spectator is presented with a series of close-ups of his hands as they flick through the passport, and his face, as he aggressively questions Kogut on her ancestry. This scene, which alerts the spectator to the continuing anti-Semitic prejudice which exists in the world, juxtaposes longstanding stereotypes of physical Jewishness with Kogut's appearance, as the man suggests that she cannot be *entirely* Jewish in origin as she is good-looking. Furthermore, when challenged with this prejudice her authority over the film and her identity becomes particularly flagrant as she announces from the side of the camera that she is indeed 'a hundred per cent' Jewish. The moments when we are presented with some aspect of Kogut's physicality, as, for instance, in the two examples given above, but also in the scene where Kogut receives her certificate of citizenship and when she presents her Hungarian passport at the close of the film, all assert the director's subjectivity and identity whilst not undermining the more general observations the film makes. It is worth noting, however, that these glimpses of Kogut's body are always partial and fleeting, refusing to grant a complete image of the director on screen.

*Um Passaporte Húngaro*, then, may be viewed alongside other Brazilian films as representative of a particular generational exploration of the past. Tizuka Yamasaki's 1979 film *Gaijin: Caminhos da Liberdade* also brings to the screen the director's perspective on the history of Japanese migration to Brazil at the turn of the

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<sup>155</sup> Mariana Baltar, 'Engajamento Afetivo Como Marca de Autenticidade: As Performances da Memória em *Um Passaporte Húngaro*', *Revista Eco-Pós*, 11.2 (2008), p. 11, <[http://www.compos.org.br/data/biblioteca\\_251.pdf](http://www.compos.org.br/data/biblioteca_251.pdf)> [accessed 1 August 2008].

twentieth century, albeit in an overtly fictional mode.<sup>156</sup> Yamasaki is the granddaughter of Japanese immigrants and thus at a generational remove from the original migration in the late 1800s. *Gaijin I* (Yamasaki has since returned to the theme with *Gaijin II: Ama-me Como Sou*, 2005) narrates the terrible living conditions and linguistic obstacles of a group of Japanese workers who came to Brazil to work on the coffee plantations and make money before returning to Japan. The reality of their positioning in Brazilian neo-colonial society at the time destroyed their hopes of returning to their homeland and the film visualizes this in no uncompromising manner. The ending of the film depicts one of the female workers, Titoe (Kyoko Tsukamoto), who had fled from the plantation where she had been drawn into a life of slavery, and who is now in a more modern version of factory slavery in urban São Paulo. In this closing sequence the woman talks of going home to Japan with her young daughter, to which the latter responds that she does not want to leave Brazil; Brazil is in fact *her* home. Where *Gaijin I* suggests more structured, one could even say rigid, responses to the notions of homeland and exile, with the daughter of the couple announcing that she feels her place of belonging is in Brazil in spite of her ancestry, *Passaporte* demonstrates an altogether more fluid approach to location and culture. Indeed, perhaps one could view this shift in perspective as a perfect reflection of the time in which *Passaporte* was made, when discussions of migration and diaspora are becoming increasingly present in the media and a growing part of many people's everyday lives.

In sum, then, Kogut draws on her own life experience to illustrate the fractured notion of identity through a multiplicity of locations, languages and citizenships. Her personal story becomes representative of a number of people who find themselves in this position. Indeed, as one of the archivists in Rio comments in the film, it is exceedingly common for Brazilians who can claim some descent from European origins to do so in order to obtain another passport, and thus the film interlocutes with global politics.<sup>157</sup> It is also worth noting that during the 1990s

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<sup>156</sup> It is worth noting here that the word 'gaijin' means alien or foreigner in Japanese. The early phase of Yamasaki's work, incorporating the film *Gaijin I* (1980), *Parahyba, Mulher Macho* (1983) and *Patriamada* (1984), reflected on the notion of *brasilidade* and otherness. More recently, however, she has directed commercial films such as *Xuxa Requebra* (1999). See Plazaola, pp. 267-284, for an overview of her early work.

<sup>157</sup> The possibilities of double nationality are also echoed in many recent films from Argentina. As Joanna Page notes, 'images of people queuing outside European embassies clutching paper to prove their European heritage have become recurring motifs in post-Crisis films'. See Page, 'The Nation as



Brazil experienced a huge societal shift in demographic terms, becoming, for the first time, a country of *emigration*. The film industry in Brazil was not immune to these changes, provoked as they were by a failing economy. Indeed, faced with the economic crisis of 1998, filmmakers were obliged to rethink the strategies of glossy productions which dominated the early years of the *retomada*. As Maria do Rosario Caetano writes,

O fim do ‘sonho globalizado’ que dominou o cinema brasileiro nos primeiros anos da Retomada se fez sentir a partir de 1998, quando reeleito presidente da República, Fernando Henrique Cardoso foi obrigado a desvalorizar o Real, a moeda brasileira, que, por quase seis anos, se equiparara ao dólar. Com moeda fraca, O Brasil (e algum tempo depois, Argentina e vizinhos) caiu *na real* e voltou a se enxergar como país em desenvolvimento. Não mais, ilusoriamente, como nação do Primeiro Mundo.<sup>158</sup>

Kogut’s perspective on global relations, then, is also intimately linked to the demographics and discourse on hybridity in Brazil. Furthermore, it points to a notion of plurality as Kogut’s vagabond sensibility seamlessly moves through languages and locations. Perhaps most importantly, however, it asserts the multiple identities which can be assigned to Kogut in different spaces and times, and implies that identity is mutable and transitory.

Where *Um Passaporte Húngaro* largely refuses the director’s image, but inscribes the director’s identity through her voice and the theme of the documentary, *Los rubios*, by way of ventriloquy, constitutes an exploration into the performance of the director’s identity on a cultural and physical level. The director, Carri, appears in the form of an actress and in her own body in the film, yet takes a similar attitude to Kogut in that she seems suspicious of the use of archival material to represent a fixed, inalterable identity of her disappeared parents. It is to this film that I will now turn.

#### ALBERTINA CARRI, ANIMATION AND THE FAMILY

Albertina Carri (1973-) is known as one of Argentina’s most celebrated and polemic filmmakers. Her films frequently challenge established normative ideas on the family and confront the audience with works that blur generic boundaries. Carri’s third film, the performative documentary *Los rubios*, actively demonstrates that

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the *Mise-en-scène* of Film-making in Argentina’, *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies*, 14.3 (December 2005), 305-324 (p. 317).

<sup>158</sup> Caetano, p. 204.

filmmaking is by nature a cooperative and collaborative task, exposing the very constructed nature of the film, whilst simultaneously testifying to a strong autobiographical impulse.<sup>159</sup> The film incited a polemic regarding appropriate forms of memory in Argentina, most vehemently expressed in the description of the film by the critic Martín Kohan as a ‘régimen de la descortesía’ based around notions of political correctness towards the victims of the dictatorship.<sup>160</sup>

Beyond *Los rubios*'s highly innovative and controversial contribution to memory work in Argentina, however, the film expands on Carri's preferred themes of dysfunctional families previously exhibited in *No quiero volver a casa* (2001), *Géminis* (2005), and most recently in *La rabia* (2008). Furthermore, *Los rubios* once again exploits a technique and aesthetic mode which she had tested earlier on in her career in the award-winning short film *Barbie también puede eStar triste* (2001). This stop-motion animation film described as ‘somewhere between pornography and the theatre of the absurd’,<sup>161</sup> depicts Barbie in a trapped marriage, a slave to consumer culture, and was the subject of much critical attention, particularly from the doll's manufacturers, Mattel, who filed a court order against the film in order to prevent its exhibition in Mexico City's Urban-Fest festival on the grounds that it was damaging to Barbie's reputation.<sup>162</sup> Here it is also pertinent to draw attention to the collaboration of Barry Ellsworth with Albertina Carri, as producer of both *Los rubios* and *Géminis*. Ellsworth previously worked on the film *Superstar: The Karen Carpenter Story* (Todd Haynes, 1987). This connection has not, to my knowledge, been developed in the countless critical analyses of Carri's films but is, in my mind, a key association with the animation scenes which are present both in *Barbie* and in *Los rubios*.

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<sup>159</sup> I borrow the expression ‘performative documentary’ from Bill Nichols's and Stella Bruzzi's discussion of the term in *Blurred Boundaries: Questions of Meaning in Contemporary Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994) and *New Documentary*, respectively. Joanna Page and Gabriela Nouzeilles have previously applied this term to *Los rubios* in the articles ‘Memory and Mediation’ and ‘Postmemory Cinema and the Future of the Past in Albertina Carri's *Los rubios*’, *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies*, 14.3 (December 2005), 263-278. I concur with the application of the term to *Los rubios* and also suggest that the film displays some characteristics of other subgenres of documentary, which will be further discussed below.

<sup>160</sup> Martín Kohan, ‘Una crítica en general y una película en particular’, *Punto de vista*, 80 (2004), 47-48 (p. 48).

<sup>161</sup> Quoted from the Princeton Documentary Festival website, <<http://spo.princeton.edu:16080/filmfestival-03/filmmak.html>> [accessed 12 April 2006].

<sup>162</sup> Page, ‘Memory and Mediation’, p. 39.

*Superstar* tells, by way of Barbie dolls in animation, of the rise and fall of US pop singer Karen Carpenter, who died at the age of thirty-two after a prolonged battle with anorexia. The film itself is forty-two minutes long, shot in 16mm, and highly effective in its evocation of the connection between 1970s North American society, the rise of consumer culture and the repression of women's bodies. Hauntingly disjointed, the dolls underline the deep mistrust of realism in discussions of the body in the visual realm, particularly when the very visual apparatus of cinema has often been seen to collude with the fetishization of the female body. *Superstar* had a very limited release due to its poor reception amongst the Carpenter family, who filed a court order against the film and had it withdrawn from circulation. However, it has been noted that the film had already attracted attention from Barbie's manufacturers, suggesting that were it not for Richard Carpenter's quick action against the film, Mattel would have stepped in and taken libel action in a similar vein to its case against *Barbie también puede estar triste*.<sup>163</sup> Whilst I would not like to suggest that Carri's use of animation lacks originality, it certainly did have a precedent in its critique of Mattel's dolls, not least in the title's allusion to the 'star' status of Barbie, which both Carri's *Barbie* and Haynes's *Superstar* make. Moreover, Carri's alignment with a producer associated with North American independent filmmaking reaffirms her status as the *enfant terrible* of the latest generation of *cinéastes* from Argentina, and confirms her penchant for avant-garde filmic references to be explored in the following analysis of *Los rubios*.

Graduating from the Universidad del Cine in Buenos Aires in 1992, Carri has directed and wielded the camera on a number of films and television films which highlight the constructed nature of identity and the fragility of the traditional family unit in Argentina. Furthermore, she has collaborated with some of Argentina's most well-known directors, producers and screen writers, namely María Luisa Bemberg, Lita Stantic, and Jorge Goldenberg. *Los rubios*, therefore, must be situated at the crossroads of a career and personality increasingly marked in criticism by *auteur* theory and the collaborative filmmaking which she exposes in this documentary.<sup>164</sup> In this light I would like to build on what I have already discussed with relation to

<sup>163</sup> Lucas Hilderbrand, 'Grainy Days and Mondays: *Superstar* and Bootleg Aesthetics', *Camera Obscura*, 19.3 (2004), 56-91 (p. 66).

<sup>164</sup> The invocation of Carri as *auteur* is intimately linked to the criticism which persistently reiterates her status as daughter of disappeared parents. As a result of the intense discussion *Los rubios* facilitated, it could be suggested that Carri's subsequent works are now increasingly read in light of the themes exposed in the film and her role as director. See note 169 for more on this criticism.

autobiography, identity and filmic technique in *Passaporte* and consider how *Los rubios* establishes its own relationship between author and film.

#### LOS RUBIOS, GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCE AND POSTMEMORY

Termed 'un reality show sobre la memoria',<sup>165</sup> *Los rubios* has at its core the search for the true identity of Albertina Carri's disappeared parents. As the film informs us, on 14 February, 1977 'Ana María Caruso y Roberto Carri fueron secuestrados, ese mismo año asesinados, tuvieron tres hijas, Andrea, Paula y Albertina'. The youngest of the sisters - she was just three when her parents were kidnapped, four when they were presumed dead - the director Albertina Carri seeks to explore memory as a theme, from different viewpoints, in particular memories of her militant Leftist parents.

As we learn in the film, following her parents' abduction, the three sisters were taken to a 'police station' for the night before their maternal grandparents picked them up the following day. During most of that year the girls maintained contact with their detained parents by way of a middle-man, El Negro, who passed on letters the family members had written. This guard, however, is ultimately suspected of being responsible for the death of her parents. Nevertheless, integral to Carri's film is the implicit impossibility of *really* being able to understand who the disappeared were and the difficulties in reconstructing the past in the postmemory generation of Argentines today.<sup>166</sup>

As has been noted by a number of critics, Carri's attempt to explore memories of the event at a temporal remove has led to it being considered within the parameters of postmemory, and contributes more generally to a growing emphasis on children of the disappeared in film, particularly from a child's perspective.<sup>167</sup> This tendency is not only apparent in documentary film but also in fiction film, as for instance in the commercially successful 2002 film, *Kamchatka* (Marcelo Piñeyro). Key to this perceived shift in cultural practice are a number of films produced since

<sup>165</sup> Julián Gorodischer, cited in María Moreno, 'Esa rubia debilidad', *Página 12: Radar*, 23 October 2003, <[http://www.pagina12.com.ar/suplementos/radar/vernota.php?id\\_nota=1001](http://www.pagina12.com.ar/suplementos/radar/vernota.php?id_nota=1001)> [accessed 24 April 2006].

<sup>166</sup> Here I draw on Marianne Hirsch's notion of postmemory to denote 'a very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation'. See Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 22.

<sup>167</sup> See Aguilar, *Otros mundos: un ensayo sobre el nuevo cine argentino* (Buenos Aires: Santiago Arcos Editor, 2006); Amado, 'Órdenes de la memoria'; Nouzeilles, 'Postmemory Cinema'; and Page, 'Memory and Mediation'.

2000 which were directed by children of the disappeared and which evidence an autobiographical perspective. These films, then, have brought generational tensions to the forefront of debate, wherein the established methods of investigating the past are deemed inadequate by the 'orphan' generation. However, it is significant that Albertina Carri herself has stated that she does not want to be regarded and interpreted solely as a child of the disappeared. In an interview, she stated 'yo no quiero ser hija toda la vida. Quiero ser otras cosas y en el medio también soy hija'.<sup>168</sup> *Los rubios* is, thus, a recognition of her status as a child of the disappeared and simultaneously an assertion of her identity in other senses, in particular her identity as a director. Significantly though, many critics continually assert her status as 'hija de desaparecidos' when they are writing on her films, irrespective of their thematic.<sup>169</sup>

As stated above, the number of films which have been produced in recent years by children of victims of the dictatorship has led to an intense discussion over their representational strategies and generational difference. Writing on *Los rubios*, *Papá Iván* (María Inés Roqué, 2004) and *(h)Historias cotidianas* (Andrés Habegger, 2001), two other key films which belong to this trend, Gonzalo Aguilar suggests that:

No es muy difícil entender por qué estos jóvenes recurrieron al cine para procesar su pasado. El carácter indicial de la imagen cinematográfica permite construir un espacio testimonial muy adecuado para la rememoración: fotos, voces, grabaciones, documentos, personas que conocieron a las víctimas, registros de acontecimientos colectivos, etc. Todo un arsenal visual y auditivo para hacer el trabajo del duelo. Pero a la vez, como si este espacio visual fuera insuficiente para rozar aquello que está ineluctablemente extinto, los tres documentales recurren – sobre todo en los interludios – a imágenes hápticas, es decir que tienen una textura que sugieren lo táctil por medio del relieve, los contrastes fuertes y los diferentes superficies.<sup>170</sup>

In Aguilar's mind, the rich source of techniques available to Carri and others of her generation provides an intensification of the representation of memory, enabling them to exploit the possibilities of cinema to create new understandings of feelings

<sup>168</sup> Carri in interview with María Moreno, 'Esa rubia debilidad'.

<sup>169</sup> See the recent articles dedicated to Carri's films since the production of *Los rubios*, which reaffirm her status as 'hija de desaparecidos'. Horacio Bernades, 'De cómo atreverse a decir su nombre', *Página 12: Espectáculos*, 9 June 2005, <<http://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/espectaculos/6-52136-2005-06-09.html>> [accessed 22 March 2007]. Countless others refer to her experience of the dictatorship or describe Carri as the 'directora de *Los rubios*', implicitly linking the theme of the *Guerra Sucia* with her experience of directing films.

<sup>170</sup> Aguilar, p. 176.

and the past. Aguilar is not the only critic to present this view of the merits of cinema to evoke memory. In one of the first critical assessments of *Los rubios*, Ana Amado writes,

Cuerpo y voz, biografía e historia, inconsciente y memoria, son demasiadas presiones para optar por una vía única, o unificada, de representación. El cine le ofrece dos – imágenes y palabras – y aprovecha para ensayar la autonomía de ambas. La imagen es, después de todo, inscripción de la memoria y simultáneamente su confiscación. La multiplicación oscurece la información, vuelve las referencias opacas, más extrañas aún cuando el espectador cree reconocerlas a través de una o de las dos pistas perceptivas.<sup>171</sup>

Experimentation with the disjunctive and multiple possibilities of cinema, then, has become a central component of many recent films, notably *Los rubios*.<sup>172</sup> One of the fundamental innovations in Carri's film, however, is its employment of an actress to enact and perform the director's identity and memory.

#### **DOPPELGÄNGERS AND VENTRILOQUISM**

The search for Carri's parents' identity in the film is accompanied by a dissection of her own identity and memory and significantly reconfigures the conventions of autobiography in that she uses an actress, Analía Couceyro, to play herself. Where *Um Passaporte Húngaro* shied away from depicting Kogut's *physical* identity on screen, Carri's film, in a self-referential turn, both establishes her identity as a performance through the device of a *Doppelgänger*, the actress, and as the authentic orchestrator of the film in the scenes where she appears as director.

Early on in the film, immediately following the first interview in the neighbourhood where Albertina lived with her parents and the written titles telling us of the disappearance of her parents in 1977, we are introduced to the actress. Here she directly addresses the camera and states that she will play the role of Albertina Carri in the film. This mirroring of identities is also underlined in the identical initials of the director's and actress's names - AC. This is then immediately reinforced when the actress goes to interview a woman about 'her' (Albertina's) parents and verbally asserts her new identity over the intercom, stating 'soy Albertina'. Thus, the spectator is encouraged to merge their identities whilst being

<sup>171</sup> Ana Amado, 'Los rubios y la disolución de la escena de la memoria', *El ojo que piensa*, 5 (August 2003), <[http://www.elojoquepiensa.udg.mx/espanol/numero05/cinejournal/05\\_losrubios.html](http://www.elojoquepiensa.udg.mx/espanol/numero05/cinejournal/05_losrubios.html)> [accessed 1 April 2006], p. 2.

<sup>172</sup> *La fe del volcán* (Ana Poliak, 2001), analysed in Chapter II, is another film which exploits the multiple possibilities of cinema to evoke the workings of memory.

fully aware that we are not witnessing the ‘real’ Albertina on screen, but her celluloid double. The cinematography further underlines this doubling as it repeatedly shows an early tracking shot of the actress Couceyro’s ‘Albertina’ against a fence after having introduced herself as the actress who will embody Albertina Carri, seemingly emphasizing the repetition and splitting of identities.

This device, however, is problematized by the fact that on a number of occasions in the film we see the ‘real’ Albertina Carri, appearing as director of the film. Indeed, whilst the logic of doubling prevails throughout the film, there is in fact a third Albertina present. As Gabriela Nouzeilles has identified,

there are at least three ‘Albertina Carri’: Albertina, the author behind the frame; Albertina the *auteur* inside the film, who appears holding the camera, giving instructions and discussing the movie with the crew; and Albertina, the daughter in a state of memory, who stands before the camera delivering a rehearsed testimony.<sup>173</sup>

The difference between the fictional (Analia Couceyro) and non-fictional Albertina is generally distinguished by using colour for the ‘copy’ and black and white video for the ‘authentic’ one. However, as Joanna Page remarks, ‘these distinctions are not respected throughout the film and this blurring serves to demonstrate the contamination of narrative by metanarrative, a theme of particular significance in the film’s exploration of memory’.<sup>174</sup> Moreover, in the use of varied film stock to express the real and fictional enactment of Albertina, there exists a parallel with the video and Super 8 images used in *Passaporte* to evoke different temporalities. The colour footage of the performance of Albertina is shot in 16mm film whereas the sequences which depict the crew discussing their takes and Albertina instructing Analia on how to play her part are shot in video. This use of different types of film stock points to the possibilities of the cinematic medium to conjure up notions of multiplicity, echoed in the film’s thematic through the treatment of the celluloid double.

The blurring of identities and merging of fictional and non-fictional characters is most explicitly realized on camera in the scene where the crew visit the Centro de Antropología Forense in Buenos Aires. Here the spectral presence of the disappeared is visualized on the walls of the research centre often used to track down family members of the disappeared. Decorated with posters and models of the

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<sup>173</sup> Nouzeilles, p. 269.

<sup>174</sup> Page, ‘Memory and Mediation’, p. 30.

human anatomy, the disarticulated limbs and X-rays litter the film with the memory of the dead. On the soundtrack we hear an eerie breathy noise, as if a malign spirit is present. Here the fake, fictional Albertina, played by Analía Couceyro, is required to have her finger pricked in order to give a blood sample. Whilst within the fictional enactment of Albertina this is a logical extension of the performance of the director through the actress's body, it is immediately belied by the fact that, in the name of biological research, the actress's blood sample bears little relevance to this investigation into the director's family.<sup>175</sup> Thus, immediately following the moment where the fictional Albertina gives a sample, the 'real' Albertina emerges from behind the camera, at once recognizing her status as director of the film and orchestrator of the performance before the camera, and reasserting her positioning vis-à-vis her family. She is the true heir of her parents and steps forward to give her own blood accordingly, in order to pursue this strain of genealogical research. This scene, therefore, provides not only the basis for authenticity in the figure of Albertina, alluding to the impossibility of the fictional Albertina being able to perform some aspects of her doubling due to biological concerns, but also explicitly draws attention to the fact that the fictional Albertina we are constantly presented with on screen is always playing a role.<sup>176</sup> The legitimization of Carri's *biological* identity, moreover, finds a parallel with Kogut's 'authenticated' identity through her acquisition of a Hungarian passport. Whilst *Passaporte* does not dwell on the painful, personal memories of her family's past in the same way that *Los rubios* does - and let us remember that Carri's memories are one generational step closer than Kogut's - both directors reflect their perspectives on identity formation and memory aesthetically.

There are other moments in *Los rubios* when the performance of Albertina and memory is brought to the fore of the film. On several occasions the actress Couceyro mediates testimonies given by other people, most notably in the scene where she informs the spectator of things the 'real' Albertina dislikes, and in the scene where she draws a diagram of a torture centre, based on her memory of someone else's memory. In the first instance the actress is instructed by the director on how to perform her identity, how to deliver the words scripted by the 'real'

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<sup>175</sup> A number of critics have dwelled on this scene, notably Page, 'Memory and Mediation', p. 32.

<sup>176</sup> Page writes, 'this scene effectively encodes the film's deconstruction of notions of authenticity and transparency in representation'. *Ibid.*, p. 32.



Albertina. This, in turn, is all filmed on camera. Several takes of this listing of pet hates illustrate both the highly constructed nature of the documentary, and the multiplicity ascribed to Albertina Carri's identity. Here the Albertina-director plays with black and white video and colour to mark the difference between the performance and the rehearsal of the scene, constantly reiterating the role-play of her own persona and deconstructing the neat boundary she had established between colour and black and white to differentiate between the two Albertinas.<sup>177</sup>

In the second instance, the actress's voiceover relates, whilst she is staring at a framed photograph on her studio wall, how on the day she took it to be framed she saw a number of other photographs of a *matadero* in the studio. Albertina's friend commented at the time that the photographer must have been tortured, alluding to the cultural history of the *matadero* in Argentina and the recent experience of the torture centres. The short story 'El matadero' (Esteban Echevarría, 1870), written between the years of 1838 and 1840, and attesting to the bloodshed during Juan Manuel de Rosas's rule, remains to this day a strong cultural influence as a metaphor for uncontrollable barbarity and dictatorship logic. Foster *et al.* write of the work, "El Matadero" is in no uncertain terms an allegory of the sociocultural circumstances under Rosas's regime wherein the slaughterhouse represents the nation and the space for conflict between civilization and barbarism to be played out in graphic descriptions of brutal violence'.<sup>178</sup> Albertina, who is transfixed by the photo, is told a week later by her sister that she has found the only person to have known her parents during their time in the torture centre, the so-called Sheraton, and to have survived the experience. It turns out that this person was the very same photographer. However, as we find out in the film, the photographer does not want to relate her experience on camera: 'Ella no quiere hablar frente a la cámara, se niega a que le grabe su testimonio, me ha dicho cosas como "yo no hablo de la tortura", "no testimonié para la CONADEP, tampoco la voy a hacer ahora frente a una cámara"'. The woman's reference to CONADEP serves as an intertextual citation of one of the predominant discourses surrounding the memory of the dictatorship in Argentina, and will be further discussed below. Albertina's response to this is, however, to enquire, '¿en qué se parece una cámara a una picana? [...] ¿Con qué se parece su

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<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>178</sup> David William Foster, Melissa Fitch Lockhart & Darrell B. Lockhart, *Culture and Customs of Argentina* (Greenwood Publishing Group, 1998), pp. 99.

cámara a la hacha con que matan a la vaca?'. Here the allusion to the violence in both the camera and the blade which slaughters cows is underlined in the visuals following the relayed testimony as we see cows herded into stalls in the countryside. Moreover, the actress's poor reconstruction of a sketch the woman drew for her, depicting the layout of the torture centre, reveals nothing about the geography of the place, or what really went on within its four walls, thus highlighting the failure of memory to convey the real terror of what happened. The juxtaposition of the film's reference to the *matadero*, then, with its visual exploration of the space of the torture centre in the actress's recollection of what the survivor drew, simultaneously underlines the inadequacy of testimony to enhance our knowledge about what happened and points to the allegory of death and violence through the trope of *el matadero*. These two examples powerfully emphasize the actress's performance of testimony, the instability of memory and the visual metaphor for death.

#### THE BLONDS?: THE FALLACY OF MEMORY

The trope of role-play is further explored in the assumption of physical identity which takes place in *Los rubios*. In one scene, a woman who still lives in the neighbourhood where the family lived prior to Albertina's parents' disappearance describes the whole family as blond. Furthermore, at another moment, unknowing of the fact that the real Albertina Carri is actually the person shooting the interview, she states that one of the girls had eyes similar to 'yours' – here the irony lies in the fact that she could either be referring to the fictional Albertina or the real one. Significantly, the description of the Carri family as blond is revealed to be a falsehood. Following the interview the crew discuss this physical description of the Carris, its misrepresentation and the woman's distorted memory of the family. In the crew's van insert-shots of the individuals' faces follow in succession, with one notable image of the director Albertina Carri looking out of the window, with an expression of reflection and pain on her face, revealing her distress at the mistruths which the neighbour has spoken in the film interview. Perhaps more importantly, however, our own eyes disavow the description of Albertina as blonde as both the real Albertina behind the camera and the fictional one playing her are considerably darker-haired. This description of the family as blond has been interpreted as an

attempt to mark the 'subversive' family as other, and as different.<sup>179</sup> Furthermore, when viewed within the particular racial fabric of Argentina the term acquires a distinct character as an emblem of superiority, education and social class. The film's experimentation with the notion of identity thus points to its performative nature, a theme manifestly visualized towards the end of the film when the entire crew, including the fictional actress Albertina and the 'real' Albertina, put on blond wigs.

The pantomimic excess displayed in the scenes where Analía Couceyro is acting out Albertina Carri, and in the closing scenes when the crew all assume a superficial 'blondness', points to the multiple possibilities of identity. Albertina Carri effectively suggests that alternative communities other than the family may be important factors in one's identity, as the crew all don their new blond wigs and run off into the distance parodying the typical Hollywood happy ending.<sup>180</sup> Furthermore, the discussion which takes place before this final scene, when the director first shoots a possible ending with Analía Couceyro walking alone into the distance - which she says is 'más bonito' - for the close of the film, is undermined by the community of the film crew which forms before our eyes immediately after.

#### CINEMATIC COMMUNITIES AND AVANT-GARDE ALLUSIONS

*'There is no such thing as family.  
We are the orphans of cinema  
and without our movie we do not exist'.*

- Cecil in *Cecil B DeMented* (John Waters, 2000)

The film's central narrative, therefore, is Albertina Carri's research into the disappearance and identities of her parents. This autobiographical impulse, however, is accompanied by two more narratives; the self-referential construction of the documentary and the Playmobil stop-motion animation sequences which punctuate the film as a whole. These animation sequences metaphorically re-enact family life in the countryside, constructing Albertina's memories and imagination from a child's perspective and emphasizing the fact that Albertina experienced the *secuestro* very early on in her life. Significantly, at the very beginning of the film there is one such

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<sup>179</sup> Aguilar, p. 180; Lerer, 'La fábula de la reconstrucción'; Nouzeilles, 'Postmemory Cinema', p. 268; Page, 'Memory and Mediation', p. 35.

<sup>180</sup> Page, 'Memory and Mediation', p. 36.

animation sequence, thus drawing attention to the narrative of the child's imagination from the outset.

The film opens with brief credits accompanied by muffled beating sounds before proceeding onto the first animation sequence. As is typical of the film as a whole, this opening sequence has many layers of signification and introduces the spectator to some of the key techniques used in the film. The Playmobil dolls enact a scene in the *campo*, which, as we learn later in the film, is where Carri's memory is said to begin. The audio track evokes the countryside with sounds of cows mooing and horses sighing before we hear the director's voice-off teaching the actress (Analía Couceyro) how to ride a horse. This opening scene, then, not only alerts us to the animation sequences present in the film's narrative, and to the director's insistent instruction on how to perform her identity, but also points to the multilayered texture the film creates more generally, namely the disjunction of sound and visuals.<sup>181</sup>

In the context of *Los rubios* the animation scenes have been considered as an expression of a child's version of events, a poignant reminder of the fact that Albertina Carri had very little access to a rational explanation of what happened to her parents. Moreover, the Playmobil figures disrupt an objective documentary discourse based on the ontology of the image and indexicality, garnering as they do a metaphorical quality evocative of a child's imagination. However, one key animation sequence in *Los rubios* has sparked controversy and intense discussion in the criticism of the film.

The sequence in question depicts the disappearance of Albertina Carri's parents reconfigured as an alien abduction, haunted by a soundtrack reminiscent of a science-fiction film. On the grounds that the animation is disrespectful to the memory of the victims of the dictatorship and trivializes their abduction, the critic Martín Kohan fervidly opposed this aesthetic choice. Kohan suggests that this Playmobil scene undermines the real effects of the dictatorship on family members, rendering the *secuestro* pure fantasy and depoliticizing the event.<sup>182</sup> In defence of this technique, however, Aguilar praises *Los rubios* for wholeheartedly evoking a child's world and version of events in the film. As a three year old at the time, with limited access to the knowledge of what really happened, Carri could *only* project the

<sup>181</sup> Ana Amado writes of this disjunction in 'Órdenes de la memoria', pp. 43-82.

<sup>182</sup> Martín Kohan, 'La apariencia celebrada', *Punto de vista*, 78 (2004), 24-30.

abduction within the realm of her imagination. Aguilar's close analysis of the film points to the 'miniaturization' of life in the film, another strategy to offer a child's perspective, depicted in the size of the Playmobil characters, a scaled-down version of real life.<sup>183</sup>

This *secuestro* Playmobil scene also marks another strategy used in the film as a whole, that of the cannibalization of sources, or intertextuality. As Aguilar insightfully points out, the music used in the abduction scene is, in fact, taken from the cult Robert Wise film, *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951).<sup>184</sup> Furthermore, the theme of this same film is, in fact, an alien landing on Earth in post-war America, reminiscent of what we see depicted in the Playmobil disappearance of Carri's parents. Thus, the animation scenes not only evoke a child's imagination of events, but also pay homage to films which may have influenced Carri. Moreover, as Aguilar's detailed analysis of the film shows, the *secuestro* scene is not the only filmic reference present in *Los rubios*. The posters in the room where Analía performs the editing of the film evidence at least two more: *Cecil B. DeMented* (John Waters, 2000) and Jean-Luc Godard.<sup>185</sup> Analía Couceyro's thick-rimmed glasses wink at Godard's own, which appear on the poster behind the actress.<sup>186</sup> In addition, the pose the actress takes as she is relating testimonies sitting in an armchair echoes the image of Melanie Griffith on the edge of the frame in the poster for *Cecil B. DeMented* in the background.<sup>187</sup> These filmic citations, coupled with the references to Mata Hari and Rasputin, Roberto Carri's book, a Wietkiwicz poem, excerpts of the *Nunca más* report, and a speech by the governor of Buenos Aires, General Ibérico Saint-Jean, during the dictatorship, are all examples of the overt intertextuality of *Los rubios*. This, Aguilar suggests, indicates the repeated notion throughout the film of the possibilities of cinema to provide escape from, or at least an alternative way of conceiving, painful events.<sup>188</sup> I would add to this, however, that

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<sup>183</sup> Aguilar, p. 188.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.* A remake of this classic Wise film has recently been released (*The Day the Earth Stood Still*, dir. Scott Derrickson, 2008).

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 181. John Waters's film is a parody of the Hollywood industry and its star apparatus and makes direct reference to the classic Hollywood filmmaker Cecil B. de Mille (1881-1959). It is also worth noting that Cecil B. de Mille's film, *Samson and Delilah* (1949) was also the inspiration for the Brazilian parody *Nem Sansão, Nem Dalila* (Carlos Manga, 1954). See Dennison & Shaw, *Popular Cinema in Brazil*, p. 104, for more analysis of the use of parody in Brazilian popular film.

<sup>186</sup> Aguilar, p. 181.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 181.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 188.

it also signals the dispersal of perspectives and the persistent breakdown of a hegemonic narrative and omnipresent voice of narration in the film.

Aguilar suggests that the filmic references in Carri's film support the notion that the production of the documentary, and cinema more generally, is, in fact, a way to 'salir del duelo'.<sup>189</sup> By affirming her identity *beyond* the prescriptive radical politics of her parents' generation, Carri finds a way to overcome her loss. Aguilar writes:

Los padres y la hija se reencuentran en el título: todos ellos son *rubios*, lo que en la lógica del film significa tanto ser diferente como rebelde. Pero donde los padres lo son por haber abrazado una causa (la del pueblo), la hija es rubia porque es cineasta, le gustan las poses, los apliques y el postizo. En el momento en que se reencuentran, se separan: ambos son rubios, sí, pero por diferentes razones. En esta separación, Carri comienza a construir su *afiliación* a la estética o a las astucias de la forma cinematográfica.<sup>190</sup>

The suggestion of an alternative community, in this case in the form of Carri's film crew, is repeated throughout the film at moments when the film lays bare its own construction.<sup>191</sup> The clearest example of the collaborative process of making the film also reiterates its controversial status.<sup>192</sup> In this scene, the fictional Albertina reads out a declaration from the INCAA - the Argentine national film institute responsible for a large part of film funding in the country - rejecting her request for financial aid. As Analía Couceyro informs us in the film, the institute decided that whilst *Los rubios* was a worthwhile project it lacked the documentary rigour appropriate to represent the memory of her disappeared parents. Following Analía's reading of the letter, which takes place in her studio where she edits and assembles material, the whole crew participate in a discussion about the verdict, thus emphasizing both the collaborative nature of filmmaking and the controversial site of memory in Argentina. The team discussion is filmed in black and white to reveal the process of collaboration to the audience. Perhaps more importantly, however, this scene invokes a strong sense of the generational gap which is perceived between those who lived through the 1970s as militants and bystanders and the orphan generation who can only recall the decade's side effects. Indeed, this generational gap is reflected in the film's perceived rejection of paradigmatic memory frameworks structured

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<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 179.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 180.

<sup>191</sup> Page, 'Memory and Mediation', p. 36.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

around, according to Gabriela Nouzeilles, two primary strands of memory;<sup>193</sup> the first, the *Nunca más* report and the second, what Hugo Vezzetti terms ‘memoria montonera’.<sup>194</sup>

#### REJECTION OF EXISTING MEMORY FRAMEWORKS

One of the most disruptive contributions *Los rubios* has made to contemporary debates in Argentina on memory and representation of the dictatorship has been in its perceived disregard for existing approaches with which to interpret the dictatorship, namely the role of testimonies in constructing memory. In *Pasado y presente* (2002), Vezzetti charts the evolution of different strands of memory in Argentina with particular emphasis on the testimonial impulse as characterized by the CONADEP *Nunca más* report of 1984. This collection of testimonies of human rights abuses during the dictatorship, and their use in the trials of the high-ranking military, became, for many, the symbol of redemocratization.<sup>195</sup> Yet the testimonial impulse and search for truth which characterized the report are largely debased in Carri’s documentary. *Nunca más* - and it is worth noting that Carri’s parents are listed in the report - is referenced in *Los rubios* in passing when Analía Couceyro mentions the crew’s experience of entering a former detention centre-cum-police station. In this scene the actress states to the camera that they hid the copy of the report, which the crew were carrying with them as they filmed. Furthermore, *Los rubios* weaves its own testimonial narrative on Carri’s parents during the dictatorship, in a number of testimonies discussing the identity of her deceased parents, which we see playing on the small television screen in the actress’s studio. However, Analía Couceyro only gives passing attention to these interviews, emphasized visually as she often has her back to the footage, physically shunning the testimonies and rendering them a backdrop for her editing activities.<sup>196</sup> The testimonies, then, do not lead the spectator to a better understanding of Carri’s

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<sup>193</sup> Nouzeilles, p. 274.

<sup>194</sup> Hugo Vezzetti, *Pasado y presente: guerra, dictadura y sociedad en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Siglo veintiuno editores, 2002), p. 99.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>196</sup> It is also worth noting, as Mauricio Alonso has remarked, that the last interview is included at 33 minutes in *Los rubios*, dispensing with the testimonies in the majority of the film. See Mauricio Alonso, ‘*Los rubios: otra forma, otra mirada*’, in *Imágenes de lo real: la representación de lo político en el documental argentino*, ed. by Josefina Sartora & Silvina Rival (Buenos Aires: Librería, 2007), pp. 157-169 (p. 165).

parents and, moreover, they underline the fracturing of memory and plurality of perspectives and memories integral to the film's construction.

The second strand of memory which is dissolved in the film is the unquestioned celebration of the Montonero militants, termed 'memoria montonera' by Vezzetti.<sup>197</sup> This is an established strain of memory in Argentina which celebrates the efforts of the militant Leftists guerrillas who resisted the dictatorship, often at the cost of their own lives. One of the fundamental perceived 'flaws' of *Los rubios* is that it does not explicitly praise Carri's parents' ideological position, deeply rooted in the 1960s idealism of a revolutionary project, but rather focuses on the small details of their lives. This, Nouzeilles suggests, resists the veneration of the Montonero efforts:

The tense dialogue with Montonero memory, and its committed aesthetics, is finally brought out into the open when Carri and her crew discuss and harshly condemn, in front of the camera, a letter from the INCAA that rejects their request for financial support, alleging that the documentary does not do justice to the Carris' militant heroism.<sup>198</sup>

This scene explicitly locates the film in the context of established strains of memory by making reference to the notion of an 'official' memory discourse. In the crew's discussion following the reading of the rejection letter, Albertina Carri insists that she understands why 'ellos' should need a documentary which celebrates the militants' efforts and should lend greater importance to 'testimonios', but she believes that 'es una película que la tiene que hacer otro, no yo', implying a generation gap between her and the authorities who have ruled on the film's funding. The documentary rigour which the INCAA suggests should be a central component of a film dealing with this issue is precisely what *Los rubios* rejects in its reluctance to provide a comprehensive idea of *who* her parents really were.

The refusal of *Los rubios* to draw on the archive as evidence for historical truth and authenticity is represented in the film's problematization of family photographs. Whilst there are several testimonies in the film on the Carri-Caruso partnership, the spectator never finds out enough to piece together this familial story of militant *desaparecidos*. Prior to the scene in the Centro de Antropología Forense where the actress and director give blood, we see the fictional Albertina look through some family photographs as she calls the Centre to make an appointment. The

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<sup>197</sup> Vezzetti, p. 30.

<sup>198</sup> Nouzeilles, p. 274.



camera moves slowly over the photos as the actress flicks through them, and eventually rests on a red-covered book, *Isidro Velázquez*, written by Roberto Carri, Albertina's father. Souvenirs of a family life become props in the reenactment of Albertina's identity since they seemingly have no narrative importance other than to bear witness to the fact that the family once existed and has a memory in archives. Moreover, the photographs, which decorate the room where the actress is editing the film and which we see in close-up on a number of occasions, depict the daughters as children but the frame cuts the images of their parents at the hips, once again resisting the temptation to offer an image of the parents which would facilitate an approximation of what they were *really* like. The photographs, then, like the testimonies, 'forman una maraña indiscernible en la que se mezclan y se superponen series de caras que nunca se nuclean alrededor de un nombre'.<sup>199</sup>

#### THE LAW OF THE FATHER

Alongside the testimonies of friends and family who knew the director's parents, the voices of Roberto Carri and Ana María Caruso are also woven into the myriad narratives articulated in *Los rubios*. Immediately following the opening Playmobil sequence discussed above, the film brings the question of her parents' voices to the forefront of representation as the fictional Albertina reads out a passage from her father's published book *Isidro Velázquez: formas pre-revolucionarias de la violencia* (1968). What at first glance seems to pay homage to the intellectual work of her militant father, in fact turns out to be a citation within a citation: the section of the book which is read out was not authored by her father.<sup>200</sup> This scene, then, could be interpreted as Albertina Carri's refusal of her father's name as originator of her identity. Ana Amado has discussed the role of the Lacanian *nom/n du père* in connection with the prevalence of daughters' narratives in recent cultural production. According to Amado,

Las películas de Carri y Roqué [*Papá Iván*], o el *collage* fotográfico en el que Lucila Quieto simula visitar en los setenta a su padre desaparecido ['Arqueología de la ausencia', 2001], muestran de entrada el ademán de hijas obedientes a las cláusulas de la ley del nombre. Sondan el pasado familiar bajo el principio de 'adicción al padre' que, más allá de la novela freudiana,

<sup>199</sup> Verónica Garibotto & Antonio Gómez, 'Más allá del "formato memoria": la representación del imaginario postdictatorial en *Los rubios* de Albertina Carri', *A Contra corriente*, 3.2 (Winter 2006), 107-126 (p. 118).

<sup>200</sup> Nouzeilles, p. 271.

encuentra su punto extremo de ficción en la tragedia griega: en nombre de la ley del nombre o de la transmisión pendiente las intervenciones de estas hijas insisten, como la diosa Atenea, en conceder al logos paterno el precepto receptor de la escena del pasado.<sup>201</sup>

Carri's film, however, in its polyphonic narrative, refuses Roberto Carri's voice where her mother's is acknowledged. The apparent inclusion of his voice, by way of the citation from his book, turns out to be misleading, whilst Ana María Caruso's voice is brought to life in the reading of one of the letters she sent to Albertina on her birthday. The mother's voice appears, then, as 'bastión de otro modo de la verdad o como frontón disponible para el reclamo. En *Los rubios*, Albertina Carri no cuida precisamente la simetría en la asignación de culpas y responsabilidades'.<sup>202</sup> Carri's film incorporates both her parents' voices, yet it is only her mother's which resonates in the filmic text itself, and even then it is only on one occasion. Irrespective of her letter, however, the viewer neither gains an insight into the reasons for their militancy - exactly what they were politically involved with - nor an overall idea of what they were like. Indeed, Albertina Carri herself has commented on her decision to omit documentary evidence which would satisfy the spectator's desire to know:

Quería impedir que los diversos elementos como los testimonios, las fotos y las cartas dejen esa sensación tranquilizadora, ese 'ya está, conozco a Roberto y a Ana María y me voy a mi casa'. Lo que yo planteo es precisamente que no los vamos a conocer, que no hay reconstrucción posible. Son inaprensibles porque no están. Entonces no se trata de hacerlos presentes, que es lo que suele suceder. A los ausentes los dejo ausentes.<sup>203</sup>

*Los rubios*, then, is founded on its very belief in the impossibility of reassembling Carri's parents and particularly the inadequacy of the typical devices of documentary film to reconstruct their presence.

#### GEOGRAPHIES OF THE SUBJECT

In many ways Carri's intervention in memory work self-consciously attempts to break out of the chains which confine her as a 'hija de desaparecidos'. The film acknowledges the huge importance of this event in her life but does not suggest that it should be the totality of her experience of the world; her work as a filmmaker in

<sup>201</sup> Amado, 'Órdenes de la memoria', p. 58.

<sup>202</sup> Ana Amado, 'Ficciones críticas de la memoria', *Cinemas*, 37 (October-December 2004), 177-197 (p. 189).

<sup>203</sup> Albertina Carri, cited in María Moreno, 'Esa rubia debilidad'.

part seems to attempt to redress this balance. In more ways than one, it aesthetically challenges the viewer with its innovative melange of styles and techniques. At the core of the film, however, is a revisiting of some of the recurrent tropes of postdictatorship memory in Argentina - testimonies which arouse the spectator's disbelief as the neighbours of the family suggest that they knew nothing of the events of the Carri-Caruso disappearance; visual motifs of bodies which reference the disappeared throughout the film, and allusions to the places where the victims were detained and tortured. Yet it is the overtly personal, first-person perspective on *place* and the *multiplicity of identity* which makes this film comparable to Sandra Kogut's *Um Passaporte Húngaro*.

Carri's identity and memory in *Los rubios* are structured around three key locations in the story of her parents' disappearance and in her own autobiography.<sup>204</sup> The *barrio*, the neighbourhood when she spent her early years and where her parents were abducted; the *campo*, the countryside, where she first moved when her parents were taken and later deemed *desaparecidos*; and finally, the *ciudad*, Buenos Aires, where she moved to go to school for a period as a child. Each location in the film is marked by a particular aesthetic. The *barrio*, the site of the original scene of the crime, appears as a place of enduring community but also the place of suspicion and denial. The eye-witness accounts of her parents' abductions do not provoke belief but rather astonishment at the impossibility of finding a true account of the events.<sup>205</sup> The *campo* is configured as a place of happiness, and the actress's voiceover in the film registers this emotion as she talks of the freedom she experienced at her aunt and uncle's home when she moved there following her parents' abduction. Moreover, the countryside is often present in the audio track, through the repeated sounds of wildlife. In *Los rubios* Carri states that the countryside constitutes the beginning of her memory: 'es el lugar de la fantasía, o, donde empieza mi memoria'. The relationship she holds with the countryside, however, is fraught with anxiety as the very freedom and enjoyment she found in the animals and fields was a direct consequence of her parents' disappearance.

After some years in the country, Carri and her sisters moved to the capital and she was registered at a Catholic girls' school. In an interview with María

<sup>204</sup> Page, 'Memory and Mediation', p. 31.

<sup>205</sup> Indeed, the opinions which transpire in the interviews with the neighbours bear striking similarities to the eye-witness accounts proffered in *Shoah* (Claude Lanzmann, 1985). Both films attest to the continuing legacy of dictatorship and anti-Semitic discourse.

Moreno, Carri stresses how the move from country to city was traumatic for her. In *Los rubios* this same impression of hostility is depicted in the harsh lines of the roads, flyovers, and concrete buildings of Buenos Aires. The city here emerges as the battleground of the Dirty War as the director and her crew visit, armed with a copy of the *Nunca más* report, the torture centre where her parents were disappeared, *el Sheraton* – which remains to this day a police station – and the Centre for Forensic Anthropology, where research into the disappeared takes place. Contrary to the bright sunny days and colours of the footage in the country, the city appears in monotone greys and wet weather.

All the places, therefore, bring different perspectives to the story of her parents and reflect aspects of Albertina's own experience of place. Her memories of her childhood and adolescence are reflected in the aesthetic of the film, and the possibility of an alternative family, the film crew, is also tellingly suggested in the *campo*, where Carri herself lived in an alternatively configured family with her aunt and uncle. Indeed, space and identity play an important role in her filmic *oeuvre* to date. *No quiero volver a casa* evokes the *menemista* era in a police thriller set in Buenos Aires which also revolves around the family. Carri's most recent film, *La rabia*, considers the violence of the countryside in its depiction of the carnal instincts which characterize its protagonists and the violence which surrounds them. *Los rubios*'s exploration of space is, then, integral to the different narrative devices the film draws upon: the interviews occur in the family's *barrio* where they were stigmatized for being *otro*, different; the city evokes the ongoing legacy of the dictatorship in its buildings and is also the site of the editing of the film; and finally, *el campo* emerges in the Playmobil sequences as an idyllic place which holds an important, if ambivalent, position in Carri's life. These connotations of place contribute to the spectator's understanding of Carri's dispersed identity.

However, for a director so concerned with breaking down existing structures of identity, her films could be criticized for buying into the longstanding and intensely problematic dichotomy between *civilización y barbarie*, *ciudad y campo*. Whilst the country provides the backdrop for the formation of Carri's alternative family - the film crew - and thus offers a safe haven for Carri's identity, it could also be argued that *Los rubios*'s depiction of the countryside resonates with the bucolic representations of *barbarie* so entrenched in Argentine literary culture. In this

respect, the film goes some way to reifying the existing discourses of progress and identity even as it destabilizes the notion of a fixed, pure and coherent self.

#### JOURNEYS OF SELF-DISCOVERY

The juxtaposition of places around the globe in the case of Kogut's film and of locations such as *barrio*, *campo*, and *ciudad* in *Los rubios* registers new subjective experiences of space in connection with national and *transnational* histories. Both films are generated from a desire to document the directors' subjective experience of identity formation and memory, and frequently reference the journeys between places which contribute to an understanding of their subjectivity. Indeed, the journey is a powerful cinematic motif of identity formation.

According to Jorge Ruffinelli (2002) and José Carlos Avellar (2003), the pronounced emphasis on the family, or more specifically on the search for a father, is a central thematic of Latin American films of the 1990s. Avellar perceives the absence of father figures, or at least their physical absence, as an indicator of the loss of utopian ideals following the fall of dictatorships in many countries, and of the lack of prospects leading up to the new millennium.<sup>206</sup> Furthermore, the notion of absence and loss is premised on an inherently positive understanding of the father figure, an idealistic assumption based on traditional notions of the family unit. Citing films such as Fernando Solanas's *El viaje* (1992) and Walter Salles's *Central do Brasil* (1998) both Avellar and Ruffinelli posit that the father figure and the family unit more broadly suggest a questioning of the national, particularly referencing those films whose very narrative structure depends on the search for the protagonists' biological father.<sup>207</sup> As Avellar suggests:

Na mesma medida em que nos filmes da década de 1960 as relações familiares e os traços individuais dos personagens apareciam fora de foco, para que eles pudessem ser compreendidos enquanto representações da cena política e social, para deslocar o conflito do particular para o geral, na mesma medida, nos filmes que começamos a fazer na década de 1990 o foco parece se concentrar no indivíduo e nas relações familiares, para que os personagens possam ser sentidos enquanto reafirmação da cena política e social no indivíduo, na família: *o pai como o país*.<sup>208</sup> [my emphasis]

<sup>206</sup> José Carlos Avellar, 'Pai/País/Mãe/Patria', *Alcéu*, 8.15 (July-December 2007), 215-237.

<sup>207</sup> It is worth noting that Walter Salles and Daniela Thomas's most recent film, *Linha de Passe* (2008), also revolves around the search for a father in an unforgiving and sprawling urban landscape.

<sup>208</sup> Avellar, 'Pai/País/Mãe/Patria', p. 226.

In this light, the family is understood as a filmic cipher for broader societal concerns and specifically the boundaries of the nation. The relevance of the theme of the family in films since the 1990s, then, relates on the one hand to the importance of the family in the democratic project following the periods of state terror, and on the other, to the enhanced economic instability caused by the debt crises of the 'lost decade' of the 1980s.<sup>209</sup>

A similar relationship between the nation-state and family ties is very explicitly described in the following passage by Ana Amado:

La ruptura de los pactos de filiación por parte del Estado-nación es la llaga abierta en la actual catástrofe política y social del país, por la que los familiares de las víctimas desaparecidas demandan simultáneamente. Perdido del derecho político a la referencia, ellos, al igual que las víctimas de la salvaje exclusión neoliberal, aparecen expulsados de las posibilidades subjetivas de integrarse a la filiación social.<sup>210</sup>

Referencing the postdictatorship climate in Argentina, Amado underlines how the state may be deemed responsible for the breakdown of social and familial networks as a result of both the dictatorship's violence and the economic violence of neoliberalism. Indeed, many view the ascent of neoliberal policies in Argentina and Brazil as an extension of the logic of the dictatorship itself, something I will return to in the next chapter with my discussion of *La fe del volcán* (Ana Poliak, 2001). Thus, in both Argentina and Brazil the demands of citizens for justice for the disappeared make the nation-state accountable for the atrocities which preceded the democratic governments of the mid-1980s. These demands, internationally renowned under the name of the celebrated *Madres de Plaza de Mayo* and similar groups in Brazil, such as the *Comissão dos Familiares de Mortos e Desaparecidos Políticos*, once again underline the law of the name and genealogical protest.

The use of the journey motif which Avellar and Ruffinelli describe as a paradigm through which to investigate the protagonists' identity and desires and to reflect national identity may also illuminate the genealogical journeys of Sandra Kogut and Albertina Carri. As Ruffinelli states, 'tradicionalmente, la búsqueda del padre por el hijo ha implicado la intención de éste por capturar su identidad del

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<sup>209</sup> The 1980s have been branded the 'lost decade' as a result of the disastrous consequences of many Latin American countries' debt crises, exacerbated by the debt accrued under authoritarian rule in the case of Brazil and Argentina and the neoliberal policies encouraged by the IMF during this period. See Duncan Green, *Silent Revolution: The Rise and Crisis of Market Economics in Latin America* (London: Latin American Bureau, 2003) for more information on this topic.

<sup>210</sup> Amado, 'Herencias', p. 140.

origen y, en consecuencia, una certidumbre a partir de la cual tomar fuerza para continuar viviendo y dar sentido a la vida'.<sup>211</sup> Habitually, then, the encounter with one's origins – particularly the father as generator of the family name in many cultures – is seen to be a stabilizing factor.

However, in both *Passaporte* and *Los rubios* the search for ancestral roots and memory does not bear fruit in terms of an all-determining identity. Rather, in these films the idea of 'origins' is radically debated in theme and cinematic form. Unlike those films which seek an idealized version of the father figure, 'a resemanticized hope for family in the midst of a post-modern malaise', Kogut and Carri's journey films seem to question the paternalistic, patriarchal underpinnings which sustain this quest and which relate specifically to the histories of dictatorships in both Argentina and Brazil.<sup>212</sup> The films deal with Kogut and Carri's family pasts, respectively, and in so doing they implicitly touch on issues of the representation of history, particularly in their portrayal or refusal of the photograph as 'authentic' evidence. Moreover, as films which highlight the ruptures of history and the absence of certain documents, information or individuals, they purposefully use genealogical research in an attempt to challenge a classical, linear notion of history.

To return to the notion of directorial interference in the subjective mode of filmmaking, Carri's commitment to exposing the collaborative nature of *Los rubios* simultaneously locates her body and identity at the centre of interrogation and representation. The use of the body to exploit multiple identities and question the family unit is something apparent in all her work, most recently in the violent carnal instincts which corrode the family portrayed in *La rabia*. However, *Los rubios* stands apart as the film which has most defined the spectator's understanding of her as an *auteur* due to Carri's frequent appearances and status as subject of the film. The very biological determinism which she seeks to undermine in her suggestion of an alternative family, namely that of her friends and colleagues, is the same determining factor which facilitates her status as director of the film. In this sense Carri's film precisely evokes Foucault's assertion that 'descent attaches itself to the body'.<sup>213</sup> However, the partial access the spectator is granted to the body-image of

<sup>211</sup> Ruffinelli, 'Telémaco en América Latina', p. 448.

<sup>212</sup> Francine Masiello, 'Este pobre fin de siglo: Intellectuals and Cultural Minorities during Argentina's Ten Years of Democracy', in *Latin American Postmodernisms*, ed. by Richard A. Young (Amsterdam & Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1997), pp. 239-255 (p. 245).

<sup>213</sup> Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History', p. 82.

the director and her parents, reflected in the device of a *Doppelgänger* and the frequent three-quarter shots of Analía Couceyro, her body double, attest to a mistrust of the representational capacity of the body.

*Um Passaporte Húngaro*, in a very different mode of address, also highlights the role of the body in constructing identities, particularly at the level of 'official', state-regulated identities where the birthplace and bloodline of the individual come to the fore. Kogut's identity is essential to the construction of the film but it is rarely physically manifested as in Carri's film. The framing of the director's perspective, however, coupled with her enquiring voice and the subject matter, make *Passaporte* an intensely subjective film, even as it bridges collective concerns.

Both films demonstrate a distrust for the body-image as an accurate and meaningful conveyor of identity. The directors' bodies here are at once a 'site of autobiographical knowledge, as well as a textual surface upon which a person's life is inscribed'.<sup>214</sup> Yet the fact that both directors draw on intensely personal, familial histories in the first-person does not undermine the films' relevance to broader concerns of memory and nation in both Argentina and Brazil. In this sense, whilst neither film dwells on the gender implications of contesting received history and the regulation of memory and identity, they constitute voices from the margins which continue to destabilize universalizing and phallogocentric interpretations of the world, highlighting the interrelated nature of private and public spheres, and contesting the paternal metaphors which consolidated the dictatorial states in question. As such, they highlight the diverse aspects of corporeal female authorship in film - theme, voice, and body - all aspects which will be further developed in the following chapter's discussion of the intersection of cinematic autobiography with the trope of the tortured and marginalized body.

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<sup>214</sup> Sidonie Smith & Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Reading Life Narratives* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), p. 37.



## CHAPTER II

### Body Memories: Filmic Performances of the Tortured Body in *Que Bom Te Ver Viva* (Murat, 1989) and *La fe del volcán* (Poliak, 2001)

*'The body's knowledge cannot be contradicted, the body's knowledge is forever'.<sup>215</sup>*

- Marguerite Feitlowitz

#### AUTOBIOGRAPHY, TAKE 2

Leading on from the previous chapter's exploration of Sandra Kogut's and Albertina Carri's genealogical investigations, this chapter also considers films which contest the conventions of autobiography and documentary in their depiction of harmed and violated bodies. Both *Que Bom Te Ver Viva* (Lúcia Murat, 1989) and *La fe del volcán* (Ana Poliak, 2001) reference the directors' experience of the Brazilian and Argentine military dictatorships respectively, specifically their use of torture to violate selfhood and rupture the cohesion of the social unit. *Que Bom Te Ver Viva* considers the repercussions of the dictatorship in the present by way of intercalated testimonies and a fictional account of the experience of torture. For its own part, Ana Poliak's film, whilst building on and referencing the violence of the Argentine dictatorship, moves beyond discussing the body in this context, conveying the persistence of the themes of abuse and violence in the social exclusion typically associated with Carlos Menem's presidential rule in democratic Argentina.

The autobiographical interventions explored in the last chapter indicate the importance of the filmmaker's presence and perspective regarding questions of history, identity and memory. Kogut's and Carri's films blur the distinctions traditionally made between the documentary and the fiction film, whilst making their point of enunciation explicit in an autobiographical mode of address. The two films discussed in this chapter, *Que Bom Te Ver Viva* and *La fe del volcán*, also problematize a clear-cut distinction between autobiography, documentary and fiction, but this time the narratives are more concertedly imbued with fictional resonances. Episodes of the directors' lives are acknowledged in the films yet do not appear in the same way as in *Um Passaporte Húngaro* and *Los rubios*. The hybrid aesthetic present in the two subjective documentaries of the first chapter, however,

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<sup>215</sup> Feitlowitz, p. 61.

continues in these films, which display a marked concern for generic innovation in their fusion of documentary and fiction modes. This chapter, then, furthers the thesis's discussion of the autobiographical in women's film and the typically hybrid aesthetics of recent cinematic production.

In *Que Bom Te Ver Viva* the director Lúcia Murat, a former guerrilla member during the last Brazilian military dictatorship, blends testimonies from women who were detained and tortured under the regime with a fictional direct address delivered by an actress who confronts the spectator with the difficulties of living post-torture. Both the testimonies and fictional address point to the continuing struggle with the past when, following their traumatic ordeals, survivors are challenged with the inherent difficulties in relating to a world which robbed them of their intimacy and respect. This is explicitly associated with the experience of torture and imprisonment during the Brazilian dictatorship, where the women's survival after torture and isolation has completely altered their lives. As will be evidenced below, the women who give screen testimonies in *Que Bom* all reference their experience as a limit-situation requiring,<sup>216</sup> in the case of the detainee who survived torture and imprisonment, certain defence mechanisms, a process of *disassociation*, which separates the individual's current situation from her former self, and protects elements of her identity.<sup>217</sup>

Ana Poliak's narrative of trauma, *La fe del volcán*, opens with a reference to torture under the dictatorship which returns throughout the film, in the theme of the abused body, beginning in the Dirty War and ending in the exclusionary neoliberalism of 1990s Argentina. In the case of *La fe*, it is not the director's first-hand experience of torture but her proximity to other victims which initiates the central theme of depression and marginalization in the film. *La fe* references the legacy of torture and authoritarianism in contemporary Argentine society, creating a dialogue and continuum between the abuses of the dictatorship and those of the economic marginalization of the present.

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<sup>216</sup> By limit-situation I mean the conditions which give rise to a radical fracturing of the presumed unity of body and mind, a fracturing which is integral to traumatic experiences which remain inassimilable to the human condition.

<sup>217</sup> For a discussion of the processes of *disassociation* and *victimization*, which may both protect and threaten the victim's body-mind integrity, see Inger Agger, *The Blue Room: Trauma and Testimony among Refugee Women. A Psycho-Social Exploration*, trans. by Mary Bille (London: Zed Books, 1994), pp. 12-14.

This chapter, then, seeks to illuminate the ways in which one may think about the distressed body in relation to military dictatorships, social exclusion more generally, and memory, tracing the perspectives on bodily distress proffered by the directors in the films' form and techniques. The dictatorships in both countries provide the basis with which to begin narratives which discuss depression and survival, madness and reason, bringing both real-life testimonies of the dictatorship to the screen in the voices of the militant women survivors in the case of *Que Bom*, and Ana Poliak's difficulty in understanding the violence of the dictatorship in *La fe*. Common to both films is the dialogue established between the past and present, materialized here in the continual resonances of the dictatorship past in the postdictatorship societies. Murat and Poliak, whilst positioned differently towards their subject matter, assume a critical view of violence and exclusion which bears relevance, I argue, to their gender. Their gendered interventions in both the recounting of the dictatorship and neoliberal repression are reflected through, amongst other things, echoes of the directors' bodies in the films.

#### BODY SIGNATURES

The following analysis of the authorial inscriptions in the structure of *Que Bom Te Ver Viva* and *La fe del volcán* may be elaborated in terms of Elizabeth Grosz's analysis of women's cultural production. Within a metropolitan context, Elizabeth Grosz succinctly illustrates the political implications of defining cultural products in view of their author, reader and content in *Space, Time, and Perversion* (1995). Dividing cultural production into the terms feminist, feminine and women's texts, Grosz analyses the underlying desire to draw out defined categories of cultural production in terms of Barthes's and Foucault's theories of the author, and posits a more flexible definition of feminist texts. She suggests a "discursive positioning," a complex relation between the corporeality of the author, that is the author's textual residues or traces, the text's materiality, and its effects in marking the bodies of the author and readers'.<sup>218</sup> Whilst Grosz here is describing the process of defining written texts, referring to the specific relationship which exists between a reader, the text and its author, it is possible to extract certain elements of her 'compromise' and apply them to filmic material.

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<sup>218</sup> Elizabeth Grosz, *Space, Time, and Perversion* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 18.

In the case of the two films examined in this chapter, Grosz's discussion of the signature of a work and its influence on a text's interpretation acquires particular resonance, as directors Murat and Poliak frequently assert their 'residues' and 'traces' on the cinematic text. According to Grosz, 'as both inside and outside the text, the signature is not simply the author's proper name, but the citation or iteration of a name'.<sup>219</sup> Furthermore, this 'citation' or 'iteration' of the director's selfhood and memory intersects with issues of the violated body throughout the films discussed in this chapter. Both films, then, draw on the director's body and life in order to convey meaning in the films. In so doing, however, they problematize male-centred configurations of power and corporeal abuse, and thus speak from the margins of official versions of history and human rights abuses. Furthermore, this critique of power, it could be suggested, stems from women's positioning at the margins of discourse, as they are 'particularly attuned to the necessarily partial and subjective nature of history writing'.<sup>220</sup> Fundamental to this critique of power is the practice of torture.

## TORTURE

Torture is not a new phenomenon, nor is it isolated to the military regimes of the Southern Cone. Torture devices were used in the Middle Ages in Europe and the punishment of the body was integral to the development of the Catholic Church. As Kenneth Serbin remarks in his *Secret Dialogues: Church-State Relations, Torture, and Social Justice in Brazil* (2000), torture

has a long record in the history of civilizations, including in presumably advanced ones. The British employed torture in Kenya, and the French used it in Algeria [...] Torture echoed powerfully from the Church's distant past. Latin America's torturers had plenty of examples from their own societies' long history. Torture figured prominently in the slavocracies tolerated by the Church and the authorities for hundreds of years.<sup>221</sup>

Irrespective of torture's long past, however, it should not be considered an antiquated and outmoded practice associated only with dictatorial societies. Indeed, it is fundamental, as Jean Franco acknowledges, to see torture as part of a global

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<sup>219</sup> Grosz, p. 20.

<sup>220</sup> Diane Waldman & Janet Walker, 'Introduction', in *Feminism and Documentary*, ed. by Diane Waldman & Janet Walker (Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), p. 1.

<sup>221</sup> Kenneth P. Serbin, *Secret Dialogues: Church-State Relations, Torture, and Social Justice in Brazil* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000), p. 165.

phenomenon and not, as some may have it, as endemic of ‘backward’ or ‘uncivilized’ societies.<sup>222</sup> In this light, torture may often be manifested as a result of the global political climate. As Franco has pertinently stated ‘from the point of view of the metropolis, real Third World cadavers have fueled the “mobilized privatization” of contemporary society’.<sup>223</sup>

Within the context of Argentina and Brazil, torture and its technologies were not new inventions at the dawn of the most recent military dictatorships. In the Argentine context both Feitlowitz (1998) and Robben (2005) acknowledge that prior to the military dictatorship of 1976-1983, torture was relatively widespread amongst police officers dealing with both common and political detainees.<sup>224</sup> Furthermore, the *picana eléctrica*, an electric prod used as a tool of torture and considered an Argentine invention initially intended for cattle, is dated as being in use as early as 1935 in police investigations.<sup>225</sup> In addition to the mechanisms of torture, the strategy of disappearance – synecdoche of the Argentine dictatorship – also finds a precedent earlier in the twentieth century.<sup>226</sup>

In Brazil, the police have routinely used torture both against the lower classes and in interrogations of political dissidents prior to, and subsequent to, the coup of 1964.<sup>227</sup> Perhaps more significantly, however, the strategy of disappearance and eradication is also employed in Brazil’s contemporary climate, with the attempt to make invisible those sectors of society which are unwanted. As Bouças Coimbra points out,

É importante lembrar que, naquele passado recente, o opositor político foi seqüestrado, torturado, isolado, assassinado, ocultado e enterrado como indigente, perpetuando-se assim a tortura sobre seus familiares e amigos. Hoje, as mesmas práticas são aplicadas aos pobres em geral, aos excluídos, aos também chamados ‘perigosos’, que são aniquilados como simples objetos. O extermínio dos subalternizados tem sido plenamente justificado como uma necessária ‘limpeza social’, aplaudido pelas elites e por muitos

<sup>222</sup> Jean Franco, ‘Gender, Death, Resistance: Facing the Ethical Vacuum’, in *Critical Passions: Selected Essays*, ed. by Pratt & Newman, pp. 18-38 (p. 22).

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>224</sup> Feitlowitz, pp. 12-13; Antonius C.G.M. Robben, *Political Violence and Trauma in Argentina* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), pp. 214-217.

<sup>225</sup> See Darius Rejali, ‘Electric Torture: The Global History of a Torture Technology’, *Connect: art.politics.theory.practice* (June 2001), 101-109.

<sup>226</sup> Robben points out that ‘the disappearances did not begin on the 24th March 1976, the day of the coup [...] even in 1946 four students and one worker disappeared for several days and were moved repeatedly by the police to confuse the searching relatives’. Disappearance as a generalized strategy, however, only became implemented during the dictatorship. See Robben, p. 263-265.

<sup>227</sup> Serbin, p. 165; Lawrence Weschler, *A Miracle, A Universe: Settling Accounts with Torturers* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 58.

segmentos médios de nossa sociedade. Como no período da ditadura militar, também hoje, nesses tempos neoliberais, o ‘inimigo interno’ deve ser não somente calado, mas também exterminado.<sup>228</sup>

Indeed, it is worth noting that the contemporary use of the word *desaparecido* in Brazil is often mobilized in conjunction with a practice of ‘limpeza social’, pointing to the echoes of dictatorship practice in discourse to this day. These critical interventions in the historiography of repression in both countries, which acknowledge the role of torture practices before, during and after the most recent military regimes, are fundamental in gaining a broader understanding of the use of violent methods during both authoritarian and democratic regimes, particularly when, as the recent Abu Ghraib and Guantánamo Bay cases testify, torture is continually justified by nominal democracies as a fundamental strategy in a policy of national security.<sup>229</sup>

The evidence of torture methods in earlier periods in both Argentina and Brazil underlines the fact that neither dictatorship emerged from a vacuum; both built on existing anxieties in the respective societies and fed off the global Cold War climate of resistance to Communism. Whilst it is vital to remember that the repression became planned and strategic under military rule, it did not result from an inherent evil which only belonged to the torturers, but rather from an established conflation of power and violence for political use. The institutionalization of that violence involved many people who were coerced, and willingly acted, as violent repressors of the military state. Torture was justified on the part of the military authorities as a necessary measure to combat the ‘internal enemy’ which was ‘eating’ the country from within. The recent dictatorships of Argentina and Brazil, however, demand that special attention be given to the systematic implementation of torture and disappearance during these periods and the profound effect the human rights abuses have had on these societies’ structures. The techniques which were previously used on an *ad hoc* basis, here became routine.

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<sup>228</sup> Cecília Maria Bouças Coimbra, ‘Tortura Ontem e Hoje: Resgatando uma Certa História’, *Psicologia em Estudo*, Maringá, 6.2 (July – December 2001), 11-19 (pp. 17-18).

<sup>229</sup> See Diana Taylor, ‘Double-Blind: The Torture Case’, *Critical Inquiry*, 33 (Summer 2007), 710-733, for an in-depth discussion of the torture debate in North American society and the government’s justification of it in light of the War on Terror.

As a violent method, torture may be described as ‘the intense pain that destroys a person’s self and world, a destruction experienced spatially as either the contraction of the universe down to the immediate vicinity of the body or the body swelling to fill the entire universe’.<sup>230</sup> The primacy of the body in such matters, is, perhaps, self-evident, yet the way in which cultural production may envisage and engage with the violence enforced upon both the individual and social body may vary according to the perspective of the artist and his/her collaborators. Moreover, integral to this discussion of the representation of a radically *other* experience is the notion that such abuses are essentially unrepresentable. Indeed, on this subject countless articles and books have been published discussing the abyss which separates experience from intelligibility.

The debate over representations of torture and concentration camps in the context of the Argentine and Brazilian dictatorships draws a great deal on scholarship discussing the ethical implications of representations of the Holocaust. Given the wealth of material on this subject, and the Holocaust’s position as an unprecedented event which has radically altered history and society, this is perhaps not surprising. Theodor Adorno’s famous dictum on the possibility of aesthetics after Auschwitz initiated a vibrant critical engagement with the very politics of representation. This ‘ethics of representation’ may thus be seen as a close relative of the debate on the ‘limits of representation’, pioneered by Saul Friedlander and others in the early 1990s. In Friedlander’s anthology of essays, *Probing the Limits of Representation* (1992), Berel Lang establishes that ‘any representation [...] in addition to its manifest content, represents the exclusion of others’.<sup>231</sup> A director’s decisions over what to include and exclude in a visual narrative invoke a serious judgement as regards the way s/he views the moral implications of his/her representation of the Holocaust. At the heart of the debate over what constitutes ‘representable’ and ‘unrepresentable’ material is the question of the capacity of images to express the utter alterity of the Holocaust. This alterity, the gap of experience and suffering which limits our capacity to respond to the events, is, seemingly, also the central theme of *Que Bom Te Ver Viva*, which contrasts fictional

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<sup>230</sup> Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: the Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 35.

<sup>231</sup> Berel Lang, ‘The Representation of Limits’, in *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the ‘Final Solution’*, ed. by Saul Friedlander (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. 300-317 (p. 300).

and documentary accounts of the dictatorship era with the spectator's position as presumed 'onlooker'. Poliak's autobiographical prologue, for its own part, also references the difficulty in understanding the human rights abuses of the Argentine dictatorship and their legacy in contemporary Argentina.

The two films examined in this chapter have at the centre of their narratives both an individual and social body which is affected by the use of violence. As a reflection of the disruptive nature of this violence, both films also experiment with cinematic techniques in order to convey the unspeakable. Perhaps most importantly, however, they interrupt the discourses surrounding amnesty and forgetting at critical junctures in the respective countries' histories with gendered configurations of state violence. These films, then, highlight the scars of the dictatorship in the present through the citation of the directors' bodies and lives.

#### CRITIQUES OF THE STATE

Both *Que Bom Te Ver Viva* and *La fe del volcán* are concerned with the representation of violence and its association with the state, and could be seen as contributing to a number of films which question the capacity of the state to protect its citizens. Since the economic crisis of the late 1990s, culminating in the crash of December 2001, Argentine films have persistently registered experiences of urban marginality, indicating a concern for the disenfranchised individuals at the edge of society. Celebrated films of the *Nuevo cine argentino* such as *Pizza, birra, faso* (Adrián Caetano & Bruno Stagnaro, 1998) and *Mundo grúa* (Pablo Trapero, 1999) may be seen alongside other works, including *La fe*, as demonstrating a marked concern for strategies of exclusion which characterized the economic struggle of the *menemista* 1990s. Indeed, Ana Poliak has been described as a director specifically concerned with the theme of marginalization, as her cinematic output to date testifies.<sup>232</sup> Viviana Rangil, in her important work on Argentine women directors, states, 'subversión y marginalidad son constantes en las películas de Poliak, quien trabaja para subvertir lo preconcebido y lo naturalizado, para desdibujar lo que consideramos marginal'.<sup>233</sup>

<sup>232</sup> Poliak's first film, *¡Que vivan los crotos!* (1995), a documentary, considers a movement of itinerant workers between the 1930s and 1950s who gave up their homes to pursue a freer life. Her last film *Parapalos* (2004) is a documentary about the people who work in an old bowling alley.

<sup>233</sup> Rangil, *Otro punto de vista*, p. 18.



In Brazil a number of recent films question the state's legitimacy through institutions such as the prison system (*Carandiru*, Hector Babenco, 2003), the judicial system (*Justiça*, Maria Ramos, 2004 and *Juízo*, Maria Ramos, 2007) and the police force (*Ônibus 174*, José Padilha & Felipe Lacerda, 2004 and more recently *Tropa de Elite*, José Padilha, 2007). These films demonstrate a mistrust of institutions, notably the prison, judicial and police authorities, which purport to have the best intentions towards the state's citizens. Societal institutions such as the Church, family and patriarchy have also come under attack, notably in the form of allegory typical of the cultural production produced under the dictatorship in Brazil.

During the last period of authoritarianism in Brazil, the renowned filmmaker Ana Carolina Teixeira Soares (1949-) made a trilogy of inflammatory films, centred around three stages of a woman's life. These were released whilst the dictatorship was still formally in place, though weakened following the 1979 amnesty of General Figueiredo's administration (March 1979-1985), and thus she was able to escape the strict censorship which characterized the earlier General Médici years (1969-1974). Ana Carolina's films, *Mar de Rosas* (1977), *Das Tripas Coração* (1982), and *Sonho de Valsa* (1987), vehemently challenge the cornerstones of Brazilian society – the Church, the family and patriarchy.<sup>234</sup> The films trace the female protagonist's development from childhood, through adolescence, to becoming a fully-grown woman. The appearance of *Mar de Rosas*, the first film in the trilogy, profoundly altered the panorama of women's filmmaking in Brazil, as it was the first feature film directed by a woman to receive substantial screen time.<sup>235</sup> However, it is the second film of the trilogy, *Das Tripas Coração*, which has attracted most critical attention, though all three films may be seen as contributing to an understanding of Ana Carolina's aesthetic proposal and politics. Laura Podalsky, in an article considering the surreal aspects of *Das Tripas*, writes, 'on an allegorical level, the framed narrative ridicules the projections of the patriarchal state about the consequences of its vigilance'.<sup>236</sup> Thus, Ana Carolina's films constitute veiled

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<sup>234</sup> It is worth noting here that I am not using this director's name in a shortened version because she is a woman as some critics insist on doing. Ana Carolina Teixeira Soares is known as Ana Carolina, as her interviews and film credits underline, and this is not suggestive of a condescending use of her first name.

<sup>235</sup> Tata Amaral, 'Evolução Histórica: As Mulheres e o Cinema Brasileiro', speech delivered at CREA conference 2003, <<http://www.fedala.org/profesion/bracinemujer.pdf>> [accessed 19 March 2007].

<sup>236</sup> Laura Podalsky, 'Fulfilling Fantasies, Diverting Pleasures: Ana Carolina and *Das Tripas Coração*', in *Visible Nations: Latin American Cinema and Video*, ed. by Chon A. Noriega (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), pp. 115-129 (p. 118).

critiques of the dictatorship, integrating the Church and patriarchy into the overall framework of repression.<sup>237</sup> Furthermore, the themes at the centre of each narrative tackle the authoritarian society of the dictatorship, facilitating an interrogation of the power structures which typified the period.<sup>238</sup>

By way of their emphasis on female experiences of dictatorship and marginalization, *Que Bom Te Ver Viva* and *La fe del volcán* may both be viewed as responses to the regimes which articulated the state as overtly masculine, violent and patriarchal, whilst they simultaneously constructed the nation, or *patria*, as feminine. As Diana Taylor notes on the Argentine context, ‘while the junta embodied masculinity, the masses were feminized. And, as before, gender itself constituted grounds for marginalization: women and nonassimilable men were pushed to the side’.<sup>239</sup> Sonia Álvarez echoes this sentiment in her discussion of the National Security State in Brazil:

Political regimes have offensive and defensive policy agendas that reorder social relations of production and reproduction, reorganizing relations between capital and labor, State and family, the public and the private, women and men. This is clearly evident in military authoritarian regimes; the National Security State delineated a sharpened separation between the public world of ruthless military men and the private world of self-sacrificing, motherly women.<sup>240</sup>

Thus, the critique of the state exemplified in the films listed above, with Ana Carolina’s trilogy constituting a damning indictment of the patriarchal dictatorial order, is replicated in the films to which I will now turn, beginning with *Que Bom Te Ver Viva*.<sup>241</sup>

#### **QUE BOM TE VER VIVA**

Lúcia Murat’s (1947-) first feature film, *Que Bom Te Ver Viva* (1989), is, to date, perhaps the most concerted attempt to convey the legacy of torture in film through a

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<sup>237</sup> It should be noted that many members of the Church in Brazil actually resisted the dictatorship. In fact, a number of the urban guerrilla groups fighting against the military forces were of a Christian-Marxist tendency. See Serbin’s *Secret Dialogues* for more information on specific cases of resistance and denouncement of human rights abuses from the Church.

<sup>238</sup> Fernão Ramos & Luis Felipe Miranda, eds., *Enciclopédia do Cinema Brasileiro* (São Paulo: Editora SENAC, 2000), p. 93.

<sup>239</sup> Taylor, *Disappearing Acts*, p. 71.

<sup>240</sup> Álvarez, *Engendering Democracy*, p. 35.

<sup>241</sup> It is also worth remembering that María Luisa Bemberg’s film *Camila* (1984) also depicts the Church and state as authoritarian institutions in alliance in its allegory of the recent dictatorship in Argentina.

gendered lens within the Brazilian context.<sup>242</sup> Released just four years after the official handover to democratic rule, and felicitously one year before the Collor de Melo government completely dismantled support for the national film industry, the film was not isolated in its attempt to discuss the dictatorship in its immediate aftermath.<sup>243</sup> Along with the aforementioned trilogy of films directed by Ana Carolina, Roberto Farias's film *Pra Frente, Brasil* (1982), *Nunca Fomos Tão Felizes* (Murilo Salles, 1984) and the documentary *Cabra Marcado Pra Morrer* (Eduardo Coutinho, 1985) all contributed to public debate on the recent period of repression even before the official handover to democratic rule in 1985. Murat's film, however, is particularly significant in its aesthetic ambition to represent the ongoing effects of violent repression in contemporary society. The film's mixture of fiction and documentary is, indeed, fundamental to the understanding of the experience of the women involved.

Building on the first-hand experience of director Murat, *Que Bom* could, in many ways, be seen as a subjective reckoning with her ordeals as a victim of the violence of the period. As a student of economics at the Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ), Murat became involved with the student movement and, following the crack-down inaugurated by the Ato Institucional 5 in 1968, joined the MR-8, an urban guerrilla movement which fought against the dictatorship.<sup>244</sup> As a result of her militancy she was detained and tortured during the regime, although this information is not divulged within *Que Bom Te Ver Viva* itself. Murat's life experience, however, as a politicized 1968 youth, *guerrilheira*, and journalist permeates all her cinematic work to date. In an interview with Lúcia Nagib, Murat reflects on the impact of the dictatorship on her life and work:

em abril de 1971, fui presa e torturada nos dois meses e meio em que estive no DOI-Codi. Uma experiência que me marcou para o resto da vida. Boa

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<sup>242</sup> Prior to *Que Bom Te Ver Viva*, Murat had collaborated on a documentary on the Nicaraguan revolution called *O Pequeno Exército Louco* (1984). This was co-directed with her second husband Paulo Adário.

<sup>243</sup> The year 1990 marked the death of Brazilian cinema for many critics and professionals alike. The dismantling of Embrafilme, the state agency which supported film production and distribution, had a devastating effect on levels of production. In the late 1970s approximately 100 films were being produced a year. In 1992 only 3 were produced. For an in-depth discussion of the effect of Fernando Collor de Melo's administration on Brazilian cinema see Moisés, 'A New Policy for Brazilian Cinema'; and Johnson, 'TV Globo, the MPA and Brazilian Cinema', pp. 11-38.

<sup>244</sup> Júlio Bezerra, 'Lúcia Murat: O Cinema Militante', *Revista de Cinema*, 5.53 (April 2005), 19-23 (p. 19). It is also worth noting here that Murat's views on cinema as a way to overcome the past resonate with Gonzalo Aguilar's suggestion that *Los rubios* constitutes a way for Albertina Carri to 'salir del duelo'.

parte do trabalho que eu faço se refere, direta ou indiretamente, a essa experiência. Toda essa violência me marcou profundamente. A violência passou a ser tema reiterado em minha reflexão sobre a vida. Passei a pensar que, se sobrevivi a tanta violência, o resto é lucro. Até hoje não consigo planejar nem lidar com o futuro. Tenho a *sensação de ser um sobrevivente*, embora essa sensação venha se amenizando com o passar do tempo [...] Minha relação com o cinema passa pela necessidade de refletir a vida, a experiência da prisão, da tortura, da derrota política e da fantasia [my emphasis].<sup>245</sup>

Moreover, Murat has stated that her beginnings in the cinema were an opportunity to explore what had happened to her, and by default the experience of her generation, in order to find some way of dealing with the past. In an interview given in 2005, Murat reflects on the importance of cinema to her overcoming her painful experience:

O cinema apareceu não só como uma possibilidade de refletir, mas também sobreviver a tudo isso [...] O cinema foi como uma desculpa para poder discutir tudo isso. Acho que a partir deste primeiro curta, venho buscando o cinema como uma espécie de desculpa para poder viver essa experiência e sempre sobreviver a ela [...] De tudo que fiz na minha vida, eu tenho um lado visual, um lado de movimentação corporal. No cinema posso trabalhar tudo isso de uma só vez.<sup>246</sup>

Certainly the themes of resistance and oppression, power and its abuse, which characterized the dictatorship period, infuse Murat's other feature films, from her critique of the media in *Doces Poderes* (1997), through the colonial genocidal endeavour to dominate the indigenous population of Brazil in *Brava Gente Brasileira* (2000), the juxtaposition of militancy and contemporary drug trafficking and violence in *Quase Dois Irmãos* (2004), and most recently in her musical film, *Maré, Nossa História de Amor* (2007), a reworking of *Romeo and Juliet* in one of Rio's largest slums, *Favela da Maré*. *Que Bom Te Ver Viva* stands out amongst her other productions, however, for its semi-autobiographical status and appropriation of testimony. The 'movimentação corporal' of which Murat talks above is here visualized in her weaving of testimonies with the performance of suffering.

On the dissolution, and reconstruction, of the self following a traumatic event, Susan J. Brison has written, 'the undoing of the self in trauma involves a radical disruption of memory, a severing of past from present and, typically, an inability to envision a future. And yet trauma survivors often eventually find ways to

<sup>245</sup> Lúcia Murat in interview in, *O Cinema da Retomada*, ed. by Nagib pp. 323-324.

<sup>246</sup> Murat cited in Bezerra, p. 19.

reconstruct themselves and carry on with reconfigured lives'.<sup>247</sup> It is this tension between the body inside the cell being tortured and the human being outside the cell, the impossibility of overcoming the traumatic event and the victim's eventual survival, which is ultimately seen to escape our understanding. Murat's film, however, by way of the staged encounter of confessional and theatrical accounts of torture, goes some way in problematizing the representation of such traumatic events and their legacy in the postdictatorship present.

As stated above, the film interweaves eye-witness accounts of women resistors who suffered at the hands of Brazilian military rule with a dramatized narrative enacted by the actress Irene Ravache. This fusion of genres in the film, at once documentary, fiction and *testemunho*, provides a multifaceted approach to the trauma of the dictatorship era which underlines the difficulties inherent in representing the torture and suffering associated with the period and in surviving the experience in a postdictatorship society. Additionally, the fictional character brings traces and echoes of Murat's public persona, as a former *guerrilheira* and tortured woman, to the screen.<sup>248</sup>

Murat's 'sensação de ser um sobrevivente' is reflected in the opening of *Que Bom* and suggests that the film may act as a narrative of identity reconstruction for the director. The film opens with red intertitles on a black background, informing the spectator of the historical context to its production and simultaneously announcing a menacing theme:

Em 31 de março de 1964 um golpe militar derrubou o governo civil no Brasil. Quatro anos depois, em 13 de dezembro de 1968, foi decretado o Ato Institucional No. 5, que suspendeu os últimos direitos civis que ainda vigoravam no país. Era o golpe dentro do golpe. A partir daí, a tortura tornou-se uma prática sistemática usada contra todos os que fizessem oposição ao regime. Este é um filme sobre *os sobreviventes* destes anos [my emphasis].

<sup>247</sup> Susan J. Brison, 'Trauma Narratives and the Remaking of the Self', in *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present*, ed. by Mieke Bal, Jonathan Crewe & Leo Spitzer (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1999), pp. 38-54 (p. 39).

<sup>248</sup> Several critics have highlighted the portrayal of Murat by way of the fictional persona. Aramis Millarch describes Irene Ravache as 'uma espécie de alter-ego da própria diretora' in 'Brasil, Tortura e Mulheres em Duas Visões de Cineastas', *O Estado do Paraná: Tablóide*, 21 November 1989, p. 3; José Carlos Avellar, writes 'a cena encenada, a personagem de ficção, parece algo assim como a projeção da própria realizadora do filme, Lúcia Murat', in 'A Cicatriz Interior: *Que Bom Te Ver Viva*', *Ultima Hora* (Rio de Janeiro), 24 October 1989; and finally Diane Sippl suggests that Ravache's character is a 'projection of the filmmaker's own introspection', in 'Terrorist Acts and "Legitimate" Torture in Brazil: *How Nice to See You Alive*', *Discourse: Journal for Theoretical Studies in Media and Culture*, 17.1 (1994), 77-92 (p. 83). This will be further discussed below in relation to the performance of the hysteric in *Que Bom Te Ver Viva*.

This prelude is accompanied by orchestrated electronic music of a sinister timbre, with minor key, discordant and synthesized sounds underlining the dark nature of the film's subject matter. Following this historical contextualization, there is a written epitaph to the film borrowed from Bruno Bettelheim, highlighting the prevailing use of the psychoanalytic model in matters of trauma and torture: 'A psicanálise explica porque se enlouquece, não porque se sobrevive'. This epitaph alerts the viewer to one of the key themes of the film, that of reason and madness, and the ensuing madness of surviving torture.<sup>249</sup> This opening thus launches the key questions to be approached within the narrative and underscores the limitations of the psychoanalytic model to understand trauma narratives, which will be further discussed below.

Following the opening's historical intertitles, we are introduced to the fictional character played by Ravache, an anonymous guide who orientates us through the testimonies in the film as she questions the joy of surviving a regime which robbed her of her sexual integrity and wholeness.<sup>250</sup> This encounter with the actress highlights the dynamics of spectatorship and the politics of being an onlooker from the very beginning of the narrative. Here we see the actress removing a videotape from the VHS machine, followed by a frame filled with the empty black and white static of the television screen which then transforms into the colourful test-screen stripes as the character inserts a new videotape.<sup>251</sup> This discussion of spectatorship is accentuated further on in the film when, intersected with images of Maria do Carmo Brito's daily life, the voiceover of the actress-narrator states, 'observando do lado de fora, como um *voyeur* que olha pela janela da vizinha, meu olhar é igual ao de todo o mundo'. Thus, the politics of spectatorship, the public's desire to know and the subsequent critique of the media, neatly frame the film's enquiry into the effects of political torture.

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<sup>249</sup> The theme of reason and madness resurfaces in the following chapter, which considers the use of violent methods to repress members of the population deemed mad in *Bicho de Sete Cabeças* (Lais Bodanzky, 2001).

<sup>250</sup> The fictional character's anonymity reflects the nameless status of the unretrieved *desaparecidos*' bodies and those survivors who do not wish others to recognize their stories. Indeed, there is one such anonymous testimony in *Que Bom*, in the figure of the former militant who has a new way of life in the peaceful philosophy of mysticism.

<sup>251</sup> Sippl, p. 84.

The media and their representation of events become an integral part of *Que Bom*, particularly in the fictional narrative, as we learn that the persona has unwittingly provided information to a journalist for a report on torture. Her account, it transpires, was extracted from the *Nunca Mais* report, and was used here without her permission.<sup>252</sup> Angry and denied the opportunity to speak, the fictional character demands that the spectator listen to her story, ‘esta é minha história e vocês me têm que suportar’, followed by insert shots of newspaper clippings which serve to reinforce the context of political repression and human rights abuses. Moreover, as David William Foster suggests, the fictional character’s attack on the spectators may be seen as targeting ‘the male world of the newspaper and the former state apparatus’.<sup>253</sup> Indeed, the ‘official story’, which continues to circulate in the popular press, constitutes an attack on the painful experiences the persona has endured as a political prisoner during the dictatorship.

In a later scene the character also draws attention to the persistent presence of the dictatorship logic in the media when, commenting on an article in the newspaper, she laughs at the fact that the journalist continues to ‘chamar o torturador de doutor e eu de terrorista’. Given the fact that a number of former repressors unabashedly continued in their professions following redemocratization, this is a poignant comment on a country which refuses to hold those ‘doctors’ responsible for the state violence.<sup>254</sup> Indeed, the critique of the power of the media is also echoed in Ravache’s striking parody of a newscaster who is reporting on the location of Josef

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<sup>252</sup> The *Nunca Mais* report was published in July 1985. Its preparation, however, began in 1979 when as part of the *abertura*, or loosening of control, the military authorities made their archives of military tribunal proceedings open to the public. The Archbishop of São Paulo, in collaboration with a team of thirty individuals over a period of three years, managed to photocopy the entire collection and later edited the material into *Nunca Mais: Brasil*. For a highly stimulating account of the efforts of this team to compile the report, and of how they managed to maintain complete secrecy as regards their work throughout the period when the military was still ruling the country, see Weschler, *A Miracle, A Universe*.

<sup>253</sup> David William Foster, *Gender and Society in Contemporary Brazilian Cinema* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999), p. 102.

<sup>254</sup> In actual fact, human rights groups such as the Rio branch of *Tortura Nunca Mais* have put pressure on the state to punish doctors involved in the repression. By 2001, three doctors had been tried and removed from service in Rio, including the notorious torturer Amílcar Lobo, who had his medical register cancelled in 1988. This has set, according to Bouças Coimbra, an important precedent for other countries who are struggling with dictatorship pasts, urging them to do the same. ‘Sabe-se que nenhum outro país que passou por recente regime de força conseguiu punir médicos envolvidos em crimes contra a humanidade. O Brasil leva para o mundo um importante exemplo: em alguns casos é possível fazer justiça; é possível se produzir uma outra história, que começa, então a fazer parte da “história oficial”; uma história que, de um modo geral, foi esquecida, negada, mas que vem se afirmando e se impondo’. Bouças Coimbra, p. 17. For more information on the activities of the Rio branch of the *Tortura Nunca Mais* Group, see their official website: <<http://www.torturanuncamais-rj.org.br>> [accessed 12 August 2008].

Mengel in Paraguay. Once again, the reference to a perpetrator (in the Nazi context) and his impunity reflects back on the current situation in Brazil, using the powerful symbolism of the Holocaust context as a short cut to convey the present issues of impunity and annihilation. The film's critique of powerful, predatory and unsympathetic media, then, highlights the difficulty of living as a stigmatized ex-militant, an idea which is repeated over the course of the film. It is not until we have met all eight survivors who feature in the film, however, that we realize that *Que Bom* exclusively focuses on the experience of *women* under torture. These experiences are conveyed in the confessional mode of testimony.

### TESTEMUNHO

Testimonies of political repression of both the Argentine and Brazilian dictatorships have become paradigmatic of the shift towards more subjective narratives in a postmodern climate.<sup>255</sup> Moreover, these confessional accounts of torture and imprisonment could be seen as sharing some concerns with the broader genre of *testimonio*, celebrated by many as a literature which gives subaltern subjects, such as Rigoberta Menchú, the opportunity to voice their perspectives on life, albeit by way of an intermediary transcriber.<sup>256</sup> Nevertheless, political testimonials and *testimonio* as a literary genre are two distinct forms of writing. According to Rebecca Atenció, there are two key ways in which political testimonials distinguish themselves from *testimonio*:

First, the survivor-authors of political testimonials are usually middle-class, highly educated members of the intelligentsia (often journalists), not the subaltern subjects associated with *testimonio* in Latin Americanist literary criticism. Second, although political testimonials and *testimonios* are both part of larger struggles against repressive states that employ institutionalized violence, the former also tend to narrate the struggle to come to terms with the after-effects of that violence.<sup>257</sup>

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<sup>255</sup> Both Beatriz Sarlo and Leonor Arfuch have recently discussed this explosion of subjective narratives in *Tiempo pasado: cultura de la memoria y giro subjetivo. Una discusión* (Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno, 2005) and *El espacio biográfico: dilemas de la subjetividad contemporánea* (Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica Argentina, 2002), respectively. As Beatriz Sarlo writes 'vivimos una época de fuerte subjetividad y, en ese sentido, las prerrogativas del testimonio se apoyan en la visibilidad que "lo personal" ha adquirido como lugar no simplemente de intimidad sino de manifestación pública'. See Sarlo, *Tiempo pasado*, p. 25.

<sup>256</sup> John Beverley has written of *testimonio*, 'where literature in Latin America has been (mainly) a vehicle for engendering an adult, white, patriarchal, "lettered" subject, testimonio allows for the emergence - albeit mediated - of subaltern female, gay, indigenous, proletarian, and other identities'. See John Beverley, *Against Literature* (Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 98.

<sup>257</sup> Atenció, p. 4.



In this light, Murat's film may be seen as attempting to convey visually those same after-effects, locating the film in the broader framework of trauma theory and cultural production, and illustrating the repercussions of torture and imprisonment in the present.

The role of these testimonials cannot be underestimated, given that the emergence of life stories during, and subsequent to, the dictatorship periods have proved fundamental in the courts' attempts to bring perpetrators to justice.<sup>258</sup> As Idelber Avelar writes, 'the accumulation of facts provided by testimonial literature represented a crucial step not only to convince those who insisted in denying the obvious but also for the juridical battles that have taken place and will yet ensue over the coming years'.<sup>259</sup> Well-known accounts of torture and imprisonment, such as Jacobo Timerman's *Preso sin nombre, celda sin número* (1981) and the Brazilian *O Que É Isso, Companheiro?* (Fernando Gabeira, 1979) - both adapted into films by Linda Yellen (1983) and Bruno Barreto (1997) respectively - are not, however, bereft of criticism in their appropriation of the perpetrators' language and logic in their representation of events.<sup>260</sup> Indeed, whilst testimonialism's role in exposing the torture chambers 'from the inside' has undeniably had some welcome repercussions, at times the genre's limited questioning of the forms of language in representation has demanded a reappraisal of its contribution to Latin American literature and society.<sup>261</sup> It is in this respect that *Que Bom Te Ver Viva* demands greater analysis as

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<sup>258</sup> Both the *Nunca más* (1984) and the *Nunca Mais: Brasil* (1985) reports were released around the same time and documented some of the experiences of the dictatorships by way of testimonies from the victims, relatives of victims and perpetrators. The Argentine CONADEP commission, which investigated the human rights abuses of the dictatorship, has proved a paradigmatic example for a number of countries dealing with their own periods of state terror, namely South Africa (The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission [TRC]) and Chile (the Rettig Commission). The Brazilian report was unusual in that it was based on the perpetrators' own records of torture from military tribunals and was therefore not a result of an independently led investigation following the transition to democracy, as the Argentine case exemplified. The Brazilian report did, however, borrow its name from the Argentine report, released one year earlier than the Brazilian document.

<sup>259</sup> Avelar, *The Untimely Present*, p. 64.

<sup>260</sup> Avelar writes most disapprovingly of the form of *O Que É Isso, Companheiro?* (Fernando Gabeira, 1979): 'The most successful dictatorship memoir published in Brazil, reads like an adventure novel. Everything in the text, from the light-hearted tone or the emphasis on miraculous escapes to the heroic portrayal of superhero militants, invites specular, unreflective identification and precludes the possibility of asking questions about the nature of that experience' (*Ibid.*, p. 65). Avelar also suggests that Jacobo Timerman's testimony is infused with language and logic promoted by the generals' discourse, particularly in the author's description of the Leftist militants as 'terrorists' (*Ibid.*, p. 64).

<sup>261</sup> See George M. Gugelberger, *The "Real" Thing: Testimonial Discourse and Latin America* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1996) and Avelar, *The Untimely Present*, for a reassessment of testimonialism's legacy.

it self-consciously challenges the spectator to rethink the strategies of representation for traumatic accounts. In so doing, it shows that the scars left on the bodies and minds of the women who endured military repression have far from healed. On the contrary, they are a daily and unpredictable part of their lives post-trauma.

### GENDERED TORTURE

Notwithstanding the critiques levelled at the inadequate form and language of some written political testimonials, it is evident that accounts of torture and imprisonment are fundamental in understanding the specificities of violence and psychological abuse. Moreover, it is frequently suggested that the opportunity to recount the events accords the victim a sense of control over the trauma narrative and in some way enables him/her to re-establish his/her identity.<sup>262</sup> Given the overtly sexual and gendered nature of much violent repression during the dictatorship, it is extremely significant that Murat should highlight *women* survivors' perspectives on their ordeals. Whilst torture targeted both men and women, the victims did not experience the violence in the same way.<sup>263</sup> As Elizabeth Jelin writes, 'el tratamiento de las mujeres incluía siempre una alta dosis de violencia sexual. Los cuerpos de las mujeres - sus vaginas, sus úteros, sus senos -, ligados a la identidad femenina como objeto sexual, como esposas y como madres, eran claros objetos de tortura sexual'.<sup>264</sup> Moreover, in male victims' accounts of torture the men are invariably portrayed as 'passive' and corporeally self-conscious subjects.<sup>265</sup> Indeed, male victims of torture are often seen as sharing the position of women as they are objectified and rendered passive in comparison to the active violence of the torturer. In this context cultural production plays a significant part in perpetuating the image of the passive victim as female and torturer as male, thus mirroring the dictatorship discourse, which also mapped the enemy 'subversive' onto the female body. The feminization of male protagonists in cultural representations is, in a sense, one way

<sup>262</sup> Brison, p. 39; and Dori Laub, 'Truth and Testimony: The Process and the Struggle', in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. by Cathy Caruth (Baltimore, MD & London: John Hopkins Press, 1995), pp. 61-75 (p. 63).

<sup>263</sup> For a good overview of the practices of torture which specifically target women, see Ximena Bunster-Burotte, 'Surviving Beyond Fear: Women and Torture in Latin America', in *Women and Change in Latin America*, ed. by June Nash & Helen Safa (South Hadley, MA: Bergin & Garvey Publishers, 1986), pp. 297-325.

<sup>264</sup> Elizabeth Jelin, 'El género en las memorias', Chapter 6 in *Los trabajos de la memoria* (Madrid: Siglo Veintiuno editores, 2001), reproduced at

<<http://www.cholonautas.edu.pe/modulo/upload/JelinCap6.pdf>> [accessed 01/08/2008].

<sup>265</sup> Atenció, pp. 81-83.

to convey their complete and utter humiliation.<sup>266</sup> By neglecting the *real* experiences of women under torture, however, and simply feminizing the torture endured by male victims, such a form of representation runs the risk of colluding with the dictatorial logic. Given that there were many more male political prisoners of the regime than female in Brazil – according to a military report conducted in 1970, approximately eighty percent of the detainees were men – and that their accounts frequently emphasize their degradation in terms of the violence enacting a *feminization* of their bodies, it is important to rescue a specifically female account of the torture to reclaim the specificities of women's experiences.<sup>267</sup>

*Que Bom Te Ver Viva*, then, makes an important contribution to the historiography of the dictatorship era given that few films have dealt specifically with women's first-hand experiences of torture. Moreover, the abuse of women's bodies during the dictatorship must be seen as a particularly gendered configuration of the mistreatment of power, rendering the violence different to the experiences of their male counterparts. As the testimonies given in *Que Bom* highlight, rape and the routine shaming of the woman victim targeted particular aspects of female identity, notably menstruation, the vagina, and women's social roles as wives and mothers, as embarrassing and dirty symptoms of womanhood. These techniques, as Inger Agger shows in *The Blue Room* (1994), emphasize humiliation and impurity:

In the political technology of torture of the female body all available methods are employed to induce a sense of contamination. Naturally, menstrual blood, which symbolizes both something pure and beautiful and something impure and shameful, is a suitable instrument. Through this symbolic attitude toward her blood, a woman's ambiguity is threatened: she is no longer both madonna and whore; she is now only whore.<sup>268</sup>

In *Que Bom Te Ver Viva*, Maria do Carmo Brito's testimony attests to this practice of humiliation when she recounts how she was given some dirty underpants to wear whilst menstruating and was then hung up on the *pau-de-arara*, the 'parrot's perch'.<sup>269</sup> Rosalinda Santa Cruz, states how the repressors almost always tortured the

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<sup>266</sup> The feminization of male victims in cinema will be further discussed in my analysis of *Bicho de Sete Cabeças*, discussed in the following chapter.

<sup>267</sup> See Jelin, 'El género en las memorias'; and Franco, 'Gender, Death, Resistance', for more analyses of the feminization of male victims of torture.

<sup>268</sup> Agger, p. 72.

<sup>269</sup> The *pau-de-arara* (parrot's perch) is described in detail by Augusto César Salles Galvão in the English translation of the *Brasil: Nunca Mais* report, *Torture in Brazil*, trans. by Jaime Wright (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998): 'The parrot's perch consists of an iron bar wedged behind the victim's knees and to which his wrists are tied; the bar is then placed between two tables, causing

women naked to make their bodies the blatant object of humiliation and violence. Regina Toscano talks of how she was captured by the military, stripped naked and then humiliated as they gazed up her vagina, pretending to look for weapons. The inclusion of these testimonies in the narrative of *Que Bom* – and it is worth noting that Murat had twelve hours of interview footage with the women which was reduced to the forty minutes of testimonies presented in the film – serves to underline the specifically female experiences of torture.<sup>270</sup>

As a potent form of corporeal repression, torture and its traumatic effects also provoke overtly corporeal responses, such as crying, convulsions and psychosomatic illness. All of these responses are brought to the fore of *Que Bom*'s texture as the camera records the silences, pauses, nervous outpourings and intermittent breakdowns of the women. Maria do Carmo Brito states 'sou capaz de adoecer com a minha imaginação', and Regina Toscano's second husband recounts the time when on holiday, whilst reading Gabeira's aforementioned testimonial, *O Que É Isso, Companheiro?*, she began to convulse uncontrollably. In this respect, film permits a visual registering of the after-effects of trauma which elude verbal and written accounts of suffering, thus affirming its status as a corporeal medium. Furthermore, it reinscribes these women in the public and overtly visible domain, resisting their silencing as the general climate of amnesty would promote. Lúcia Murat's film, then, remains to this day the most strident filmic attempt to bring to light the violence committed against women during this period and demonstrate its ongoing psychological effects. The oral accounts integral to the film's structure, and the unpredictable consequences of torture, offer a window onto the experience of women under the repressive regime, simultaneously bringing their strategies of survival to the forefront of the film.

#### FEMINISM AND SOLIDARITY

The *depoimentos*, however, also enact a move towards female solidarity, crucial to the development of feminist consciousness in Brazil. The memories of the dictatorship which Murat interweaves testify to Cynthia Sarti's assertion that 'a memória dos "anos de chumbo", com os depoimentos de mulheres militantes e

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the victim's body to hang some twenty or thirty centimetres from the ground. This method is hardly ever used by itself: its normal "complements" are electric shocks, the *palmatória* [a length of thick rubber attached to a wooden paddle], and drowning' (p. 16).

<sup>270</sup> Millarch, 'Brasil, Tortura e Mulheres'.

vítimas da repressão militar, permite confirmar que o caráter radical do feminismo brasileiro foi gestado sob a experiência da ditadura militar'.<sup>271</sup> This perceived enlightened consciousness of gender politics and feminism stems from, amongst other things, the emergence of women's groups associated with those branches of the Church who worked in opposition to the regime, and women's resistance work as *guerrilheiras*.<sup>272</sup> The traditionally domestic realm of women became public as the concerns of family welfare intersected with the state's repressive apparatus.<sup>273</sup> Furthermore, the direct inscription of power on women's bodies moved beyond the home and into the torture chambers, rendering family relations even more complex. During their detention, pregnant women were frequently submitted to ferocious torture sessions and often lost their babies. Moreover, women were psychologically tortured with the possibility that their children would be harmed, perhaps in front of their own eyes. As Sarti suggests, women 'foram atingidas não apenas sexualmente, mas também por uma manipulação do vínculo entre mãe e filhos, uma vez que esse vínculo torna a mulher particularmente vulnerável e suscetível à dor'.<sup>274</sup>

Here it is worth commenting on Elizabeth F. Xavier Ferreira's work on Brazilian women militants' memories of their torture and imprisonment. In *Mulheres, Militância, e Memória* (1996), Ferreira introduces and transcribes the testimonies of thirteen survivor militants who reflect on their experience of the Brazilian dictatorship. The accounts emphasize the radical rupture between life outside and inside the camp, where they were forced to undergo brutal and lengthy interrogations, which involved torture as a method to break them down. The impossibility of recognizing themselves in this atrocious situation obliged them to split their former lives from their experience in order to maintain some level of

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<sup>271</sup> Cynthia Sarti, 'O Feminismo Brasileiro desde os Anos 1970: revisitando uma trajetória', *Revista de Estudos Feministas*, 12.2 (May-August 2004), 5-50 (p. 37).

<sup>272</sup> The Church in Brazil during the military period was strongly divided between those priests and bishops who espoused liberal theology and who fought the regime, and those who supported the ideals of the military generals and maintained a dialogue with the regime throughout the dictatorship. See Serbin, *Secret Dialogues* and Weschler, *A Miracle, A Universe* for detailed discussions of the politics of the Church during the military dictatorship. It is worth noting, however, that it was the Metropolitan Archbishop of São Paulo, Cardinal Arns, who advanced the project of *Nunca Mais* and obtained funding for the research, which led to its publication, from the World Council of Churches in Geneva, Switzerland.

<sup>273</sup> See Álvarez, *Engendering Democracy*, pp. 23-27, for an account of the tensions in the broad-based women's social movement which emerged during the Brazilian dictatorship. Álvarez characterizes those sectors which expressed immediate, practical concerns as *feminine* groups, whereas *feminist* sectors constituted those branches of the movement which advanced strategic gender interests in the long term.

<sup>274</sup> Sarti, p. 38.

bodily integrity whereby they could preserve elements of their past identity. The women's strategies of defence repeatedly emphasize solidarity with other prisoners, and specific techniques to underline the possibility of normal life after being released from prison. Significantly, one of the most common survival techniques was to think of future names for their babies with the other women in the communal cell.<sup>275</sup> As Ferreira states:

Nessa situação, a solidariedade era um componente fundamental para que pudessem suportar o sofrimento ao qual estavam sendo submetidas. Essa experiência [...] não poderia ser partilhada a não ser entre elas próprias, que a vivenciavam e assim podiam oferecer conforto e cuidados às que saíam das sessões de choques e de permanência no pau-de-arara. Essa convivência se dava na cela coletiva, no segundo andar no prédio onde se alojava o DOI-Codi no Rio.<sup>276</sup>

These strategies of solidarity and survival are referenced in the testimonies given by the eight women in *Que Bom*, reiterating that maternity offers them the greatest hope of survival.

The women who testify in *Que Bom Te Ver Viva* all suggest that maternity was also a counterattack to the logic of death which the military promoted. In the words of Regina Toscano, 'eles me queriam matar e eu dava uma resposta de vida. A primeira coisa que eu fiz depois de sair foi engravidar'. Maternity and childbirth thus became a retort, an act of defiance to the military, combating their attempt to annihilate bodies with the renewal of life. In *Que Bom*, then, the manipulation of filial ties and the distortion of the family are at the centre of the women's experience of dictatorship. Once again, as we have seen in Chapter I, the family unit manifests itself at the threshold of gender, politics and grief.

Cinematically the women's association with maternity is established from the onset, in their individual presentation to the spectator following the first encounter with Ravache's persona. The eight women who give their testimonies in the film are introduced to the spectator by way of still photographs, similar to the passport photo, associating the image of the women with a firm, stable identity.<sup>277</sup> Each woman's photo is superimposed on a background of prison bars and black, grey and red colours, evoking a carceral aesthetic, which traps the women. Additionally, each

<sup>275</sup> Elizabeth F. Xavier Ferreira, *Mulheres, Militância e Memória* (Rio de Janeiro: Fundação Getúlio Vargas, 1996), p. 151.

<sup>276</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 149.

<sup>277</sup> This use of the 'mugshot' or passport photo is curiously akin to the use of the photo to authenticate an identity represented in *Um Passaporte Húngaro*, discussed in the previous chapter.

identity is elaborated in terms of her current profession and family position, for instance: ‘Estrela Bodean, militante de organização clandestina POC, é presa e torturada em 1969, no Rio, e em 1971, em São Paulo. Filósofa, está casada e tem dois filhos’.

Coupled with the interviews, however – all shot in video, close-up, and with the woman’s head at a slight angle as she talks to the interviewer (Murat) – there are frequent scenes of the women going about their daily lives at work, with their children, at the cinema, and on the metro. Of these activities it is unquestionably the performance of motherhood and the time the women spend with their children which take the largest portion of the testimonies’ footage time. Both the interviews themselves, then, and the emphasis on the survivors’ lives post-trauma, position and highlight the women as professionals, wives and most importantly, mothers.

#### ESSENTIALIZED WOMANHOOD?

As demonstrated above, the eight women interviewed in the film, in discussing their traumatic experiences, emphasize their survival in highly gendered terms. More than once the women return to the idea that motherhood and the ongoing possibility of giving birth served as inspiration which assisted them in surviving the atrocities, including rape, inflicted upon them. Maria do Carmo Brito reaffirms this when she states: ‘aí descobri que a melhor coisa do mundo era ser mulher [...] A gente produz vida’.<sup>278</sup> Thus, a narrative of motherhood and womanliness is created which excludes other accounts of resistance and survival, which may not be linked to bearing children or becoming a wife. Here the possibility of (re)marrying after the violence and the dream of ‘starting again’ is vocalized through middle-class accounts of repression, largely neglecting those other versions of repression which may be harder to bear. *Que Bom Te Ver Viva* first and foremost emphasizes solidarity between the women ex-combatants and their shared response to having survived the period by becoming mothers again. Indeed, as Sonia E. Álvarez notes in *Engendering Democracy*, “‘Motherhood,’ not citizenship, provided the principal *mobilization*

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<sup>278</sup> Since this film was made Martha Vianna has written a biography of Maria do Carmo Brito, the only woman to assume the role of commander in a guerrilla movement. Following the death of Carlos Lamarca, she assumed control of the Vanguarda Popular Revolucionária (VPR). See Vianna, *Uma Tempestade Como a Sua Memória: A História de Lia, Maria do Carmo Brito* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Record, 2003).

*referent* for women's participation in urban social movement organizations'.<sup>279</sup> In this way, the politicization of motherhood on varying levels provided one means of turning the dictatorship logic on its head, refusing to conform to the image of motherhood which the regime promoted. *Que Bom Te Ver Viva*'s prioritization of the motherhood *as survival* narrative, however, points to the ambivalent position motherhood held during the regime. These women defied the dictatorship in their politicized role as mothers, yet they did so at the risk of retreating to the only space accorded them in the authoritarian society. Moreover, their championing of motherhood as a solution to the regime's abuses nonetheless remains firmly within the heterosexual, patriarchal matrix, potentially limiting the truly subversive message of their accounts.

The film's coherence in its presentation of women who have survived and their self-identification as mothers is also, according to Foster, negligent of other experiences of the dictatorship in order to maintain a strong message of solidarity. Foster reflects on the absence of the lower social classes in the film, suggesting that Murat's desire 'to attain a level of discursive eloquence perhaps explains why the women are drawn from the middle class, with no reference to or inclusion of working class women, who, in addition to the double marginalization of being political activists/women, also manifest the third degree of marginalization, of social class'.<sup>280</sup> Whilst I concur with Foster on the omission of working-class testimonies, it must be recognized that the leftist militants of the 1968 generation in Brazil were overwhelmingly from a middle-class background.<sup>281</sup> As a film which deals specifically with the experiences of *militant* women survivors, and not general women survivors of the dictatorship, it is perhaps understandable that the film should present middle-class women's testimonies.<sup>282</sup> Moreover, a number of references to the Baixada Fluminense, a huge metropolitan area to the East of Rio's city limits, point to the film's discursive connection with a working-class area which has long

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<sup>279</sup> Álvarez, *Engendering Democracy*, p. 50.

<sup>280</sup> Foster, *Gender and Society*, p. 99.

<sup>281</sup> Based on a military report from 1970 which is cited in Ferreira's work *Mulheres, Militância e Memória*, from a sample of 500 political prisoners 56% of the detainees were students, 80% were men and all of the detainees could read and write. In Rio de Janeiro women made up 26% of the total. See Ferreira, p. 49.

<sup>282</sup> It is also worth observing that five of the eight women interviewed were detained in the same institution, the DOI-CODI in Rio, as director Murat, and at the same time (Millarch, 1989). Given the sensitive subject material this is perhaps significant in accounting for Murat's 'choice' of sample, considering that access to accounts of torture may be difficult to elicit from complete strangers.



been identified as a particularly violent place. In fact, a woman from the area who is interviewed in the film even goes so far as to state that, ‘a violência aqui na Baixada Fluminense é maior do que uma tortura política’. Many critics attribute the region’s current levels of violence, including massacres and ‘clean-up’ operations conducted by the police and paramilitary groups, to the dictatorship era when the Baixada became a kind of ‘laboratory’ for structures of power and repression under the military.<sup>283</sup> Thus, in spite of the omission of the scarce testimonies of women ex-militants who came from the lower-middle classes, the link Murat and the women who testify draw between poverty and violence points to their continuing commitment to social causes and evidences their concerns over the ongoing use of violence and torture at the hands of the police and special drugs squads.<sup>284</sup> The film’s depiction of solidarity and the women’s continued interest in women’s community groups suggest an engagement with the feminist *conscientização*, which is attributed to the period of the dictatorship, as varied social actors coalesced around resistance to the regime. Furthermore, it performs the transition that a number of women militants made when disillusioned with the armed struggle, demonstrating their subsequent role in working-class women’s neighbourhood groups.<sup>285</sup>

This perspective on torture celebrates the women’s resistance over any other differences which may distinguish their experiences of the dictatorship. Murat effectively illuminates the anxiety over talking about this period and the ongoing stigma of being a victim of sexual violence, whilst making the survivor-mother the only voice to be heard. There is one testimony, however, which is unlike the others

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<sup>283</sup> The Brazilian sociologist José Cláudio Souza Alves writes in his doctoral thesis, ‘as configurações da história política recente da Baixada demonstram a vinculação da estrutura do poder local, sobretudo sua face político-partidária, com os diferentes projetos que se sucederam. O interregno brizolista e pedetista, seccionados pelo governo Moreira Franco e sua ligação com setores do período ditatorial e da fase pré-ditadura, não conseguiu recuperar a tradição oposicionista e contestadora do trabalhismo, anteriormente vivenciada na região. O modelo neoliberal que se anuncia, resgatando a velha forma de relação com o poder local, aponta para a persistência e eficácia de um projeto político calcado no clientelismo e no terror, transmutados, via processos eleitorais, em identidade popular e reconhecimento democrático’. See Souza Alves ‘Da Ditadura Militar ao Neoliberalismo: O Poder e a Violência na Recente História da Baixada’, Chapter 3 of ‘Baixada Fluminense: A Violência na Construção do Poder’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, Universidade de São Paulo, 1998) <[http://observatorio.ultimosegundo.ig.com.br/blogs/download/BaixadaFluminense\\_aviolencianaconstrucao\\_dopoder\\_IV.pdf](http://observatorio.ultimosegundo.ig.com.br/blogs/download/BaixadaFluminense_aviolencianaconstrucao_dopoder_IV.pdf)> [accessed 1 August 2008].

<sup>284</sup> The recent Brazilian film *Tropa de Elite* (José Padilha, 2007) deals precisely with the latent corruption and violence of special task units of the police (BOPE) in impoverished areas of Rio de Janeiro. The film has elicited much criticism in its fictionalizing of real events and has been accused of promoting a ‘fascist’ aesthetic which, contrary to the director’s intentions, justifies the policeman’s perspective and depicts nothing of the lives of the people who live in such areas.

<sup>285</sup> Álvarez, *Engendering Democracy*, p. 75.

in that the woman requested to remain anonymous. Furthermore, in her case, motherhood has not provided a way to survive the trauma, as we learn that she has no children and leads a reclusive life as a member of a spiritual Buddhist community. The woman's anonymity points to her desire to remove herself from the context of statements against the military's actions and, moreover, find peace following her traumatic ordeal. The inclusion of her testimony in the film, then, which is treated with equal importance as those of the other women who feature, evidences Murat's recognition of heterogeneous ways of coping with the ordeal. Whilst maternity has been a survival strategy for many of the women, it is not necessarily the only one which allows these women to pursue a life post-trauma. The anonymous testimony is thus paramount in offering another point of view on survival.

The contrast between the tone of the testimonies (filmed in video) and the fictional narrative (filmed in 35mm) underscores the very problematic nature of attempting to construct a family and sexual life after suffering torture, and in many cases rape, at the hands of the dictatorship. The tension between the two forms of narrating the trauma - testimony and theatricalization - is emphasized by way of devices which recognize the shift - the transition - between different testimonies and from the testimonial discourse to the fictional enactment. Additionally, the use of wipes and black empty screens, and the visibility of time codes in the testimonial sequences evidence the film's careful construction.<sup>286</sup> Given the fact that the women interviewed *have*, for the most part, managed to establish family lives in the postdictatorship era, it could be suggested that the documentary and fictional accounts dialogue with each other in an attempt to express the very fraught nature of survival, as the latter narrative explodes into questions, rather than answers, surrounding the possibility of overcoming the past. This fictional enactment of rhetorical questions is instigated at the beginning of the film when the actress Ravache asks, in a voiceover, 'como sobrevivemos?'

#### HYSTERIA AND PSYCHOANALYSIS

As Bouças Coimbra acknowledges in her essay on torture in Brazil, during the 1980s psychoanalysis became one of the most predominant theoretical paradigms

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<sup>286</sup> Sippl, p. 82.

employed to understand, or in some cases explain away, the atrocities of the dictatorial past.<sup>287</sup> In an attempt to comprehend how so many individuals were compelled to act violently towards their prisoners, certain psychoanalysts of this period, according to Bouças Coimbra, emphasized the unquestioning acceptance of the general amnesty declared in 1979, as it fostered a sympathetic approach to the repressors, which rendered their actions understandable.<sup>288</sup> In the context of survivor narratives, however, Murat's film suggests that there are distinct limits to psychoanalysis as a model for healing. Moreover, at least one woman in the film is married to a psychoanalyst, also - perhaps inadvertently - pointing to the inadequacies of the power relationship which may exist between analyst and *analysand*.<sup>289</sup> In fact, in contrast to the close-up shots of the women survivors, the two male psychoanalysts who are interviewed are both filmed at medium distance while sitting in large, imposing armchairs, emphasizing the contrast between the women survivors' overtly emotional recollections and the constitution of the institution of psychoanalysis as a predominantly masculinist discourse. The men speak directly to the camera – not at an angle – and attest to the difficulties inherent in surviving torture. In the words of Estrela's psychoanalyst husband, the paradox of surviving the trauma is to be found between 'fingir que não aconteceu' and 'fingir que não sobreviveu'. Without talking about the torture the survivor denies that it happened, yet if s/he talks continuously about it there remains no point in living and having survived. This paradox, and the impossibility of psychoanalysis to provide a 'magic cure' for the women, references the discipline's limitations and hints at its shortcomings as a patriarchal discourse incapable of allowing female accounts of trauma into its method.

Since the 1970s prominent feminist theoreticians, particularly in the field of philosophy, have frequently levelled critiques at psychoanalysis, which they consider a phallogocentric institution. Given that the founding cornerstones of psychoanalytic theory rest on the gendered configuration of hysteria as a 'female malady' and the assumption that women develop penis envy when confronted with their genital

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<sup>287</sup> Bouças Coimbra, p. 14.

<sup>288</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 11-19.

<sup>289</sup> On this subject Luce Irigaray is one of the foremost thinkers, the first philosopher to seriously consider the environment of traditional psychoanalytical consultations and the power relationship which may arise from the patient who is required to lie down and the analyst's position in an armchair as s/he takes notes. Irigaray's principal works include *Spéculum de l'autre femme* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1979); *Ce Sexe qui n'en est pas un* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1983); and *Éthique de la différence sexuelle* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1984).

'lack', it is perhaps not surprising that it should be considered a patriarchal narrative.<sup>290</sup> The techniques of 'working through', therefore, may not yield results with women who have suffered traumatic experiences, particularly considering the masculinist assumptions upon which many of the theories are based. Indeed, the development of psychoanalysis as a discipline is often attributed to Freud and Breuer's text, *Studies in Hysteria* (1895). In this light, the film's theatricalization of the hysteric suggests a broader critique of the shortcomings of psychoanalysis.

Whilst in *Que Bom Te Ver Viva* Murat does not reference her own personal experience transparently, the fictional narrative delivered by actress Irene Ravache resonates with the director's own predicament as a survivor who struggles with the inherent difficulties of living post-trauma. This, as mentioned above, has not gone unnoticed by critics, who repeatedly emphasize the similarities between the performance of Ravache and Murat's biography. Sippl states,

Murat creates a dramatic persona in her otherwise documentary film as an effective vehicle for a most intimate self-revelation. She is a foil for the interviewees, both in terms of their mystification within the culture and their meaningful interaction with Brazilian society today. But the persona is also a foil for the filmmaker herself. In a sense Murat is the ninth subject of her film, and she, too, has been 'interviewed'.<sup>291</sup>

Furthermore, Ravache bears a striking physical resemblance to the director herself, underlined by her full-bodied hair and relatively fair complexion. In fact, Murat spent a whole month preparing Ravache for her role. In one interview she discusses this preparation and the actress's appropriation of the director's characteristics: 'O que achei importante é como ela me usou como laboratório para construir o personagem [...] pegou até meus tiques nervosos', suggesting the highly gestured and physical nature of trauma narratives in reference to the director's and actress's nervous 'tics'.<sup>292</sup> Thus, one could postulate that Murat's own survival narrative appears among the network of survivor testimonies included in the film, albeit in a

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<sup>290</sup> The phrase 'female malady' was coined by Elaine Showalter in her book *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830-1980* (London: Virago, 1985). Despite the recent developments which have considered the male hysteric, and even gender-neutral interpretations of the disease, hysteria has long been associated with the feminine. As Christina Wald states, 'the heterogeneous theories and histories of hysteria tend to share, however, the gendering of the disease as a specifically female malady. Ever since hysteria was classified as the disease of the wandering womb, it has not only influenced social constructions of femininity but also dramatic representations of women'. See Wald, *Hysteria, Trauma and Melancholia: Performative Maladies in Contemporary Anglophone Drama*, New York & Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), p. 27.

<sup>291</sup> Sippl, p. 83.

<sup>292</sup> Lúcia Murat cited in interview in Suzana Braga, 'Mais do que a História Oficial', *Última Hora* (Rio de Janeiro), 19 October 1989.

fictional mode of address. In this sense Murat legitimizes her subject-position as one of the *sobreviventes* who form the subject of her film. Moreover, Murat's direction of the film could be seen as a process of catharsis since she shares her story with others who have also experienced dictatorial repression. The narrativization of testimonies and the fictional enactment of trauma permit the director an opportunity to 'master', to some degree, her traumatic experience.

The staging of Murat by way of an alter ego, Ravache, permits the director to further explore dimensions of the intersection of gender and trauma through the figure of the hysteric. Following the Bettelheim quotation which launches the film, the actress-narrator suggests that *Que Bom's* enquiry into women's strategies of survival begins with the inadequacy of the psychoanalytic model to provide an answer to understand their experience. The actress-narrator states, 'vejo e revejo as entrevistas e a pergunta permanece sem resposta. Talvez o que eu não consigo demitir é que tudo começa exatamente aqui, na falta de resposta. Acho que deveria trocar a pergunta, ao invés de "Porquê sobrevivemos?" seria "Como sobrevivemos?"'. The suggestion that psychoanalysis cannot explain why these women survived their experience is confirmed with the words of the eight women interviewed, which all attest to the continuing effects of trauma in their lives, in spite of survival. Thus, it seems their lives and identities are constantly caught between reason and madness. This intermediate state is given corporeal form in the hysterical performance of the actress.

The *guerrilheiras*, in their double transgression of societal norms, as both women and agents of social change in their combat, performed a role which often provoked particularly harsh treatment from the repressors. Indeed, as Ferreira writes,

As militantes estavam desempenhando um papel duplamente transgressor: enquanto agentes políticos (insurgindo-se contra o regime) e enquanto gênero (rompendo com o padrão vigente). Portanto, a junção desses dois aspectos imprime um significado radical à participação política dessas mulheres no movimento contra a ditadura, fato que certamente não escapa à interpretação dos agentes dos aparelhos de repressão do Estado.<sup>293</sup>

The women's 'double crime' is punished in the violation of the body, but also in the perpetual fear of madness as a result of their experience.<sup>294</sup> The constant threat of the complete dissolution of the self and identity may result in the performance of

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<sup>293</sup> Ferreira, p. 152.

<sup>294</sup> Agger, p. 2.

hysteria, which Freud and Breuer considered a symptom of sexual abuse or repressed sexual desires. Described by Wald as the ‘hallucinatory re-enactment of a past scene, which is “portrayed in pantomime”’, Freud’s case studies emphasize the hysteric’s silence or inadequate verbal expression as negative signs of her disease.<sup>295</sup>

Diane Sippl, in her article on *Que Bom Te Ver Viva*, suggests that the film radically problematizes female identity, particularly the experience of the tortured woman, by way of the figure of the hysteric. She writes, ‘recently the hysteric has been theorized as a social performer at the edge, the turning point, of making and unmaking the binary codes of gender. The power of patriarchy pivots on the hysteric, without whom there is no father, no master, and also no analyst’.<sup>296</sup> This description of the hysteric as a ‘social performer at the edge’, moreover, chimes with Luce Irigaray’s conceptualization of hysteria.

Irigaray, in response to Freud’s understanding of the phenomenon, developed an approach to hysteria which reclaims the disease as a subversive and specifically feminine form of expression. In contrast to Freud’s emphasis on the verbal symptoms of hysteria, grounded in the assumption that the hysteric suffered sexual abuse as a child, Irigaray suggests that hysteria should be considered an intensely gestural and corporeal form of expression. Irigaray is not alone in her consideration of the empowering position of the hysteric in a phallogocentric society. However, there remains to this day little consensus regarding the potential of the hysteric, particularly in the disperse camp of feminist theory. As Cristina Wald notes, ‘in feminist eyes, hysteria oscillates between subversion and affirmation, between rebellion against norms of femininity and a reinforcement of the image of the debilitated, insane, mute woman’.<sup>297</sup> This oscillation between rebellion and silence provides the foundations with which to consider Ravache’s performance as symptomatic both of the character’s sexual trauma and the postponed trauma of a society which condemns the women to silence as damaged goods or as ‘branded fallen angels’.<sup>298</sup>

The subversive potential of Ravache’s performance of hysteria echoes Irigaray’s suggestion that, whilst the hysteric may be seen as a construct of the phallogocentric discourse, there is also ‘a revolutionary potential in hysteria. Even in

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<sup>295</sup> Wald, p. 38.

<sup>296</sup> Sippl, p. 86.

<sup>297</sup> Wald, p. 40.

<sup>298</sup> Sippl, p. 88.

her paralysis, the hysteric exhibits a potential for gestures and desire [...] It is because they want neither to see nor hear that movement that they so despise the hysteric'.<sup>299</sup> The above citation emphasizes the fundamentally corporeal elements of hysteria, the hysteric's exaggerated body movements and gestures, and society's attempts to stifle her expression. The fictional enactment of the torture victim in *Que Bom*, then, with her continuous monologues and varied interlocutors – spectator, her torturer and lover - problematizes society's attempt to silence the hysteric by relating her performance to the taboo of talking about sexual torture in postdictatorship Brazil. The actress Ravache parodies the psychoanalytic discourse of the female hysteric by speaking and gesturing back to the same society which witnessed her sexual torture and permitted her subsequent silencing. In so doing, she reasserts control over matters of the body in the public sphere, transgressing societal norms which inscribe her in the private realm.

The character's claim to sexual desire, pain and madness speaks to the audience who is brought into a theatre of complicity – 'where were you?', she asks, explicitly referencing the general public's refusal to acknowledge the atrocities of the regime during the dictatorship period. Moreover, the actress's direct address to the camera challenges the spectator to consider the difficulties of living after such an experience. The aggressive tone the fictional character assumes, by way of her pantomimic monologues, explicitly addresses the public realm of the media which, as we learn at the beginning of the film when we meet the character, continues to harangue her for comments included in the *Nunca Mais* report. She alternately addresses spectator, torturer and lover and persistently emphasizes her sexual desire, even though relations have become fraught with anxiety following her torture during the dictatorship. Moreover, her constant pacing around the enclosed space of her home – and it is worth noting that we only ever see her in this private space – coupled with her nervous smoking, underline the character's agitated state as she recollects her experience of torture.

Towards the beginning of the film, in the monologue dedicated to her lover and the reasons for which she believes he will no longer call her following the statement published in the newspaper on 'tortura sexual', she defiantly declares to the camera 'com mártir não se trepa'. This gesture condemns society's stigmatization

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<sup>299</sup> Luce Irigaray, 'Women, Mothers, the Silent Substratum of the Social Order', in *The Irigaray Reader*, ed. by Margaret Whitford (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), pp. 47-52 (pp. 47-48).

of these women for having been tortured in its assumption that they will be permanently damaged and unable to have sexual relations. Indeed, the sexuality of the theatrical persona is often brought to the fore of the film, as she talks of how she desires her lover. By bringing this process of stigmatization to the spectators, the fictional character reiterates the after-effects of torture in postdictatorship Brazil. The juxtaposition of the eye-witness accounts which reflect on the past with the persona's enactment of the ongoing effects of trauma disrupts a linear version of accounts which condemns the dictatorship to the history books and limits its understanding in the present. Instead, the film's constant cross-cutting between the testimonies and the hysteric engages the spectator in the narrativization of torture's repercussions which is at the centre of the film.

Significantly, however, the film makes no attempt to reconstruct the scenes of torture which the women – real and fictional – recount. The testimonies convey the horror of torture in words, yet it is in the cinematic gauging of the women's facial expressions, nervous tics, and breakdowns on camera, that the film presents their trauma most forcefully. In place of direct images of suffering, the tortured body is evoked in the *mise-en-scène* of the fictional enactment, as, for instance, in the scene where Ravache relates her experience on the *pau-de-arara*. As she states 'mais uma vez pendurada', drawing a comparison between her torturer and her lover, a floating mobile angel is captured in the shot. The allusion to both the physical posture of someone strung up from the ceiling and the notion of the 'fallen angel' visually underlines the physical and mental inscription of torture on the women's bodies. In this way, the theatrical production of reality through the hysteric in *Que Bom Te Ver Viva* is at once a counterpoint to the testimonies of the eight women and a fierce indictment of the relegation of tortured women to private silence and celibacy. The hysteric persona who, whilst trapped within the walls of her apartment, directly attacks the public discourse on amnesty and the unjust stigmatization of women, points to the dissolving of spatial barriers which separate public from private. The hysteric here brings intimate revelations to the public stage in order to ignite discussion over postdictatorship gender politics.<sup>300</sup>

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<sup>300</sup> Although I incline to disagree, B. Ruby Rich suggests that the fictional persona in *Que Bom Te Ver Viva* actually undermines the film's message on the grounds that by using a well-known actress to relay these powerful statements Murat avoids 'the added disapproval that would have met such pronouncements by any non-fictional woman'. See Rich, 'An/Other View', p. 291.



## GENERATIONAL CONFLICTS AND AMNESTY

*Que Bom Te Ver Viva*, then, should be considered a response to the cultural climate in which it was produced, where a discourse of amnesty and healing was promoted. Indeed, the repercussions of the *Lei da Anistia* (1979) may be felt today in Brazilian society as the government continues to celebrate the myth of *cordialidade*, a fraternal ‘live and let live’ which has characterized discussion of the ethnic ‘melting pot’ as much as it has contributed to a sense of putting the past behind the country in the context of the dictatorship. As such, the film constitutes an important reminder of the effects of the dictatorship on Brazilian society, and particularly draws attention to the gendered configuration of torture and survival in its focus on women survivors’ testimonies.

This climate of amnesty and the difficulty in talking about the experience of torture as a stigmatized woman is also referenced explicitly in the testimonies in the film. Throughout *Que Bom* several members of the younger generation are also interviewed, along with the partners of the women concerned. These additions to the otherwise exclusively women-oriented interviews attest to the tensions inherent in safeguarding memory in the postdictatorship period. Some of the children of the women who suffered at the hands of the regime do not want to know anything about the horrors that their mothers experienced. Indeed, as Estrela comments on her two sons, aged ten and fifteen, ‘o que eu sinto nos dois, é que [...] o fato de ter sido presa, ter sido torturada, incomoda, cria certa revolta e eles preferem que eu não fale. É um assunto que incomoda tanto que é melhor que se esqueça’. The film’s discussion of later generations’ approaches to this period underlines the contemporary importance of cultural productions such as *Que Bom*. As public documents they have a role in educating those who did not directly experience the dictatorship as to the human rights abuses which occurred at the time. Moreover, as in the case of *Los rubios* and other recent Argentine films, the emphasis on memories from the children’s perspectives points to a politics of postmemory representation.<sup>301</sup> Released ten years

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<sup>301</sup> It is worth noting that another Brazilian film, *15 Filhos* (Marta Nehring & Maria Oliveira, 1996) more clearly emphasizes this move to consider not only the first-hand experience of torture but also the first-hand experience of being a young child with militant parents. As Regina Maria Rodrigues Behar notes, ‘os personagens do documentário *15 Filhos* lutam pela preservação de uma memória pessoal dolorosa, da qual não têm como escapar, pois estruturou (ou deestruturou) o cotidiano de uma geração de crianças pertencentes a um grupo de identidade, os filhos de guerrilheiros mortos, de presos e “desaparecidos políticos” (eufemismo para denunciar o sumiço dos corpos), com consequências permanentes na constituição de suas individualidades’. Interestingly, a recent article on

after the passing of the Amnesty Law, *Que Bom Te Ver Viva* should thus be considered an important intervention, maintaining the spotlight on the human rights abuses of the military through a gendered lens. Given that the last Brazilian dictatorship constituted the longest period of military authoritarianism in the Southern Cone during the twentieth century, it seems surprising how little acknowledgment of the human rights abuses there has been on the part of official state institutions.

Where *Que Bom Te Ver Viva* is explicitly concerned with the military dictatorship and its legacy in terms of the responsibility of the state and the effect it has had on the female victims of the violence, *La fe del volcán* draws a parallel between the impact of the dictatorship era in Argentina on the life of the director, Ana Poliak, and the central fictional narrative which is built around the disenfranchisement of a young girl, also called Ana. Many links are established between the two periods concerned, namely that of the military junta of 1976-1983 and the more expansive neoliberalization the country experienced under Carlos Menem. In this sense, Poliak references the inability of the state to protect both the director from the overtly corporeal violence of the dictatorship, albeit at a remove, and the young Ana from the violence of marginalization and social exclusion. Constant citations of dismembered bodies haunt the contemporary setting of the streets of Buenos Aires as the fictional Ana and her companion, Danilo, roam the streets. The dialogue established between the two types of violence and exclusion is fundamental to my discussion of the film below, particularly as it builds upon the symbolic power of the body from the onset of the film. Like Murat's film, *La fe del volcán* highlights the continuation of violent forms of marginalization in contemporary society and builds on the director's corporeality to establish this thematic. Moreover, the issues of performance which were integral to the above discussion of the hysteric resurface in *La fe* as the film both performs the director's body and stimulates performative citations of the dictatorship era in a contemporary setting.

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*15 Filhos* also described the film as a 'performative documentary', thus signalling some interesting comparisons with *Los rubios*. Furthermore, the film's directors, both daughters of disappeared militant parents, also eschew archival images. In all these respects, *15 Filhos* bears some striking resemblances to Albertina Carri's film. See Rodrigues Behar, '15 Filhos: um Documentário no Rastro da Ditadura e suas Possibilidades de Uso Didático', *O Olho da História*, 12.9 (December 2006), <<http://oolhodahistoria.org/artigos/SIMPOSIO-15%20filhos-regina.pdf>> [accessed 20 March 2008]. See also Edson Luis de Almeida Telles, 'Cine-Bionarrativas: Esquecimento e Memória Política', *Revista Olhar*, 6.10-11 (January – July, August-December 2004), 50-56.

## LA FE DEL VOLCÁN

*La fe del volcán*, directed by Ana Poliak (1962-), draws a line between the artifice of bodies and the experience of bodies under trauma and torture. This, her second feature, resists any facile generic categorization, seamlessly merging documentary and fiction within the framework of autobiography. Furthermore, the film's status as autobiography lends itself to a complex discussion of the author, particularly in light of the director's gender.

Unlike in Murat's film, Poliak herself quickly emerges as the 'voice', the enunciator, from behind the camera, not only verbally but physically, thus drawing attention to the director's 'signature' at every turn. In an interview following the release of her third film, *Parapalos* (2004), Poliak explained that *La fe del volcán* was 'un especie de grito desesperado en medio de la oscuridad del menemismo, cuando sentía que algo *tenía* que estallar, que algo *iba* a estallar'.<sup>302</sup> This *grito* is echoed in every aspect of the film, through both its form and its content, and is to be found at the crossroads of performativity and Grosz's 'discursive positioning' discussed in the introductory preamble to this chapter.

Whilst there is abundant material to explore in *La fe*, I would particularly like to trace the author's corporeal residues, which resonate throughout the central fictive narrative and thus create a kind of performative citation. The body here accrues a series of culturally specific meanings which lend itself to a performative reading, and simultaneously craft an autobiographical narrative. To borrow the words of Butler, the body,

appears as a passive medium on which cultural meanings are inscribed or as the instrument through which an appropriative and interpretive will determines a cultural meaning for itself [...] The body is figured as a mere *instrument* or *medium* for which a set of cultural meanings are only externally related. But 'the body' is itself a construction, as are the 'myriad' bodies that constitute the domain of gendered subjects.<sup>303</sup>

The prologue to *La fe* launches a trajectory of what could be termed a narrative of bodies: the corporeal leitmotif in the film creates a powerful reminder, and *remainder*, of those tortured in the Dirty War, the *desaparecidos*, and the bodies of the disempowered which circulate in Buenos Aires today. This fusion of past with

<sup>302</sup> Ana Poliak, quoted in interview with Agustín Masaedo & Juan Pablo Martínez, 'Después del volcán: Entrevista con Ana Poliak', <<http://elamante.com.ar/nota/2/2355.shtml>> [accessed 14 December 2005].

<sup>303</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York & London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 12-13.

present is also reflected in the *desaparecidos*' unbound bodies, buried under buildings in modern-day Buenos Aires, as the cityscape relentlessly develops around the corpses of the past.<sup>304</sup> Similarly, *La fe del volcán* constructs an exchange between the Dirty War's corpses and the living bodies that continue to roam the city, creating a poignant 'moving monument' to Argentina's and Poliak's traumatic past. This commemoration of the victims of the repression of the Junta is referenced from the onset of *La fe* in the opening titles: 'Un film dedicado a nuestros abuelos, sus hijos: nuestros padres, y a Susi'. This dedication explicitly locates *La fe* within the boundaries of the memory of the disappeared and the postmemory generation of Argentines today. Furthermore, the dedication illustrates the tri-generational development of protest surrounding the Dirty War as expressed by the Abuelas, the Madres and more recently by H.I.J.O.S, a 'name and shame' group created in 1995 committed to unveiling the atrocities of the Process. As Diana Taylor remarks,

performance, then, works in the transmission of traumatic memory, drawing from and transforming a shared archive and repertoire of cultural images. These performance protests function as a 'symptom' of history (i.e. acting out), part and parcel of the trauma. They also assert a critical distance to make a claim, affirming ties and connections while denouncing attacks on social contracts.<sup>305</sup>

In this sense Poliak's film not only pays tribute to these 'performance protests' in the dedication titles but also highlights her involvement in both the collective and personal trauma provoked by the experience of violent dictatorship.

#### AUTOBIOGRAPHIC PROLOGUE

*La fe* begins with an autobiographic prologue establishing the visual and aural motifs which will structure the central narrative of the film. Directly after the dedication titles the spectator is introduced to Poliak by way of a lengthy sidelong medium shot where she is shown standing, hunched at the shoulders, looking down to the floor. Her image is one of devastation and fragility, emphasized by the cold white and

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<sup>304</sup> In an interview published on the World Socialist Web Site, Poliak comments on her horror at the remains which now serve as foundations for new constructions. She states, 'when a wound is in the body, you develop a scar, but it doesn't happen in this case. I think that the country and everybody in it is still bleeding. It's impossible to live – how can we walk over these corpses? For example, many shopping centers are built over the corpses. They buried the bodies in construction sites'. Ana Poliak in interview with David Walsh, 'An Interview with Ana Poliak, director of *La fe del volcán*', <[http://www.wsws.org/articles/2001/jun2001/int-j05\\_prn.html](http://www.wsws.org/articles/2001/jun2001/int-j05_prn.html)> [accessed 11 April 2007].

<sup>305</sup> Diana Taylor, *The Archive and The Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 188.

harsh lines of the tower blocks shown through the window in the background. An opening title reading ‘estoy en un piso muy alto/ rodeada y llena de vacío/ tengo que saltar, lo sé/ pero hacia fuera o hacia adentro?’ follows, initiating the spectator to the highly personal and at times disturbing style which characterizes *La fe*. Moreover, the reference to an ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ acts as a metaphor for the theme of torture, whereby the self’s integrity is split into two. According to Elaine Scarry, ‘this dissolution of the boundary between inside and outside gives rise to a fourth aspect of the felt experience of physical pain, an almost obscene conflation of private and public’, thus underlining the contested nature of private and public realms during the dictatorship.<sup>306</sup>

Broadly speaking, this prologue acts as a signature to the film, clearly revealing the director behind the images, and making it impossible to depart from the autobiographical point of enunciation.<sup>307</sup> This introduction immerses the spectator into Poliak’s subjective world in four ways: by familiarizing the viewer with Poliak’s old house; by turning the camera back on the director’s body; by referencing a difficult period of Poliak’s childhood from the point of view of her (presumed) mother; and by explicitly illustrating a traumatic episode in Poliak’s teenage years. Fundamental to our understanding of *La fe*, this prologue establishes the basis for performativity to take place throughout the film as it creates ‘its own social temporality in which it remains enabled precisely by the contexts from which it breaks’.<sup>308</sup>

Following the poetic text, which frames the film, *La fe* begins in earnest. The sound of an impatient banging on a door alerts the spectator before blurred images introduce us to the door of what emerges to be Poliak’s birthplace. A female voice asks to enter ‘la casa donde nací’, and although she is supposedly refused entry we ultimately witness the director’s exploration of the spaces of her early years. Whilst the soundtrack insists on the banging on the door, the visuals rarely match the noise, indicating the double narrative - one aural and one visual - which continues throughout the film. By disconnecting the visuals from the sound, *La fe del volcán* exploits the varied layers of cinematic production in order to produce affect, or

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<sup>306</sup> Scarry, p. 53.

<sup>307</sup> I am here adopting Grosz’s aforementioned ‘discursive positioning’ which underlines the corporeality of the author’s traces on the text. Here I have adapted her suggestion in light of the filmic nature of the material for my study.

<sup>308</sup> Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (London & New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 40.

reflection, on the spectator's part. Moreover, the disembodied female voice which narrates the autobiographical prologue disavows the proposed unity of body and voice which classical realist narrative supports. By 'divorcing the visual from the verbal' Poliak experiments with the sensorial capacities of film appropriate to express the depression and disillusionment of the narrative as a whole.<sup>309</sup>

Throughout *La fe* the sound proves largely non-diegetic as although in some instances sound and image are married, much of the soundtrack is repetitive in order to evoke the visceral workings of memory. The monotonous sound of Danilo's bicycle as he rides around the streets of Buenos Aires emphasizes the persistence of time, and the occasional return to the creaking of the door latch instantly transports the spectator to the opening autobiographical prologue. Furthermore, the use of strong sudden sounds such as gongs, knocks and bangs seems to seek out a corporeal reaction from the spectator, punctuating our seamless involvement with the film. This disruption of the spectator's viewing is akin to Murat's cross-cutting between subjective recollections and fictional reenactments of trauma in *Que Bom Te Ver Viva*, a distancing effect which facilitates the spectators' reflection on the form and content of the film in question.

Inside Poliak's house the camera is reminiscent of a poltergeist, an intruder in the empty, rundown rooms, all the while accompanied by the sound of running water and the repeated squeaking of a rusty door latch being opened. These opening scenes are littered with claustrophobic shots of window and door-frames, confusing out-of-focus close-ups, which eventually gain form, and images of the director's body encroaching on the spectator's field of vision as a hand reaches out and touches the surfaces before it. The viewer becomes witness to Poliak's rediscovery of her old house, and is granted the same perspective as the director-subject-camera. Moreover, the shaky quality of the images and the strangely familiar, yet ghostly, association made between the subject and the intimate space of the house is reminiscent of Freud's formulation of the 'uncanny'.

The uncanny, in the original German the *unheimlich*, is, according to Freud, 'that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long

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<sup>309</sup> Marks, p. 36.

familiar'.<sup>310</sup> This haunting presence in the director's old home, evoked in the strangely disarticulated relationship between memory, space and selfhood, could be attributed to Poliak's later recollection of the violent events of the dictatorship, events which seemingly sent the director into a period of depression during her adolescence. Here the home appears not as a comforting safe-haven, a place protected from the atrocities of the Dirty War, but rather as an intimate, private space which was polluted with the disappearance of her teacher-mentor.<sup>311</sup>

Towards the end of this opening sequence, Poliak's body once again becomes the subject of the camera's, and by extension the spectator's, gaze, alerting the viewer to the director's devastated appearance and her own physicality. The film cuts from the repeated image of the disembodied hand opening and closing the door latch to a close up of Poliak looking slightly up from the camera's direct line of vision before she looks straight back at the spectator. Throughout this shot the metallic screeching sound of the door bolt continues to play in the soundtrack, creating an uneasy atmosphere. Furthermore, the camera is not static as it films the director's face. Rather, it is handheld and wavers slightly from time to time, thus accentuating the instability of the director's image. These sustained shots of Poliak's body, looking up, down and then directly at the camera, reinforce the solemn tone of the film and trace a trauma narrative as the spectator becomes aware of the upsetting event which appears to have altered Poliak's life, emotionally and physically.<sup>312</sup> As Butler notes,

The body is not a self-identical or merely factic materiality; it is a materiality that bears meaning, if nothing else, and the manner of this bearing is fundamentally dramatic [...] One is not simply a body, but, in some very key sense, one does one's body and, indeed, one does one's body differently from

<sup>310</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny', in *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. 17 (1917-1919)*, trans. by James Strachey & Anna Freud (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), pp. 219-252 (p. 220).

<sup>311</sup> As Robben's meticulously detailed study demonstrates, 62 per cent of the disappeared were abducted from their homes. Robben states, 'the abduction of Argentines from their homes and the humiliation of their relatives led to the violation of the physical, psychological, and symbolic safety of the home, the destruction of trust among parents and children, and the disintegration of personal boundaries. The raid was a disturbing intrusion of a threatening outside world and caused lasting damage to the self by the transgression of deep-seated cultural values'. See Robben, p. 209.

<sup>312</sup> In her essay 'Traumatic Awakenings', Cathy Caruth describes trauma as 'the response to an unexpected or overwhelming violent event or events that are not fully grasped as they occur, but return later in repeated flashbacks, nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena'. In this light I use the term 'trauma narrative' to describe the return of an event which was traumatic and played a formative role in the construction of Poliak's filmic 'narrative'. See Caruth, 'Traumatic Awakenings', in *Performativity and Performance*, ed. by Andrew Parker & Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (London & New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 89-108.

one's contemporaries and from one's embodied predecessors and successors as well.<sup>313</sup>

Poliak's corporeal existence is visibly moulded by her traumatic past, not in the sense that she herself has been tortured and bears physical scars to evidence trauma, but in the posture and presentation of her body as a site of grief and devastation. Indeed, in many ways the body is the *whole* representation of trauma in that a traumatic event alters one's subjectivity and sense of physical embodiment. Thus, Poliak's incursion into the visual renders her body and selfhood a trope of the entire film. Furthermore, 'considering that "the" body is invariably transformed into his or her body, the body is only known through its gendered appearance', and in this way Poliak explicitly references the gender behind the filmmaking.<sup>314</sup>

This powerful first encounter with the director then cuts to a passage on a train, similarly shot through the claustrophobic, framed space of the railed window. The soundtrack registers a conversation, presumably taking place between Poliak and her mother, out of the camera's field of vision. This dialogue, which in fact only illustrates the views of the older woman, talks of a troubled time for her daughter: 'Para mí eras una chica feliz y de repente descubrí que vos ahí dentro, qué sé yo, tenías un volcán que yo no conocía'. This is the first reference to the film's title, explicitly associating it with a period of depression in Ana's past which coincided with her school years. Significantly, throughout this scene someone's hands are resting on the railings of the window, drawing attention once again to the physical substance of the speaker. Furthermore, the separation of the hand from the body which is speaking/listening on the soundtrack causes a distancing effect similar to the alienation felt by the body which has experienced trauma.

The final scene of the prologue before the central narrative commences shows the director in frame once again, this time looking at a children's pop-up book, as the voice-over elucidates more information regarding a formative traumatic event in both the director's, and Argentina's, past:

Cuando yo tenía catorce años escribía cartas a mi maestra sin imaginar que la estaban torturando. Hoy tengo siete años más de los que a ella le dejaron

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<sup>313</sup> Judith Butler, 'Performative Acts and Gender Construction: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory', in *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*, ed. by Amelia Jones (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 393.

<sup>314</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 395.



vivir. ¿Cómo se puede caminar entre cadáveres sin estallar en alaridos? ¿No puede haber otra respuesta que el cinismo? ¿Qué es la realidad?

This scene, which begins with a close-up of the pop-up book's pages being turned by what later emerges to be the director's hand, reconfigures Poliak's childhood as a period of disturbance and the original site of trauma, as she remembers her teacher who was tortured during the dictatorship. Moreover, it is the first explicit reference to Argentina's turbulent political history, firmly locating Poliak's personal distress in line with that of the nation. Sitting in a bare room reminiscent of a schoolroom, she turns the pages with her back to the spectator as the camera looks down on her from above. Whilst we do not see her facial expression to be able to gauge her feelings as she relives the painful memories narrated on the soundtrack, we understand that she is distressed by her recollection of the past, as she pauses after turning the last page of the children's book and rests her head on her arms on the table, seemingly exhausted by the emotional journey she has just undertaken. In conjunction, then, these three opening scenes constitute the core autobiographical thread to *La fe*, and inform the spectator's understanding of the central narrative which will ensue, tracing a parallel between the life of Ana, the young girl who features in the central story, and the life of the director Poliak. Furthermore, the visual and aural motifs which characterized the spectator's introduction to the director's life – the disembodied hands, sinister non-diegetic sounds and trapped spaces – reemerge in the central narrative, explicitly conjuring the emotive value of the director's past in the 'fictitious' story she has created. Ana Poliak's frustration is thus transposed onto a modern-day version of herself, a young Ana, 'hija de Menem'.<sup>315</sup>

#### NEOLIBERAL NARRATIVE

Carlos Menem's neoliberal regime drastically altered Argentina's economic and social structure, encouraging lavish spending and privatizing huge sectors of the national industries, including the national oil company, Yacimientos Petrolíferos Fiscales (YPF), the national airline, water, railroads and the electric and gas utilities. Whilst his policies certainly contributed a great deal to the resultant social

<sup>315</sup> I am here adapting Tamara Falicov's turn of phrase 'los hijos de Menem', which she uses to refer to the directors associated with the New Argentine Cinema. See Tamara Falicov, 'Los hijos de Menem: The New Independent Argentine Cinema, 1995-1999', *Framework*, 44.1 (Spring 2003), 49-63.

stratification in Argentina, causing a marked rise in unemployment and informal jobs, the generals from the Junta had already implemented an economic infrastructure which would systematically polarize society for the decades following democratization. Indeed, Argentina was seen as the neoliberal brainchild for a long time prior to Menem's administration. As Paul Cooney highlights in his survey of neoliberal policy in Argentina from the 1970s to the present, the last military government received huge loans from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and vigorously set about dismantling the manufacturing industries to replace them with agro-industries, in order to accommodate multinational capital. The Junta's willingness to accept loans from the IMF resulted in a 363% increase of foreign debt between 1976 and 1983.<sup>316</sup> This legacy of debt proved difficult for the newly democratic administration of Raúl Alfonsín, but it was not until Carlos Menem's presidency that neoliberal reforms instigated during the dictatorship were fully deepened and strengthened in Argentina. Ana Poliak's film reflects the consequences of Menem's de-industrialization policies and privatization in the characters of Ana and Danilo, who have precarious employment on the streets of Buenos Aires. The two sections of *La fe del volcán*, the autobiographic prologue and the central narrative which will be discussed below, are thus symbolic of the transition between the trauma of dictatorship and the economic and social marginalization characteristic of *menemista* Argentina.

The central core of *La fe del volcán* follows the daily life of Ana, a young, poor, rootless beauty parlour trainee, and Danilo, an *aflador* who works on the streets of Buenos Aires. These two characters spend their free time together, and Ana's curiosity about Danilo's life, in particular his family, inspires the majority of the conversation which occurs between the two friends. The young girl's own family history and living conditions are not referenced, although we can assume that she lives a precarious existence. They are filmed going about their daily vagaries and chores, both in solitude and together, thus emphasizing the solace they find in their mutual company. The juxtaposition of Danilo's worldly cynicism, his own *respuesta* to the past, with Ana's childlike innocence, aligns the Dirty War with the harshness of Carlos Menem's presidential years during the later generation.<sup>317</sup> Ana and Danilo

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<sup>316</sup> Cooney, p. 13.

<sup>317</sup> It is worth observing Poliak's own comments on the shared experience of the actor who plays Danilo, Jorge Prado, and her own life. She states, 'teníamos conversaciones, compartimos el mismo

both 'embody' their respective hardships: Danilo belongs to the Dirty War and Ana to the neoliberal excesses of Menem's rule.<sup>318</sup>

The artifice of performance is key to the interpretation of *La fe* as Danilo theatrically exploits the possibilities of role-play and future aspirations in numerous monologues. Towards the beginning of the central narrative of the film, he impersonates each of his clients who live in a *monoblock*, providing ludic, entertaining interludes to Ana's dull and sad life. Similarly, immediately following one of the montage sequences to be discussed below, Danilo and Ana sit in the symbolic location of the riverside by the port and, prompted by Danilo's performances, discuss their future aspirations. This scene begins with Danilo's impersonation of someone who has seemingly suffered brain damage in a demonstration in the Plaza de Mayo and who now sells sweets on the streets of the city. This reference to another informal, precarious and traditional job once again underlines the stark prospects of 1990s Argentina in the context of accelerated technological progress.<sup>319</sup> Moreover, Ana's desire to go to school is quickly undermined as Danilo asks '¿Para qué vas a ir a la escuela?'. Following this statement the *afilador* quickly begins to perform a 'tour' of Europe, mentioning the food, landmarks and football teams typical of the foreign lands, and simultaneously emphasizing the contrast in prospects between Argentina and Europe. At the port the pair are transported by Danilo's mimicry to the Arc de Triomphe, the palace of Louis XV and the bunker of 'el gran hijo de puta' (read Hitler). Danilo's parodic interpretation of Hitler, with his racist diatribe and fake, mimed moustache, coupled with the monuments and countries he has mentioned, synthesizes the history class he believes Ana will receive at school. Thus, the performances, in his eyes, dispense with the need to have a formal education as he states, immediately after his staging of Hitler, 'eso es lo que pasa, no vayas a la escuela'. The contrast between the dream of travelling and the bleak reality that they experience in Argentina, highlighted by

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dolor, por ejemplo, frente a lo que fue la dictadura militar, tenemos las mismas heridas'. Poliak cited in interview with Viviana Rangil, *Otro punto de vista*, p. 70.

<sup>318</sup> Although the film was actually released after Menem had left his presidential position, it was conceived long before, shortly after shooting her first film *Que vivan los crotos*, whilst Menem was still in power. See Ana Poliak in interview with David Walsh, 'An Interview with Ana Poliak'.

<sup>319</sup> Joanna Page notes that the figure of the *afilador* in *La fe* represents a desire to safeguard traditional forms of labour under threat in neoliberal Argentina. See Page, *Crisis and Capitalism in Contemporary Argentine Cinema* (Durham: Duke University Press, forthcoming in 2009), pp. 53-54.

the loss of a national project in his question ‘Gardel, Gardel, ¿Dónde está Gardel?’, underlines the limited prospects Ana and Danilo have before them.<sup>320</sup>

Whilst it should be said that Danilo’s mini performances are not explicitly referencing the performative trope of the tortured body, which will be explored in detail below, his ‘speeches’ do cite well-known aspects of the Dirty War in a performative manner. For instance, at one moment after an argument with Ana, Danilo rides his bicycle away from her accompanied by a monologue of thoughts in his head which ironically restate many famous sayings from the Dirty War. The expressions ‘los argentinos somos derechos y humanos’ and ‘por algo será, algo habrán hecho’ would be familiar to most Argentines as the archetypal expressions associated with the Junta and the disbelievers who needed to find a logical justification to explain *away* the torture and the *desaparecidos*.<sup>321</sup> Here Danilo’s facial expression is strained and upset in accordance with the voice in his head, and the scene culminates in his screaming in despair three times. In this sense the visual iteration of anxiety and frustration belies the acceptance of the statements and points to an ironic performance whereby Danilo problematizes the Junta’s rhetoric. Indeed, this reconfiguration is where the subversive potential of performativity may be found as ‘while the citationality of the performative is what grants its authoritativeness and relative stability, this does not mean that it fully determines its future effects’.<sup>322</sup> Thus, the citationality evidenced in Danilo’s performances effectively destabilizes the original value of the statements: his superficial disavowal of the disappeared at once remembers the initial context of the phrases and breaks away from their

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<sup>320</sup> The tango singer and film star Carlos Gardel (1890-1935), also known as ‘el Morocho del Abasto’, was brought up in the poor *barrios* of Buenos Aires and became a potent symbol of upward social mobility during the 1920s and 1930s when his image of a handsome man from a humble upbringing met with great success. His appeal made his music and films exceedingly popular with Juan Domingo Perón’s administration in the 1940s, although he was never particularly appreciated by the working classes. See Marta Savigliano’s book *Tango and the Political Economy of Passion* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1995) for a nuanced social reading of the role of tango in Argentine society and the entry on Gardel by Thea Pitman in *Pop Culture Latin America!: Media, Arts, and Lifestyle*, ed. by Lisa Shaw & Stephanie Dennison (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC Clio Press, 2005), pp. 198-199.

<sup>321</sup> As Geoffrey Kantaris notes ‘the expression “los argentinos somos derechos y humanos” was a cynical slogan invented by the regime’s propagandists at the time of Amnesty International’s visit to Argentina to investigate the human rights abuses of the regime’. See Kantaris, ‘The Last Snapshots of Modernity: Argentine Cinema after the “Process”’, *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* [Glasgow] 73.2 (April 1996), 219-244 (p. 244). The dictatorial state publicized this slogan during the 1978 World Cup by writing it in the reception area at Ezeiza airport. During this tournament the country, and the regime, attracted huge international attention. See Feitlowitz, p. 36.

<sup>322</sup> Verónica Zebadúa-Yañez, ‘Killing as Performance: Violence and the Shaping of Community’, *emiférical*, 2.2 (Fall 2005), <[http://hemi.nyu.edu/journal/2\\_2/zebadua.html](http://hemi.nyu.edu/journal/2_2/zebadua.html)> [accessed 14 February 2006], p. 5.

ideology. The meaning of Danilo's performative citations, we are reminded, is not foreclosed, as in their new context they trace the trajectory they have undergone. The permutations of the phrases signal the collective disavowal of atrocity during and following the Dirty War and the impossibility of fully comprehending what happened. They are, however, far from suggesting a denial of the terror. Rather, Danilo seems to parody the phrases in order to contest them. His parodic excesses, then, make his performances comparable to the hysteric's function in *Que Bom Te Ver Viva*, directly addressing the public realm and contesting a politics of forgetting the atrocities of the past.

#### PERFORMATIVITY IN THE *PROCESO*

The Dirty War provides not only the personal framework for Ana Poliak's autobiographical prologue but also the cultural baggage with which to view the performative citations of the body in *La fe*. The images of Poliak's corporeality in the opening sequences are directly linked to her recollection of the torturing of one of her teachers and her exploration of selfhood. In this way the spectator may perceive a kind of disgust at the thought of living when so many people were unjustly murdered. This disgust is explicitly voiced when, in the voiceover which is heard towards the end of the prologue, she asks: '¿Cómo se puede caminar entre cadáveres sin estallar en alaridos?'. Poliak's critical engagement with the disenfranchised inhabitants of marginalized Buenos Aires and the literally 'disembodied' *desaparecidos* constantly compares the modern-day bodies with those which have disappeared.

The first striking example of the citation of the director's body and life is during a conversation between young Ana and Danilo where the former enquires about the profession of Danilo's father. Danilo theatrically assigns varied vocations to his father, a pizza maker, a Formula 1 driver, a footballer and finally 'torturador'. Simultaneously, the pair pass by a shop window full of naked mannequins, a haunting image which both articulates a visual memory of the tortured and disappeared and references the film's prologue, when Poliak makes her own body the subject of a traumatic episode of the Dirty War.<sup>323</sup> Furthermore, in the context of

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<sup>323</sup> This is not by any means the only Argentine film to use 'artificial' bodies to express torture. In a recent article, Geoffrey Kantaris discusses the 1998 film, *La sonámbula* (Fernando Spiner) in terms of its exploitation of the figure of the cyborg in order to make a comment on the disappeared in

Argentina's particular 'history of the body', mannequins and silhouettes have been shown to be a key visual representation of torture and the disappeared. As Laura Podalsky notes regarding efforts to defy the destructive potential of 'the body' during the Process, 'attempts to counter these tactics were immensely dangerous and, consequently, much more contained. Yet, they, too, often relied on corporeal display. The Madres de la Plaza de Mayo made a spectacle of themselves'.<sup>324</sup> The 'Silhuetada' movement, which emerged during the final stages of the dictatorship and at the beginning of the return to democracy in 1983, also publicly remembered the 'vanished' body by transforming Buenos Aires into a stage to resurrect the *desaparecidos*.<sup>325</sup> Viewed in the context of a broader cultural history of the mannequin, it should be noted that within the surrealist tradition in twentieth-century Europe dummies assumed a 'symbolic weight, heightening a sense of dehumanization, inhumanity and violence to the human body suffered during war-time'.<sup>326</sup> In a similar fashion the mannequins in *La fe* are symptomatic of the attempt to annihilate the body under the Process and the subsequent representational practices which have sought to remember the disappeared. Like the Surrealist movement, their presence on screen recalls the inhumane violence committed against the body under torture and acknowledges the loss of 30,000 Argentines during the Dirty War. Moreover, the evocation of dismembered bodies created by the sight of the mechanically articulated limbs of the mannequins references the continued presence of terror in the Argentine collective memory.

The theme of torture resurfaces later in the film when Ana emerges from a building and subsequently states that 'la policía me hizo tocar el piano'. Danilo is understandably worried for her as the expression evokes acts of torture from the

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Argentine society. Kantaris writes, 'in the case of Argentina, a tradition of cultural engagement with cinema as the mechanical simulation of absent bodies, or, in more complex terms, as the disavowal of the disappeared body behind the screen fetish of the mechanically reproduced image, becomes an available framework for interpreting the operations of power in the aftermath of the dictatorship of 1976 to 1982, with its 30,000 disappearances and some 300,000 directly affected by repression'. See Kantaris, 'Cyborgs, Cities, and Celluloid: Memory Machines in Two Latin American Cyborg Films', in *Latin American Cyberculture and Cyberliterature*, ed. by Claire Taylor & Thea Pitman (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007), pp. 50-69 (p. 60).

<sup>324</sup> Laura Podalsky, "'Tango, Like Scotch, Is Best Taken Straight": Cosmopolitan Tastes and Bodies Out of Place', *Journal of Latin American Popular Culture*, 21 (2002), 131-154 (p. 141).

<sup>325</sup> The 'Silhuetada' movement made life-sized silhouettes of bodies and placed them around the city to represent the 30,000 *desaparecidos*. See Victoria Ruétalo, 'From *Villa* to *Village*: Situating Argentina's Theatrical Coordinates on the Global Map', *Studies in Latin American Popular Culture*, 21 (2002), (175-187), p. 184.

<sup>326</sup> Thea Pitman, 'Le mannequin surréaliste' (unpublished MA dissertation, University College London, 1993), p. 7.

dictatorship era. Ana then clarifies her position: she gave fingerprints for her identification card and for this reason she has blackened fingertips. The abstract association of Ana's statement with torture is recontextualized in the present day, making this moment performative: the initial meaning breaks out of its sociotemporal context and reaffirms itself in a new situation. Moreover, her identification number, 35.497.845, also points to the continued monitoring of the body in contemporary society. This recoding does not, however, signal a positive shift in Argentine society. In accordance with the requirements of late-capitalism, Ana's identification number reifies her existence as a *no-body* in a society intent on policing and surveilling its individuals. Ana's fingerprints, 'like DNA testing [or] photo IDs, [...] serve to identify strangers in relation to the state. Normally categorized, decontextualized, and filed away in official or police archives, they grant the government power over the marked citizen'.<sup>327</sup> This performative citation of the abstract association with torture therefore equates Ana's interaction with the police in democratic Argentina with the atrocious practice of torture performed during the Dirty War.

Torture is visually cited once again in the film when Ana, wearing a blonde wig, visits Danilo in his humble home and the *afilador*, who at first pretends to be his twin brother, insistently playing with the limits of performance, remarks that her new look reminds him of 'la Chirolita', a famous ventriloquist's doll.<sup>328</sup> This scene is noteworthy not only for its emphasis on performance and on changing, mutable identities, but also for the resurfacing of the blond wig, used as a marker of difference in *Los rubios*. Here both Ana and Danilo stretch the limits of their identities, continuously experimenting with performance in an attempt to escape their own reality. As Jorge Ruffinelli notes on this scene, 'nadie quiere ser quien es. O bien sabe quién es. O quiere ser otro'.<sup>329</sup> Ana sits beside Danilo on the bed and her leaden 'puppet' body is, then, in an abstract way, *made* to speak as Danilo moves her head and he voices the words. The association of ideas borne from the director's prologue provides the springboard for this conjuring of atrocity, evoking the inquisitions that were regularly carried out under the Junta's auspices. As Idelber

<sup>327</sup> Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, p. 176.

<sup>328</sup> Mister Chasman (Ricardo Gomero, 1938-1999), the celebrated ventriloquist, and his doll, Chirolita, were an extremely successful and well-known Argentine act.

<sup>329</sup> Jorge Ruffinelli, 'De los otros al nosotros: familia fracturada, visión política y documental personal', in *Imágenes de lo real: la representación de lo político en el documental argentino*, ed. by Josefina Sartora & Silvina Rival (Buenos Aires: Librería, 2007), pp. 141-155 (p. 145).

Avelar notes ‘torture, then, also functions as a production of speech, not, we repeat, because torture is carried out in order to produce a successful interrogation but because interrogation is what torture is in its realization’.<sup>330</sup> Danilo, here, is therefore placed in his usual playful role of performer, whilst simultaneously rendering the ventriloquism a metaphor for the interrogations typical of the dictatorship. This intersection of performance and performativity of the tortured body in *La fe* is proper to Danilo as he recites numerous monologues and reconditions their meaning in new contexts. His pantomimic excess exposes the mechanisms of identity embodiment and fuses theatricality with performative identities, constantly reconfiguring the past in the present.

#### MONTAGE AND ALIENATION EFFECT

At various points in the central fictive narrative the quotidian events of Ana and Danilo’s lives are spliced by montage sequences depicting still lives, shots of virtual reality and the cityscape. These sequences, beyond emphasizing the location of the narrative to the acquainted spectator, effectively evoke the spectre of fear and torture which could be interpreted in contemporary Argentine culture. Dislocated from the plot in a straightforward manner, they encourage a distanced observation on the part of the spectator, and their editing facilitates the imaginary association of ideas which must take place in order to make sense of their inclusion in the film. The images inserted into the core narrative of *La fe* testify to the changing nature of the Argentine nation under the presence of authority.

The first of these montage sequences is potentially the most haunting. Beginning with a scene of women selling religious necklaces in a mall, where the sound of their jangling merchandise is amplified to sound like wind chimes, the scene cuts to an image of an imitation cockroach falling down from a wall with a crashing sound, then to a painting depicting a cyborgesque face with strong dark purple make-up, then to a religious statue, on to a billboard advertising Aerolíneas Argentinas, followed by a religious mosaic, then by a model helicopter stationed at dusk on top of a tower, and then finally it cuts to a reproduction of a Van Gogh painting displayed on a nocturnal street. This sequence concludes with a blackout screen. All these images, accompanied by sinister sustained electronic chords, point

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<sup>330</sup> Idelber Avelar, ‘Five Theses on Torture’, *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies*, 10.3 (2001), 253-271 (p. 260).



to the decay of the Argentine nation in light of the Dirty War and the impending economic crisis. The viewer, awarded the power of hindsight, associates the emblems of the Argentine nation, such as the airline billboard, with the obstacles the country will face. The helicopter, although stationary, seems ever ready for action, as confirmed in the following montage sequence when it flies above a violent demonstration on the streets, and is also reminiscent of the rapid exits from power of a number of Argentine presidents, namely 'Isabelita' Perón, who was helicoptered out from the Casa Rosada by the military during the 1976 *golpe de estado*, and Fernando de la Rúa, who also exited power by helicopter during the crisis in December 2001. Moreover, the cyborg face, with its dark purple tones, references the body once again as a potent signifier for the distress of trauma and torture. The poignant counterpart to the cyborg face, the religious statue, locates these images within the limits of the crisis of the state: the pomp and history remain but cannot resist societal malaise, which we will shortly witness. This sequence interlocks both with the central narrative, which continues, depicting more images of urban decay as Danilo observes people rummaging through a skip in the street, and with the following montage sequence, which explicitly showcases the riots and unrest leading up to the economic crisis. The montage images, therefore, work in contrast with each other, encouraging the spectator to use the power of the imagination to make the appropriate connections.

Another such montage sequence prioritizes consumer culture and virtual bodies, cutting from a scene showing Ana's dismissal at the beauty parlour where she had worked to a shot of a statue outside a church, to the image of toy, battery-operated hula girls, followed by a scene of the videogame *Streetfighter* playing on a machine in the same shop, then to a shot of a life-size doll, boasting accentuated breasts and a blond wig, as it moves its hands from side to side against a bright blue sky. These 'objects', or still lives, seemingly inserted in the film completely devoid of narrative meaning, assume significance as they encourage the abstract association of ideas with the body. These virtual bodies which perforate the core narrative depict the annihilation of the innocent experience of the body in a culture which is persistently haunted by the disappeared and their dismemberment. Like the artificial bodies displayed in the montage sequence, young Ana's job in a beauty parlour shows her working on heads of mannequins, disjointed body parts, which evoke the history of torture. Furthermore, her restructuring of the mannequin heads points to

the performative nature of the body in that the figures assimilate the overarching notions of beauty and conventions of the female body in society. The juxtaposition of old (monuments) and new (electronic dolls and video games) in these montage sequences effectively suggests a parallel between the dismembering of bodies and that of the Argentine nation. Furthermore, they signal the growth of consumer culture and the prevalence of simulacra in *menemista* Argentina, as well as the complete aesthetic domination by the virtual and ideal body in contemporary society. Thus, virtual bodies which would purportedly enact the ultimate in performativity in that they only exist in a mechanical vacuum, obtain a poignant relevance as both the markers of the perfect female body and as the dismembered figure of torture. In this way the virtual bodies are both symptomatic of the contemporary alienation of the body, and simultaneously make reference to the very real suffering of bodies under torture.

The distancing effect of the montage sequences, with their attention to the virtual body, is, then, similar to the radical performance of hysteria in Murat's film which perforates the documentary testimonies. Considered together, the montage sequences, Danilo's performances and Irene Ravache's embodiment of the hysteric all interrupt an emotional involvement with the narrative and demand engagement on the part of the spectator to understand their relevance to the narrative. Moreover, they reference the directors' experimentation with cinematic language as a necessary technique to convey the painful and traumatic. As Elaine Scarry points out, 'intense pain is also language-destroying: as the content of one's world disintegrates, so the content of one's language disintegrates; as the self disintegrates, so that which would express and project the self is robbed of its source and its subject'.<sup>331</sup> So too could the linear, classical cinematic language be deemed inadequate for conveying trauma.

The instability in the editing of images finds its parallel in the film's use of sound, and this is brought to its most powerful culmination at the film's close. The unsteadiness of the sound and image in *La fe*, by way of Poliak's shaky camera and the vagabond sounds, persistently suggests instability and movement. The prologue implicates the spectator in an emotional journey with the director and this travelling motif is taken full circle with the closing scene of *La fe*. The extremely lengthy final scene follows young Ana walking down the central reservation of a dual carriageway

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<sup>331</sup> Scarry, p. 35.

accompanied by the voiceover of a disillusioned Danilo. The shot of Ana's silhouette, emphasized by her black clothes, is a powerful and moving image. Ana's body and Danilo's monologue simultaneously conjure the contours of all the 'unknown' bodies which were 'disappeared' and the power which Ana holds inside, as she walks away from the city towards an uncertain future. '¿Cuánto hace que estamos escavando y buscando huesos para rearmar cuerpos como rompecabezas y saber de quienes son?', asks Danilo. 'Sé que hay algo en mí que hace saltar las piedras...**La fe del volcán**', responds Poliak to close the film.

*La fe del volcán*'s autobiographical framework makes the film a highly personal perspective on the redefinition of the body in the aftermath of Argentina's Dirty War. The cinematic signifiers which elaborate the performative trope of the tortured body extend from the very first images of *La fe*, when Poliak's appearance illustrates the aftermath of a traumatic experience. Moreover, whilst the director herself was not, as far as we understand from the film, subjected to torture, her vicarious suffering demonstrates the workings of trauma in Argentina's postmemory generation, and reveals the ongoing repercussions of the Process in contemporary society. Perhaps one could even dare to suggest that the film constituted some sort of 'working through' for Poliak, a right of passage to enable her to pursue her filmic career in perhaps more frivolous ways.<sup>332</sup> In this sense *La fe* may be comparable to Murat's film, as they both appear as challenges for the directors to overcome.

#### AUTHORSHIP, CORPOREALITY AND SENSE MEMORY

To return to Grosz's analysis of authorship I would like to reiterate that the 'discursive positioning', of which she writes, assumes particular relevance in the cases of the two films examined here as a result of the directors' identity and corporeality, which are represented in different ways in the films. This 'discursive positioning' is, in a sense, inevitable as we are unwittingly involved in the lives of the directors, who bring their respective trauma and subjectivity to the screen. In the case of *Que Bom Te Ver Viva*, Murat's position and identity as a tortured ex-militant woman who continues to suffer from the repercussions of violence, is transposed

<sup>332</sup> Ana Poliak stated in interview that after completing *La fe del volcán* 'me sentí liberada. Y al pensar en una idea para mi siguiente película, sí tuve claro que quería hacer una película más accesible. Con *Parapalos* me propuse hacer una película más simple y luminosa. Espero haberlo logrado'. Ana Poliak in interview with Carolina Giudici, 'Entrevista Ana Poliak: "Me propuse hacer una película simple y luminosa"' [n.d], <<http://www.cinenacional.com/notas/index.php?nota=456>> [accessed 14 December 2005].

onto the screen in the figure of the hysteric, played by Irene Ravache. Ana Poliak's prologue, for its own part, frames the entire narrative with the director's subjectivity and simultaneously sows the seed for the development of the despair and frustration of another Ana in the central narrative, that of a poor girl in neoliberal Argentina. Our interpretation of the central narrative is thus always constructed by our initial encounter with the director's memory and body in the prologue, and by the insistence throughout the film on the body as a locus of distressed cultural memory based on the events of the Dirty War.

The directors' bodies in both films become symbols of distress and survival, attesting to the difficulties in communicating the gap between the experience of physical violence and its witnessing. Murat's and Poliak's filmic 'signature', therefore, contradicts Grosz's literary notion that it 'cannot authenticate, it cannot prove, it cannot make present the personage of the author' as their identities and corporeality are powerful catalysts for meaning in both films. The directors' bodies constitute, then, as Grosz continues, 'a remnant, a remainder of and a testimony to both a living past and a set of irreducible and ineliminable corporeal traces'.<sup>333</sup>

The responses which the films elicit from the spectator may be varied and unpredictable, partly dependent on the viewer's familiarity with the respective countries' turbulent pasts. However, in many ways both Murat and Poliak's films could be described as sensorial works, whose narratives take the 'path of the body, the visceral experience inscribed on the viewer's skin'.<sup>334</sup> This is most forcefully projected in the distancing techniques of the hysteric's monologues in *Que Bom*, and in the disjuncture of sound and visuals, coupled with the montage sequences, in *La fe*.

By engaging in cinematic experimentation both directors seek to problematize the representation of trauma and engage the spectator in a complex process of reflection, albeit in different ways. These narratives suggest that the body exists as a warehouse of memory, particularly concerning traumatic memories. In accordance with these body memories, sense and affect comes to the forefront of representation. As Jill Bennett writes on contemporary art practice, 'as the source of a poetics or an art, then, sense memory operates through the body to produce a kind

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<sup>333</sup> Grosz, *Space, Time and Perversion*, p. 21.

<sup>334</sup> Amy Kaminsky, drawing on the notion of the haptic in the work of Laura Marks, 'Marco Bechis' *Garage Olimpo: Cinema of Witness*, *Jump Cut*, 48 (Winter 2006), p. 10.

of “seeing truth,” rather than “thinking truth,” registering the pain of memory as it is directly experienced, and communicating a level of bodily affect’.<sup>335</sup> To this end, these films are particularly effective in offering readings of trauma ‘*from the body*’, locating the repercussions of the past in contemporary situations.<sup>336</sup> In this respect I argue that the body is not only the visual and thematic trope of *Que Bom Te Ver Viva* and *La fe del volcán* - the site of representation for depicting the inhumanity of dictatorship, neoliberalism and postdictatorship amnesia - but also the target area for the spectator’s sensorial response.

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<sup>335</sup> Jill Bennett, *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma and Contemporary Art* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2005), p. 26.

<sup>336</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.

## **PART II**

### **INSCRIBING THE OTHER**

## CHAPTER III

**Bodies in Rebellion: Medical Interventions and the Cinematic Gaze in  
*Bicho de Sete Cabeças* (Laís Bodanzky, 2001) and *XXY* (Lucía Puenzo, 2007)**

*'We may call it a border; abjection is above all ambiguity.'*<sup>337</sup>

- Julia Kristeva

**OF MONSTERS, MADNESS AND MYTH**

The films to be explored in this chapter, *Bicho de Sete Cabeças* (Laís Bodanzky, 2001) and *XXY* (Lucía Puenzo, 2007) move beyond the autobiographical framework which characterized the films discussed in Chapters I and II and relate themselves to contemporary human rights struggles in different domains, both closely related to the body. Unlike the films discussed in Part I, neither film details episodes of the respective directors' lives; rather, Laís Bodanzky (1969-) and Lucía Puenzo (1973-) create their narratives based on a great deal of research and collaboration with specialists in the experiences they attempt to convey through film. Moreover, both *Bicho* and *XXY* continue to illustrate the potency of the body as a representational tool with which to discuss socio-political concerns, and question the legitimacy of medical reason, which has systematically used violence to repress society on different levels, thus building on the discussion of the body in the autobiographical narratives explored previously. In these films, the protagonists' bodies are configured as a societal battleground, a space and vessel to stake out certain conservative and controlling tendencies.

This chapter considers the representation of two institutions, albeit intimately linked, which create regulatory systems against which they create their other, their flipside. Both *Bicho de Sete Cabeças* and *XXY* critique the mechanisms by which normative society creates its other, underlining the repressive structure of scientific reason as embodied in the psychiatric institution and the anatomical 'correction' of intersex bodies. These institutions, moreover, are shown to be founded on strict categories and dichotomies, evidencing a marked disrespect for any deviation from the established norm in their attempts to control. The films' foregrounding of

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<sup>337</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. by Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 10.

madness and intersexuality, respectively, further illustrates the continued resonances of military authoritarianism in contemporary discussions of corporeal repression.

Embedded in this critique is the notion that repression is often configured as a *looking* structure; that is, the power of vision is fundamental in portraying the isolation and violence which the protagonists of these two films suffer. Linking this concept of vision and repression is the motif of the monster; at once an aberration which should be erased and a curiosity to be upheld for everyone to see. The trope of the monster is a particularly enabling concept here given Foucault's description of the madman and hermaphrodite as monsters which have, over the ages, provided a gauge by which to measure normative society's anxieties.<sup>338</sup> This chapter, then, will chart the narrativization of the monstrous body in *Bicho* and *XXY*, emphasizing their differences but also reiterating their use of a hybrid, ambiguous, non-conformist body to portray the violence of a dualistic system which draws a dividing line between the sane and the insane, the male and the female. Furthermore, it will trace how these films cinematically express otherness and consider how these depictions rely on the apparatus of the cinema to evoke horror.

Fundamental to this discussion is the role of vision and spectacle in systems which create their own 'outside' or 'abject' in order to define themselves. The abject body, described by Julia Kristeva as that which 'does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite', defies rules and categorization in its very otherness and its threat to order.<sup>339</sup> Although the abject has been theorized as a creation of the phallogocentric system, producing the opposite against which the latter defines itself as normative, the power of the concept here lies in its possibility to overturn existing paradigms and systems, notably, the normative hegemonic order. Abjection, in its location at the limit of human experience, and association with the border and in-between state, also denotes the monster, who, as a marker of deformity and irregularity, has come to represent the other *par excellence* in cultural representation.

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<sup>338</sup> See Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (London & New York: Routledge, 2001); and his prologue to *Herculine Barbin: Being the Recently Discovered Memoirs of a Nineteenth-century French Hermaphrodite*, trans. by Richard McDougall, with an Introduction by Michel Foucault (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980).

<sup>339</sup> Kristeva, p. 4.



Furthermore, this discussion of other bodies, those which resist the hegemonic order, is illustrated in these films at the intersection of the economy of the cinematic gaze with that of medical reason. As João Luiz Vieira observes, both the cinema and medical culture,

celebram simultaneamente um prazer aliado à curiosidade com o corpo humano. Na etimologia da noção de curiosidade, encontramos o termo em latim *curiositas* – desejo de exploração mapeado no desejo dos olhos, sentido, afinal, que encontramos embutido na idéia de espetáculo. Um desejo de encontro que desemboca no fascínio pelo *ver*, uma atração perceptível por lugares, coisas, objetos ou pessoas que, conseqüentemente constroem o espetáculo.<sup>340</sup>

This process of radical ‘othering’ through the idea of the spectacle is particularly flagrant in *XXY*’s manipulation of the cinematic gaze to elicit fascination with the body of its protagonist. Similarly, however, *Bicho de Sete Cabeças* highlights society’s attempts to repress the perceived insanity of the patients through the architecture of the asylum and practice of observation. Indeed, Foucault’s discussion of the history of madness accordingly emphasizes the tension between the visible and invisible in society. He writes,

Madness is responsible only for that part of itself which is visible. All the rest is reduced to silence. Madness no longer exists except as *seen*. The proximity instituted by the asylum, an intimacy neither chains nor bars would ever violate again, does not allow reciprocity: only the nearness of observation that watches, that spies, that comes closer in order to see better, but moves ever farther away, since it accepts and acknowledges only the values of the Stranger.<sup>341</sup>

Thus, in both instances it is vision which violates the films’ protagonists and observation which aims to classify and categorize these unruly bodies. In this way both *Bicho* and *XXY* demonstrate a concern for the practice of surveillance, so prevalent in contemporary society, but also characteristic of the intense suspicion of the dictatorship regimes. The films’ allusions to the violent repression of the authoritarian state, moreover, resonate in the ongoing practices of classification and ‘othering’ which systematically rob citizens of their bodily integrity, practices which are deeply entrenched in medical reason.

<sup>340</sup> Vieira, ‘Anatomias do Visível’, p. 84.

<sup>341</sup> Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, pp. 237-238.

The struggle for control over the protagonists' bodies depicted in *Bicho* and *XXY* provides a vehicle with which to critique the institutions of mental health and biological science, respectively. Furthermore, both films locate these struggles within the framework of the family unit, thus returning to some of the ground covered in previous chapters and highlighting the continued conflict between the generations which has marked recent cultural production from both countries. This generational conflict also builds on the imaginary of the dictatorships, by extension relating the violence and abuse depicted in the films to the logic which characterized the military periods. Here, then, the institutions depicted embody a patriarchal state, configured as the oppressive father and male doctor in both instances.

Inspired by the autobiographical account of a Brazilian psychiatric hospital by the late Austregésilo Carrano (1957-2008), *Bicho de Sete Cabeças* discusses the realm of the abused body within the walls of the repressive institution.<sup>342</sup> The film evidences a concern for the structures of power which orchestrate and enable the violent manipulation and isolation of the protagonist Neto's body, and in turn brings a story of torture to a public largely unaware of the disturbing occurrences which take place behind the walls of such institutions.<sup>343</sup>

*XXY*, for its own part, brings debates over sex, gender and sexuality to the fore in its depiction of an intersex adolescent, Alex, struggling with her own identity.<sup>344</sup> The tensions present in her family and attitudes in the community emphasize the unease which surrounds Alex's ambiguous status, tensions which are highlighted by the arrival of a surgeon 'friend' who comes to visit the family and

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<sup>342</sup> Austregésilo Carrano Bueno published *Canto dos Malditos* in its first edition in 2001 (São Paulo: Rocco, 2001). The book was, however, subject to a court case led by the families of a number of the doctors it accused of ill-treatment and torture, and in 2002 was withdrawn from bookshop shelves. Finally, after a long struggle, the book was republished in 2004, omitting the names of the individuals responsible for Carrano's violent experience of the institution. Carrano was a respected and extremely active spokesperson for the anti-psychiatry movement in Brazil, where he specifically fought for the provision of day hospitals and alternative therapies to treat mental illnesses. Sadly, he died on 27 May, 2008 in São Paulo due to liver cancer. The following day President Lula praised him for his activism.

<sup>343</sup> Bodanzky declared in an interview that this was, in fact, the stated aim of the film: 'Puxa vida, se eu não conheço esse universo outras pessoas também não conhecem! [...] Se essa história foi vital para mim, pode ser para outras pessoas também. É essa história que eu quero contar'. See José Carlos Avellar & Ivana Bentes in interview with Lina Chamie & Laís Bodanzky, 'O Buraco do Espelho Como um Pomar às Avestas Aqui Dentro do Lado de Fora', *Cinemas*, 24 (July-August 2000), 7-42 (p. 9).

<sup>344</sup> I refer to Alex in the feminine throughout this chapter. Admittedly, this is problematic, although the character seemingly self-identifies as a female throughout the film. However, I have not yet found an appropriate linguistic sign to convey Alex's 'in-between' state, thus exemplifying the discussion below on the constitutive nature of language with respect to Alex's description by her father as 'perfecta'.

simultaneously investigate her case. The monitoring of bodies within the walls of the Brazilian *manicômio* in *Bicho*, then, finds a parallel here in the designation of intersex babies as anomalies which should be rectified. As will be shown, Alex's corporeal identity radically challenges the views of those around her, and those of the audience, to reconsider the rules by which we make assumptions on gender identity. Similarly, *Bicho* asks the audience to question notions of reason and madness and appeals for a greater awareness towards the injustices carried out in psychiatric institutions.

Neto and Alex both suffer extreme violence in the films which seriously undermines their bodily integrity and identity. The violence in both instances is associated predominantly with a masculinist form of abuse, and depicts male characters in the film executing this violence in various forms, thus pointing to the directors' gendered interpretation of power. Moreover, in both films the violence has strong echoes of the torture carried out during the countries' respective dictatorship eras. However, as the films reach their *dénouement* – and it seems increasingly unlikely that Neto and Alex will emerge unscathed from their battle to maintain corporeal integrity – there is a suggestion of dialogue and intergenerational communication which salvages the possibility of a somewhat happier ending, in a somewhat not-so-distant future.

#### *BICHO DE SETE CABEÇAS*

Awarded the Golden Sun for Best Film at the Biarritz International Festival for Latin American Cinema in 2001, numerous awards at the Brasília Festival for Brazilian Cinema in 2000, and the Prêmio Margarida da Prata for Human Rights by the Conferência Nacional dos Bispos do Brasil (CNBB),<sup>345</sup> *Bicho de Sete Cabeças* is often listed in the top ten films of the Brazilian *retomada* by critics.<sup>346</sup> In contrast to the films discussed in the section on authorial self-inscription, where we see the very overt authorial interference of the directors' lives in the cinematic text, *Bicho de Sete Cabeças* does not render the director's life a central thematic of the narrative. Moreover, in the case of Bodanzky's film, as in Puenzo's, the notion of authorship

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<sup>345</sup> The CNBB launched this award for cinema in 1967 to support productions which struggled to protect human rights during the military dictatorship. See the CNBB homepage: <<http://www.cnbb.org.br>>

<sup>346</sup> See the list of the top twenty films voted by film critics in Brazil. Maria do Rosario Caetano, 'O Invasor É Eleito Melhor da Retomada', *Revista de Cinema*, 34 (February 2003), 51-53.

becomes further complicated due to the literary sources from which they are inspired. Bodanzky, then, moves this study of female authorship and its relation to the themes of body, memory and identity into a more fictional realm built not on personal life history but on a more general preoccupation with the pervading use of violence to control 'difficult' sectors of the population.

*Bicho de Sete Cabeças* narrates the breakdown in communication between the teenager Neto (Rodrigo Santoro) and Seu Wilson (Othon Bastos), his father. After a series of confrontations in the home, Neto's father finally discovers that his son is smoking marijuana when a joint falls out of his jacket onto the living room floor. Seu Wilson betrays his son's trust and under the guise of visiting a friend in hospital, checks him into a psychiatric hospital for a detoxification treatment against his will and under false pretences. Once inside, it becomes evident that the hospital merely seeks to suppress and control the patients-cum-prisoners and Neto is forced to take tranquilizers and other drugs, such as Haliperidol, which eat away at his muscles and heavily sedate him. Following an attempt to escape the compound, Neto is administered electroshock treatment and becomes depressed, introverted and physically incapable of fighting the repressive system in which he is embroiled. Despite Neto repeatedly demanding that his father remove him from the institution, Seu Wilson insists that the treatment is for his son's own good. Neto's selfhood is radically fractured as a result of his mistreatment and the film ends with an unsuccessful suicide attempt in a second psychiatric institution.

Given Brazil's recent turbulent history of torture and the abuse of power, I argue that *Bicho*, whilst departing from the central theme of the military dictatorship, interrogates the structures of society, namely its propensity to categorize in dyads, here configured as reason and madness, which permit such offences against the human body. Where Poliak's autobiographical prologue dialogued with the neoliberalism of 1990s Argentina, *Bicho de Sete Cabeças* dialogues with both contemporary institutional violence and with the earlier period of military repression in Brazil by way of generational tensions between father and son.

#### LITERARY INSPIRATIONS AND CONTEMPORARY RESONANCES

The film, as mentioned above, is based on the autobiographical account of Austregésilo Carrano, *Canto dos Malditos*. Carrano's testimony recounts how he

was admitted to hospital in his home town of Curitiba, Paraná, by his father in 1974, when the latter believed his son was addicted to cannabis. Between the age of seventeen and twenty-one he spent time in a number of institutions and was forced to endure no less than twenty-one electroshock sessions and other forms of torture. Published much later in 2001, *Canto dos Malditos* documents the state of the Brazilian psychiatric hospital in the mid 1970s and the repressive and violent methods the personnel used to control the patients. His testimony of conditions in the institution is, therefore, located during the period of the military dictatorship.

In contrast to the literary source which inspired the film, however, *Bicho* narrates the struggle between father and son, along with the violence exerted upon the patients at the psychiatric hospital, in a contemporary, twenty-first century setting. In interviews the film crew and director have repeatedly justified this decision, asserting that the same appalling conditions that Carrano experienced in the 1970s continue to the present-day in such institutions in Brazil, and that there is a timelessness to the theme of familial unrest.<sup>347</sup> The book's transposition to the more contemporary screen setting is principally carried out by way of its focus on urban youth culture, to which I will return below. Nonetheless, *Bicho*'s emphasis on the violation of selfhood and violence towards the body makes it a poignant reminder of the human rights abuses which occurred during the period of the military regime.

Additional to the inspiration in *Canto dos Malditos*, the director and crew acknowledge other literary sources in the construction of the narrative, namely Kafka's *Letter to My Father* (1917), bringing the relationship between father and son to the forefront of the filmic representation. Indeed, the director, commenting on the changes in the narrative from book to film, stated: 'O Rodrigo não interpreta o Carrano. A espinha dorsal do filme, o conflito pai e filho, não está presente no livro, e tem muita informação deste que não está no filme'.<sup>348</sup> Luiz Bolognesi, screenwriter for the film, also attests to incorporating elements from Kafka's text in order to highlight the tensions between father and son: 'O texto de Kafka fala do mesmo problema de relacionamento mas com alguns detalhes que consideramos

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<sup>347</sup> Anonymous interview with Laís Bodanzky, '*Bicho de Sete Cabeças Denuncia a Intolerância Contra os Jovens*', *Revista de Cinema*, 1.12 (April 2001), 34-36. Also see film website <<http://www.bichodesetecabecas.com.br>> [accessed 7 August 2008].

<sup>348</sup> Laís Bodanzky in interview with Lucas Pires, 'Com a Cabeça no Lugar', *Jornal do Vídeo*, 17.206 (January 2002), 66-67 (p. 67).

importantes'.<sup>349</sup> In this sense, although *Bicho* has several literary inspirations, the film team rework all the literary elements into a strongly filmic narrative. Notwithstanding the importance of both texts for the elaboration of the script, the team also underwent a serious process of immersion in theatrical workshops devoted to understanding psychiatric problems in order to sensitize the crew and cast to the characters depicted in the film.<sup>350</sup> *Bicho de Sete Cabeças*, then, is not a traditional literary adaptation; rather, the film borrows elements of narrative from both literary sources, blends them and turns them into a coherent film aesthetic, strongly marked by a mobile hand-held camera and long, uninterrupted takes, punctuated by jump cuts.

#### COMMUNICATION BREAKDOWN, GENERATIONAL GAP

The film's central narrative structure is, as stated above, predicated on the generational tension between father and son and is signalled in the opening and closing scenes with the reading of a letter sent from Neto to his father. This angry letter frames the entire narrative, providing a sense of circularity to the film and highlighting the significance of the theme of the breakdown of the father-son relationship in the story of abuse as a whole. Numerous scenes convey this breakdown in communication between the two men, but I will first discuss an early scene in the film which highlights the gulf which exists between them.

Towards the beginning of *Bicho*, Neto and his father go to a football match together. Neto is silent during the car journey to the match, and visibly drugged, emphasized by the distorted voice of his father on the soundtrack, which communicates his son's disoriented experience. Following the football match father and son go to a *lanchonete* to eat. Neto remains silent whilst Seu Wilson chats to the barman, lamenting the situation of today's football where the players are only interested in big money and are not quality players as in the days of Pele. Seu Wilson's reminiscing of a lost generation of footballers is immediately reformulated into a question to his son regarding the girl who had lunch with him at home that day. Convinced that Neto could do better, Seu Wilson criticizes the girl, whom he

<sup>349</sup> Marcelo Lyra, 'Lais Bodanzky Discute Relação de Pais e Filhos', *O Estado de São Paulo: Caderno 2*, 15 March 2000, p. 3; and Avellar & Bentes in interview with Lina Chamie & Lais Bodanzky, 'O Buraco do Espelho', 7-42.

<sup>350</sup> These workshops were held with the theatre director, Sérgio Penna. Juliana Pereira, '*Bicho de Sete Cabeças*', *Set*, 15.6 (June 2001), 36-39 (p. 37).

presumes to be his son's girlfriend, to which Neto retorts 'ela não é minha namorada'. The possibility of dialogue is thus abruptly brought to an end. Evidently father and son have little to talk about.

This is a small but significant example of the many scenes which document the breakdown between Neto and Seu Wilson prior to the former's internment in the psychiatric hospital. Moreover, it reinforces the father-son motif which reoccurs throughout the film from the onset of the narrative. Gradually it becomes clear that Seu Wilson is ashamed of his son and, equally, that Neto despises his father's treatment of him and of other family members alike. In one scene, we hear a confrontation taking place between Seu Wilson and Neto on the soundtrack as we observe Neto's mother (played by Cássia Kiss) going about her daily chores in the house to the chorus of raised and angry voices in an adjacent room. The discussion centres around Neto's refusal to inform his father of his whereabouts as he leaves the house. In a rage, Seu Wilson grabs his son's ear, which bears an earring, and exclaims 'isso aí é coisa de veadó!'. *Veado*, queer, thus becomes another complaint Seu Wilson levels at his son, symbolizing not only his desire to control his son's identity but also his reluctance to accept non-normative types of masculinity and sexuality. However, the most striking example of the complete collapse of father-son relations is in Seu Wilson's association with a repressive and violent authority which administers electroshock therapy (EST) to Neto against his will, causing a dramatic change in the son's personality.

### ELECTROSHOCK

Electroshock therapy, as Kneeland (2002) notes, reached its peak in the United States of America in the mid twentieth-century, and by the 1950s the majority of those it was used to treat were women diagnosed with hysteria and other perceived pathological disorders.<sup>351</sup> This trend continued well into the 1970s when feminist groups began to take up the concerns of female patients who were being targeted by this treatment to make them more compliant with specific gender and family roles.<sup>352</sup> Whilst the popularity of EST suffered in the wake of civil rights movements and anti-psychiatry movements in the 1960s and 1970s, it experienced a revival in the

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<sup>351</sup> Timothy W. Kneeland, *Pushbutton Psychiatry: A History of Electroshock in America*. (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002), pp. 58-62.

<sup>352</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

1980s and 1990s for certain procedures.<sup>353</sup> It continues to be used today, by psychiatrists, the police and military, the latter of which use it in the torture of prisoners in order to extract information.

Invented by a team of medical researchers investigating new methods of social engineering in fascist Italy, Ugo Cerletti led the group to first use electroshock in an experiment in Rome in 1937. It is perhaps not surprising to learn that this research was also funded by the Fascist Movement.<sup>354</sup> In Brazil the first EST equipment was imported by the psychiatrist Pacheco e Silva (1898-1988) in 1941, just a few years after its first use in Rome.<sup>355</sup> Pacheco e Silva was a close friend of the inventor of EST, Ugo Cerletti, whom he met and stayed with in Rome. He had become familiar with the technique in Europe and North America, and decided that it would be a good treatment for mental disorders in Brazil. In a recent translation of Pacheco e Silva's report of EST's first use in Brazil he states,

We found it prudent to begin our first sessions with animals. Results were entirely satisfactory because epileptiform convulsions were induced shortly after the shock, followed by a crepuscular state with amnesia, as was observed in the dog's disorientation afterward. After the post-convulsive phase, the dog recovered its former state, showing docility and revealing complete amnesia of what had happened, and thus, it was possible to submit it to successive shocks, without any sign of fear.<sup>356</sup>

The 'crepuscular state' Pacheco e Silva describes is reflected in Neto's general condition following his treatment at the nodes of the machine. Withdrawn and frightened, he is reduced to a person incapable of relating to the outside world.<sup>357</sup>

Electroshock treatment has provided material for a number of cultural representations, perhaps most famously in the novel (Ken Kesey, 1962) and homonymous film, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (Milos Forman, 1975). Sylvia Plath's 'Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams' (1977) and novella *The Bell Jar* (first published under the name of Victoria Lucas in 1963) also portrayed the use of

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<sup>353</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

<sup>354</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.

<sup>355</sup> Moacyr Alexandro Rosa, 'Pacheco e Silva and the Origins of Electroconvulsive Therapy in Brazil', *Journal of ECT*, 23.4 (December 2007), 224-228.

<sup>356</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 226.

<sup>357</sup> A number of well-known Brazilians have also undergone EST treatment, notably Carmen Miranda (1909-1955) for her bout of depression in the early 1950s and Paulo Coelho (1947-) for rebellious behaviour in the 1970s. Helena Solberg's exceptional film, *Carmen Miranda: Bananas Is My Business* (1995), visually represents the disorientation Miranda experienced under EST therapy in a scene depicting disjointed puppets and dolls, evoking her disjointed selfhood. Similarly, Coelho, who was committed three times before the age of twenty, incorporates some of his experiences of EST in his novel *Verónica Decide Morrer* (Rio de Janeiro: Objetiva, 1998).



electroshock, and more recently the film *Requiem for a Dream* (Darren Aronofsky, 2000) illustrated the procedure. Indeed, Kneeland's description of the representation of EST in the film adaptation of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* resonates with its depiction in *Bicho*:<sup>358</sup>

In this popular anti-establishment work, electroshock appeared as part of the mechanized, machine-centered, emotionless world. *Cuckoo's Nest* exemplified scholarly and popular images of the mental institution as a site of repression, electroshock as punishment, and society as constructing mental illness and applying disease labels to social deviants. Indeed, protagonist Randall McMurphy is portrayed as troubled and deviant but not mentally ill. But because of his refusal to accept social authority, he is forced to undergo a series of increasingly drastic treatment/punishments, culminating in EST and, finally, lobotomy and physical, as well as social death.<sup>359</sup>

Certainly representations of this kind did much to ignite the popular imagination and spur on the anti-psychiatry and anti-electroshock movements. Furthermore, the similarities between the 1975 film and *Bicho de Sete Cabeças* are striking in their depiction of the psychiatric institution as a *carceral* building which *punishes* its patient-prisoners. Neto's failure to conform, epitomized in his alliance with urban youth culture, ultimately leads to his incarceration. According to a recent survey on the representation of EST in US films, the image of the treatment as a means of exerting social control, as exemplified in *Cuckoo's Nest*, has become one of the most powerful perceptions of EST amongst the general population.<sup>360</sup> Indeed, Neto's experience of EST is unequivocally configured as a practice of torture in the film, given the perverse enjoyment doctors and nurses seem to gain by exerting pain on the patients and the completely unmeasured application of the treatment. In this respect, the Brazilian film recapitulates many of the existing tropes used to interrogate psychiatric methods in cinema.

During the scene where he receives EST treatment - it is worth noting that the shocks are first administered as a punishment for having attempted to escape the hospital rather than as a cure - Neto begins to hallucinate with the image and voice of his father. The image of his father's angry mouth and gnarling teeth illustrates the shadow of his presence which hangs over Neto's identity, a trope which recurs time

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<sup>358</sup> See Andrew McDonald & Garry Walker, 'The Portrayal of ECT in American Movies', *Journal of ECT*, 17.4 (December 2001), 264-27, for a complete survey of films containing references to ECT from 1948-2001.

<sup>359</sup> Kneeland, p. 64.

<sup>360</sup> McDonald & Walker, p. 266.

and again in the film in flashbacks representative of the latter's trauma. Moreover, *Bicho de Sete Cabeças* mirrors the discomfort Neto feels under the charge of the electrical shocks in both visuals and sound: alarm bells begin to ring and syncopate the sound of the charge being applied to Neto's temples as a distorted and twisted image of his father's mouth and teeth fills the frame and mutates, emphasizing the complete disorientation of Neto. Following his bout of EST treatment, he is left unconscious, foaming at the mouth and alone on the stretcher. The appearance of his father's teeth and voice at key moments of distress during the film, however, repeatedly emphasizes the close association made between him and the abuse of power and violence.

### SPACE, POWER AND VIOLENCE

The repressive and violent system to which Neto belongs is structured around the space of the institution. The repeated long shots of interminable corridors in the building emphasize the ordered use of space and restrictive architecture, as patients are crammed into small spaces. As Foucault reminds us in *Discipline and Punish*:

In organizing 'cells', 'places' and 'ranks', the disciplines create complex spaces that are at once architectural, functional and hierarchical. It is spaces that provide fixed positions and permit circulation; they carve out individual segments and establish operational links; they mark places and indicate values; they guarantee the obedience of individuals, but also a better economy of time and gesture.<sup>361</sup>

The strict control of space and the patients' enclosure in the hospital is also highlighted through the repeated panning shots of walls and scattered figures in the courtyard. The circular movement point-of-view shots in the courtyard, creating a 'sensação de desnortamento, confusão, agressividade', bring Neto's experience and subjectivity to the forefront of the film, as the camera observes this space from his perspective.<sup>362</sup> Moreover, Neto is frequently seen huddling close to the courtyard's wall, sobbing against the border which traps him in the institution. In addition to the restrictions of space, the institution regulates the patients' timetable with a strict schedule for meal times, outside time and visitor time, providing no respite for Neto, who seemingly spends most of his day asleep in the dormitory.

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<sup>361</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 148.

<sup>362</sup> Flávio Guirland, 'Olhares Contemporâneos do Cinema Brasileiro', *Teorema*, 1 (August 2001), 21-23 (p. 23).

The seclusion into which Neto is forced through the breakdown in communication with his father, his physical remoteness within the confines of the hospital complex and his subsequent marginalization once reintroduced to society, all emphasize his complete isolation. Indeed, this aspect is highlighted by Bodanzky as being of key relevance in her perception of the inadequacies of the psychiatric institution. Further, she directly links it to her experience of reading Foucault's *Madness and Civilization*:

Li Foucault e o Luiz também. Acho interessante observar como o universo da loucura vai se modificando no decorrer da história do homem. O louco na sociedade já teve outra importância, a do respeito, de ser um iluminado, de falar coisas que ninguém fala, de ser reverenciado. Hoje ele não é mais. Por quê? Vivemos numa sociedade capitalista em que só interessa aquele que produz. Se não produz, atrapalha. Só gasta dinheiro, depende do outro, não deixa trabalhar direito. Enfim, ele incomoda. Nessa sociedade, não há espaço para ele ficar. A instituição psiquiátrica é o lugar perfeito para colocar aquela pessoa que não se insere na sociedade. Daí toda a estrutura de isolar a pessoa. Essa arquitetura de muros altos, de isolamento, reproduz o próprio problema que aquela pessoa está vivendo. O que é sofrimento mental? É a pessoa se fechar no mundo dela e ir a outra dimensão que só ela sabe. Se, para tratar, você a coloca entre muros, você só está sublinhando o problema. Ela já está isolada na cabeça dela e você vai isolá-la fisicamente?<sup>363</sup>

This isolation, as we learn in the film, leads to Neto's utter incapacity to relate to the outside world, as he has been completely damaged in his ability to interact socially. This traumatic experience breaks Neto down into a catatonic state and irrevocably alters his identity. His body bears the memory of electroshock treatment through bruises and scars, and his muscle wasting and trembling also indicates the body at the centre of the representation of violence. Where once Neto's body was an emblem of vitality, it now appears fragile and damaged. The film emphasizes this contrast by way of Neto's association with the city, and by extension its youth culture, in the early sequences.

#### URBAN AESTHETIC AND YOUTH CULTURE

Neto is marked by a number of signifiers as belonging to a strong urban youth culture.<sup>364</sup> The rap and drum n' bass music he listens to, the clothes he wears, the skateboard he travels on, the graffiti he paints on walls, and the *maconha* (marijuana)

<sup>363</sup> Laís Bodanzky in interview with Lucas Pires, 'Com a Cabeça no Lugar', p. 67.

<sup>364</sup> As Lúcia Sá notes, these distinct cultural phenomena, hip hop and graffiti, 'may be discussed generally, though not unproblematically, under the rubric "youth culture"'. See Sá, *Life in the Megalopolis: Mexico City and São Paulo* (London & New York, 2007), p. 110.

he smokes all underline his association with a youth scene in the city of São Paulo.<sup>365</sup> In light of these references, it is interesting to note the director's intentions regarding the target audience for the film. When questioned by the journalist Lucas Pires on this topic, Bodanzky responded,

O público-alvo foi o jovem adolescente, porque o protagonista é um adolescente. Se o personagem central, Neto, assistisse ao filme, ele iria gostar. Pensamos em tudo: a trilha sonora, a linguagem de montagem e de som, o tipo da narrativa em que toda hora está acontecendo alguma coisa. Desde o roteiro até a finalização, o filme foi feito pensando-se no público-alvo.<sup>366</sup>

Key to this perceived 'youthful' aesthetic is the highly mobile camera (attributable to filming with the lightweight Super 16 camera) and the fast-paced editing accompanied by extra-diegetic music. The music and editing in particular come to play an important role in the construction of urban space in the film.

The film's setting in the Northern *bairro* of Casa Verde in São Paulo, alongside the characteristic hieroglyphic tagging on the area's walls, attest to the film's urban location. Whilst the director reportedly wished to give a sense of universality to the film and an anonymity to its particular location ('Não vou citar a cidade onde ocorre a história, pois pretendo que ela seja universal'),<sup>367</sup> the recourse to hip hop and *pixação* strongly evokes, according to the script writer, 'a Casa Verde, bairro classe média sem atrativos culturais, mas [que] se exprime no hip hop e na pixação'.<sup>368</sup> This urban location is evident from the opening sequence where the names in the credits are superimposed on the walls as graffiti, emphasizing the city setting and theme of counter-culture from the very beginning of the film. Moreover, these associations give the film its contemporaneity since the loose filmic adaptation of Carrano's book has altered the setting from the 1970s to the turn of the twenty-first century.

<sup>365</sup> These markers of youth appear time and again in films of the 1990s and 2000s, many beyond Brazil's borders, and indicate the rise of new responses to urban living, notably in areas of extreme marginalization. Moreover, they signal the spread of common forms of youth culture, perhaps most obviously in the case of hip hop music. Much Latin American cinema has registered these changes in youth culture, as for instance, *Rodrigo D, No futuro* (Victor Gaviria, Colombia, 1990). *Rodrigo D* draws on many of the same signifiers of youth as *Bicho*: Rodrigo's immersion in a world of punk and peripheral urban living is fundamental to Victor Gaviria's dramatization of disenfranchised individuals in Medellín, Colombia. Other films which have had commercial success such as *Amores perros* (Alejandro González Iñárritu, Mexico, 2000) and *Cidade de Deus* (Fernando Meirelles, Brazil, 2002) also emphasize the cultures of urban peripheries.

<sup>366</sup> Laís Bodanzky cited in Lucas Pires, p. 66.

<sup>367</sup> Lyra, 'Laís Bodanzky Discute Relação de Pais e Filhos', p. 3.

<sup>368</sup> Luiz Bolognesi cited in Orlando Margarido, 'A Dupla que É o Bicho: Realizadores Mostram Vida no Manicômio', *Caderno da Gazeta Mercantil*, 1-2-3 December 2000, p. 17.

Music, then, is a primary resource in expressing Neto's subjectivity and identity in the film and strongly associates him with youth culture. Bodanzky comments on the use of music in the film stating, 'eu acho que o brasileiro é muito musical. Eu não consigo imaginar um filme sem música, a música é o universo interior, o mundo invisível que está aqui [...] E no nosso caso, o tema também é o universo interior'.<sup>369</sup> The powerful drum n' bass music that accompanies the credits bursts onto the screen with images of city walls, traffic and roads. During the aforementioned credit sequence Neto is pictured on his skateboard on the roads of congested São Paulo and significantly, during his first appearance on screen, he is also wearing headphones, listening to music on his personal stereo. In fact, there are only a few occasions where Neto appears *without* his headphones during the period when he is not incarcerated in the film. *Bicho* thus builds on the character's immersion in a world of music to express Neto's subjectivity.

Neto's impulsive trip to Santos with a friend provides one strong musical motif and example of memory throughout the narrative. Following his refusal to engage in sexual acts with older men in exchange for drugs and a taste of the good-life, Neto finds himself alone with no money on the streets. Forced to beg for his return fare to São Paulo, he meets Leninha, with whom he has a brief affair. Here the lyrical and romantic song 'O Seu Olhar' (comp. Arnaldo Antunes) links the sex scene and Neto's journey back to São Paulo, as we see him listening to the music on his stereo and dreamily recalling the time he spent with Leninha. On return to the city Neto is completely love-struck, frequently reminiscing in flashbacks about the good times he had in Santos, always signalled by the music of 'O Seu Olhar'. Thus, intra-diegetic music played on his Walkman provides the opportunity to explore Neto's emotional state and thoughts, something which is fully exploited in the scenes in the asylum.

Later on in the film the soundtrack expresses his anger and frustration with the world, as, for example, in the party scene following his first release from the institution. Here the lyrics, 'é preciso sobreviver' in the song 'O Caminho das Pedras' (Zona Proibida) emphasize Neto's struggle to cope with life and prepare the spectator for the breakdown which he suffers in the bathroom shortly after he is unable to perform sexually with a girl. The choice of a rap song to express Neto's

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<sup>369</sup> Avellar & Bentes in interview with Lina Chamie & Laís Bodanzky, 'O Buraco do Espelho', p. 30.

frustration and dislocation from others in society evidences rap's association as a popular form of counter-culture in São Paulo.<sup>370</sup>

Graffiti also plays a significant role in our understanding of Neto's identity. Indeed, one of the key acts of rebellion which leads to his being admitted to the *manicômio* is the tagging of his name in spray paint. This practice, known in Brazil as *pixação*, is a variant of graffiti but generally less accepted than its more 'artistic' counterpart.<sup>371</sup> Whilst its practice has become widespread in São Paulo since the 1980s, its origins are attributed in part to the legacy of political slogan graffiti during the dictatorship era.<sup>372</sup> *Pixadores* normally act at night, highlighting their precariousness, and are known to climb extremely high buildings to paint their names. Defying their invisibility as often belonging to marginalized sectors of the population, they literally write their identities on the very fabric of the cityscape. As Lúcia Sá notes in her analysis of urban cultural expression in Mexico City and São Paulo,

Although not necessarily linked to megacities the size of São Paulo or Mexico, graffiti and tagging are both urban art forms *par excellence*: they use the space of the city as their canvas, and depend on not being seen while creating their work. Taggers usually divide the space of the city in territories that are disputed between gangs, and use writing as codes that serve both to identify groups and to restrict comprehension. They also use the space of the city as a challenge to be overcome, particularly in the case of those groups that enjoy writing on surfaces extremely difficult to reach.<sup>373</sup>

In the film, Neto and his friends are tagging one night when they are caught by the police, who are not sympathetic to their artistic expression. His subsequent arrest leads to a severe confrontation with his father which punctuates the downward spiral that characterizes their relationship in the scenes prior to Neto's incarceration.

<sup>370</sup> See Derek Pardue, *Ideologies of Marginality in Brazilian Hip Hop* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008) and Sá, pp. 107-144, for a closer analysis of the politics of hip hop in São Paulo.

<sup>371</sup> On the difference between graffiti and tagging Lúcia Sá writes, 'in São Paulo, and in Brazil more generally, there are two words for graffiti: *grafite* (or graffiti), which describes drawings (especially when they are considered artistic by the viewers); and *pixação*, used mostly to refer to tagging or to designs that are not seen as aesthetically pleasing. Needless to say, there is much room for negotiation between the two extremes'. Sá, pp. 148-149.

<sup>372</sup> David da Costa Aguiar de Souza points out in his Master's thesis on *pixação* that the practice is strongly associated with political protest which in the early years of the dictatorship took the form of graffiti slogans such as 'abaixo a ditadura'. See Aguiar de Souza, 'Pichação Carioca: Etnografia e uma Proposta de Entendimento' (unpublished Master's thesis, Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, 2007). <[http://teses.ufrj.br/IFCS\\_M/DavidDaCostaAguiarDeSouza.pdf](http://teses.ufrj.br/IFCS_M/DavidDaCostaAguiarDeSouza.pdf)> [accessed 12 August 2008].

<sup>373</sup> Sá, p. 149.

Once in the psychiatric hospital, artistic expression also becomes a crucial way of contesting the violent control of the patients. The old man Biu (Marcos Cesana), who performs the role of the wise and respected ‘inmate’ in the institution, invites Neto to his personal cell to offer him a hat and instruct him on how to cope with the exigencies of the place. ‘É preciso fingir’, Biu states, ‘quem é que não finge neste mundo, quem?’. After informing Neto of his personal mechanisms to cope with the system which has labelled him a madman, Biu shows him the graffiti on his cell walls. This graffiti indicates that this form of art is particularly rebellious on the one hand, and key to the patients’ need to express individuality in the institution on the other. Moreover, the graffiti on the wall is intensely poetic and is echoed in the song which plays on the soundtrack:

o buraco do espelho está fechado  
 agora eu tenho que ficar aqui  
 com um olho aberto, outro acordado  
 no lado de lá onde eu caí

pro lado de cá não tem acesso  
 mesmo que me chamem pelo nome  
 mesmo que admitam meu regresso  
 toda vez que eu vou a porta some

a janela some na parede  
 a palavra de água se dissolve  
 na palavra sede, a boca cede  
 antes de falar, e não se ouve

já tentei dormir a noite inteira  
 quatro, cinco, seis da madrugada  
 vou ficar ali nessa cadeira  
 uma orelha alerta, outra ligada

o buraco do espelho está fechado  
 agora eu tenho que ficar agora  
 fui pelo abandono abandonado  
 aqui dentro do lado de fora

Here, a series of jump cuts to the words on the wall picks out Arnaldo Antunes’s lyrics as they are sung on the soundtrack, followed by shots of Neto behind prison bars, visually underlining the entrapment which is reflected in the song. The image of the metal bars serves as the basis for the analogy made between the prison and the psychiatric hospital, as both institutions create strategies of confinement through isolation from outside society. The inclusion of the song and the graffiti in Biu’s cell,

then, demonstrates how the prisoner carves out a space for individual expression even within this extremely repressive power matrix.<sup>374</sup> Furthermore, it demonstrates the film's propensity to express Neto's subjectivity through music and graffiti.

Biu's capacity to be respected and listened to – and it is worth noting that Neto remains completely silent throughout their encounter in his cell – also underlines the possibility for understanding between the different patients in the hospital. Beyond the confines of the institution's walls it would be unlikely that broader society would give a man defined as mad due respect. This spatial narrative of alienation and simultaneous belonging both emphasizes the violence of forcibly isolating someone *and* the positive sense of community which may arise amongst the patients themselves. This sense of belonging and community is referenced in the film following Neto's second admission to hospital where he appears reassured by his fellow patients, and actively integrates with them in his role as organizer of football matches.<sup>375</sup>

#### THE DECLINE OF NETO

Inter-generational communication in the film, therefore, is structured around the misunderstandings which form the relationship between Neto and his father. The latter's conviction that he is acting with his son's best interests in mind, when he decides to check Neto into what he believes to be a detoxification clinic, is ill-founded, as we learn of the stark decay of Neto's vitality and physical fitness. Furthermore, the father's belief in the mental health institution contrasts with Neto's mother's concern for her son's welfare following their first visit to the hospital. The change between the vivacity of youth culture and freedom typified in Neto's body in the early stage of the film, and the blue-grey tones which characterize the scenes which take place within the walls of repression of the mental asylum, emphasizes his altered mood and draws attention to Neto's decline and inability to function in society following his heavy drugging in the hospital. Neto's agility and physique

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<sup>374</sup> It is also worth noting that a number of recent Brazilian films have depicted carceral space and the prisoners' defence mechanisms to cope with their reclusion. See, for example, Hector Babenco's *Carandiru* (2003) and *O Prisioneiro da Grade de Ferro: Autoretros* (Paulo Sacramento, 2004), which document, in fictional and documentary modes respectively, the anarchy of São Paulo's notorious Carandiru prison and its subsequent implosion in December 2002. Sacramento's film, moreover, noteworthy for its method of documenting the prison by handing the camera over to the inmates, highlights the role of hip hop as a survival mechanism behind bars.

<sup>375</sup> This corresponds to Austregésilo Carrano's request to be returned to the institution following his release as he could not integrate in 'normal' society.



were emphasized on the streets of São Paulo in the scenes where he appears on his skateboard and in the scene where he runs alongside busy roads to escape from the stifling environment of his home to catch a bus for the relatively calmer beach culture of Santos. The fast-paced and energetic music, coupled with the jump cuts between shots of Neto running and skating, accentuate his agility and freedom.

Once submitted to the techniques of repression used in the institution, however, his physical state visibly deteriorates. This is most clearly foregrounded in the sequence where Neto attempts to run away from the hospital. In this sequence, on observing that an employee of the institution has accidentally left a door unlocked, he escapes through the open door and begins to run away from the institution. He is, however, severely marred by the lack of movement and power in his arms, which seem unable to coordinate his bodily movement. Neto's flailing limbs and limp body are filmed at the centre of the frame heading towards the camera as it moves in a backward motion and emphasizes his lack of speed, and frequent jump cuts underline his jerky movements. The nurses very quickly catch him and restrain him, as they would an animal, by catching him with an elasticated belt and bringing him to the ground, where they secure his immobility by tying his feet and arms. His attempt at freedom is violently restricted by the long-term effects of the medication he is administered in the hospital, which diminishes his capacity to effectively use his limbs. The energy which characterized him in the earlier scenes contrasts starkly with the body produced under the disciplining techniques of the mental institution.

Neto's former connections with youth culture are undermined by these experiences of violence. His past self contrasts greatly with the Neto we meet following his first period of internment when he is reintroduced to society. On release from the hospital Neto is confronted with a world unfamiliar to him, and retreats into the space of his own room, becoming a recluse. After repeated attempts by his family to reintegrate him into society it is ultimately the plea of Seu Wilson to make his mother happier which changes Neto's withdrawn state. His mother suggests that he seek a job in his sister's business as a door-to-door salesman, which he obtains, as we learn in the following scenes. Following his training for his new job, represented by way of a classroom scene and the organization's maxim 'todo mundo tem um ponto fraco', Neto is pictured at his friend's house, conversing over a beer. When his friend's mother realizes that Neto is in her home she takes her son aside and asks him to eject Neto from the premises. After leaving his friend's house

Neto is seen at a bus-stop, alone and unsettled, and the disturbing voice and teeth of his father appear once again as an indication of his state of mind. His altered state is further highlighted by his change in clothes; the loose clothes which characterized his earlier skater self are now replaced by a grey suit appropriate for the line of work he is pursuing. Neto is, however, visibly uncomfortable with his new look as we see him untuck his shirt, take off his blazer and remove his tie in a later scene where he comes across Leninha in a bookshop in São Paulo. Neto's awareness of the loss of his identity and the forces which stigmatize him is also reflected in his wearing of the hat that Bui gave him in the hospital when he goes to a friend's party.

Significantly, the two psychiatric institutions use Neto's name in different ways. In the first institution the nurses repeatedly refer to him as Wilson, which as we learn in the film, is not how he is commonly known. Furthermore, Wilson is his father's name, thus highlighting both the abyss which exists between father and son and the figure of repression in his father's name. In this sense, the film returns to the earlier discussion of the Lacanian 'nom du père' in relation to *Los rubios*. Here, then, the father's name becomes a signifier of the order which represses Neto's body and another example of the repressive patriarchal power matrix which the film explores. In the second institution, however, the protagonist is called Neto by the people who work there, indicating his sense of belonging inside the walls of the *manicômio* following his complete estrangement from outside society. As a signifier of belonging or the loss of identity, the name here bears striking comparison to the dehumanizing effect of being given a number, as seen previously in *La fe del volcán*. Neto, here, whilst he is still addressed by name, not number, is disrespected as the employees of the first institution refuse to call him by his preferred name.

### RESONANCES OF DICTATORSHIP

The process of dehumanization effected through the loss of Neto's name and the torture motif strongly evokes the authoritarian and brutal methods of the Brazilian military during the dictatorship, acting as an allegory for the abuses of the regime.<sup>376</sup>

<sup>376</sup> It is worth noting that allegory played a key role in cultural production during the military dictatorship in Brazil in order for artists and writers to escape censorship whilst continuing to make social comment. Noteworthy here for its depiction of madness and the abuse of power is Nelson Pereira dos Santos's adaptation of Machado de Assis's short story 'O Alienista' (1881-1882). Belonging to the Tropicalist phase of *cinema novo*, dos Santos's film *Azyllo Muito Louco* (1970) made use of Machado de Assis's work in order to denounce the relationship between power, science and madness embodied in the abuses of the regime.

In this way, the ‘emblemization of exclusion and silencing through the image of madness’ engages with both past and present configurations of marginalization in Brazilian society.<sup>377</sup> This link is explicitly referenced when Neto is first admitted to the institution and questions if they are the military, asking ‘é exército?’, to which the nurse responds ‘fica tranquilo que não é exército, não’.<sup>378</sup> The similarities between the treatment Neto receives in the *manicômio* and the testimonies of women survivors of torture in the dictatorship era in *Que Bom Te Ver Viva* also merit consideration.<sup>379</sup> As discussed in Chapter II, many of the survivors included in Lúcia Murat’s film reference the humiliation they experienced *as women* at the hands of the military regime. This included, amongst other things, natural bodily functions being turned into sites of humiliation, as, for example, in Maria do Carmo Brito’s account of menstruation. In *Bicho de Sete Cabeças*, Neto’s humiliation and utter dehumanization is most clearly illustrated in the scene when, banished to solitary confinement, the guard finds him with wet clothes from having urinated on himself in the cell. Soiling his clothes, Neto bears the mark of fear and embarrassment in a similar way to that of the woman in *Que Bom Te Ver Viva* who stained her clothes with menstrual blood. Moreover, this fear is intimately linked to the body. This process of dehumanization, whereby Neto is reduced to bodily function, is, then, reminiscent of Julia Kristeva’s description of the abjection of bodily fluids. She writes,

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<sup>377</sup> Avelar, *The Untimely Present*, p. 53. Here Avelar was actually referring to *Hombre mirando al sudeste* (Eliseo Subiela, 1986), an Argentine film which employed the figure of the madman imprisoned in a psychiatric hospital as a poignant comment on dictatorship repression and the fate of the disappeared in postdictatorship Argentina. See Kantaris, ‘The Repressed Signifier: The Cinema of Alejandro Agresti and Eliseo Subiela’, in *Identity and Discursive Practice: Spain and Latin America*, ed. by Francisco Domínguez (Bern: Peter Lang Publishers, 2000), pp. 157-73, for more analysis of this film in light of the dictatorship.

<sup>378</sup> It is worth noting that during the military dictatorship in Brazil four soldiers were tortured to death, having been accused of using and trafficking marijuana in the Barra Mansa barracks. This episode is little known and highly important as there was, in fact, an Army investigation into the illegitimate use of torture within the institution. This enquiry, however, was an isolated example of some form of transparency during the regime. See Kenneth Serbin’s excellent research in *Secret Dialogues*, pp. 186-199, for further information on the Barra Mansa episode.

<sup>379</sup> Indeed, the parallels between the repressive structure of the psychiatric institution and the earlier period of dictatorship in Brazil point to their symbiotic relationship during the military period. As Carrano notes in an interview given in 2006, ‘a ditadura militar e a psiquiatria brasileira agiram como mão e luva no desaparecimento, morte e inutilização de brasileiros que foram contra o regime militar, usando vários hospícios como lugar de “desova”’. See Austregésilo Carrano in interview with Felipe Araújo, ‘Entrevista: *Bicho de Sete Cabeças*’, *O Povo*, 2 September 2006, <<http://www.opovo.com.br/opovo/cienciasaude/626357.html>> [accessed 18 August 2008].

The body's inside [...] shows up in order to compensate for the collapse of the border between inside and outside. It is as if the skin, a fragile container, no longer guaranteed the integrity of one's 'own and clean self' but, scraped or transparent, invisible or taut, gave way before the dejection of its contents. Urine, blood, sperm, excrement then show up in order to reassure a subject that is lacking its 'own and clean self'.<sup>380</sup>

Indeed, the reduction of Neto to a state which undermines his bodily integrity, evidencing the rupture between inside and outside, is key to both the abuse he undergoes in the psychiatric hospital and the torture that victims of the dictatorships suffered. Moreover, his dehumanization in this scene contributes to the general feminization of Neto throughout the film.

Here it is worth observing the move towards the focus on male bodies represented in this film. The other films we have discussed, *Um Passaporte Húngaro*, *Los rubios*, *La fe del volcán* and *Que Bom Te Ver Viva*, have tended to focus on the *female* body in their manipulation of themes of violence, regulation and repression, with the notable exceptions of the role of Kogut's grandfather, Carri's father, and Danilo in *La fe del volcán*. In many cases this has, in part, been due to the autobiographical nature of the works, as films which reflect the journeys, memories and personal histories of the directors. *Bicho*, on the other hand, focuses on the tensions inherent in the father-son relationship, and on the male environment of the psychiatric hospital. Moreover, in the case of *Bicho*, the focus on the male configurations of power and violence emphasizes the fact that men were, and continue to be, targets of military regimes and repressive structures more generally. This shift demonstrates the concern for the abuse of the body more broadly and suggests a continued interest in the dissection of structures of power which are inherent in the predominantly patriarchal society which surrounds these directors. The masculinist structures of power find one of their most flagrant expressions in the voice of the state. Strategically, however, Neto is feminized in *Bicho*, I argue, to make this demonization of male institutions of power even stronger.

#### FEMINIZATION OF NETO

Given that Rodrigo Santoro is a pin-up and high-profile actor, both in Brazil and internationally, and is well-known for his roles in Globo *telenovelas*, namely *O Amor Está no Ar* (1997) and *Hilda Furacão* (1998), it is perhaps surprising that

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<sup>380</sup> Kristeva, p. 53.

Bodanzky chose to have him appear so passive and disinterested in girls in *Bicho*. Indeed, as Juliana Pereira comments on the actor's transition from the *telenovela* to feature films in *Bicho*,

Os prêmios que o filme levou nesses festivais foram mais que merecidos, mérito de cada elemento impecável que compõe essa produção cinematográfica. A começar pela atuação visceral de Rodrigo Santoro, que se despiu de toda a vaidade e mostrou o ator excepcional que é sob a maquiagem global [...] quando não tem de recitar textos ordinários.<sup>381</sup>

This decision to cast an actor widely regarded in Brazil as a sex symbol also serves to emphasize the contrast with the character's emasculation throughout the film. Whilst towards the beginning we see Neto spend time with a girl and the insinuation of a possible romance, Neto is far from being a predatory male. His long hair is a sign of rebellion, at once associating him with skate fashion and suggesting his effeminacy. Indeed, his father is certainly attentive to the fact that his son does not appear to be the typical macho adolescent when he heatedly calls him *veado*, insinuating that he is gay. Here Seu Wilson's conservative desire to have a son who will conform to his ideals of masculinity neatly links the feminization of Neto to his EST treatment in the *manicômio*, as this treatment has been, in the past, destined to convert men with homosexual tendencies to the normative heterosexual model.<sup>382</sup> Indeed, it is not just Neto's rebellious nature which calls for concern in his father's eyes, and his punishment by EST in the hospital, but also his passive sexuality.

Subsequent to Neto's release from the first institution his sexual frustration comes to the forefront of the film in the aforementioned scene where he vandalises his friend's bathroom following his failure to perform sexually with a girl. Here Neto is rendered helpless and inadequate, evidencing not only his altered state following his internment but also his feminization in the film. In the second institution Neto is also forced to cut his hair, something which he rebels against as it is another assault on his identity. This not only resonates with the dominant need to conform with normative ideals of masculinity, but also the practice of shaving prisoners' heads in concentration camps. This scene thus becomes a signifier of the dehumanizing and brutal effects of institutional violence. Neto's feminization signifies the powerless

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<sup>381</sup> Juliana Pereira, p. 37.

<sup>382</sup> The use of electroshock sessions in aversion therapy was prevalent in the 1950s and 1960s when any 'soft' or 'passive' characteristics could be perceived as an indicator of homosexuality and merit treatment. This is illustrated in the Todd Haynes remake of a Douglas Sirk melodrama, *Far from Heaven* (2002), where Frank Whitaker (Dennis Quaid) seeks help for his homosexuality which results in electroshock aversion therapy.

position he finds himself in; like the torturer-victim relationship, the difference normally established between male and female is a relationship of active-passive. It is in this figuration of the protagonist as weak, passive and frequently emasculated, that the film dialogues with experiences of torture under the dictatorship, building on the existing connotations of violence and power in Brazil. This consolidation of tropes of masculinity and femininity, however, could be seen to reinforce the respective associations of victimhood and passivity, and violence and action, with women and men respectively. Neto's feminization, however, seems to suggest resistance to the hegemonic norm rather than passive submission to it.

According to Ismail Xavier, '*Em Bicho de Sete Cabeças, a instituição familiar e a ordem médica compõem o binômio da desumanização*'.<sup>383</sup> This same description could apply to the following film *XXY*, which also revolves around a family narrative in its critique of medical reason. Where Neto's body represents the boundary between civilization and madness, to borrow Foucault's turn of phrase, the protagonist in *XXY* represents a different boundary transgression. Alex's body, an intersex adolescent struggling with her identity and sexuality, contests the facile distinctions made between male and female, heterosexual and homosexual, suggesting a more fluid interpretation of body dynamics which would respect an individual's right to choice.

### *XXY*

Cited as '*una de las películas más inquietantes que el cine argentino haya dado en bastante tiempo*' by the Argentine critic Horacio Bernades, *XXY* has garnered a number of international awards and currently holds pride of place in countless GBLT film festivals around the world.<sup>384</sup> This coproduction between Argentina, France and Spain, won the Critics' Week Grand Prize at the 2007 Cannes festival and the 2008

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<sup>383</sup> Ismail Xavier, 'Humanizadores do Inevitável', *Alceu*, 8.15 (July-December 2007), 256-269 (p. 262).

<sup>384</sup> Horacio Bernades, 'El saludable arte de plantear preguntas', *Página 12: Espectáculos*, 14 June 2007, <<http://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/suplementos/espectaculos/5-6638-2007-06-14.html>> [accessed 12 May 2008].

Goya Award for best Spanish language film.<sup>385</sup> Adapted from Sergio Bizzio's short story 'Cinismo', the film constitutes the director Lucía Puenzo's feature debut.<sup>386</sup>

*XXY* is the story of a fifteen-year old girl, Alex (Inés Efron), an intersex adolescent struggling with her identity. Alex's parents decided not to operate on her unexpected phallus when she was born, despite the encouragement of the doctors to normalize her female genitalia, and left Buenos Aires for Uruguay in search of a life away from the judgemental gaze of others. Now her mother, Suli (Valeria Bertuccelli), invites a friend, Erika (Carolina Pelleritti), and her surgeon husband, Ramiro (Germán Palacios) from the Argentine capital to study Alex's case and evaluate the option of surgery to 'correct' Alex's body. The guests' son, Álvaro (Martín Piroyansky), develops a relationship with Alex, ultimately bringing the recognition of Alex's ambiguous body out into the open. The film concludes with the surgeon and his family returning to Buenos Aires and Alex asserting her desire to break free from the world of secrecy which enshrouds her body.

In spite of the fact that the film's website and director repeatedly describe Alex, the protagonist, as an intersex adolescent, and not as a hermaphrodite, the majority of film criticism on the feature uses the mythic term of the hermaphrodite to denote Alex's status.<sup>387</sup> This is problematic, not only for its denial of the more general and recent term, intersex, but also for locating the narrative in the realm of myth with which the hermaphrodite is commonly associated. The tension between myth and reality, otherness and normality, reflected in these critics' perspectives on the film, is to be found at the centre of *XXY*'s narrative structure. In order to discuss the strategies by which Puenzo brings Alex's otherness to the fore, I will first briefly outline the history of the myth and scientific treatment of hermaphrodites, or intersex individuals as they are now widely known.

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<sup>385</sup> It is interesting to note that while *XXY* was praised by Argentine and international critics alike, and selected to represent the country in the 2008 Academy Awards, the film was not finally shortlisted in the Best Foreign Film competition.

<sup>386</sup> Additional to his role as writer of a number of films, Sergio Bizzio directed *Animalada* (2001). Lucía Puenzo, also a writer, is the daughter of the renowned director Luís Puenzo, responsible for *La historia oficial* (1985), winner of Best Foreign Film Oscar at the 1985 Academy Awards.

<sup>387</sup> See the film's website at <<http://www.xxylapelicula.puenzo.com>>. For just a few examples of the description of Alex as a hermaphrodite, see the reviews and synopses at: <[www.imdb.com](http://www.imdb.com)>; <[www.variety.com](http://www.variety.com)>; <[www.siff.net](http://www.siff.net)>, (the Seattle International Film Festival website) [all accessed 12 May 2008].

## INTERSEXUALITY

As Anne Fausto-Sterling states in her book, *Sexing the Body*, ‘intersexuality is old news’.<sup>388</sup> Whilst the term has only emerged in recent years, the existence of mixed-sex people has been documented since Antiquity under the guise of the hermaphrodite.<sup>389</sup> In classical Greek mythology Hermaphroditus was the son of Hermes and Aphrodite who seemingly fused with the body of a water nymph, Salmacis, forming a body half male, half female.<sup>390</sup> The recent rejection of the term hermaphrodite by members of activist groups, such as the Intersex Society of North America, was largely brought about to correct the inadequacy of the hermaphrodite model to describe a wide range of alternative configurations of the body on the one hand, and on the other, as a move away from the intensely mythical status of the term.<sup>391</sup> Indeed, a study of the hermaphrodite over time demonstrates its persistent association with the Greek origin myth, a body belonging to the realm of the fantastical: an otherworldly body. The changing attitudes to the figure of the hermaphrodite mirror the changes in European societies, which increasingly sought to categorize the human body. As Foucault documents in the Introduction to *Herculine Barbin*, ‘it was a very long time before the postulate that a hermaphrodite must have a sex- a single, a true sex- was formulated. For centuries it was quite simply agreed that hermaphrodites had two’.<sup>392</sup> Whilst not entirely devoid of stigmatization, the hermaphrodite did have certain rights and could, up to a point, enjoy its status as a Third Sex. As Gilbert Herdt notes in the volume *Third Sex, Third Gender* (1994):

The Greeks and the early Romans seem to have shared in folk beliefs and practices that were more open in their epistemology of sexual nature and sexual culture. Their acceptance of sexual and gender variations emerged

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<sup>388</sup> Anne Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), p. 32.

<sup>389</sup> The term ‘intersexuality’ was purportedly coined by the biomedical researcher Richard Goldschmidt in 1917.

<sup>390</sup> The myth of the origin of Hermaphroditus is documented in Book IV of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. It is repeatedly discussed in scholarly works dedicated to the theme of hermaphroditism and intersexuality. See Alice Domurat Dreger, *Hermaphrodites and the Medical Invention of Sex* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 31.

<sup>391</sup> Alice Dreger writes of the difference between the two terms: “‘Intersexed’ literally means that an individual is *between* the sexes – that s/he slips between and blends maleness and femaleness. By contrast the term, “hermaphroditic” implies that a person has *both* male and female attributes, that s/he is not a third sex or a blended sex, but instead that s/he is a sort of double sex, that is, in possession of a body which juxtaposes essentially “male” and essentially “female” parts’. See Dreger, p. 31.

<sup>392</sup> Foucault, ‘Introduction’ to *Herculine Barbin*, p. vii.



from fundamental sources: the variety of life forms and genders that Zeus could temporarily inhabit, at one time desiring a woman and later a boy; the significance of the god Hermaphroditus in Greek thought; the acceptance of the legendary Tiresias, who changed from male to female to male again in one lifetime, and whose soothsaying powers hark back to such pansexuality. All of these Greek forms showed a lively attention to anatomical differences and sexual options, but with much more fluidity permitted in states of being and ways of acting human.<sup>393</sup>

However, with the rise of scientific reason in the nineteenth century, biologists focused on further dissecting and categorizing the human body. The French zoologist Isidore Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire in the 1830s developed a science of unusual births, *teratology*, which began to work towards the subdivision of hermaphrodites into the categories of 'true' and 'pseudo' hermaphrodites.<sup>394</sup> Moreover, the fusion of the two sexes became increasingly questioned during the nineteenth century, as it was assumed that one of them, male or female, would prevail, even in a hybrid body. Gradually the hermaphrodite became explained away to the point of societal obsolescence. The denial of the juxtaposition of the two sexes thus reinforced the binary sex system which marked male and female at opposing poles on a scale and obliterated their hybrid from the middle. Scientific advancement began to treat these 'unusual' bodies not as freak phenomena but as disfigurements that could be 'fixed' with the tools of science.

Whilst today a growing number of accounts of intersex experience are coming to the fore in autobiographical narrations of embodiment and gender reassignment, it seems that little has changed since the nineteenth century with regards to the medical treatment of intersex individuals. Indeed, as Alice Dreger makes patently clear in the epilogue to her excellent account of hermaphroditism and its treatment over time, there exists a disjuncture between what Dreger terms the contemporary 'postmodernistic' life histories from the perspective of intersex individuals themselves, and, the 'extremely modernistic' medical-technological approaches to these biological anomalies.<sup>395</sup> These approaches are based on the underlying assumption that unless a child is brought up firmly in accordance with the societal gender norms of his/her given culture, s/he will be confused and severely

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<sup>393</sup> Gilbert Herdt, ed., *Third Sex, Third Gender: Beyond Sexual Dimorphism in Culture and History* (New York: Zone Books, 1994), pp. 13-14.

<sup>394</sup> See *Third Sex, Third Gender*, ed. by Herdt, and Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body*, for detailed discussions of the development of scientific approaches to intersexuality.

<sup>395</sup> Dreger, p. 181.

unstable.<sup>396</sup> In line with this belief, doctors generally seek to take action promptly after birth to ensure an effective adjustment.

At birth intersex children are declared a social emergency. Typically the parents are given twenty-four hours to make a decision about whether to operate on the baby's body and rarely allowed the opportunity to talk to other parents of intersex children to understand their options. However, today activist groups such as the aforementioned Intersex Society of North America demand that 'normalization' surgery should be decided with the patient at a later stage, giving the person the opportunity to choose and live with his/her chosen bodily configuration.<sup>397</sup>

It is in this context that I wish to discuss *XXY*, which brings to the fore debates over the categorization of bodies and their subsequent gender upbringings. *XXY* questions the surgical and hormonal methods used to control intersex bodies and as such overlaps with concerns of activist groups who seek to protect the corporeal autonomy of these children until they are of an age to make a decision for themselves. The film both highlights the scientific and illegitimate 'fixing' of intersex individuals, and allows the protagonist Alex agency in decisions over what should happen with her 'deviant' body. The present analysis, then, considers both the film's important attempt to inscribe the body of the intersex person in the visual realm and the concomitant reiteration of this same body as otherworldly through the use of the marine myth.

## BORDERLANDS

Alex's body is contested in multiple ways, and its corporeality suggests a borderland that is neither male, nor female, neither heterosexual, nor homosexual. Indeed, the figure of the intersex adolescent recognizes the limitations of sexual dimorphism, acknowledging that there are other combinations of gender and sexuality which are, in fact, humanly possible. Alex's corporeality, then, is 'caught up in cultural "border wars" – wars over the borders separating males and females, men and women, boys

<sup>396</sup> See Suzanne Kessler, *Lessons from the Intersexed* (New Brunswick, NJ & London: Rutgers University Press, 1998) and her account of John Money's research which has led to these assumptions (pp. 14-16).

<sup>397</sup> The Intersex Society of North America was established by the prominent intersex woman Cheryl Chase. See the society's website for more details: <<http://www.isna.org>>. In the UK the AIS (Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome) Support Network, created in 1988, coordinates help for varied conditions leading to intersexuality. See the group's website for further information: <[www.aissg.org](http://www.aissg.org)> [12 May 2008].

and girls, borders separating the acceptable heterosexual and the disfavored homosexual, borders separating those with authority from those without'.<sup>398</sup> This frontier is evoked not only through Alex's hybrid body but also through her environment.

The borderland in *XXY* is inscribed from the outset in the location of the narrative. The film is set near Piriápolis in Uruguay, where the family lead a reclusive life away from the big city and are deeply involved with marine and beach life. The beach, as a physical border which separates land and sea, becomes the landscape which epitomizes Alex's in-between state, as we learn in the film that she was in fact conceived on the sand. Alex's parents' decision to return to the place where she was conceived, and thus escape the judgement of people in the city of Buenos Aires, indicates a return to the very origin of Alex, located in this desolate beach landscape. Far from depicting a hot, sunny beach with scantily dressed holiday-makers, however, the beach where Alex's family live is wild, windy and grey. Furthermore, Alex's tomboyish appearance emphasizes the refusal of the film to exoticize the beach location, as in place of the usual swimming costume or bikini, Alex appears in a hooded top and knee-length shorts. Thus, the remote coastal setting of the film highlights Alex's reclusion and stakes out her difference in terms of dress code and modes of leisure. Far from becoming the liberating space which her parents had desired, Alex's existence in this small-town locality is overshadowed by the secret she maintains hidden under her clothes. This secret is guarded throughout much of the film, and the spectator gradually realizes the nature of Alex's body from hints which are given in the dialogue. Yet it is the cinematography which most forcefully underlines the otherworldly status of Alex, alluding to the myth of the sea monster and depicting Alex's marginality from the opening of the film.

#### SEA MONSTERS

Whilst the myth of Hermaphroditus is not specifically referenced in the film, I suggest that another myth, that of the sea monster Kraken – announced by way of Alex's father's name – structures its narrative. The film's proximity to the sea gives rise to the marine monster motif which perforates the film's symbolism.<sup>399</sup> The myth

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<sup>398</sup> Dreger, p. 198.

<sup>399</sup> The Kraken myth derives from Norse mythology, closely related to the word *krake*, which means an unhealthy or twisted animal, but is in fact now thought to be the true account of a giant squid

of the sea monster is invoked from the opening sequence when we see the protagonist Alex running breathlessly through a wood with a machete, intercut with the film credits depicting underwater scenes of pulsating squid-like creatures and subaquatic noises. This scene begins with a close-up of Alex's feet as she walks through the woods barefoot. Its invocation of a biblical scene immediately establishes Alex as a 'special' being in its allusions to Jesus, and the over-exposed light on the feet accentuates their symbolism. Moreover, as a largely gender indeterminate part of the body, the shot of the feet highlights the theme of Alex's bodily ambiguity from the onset. We then become aware that a girl, who turns out to be Alex's friend later in the film, is chasing her through the woods. But whilst this chasing game would purport to suggest innocent child's play there seems to be a more malign spirit which encodes the spectator's first encounter with Alex. The sound of breathlessness emphasizes a sense of urgency and panic and this is interlaced with the underwater sounds that accompany the credits. The cuts between the scene in the woods and the credits become shorter, giving the impression that someone else, or something else, is chasing Alex, and the sequence stops abruptly with a thud as Alex brings the knife down to the ground as if she has been dragged to the depths of the sea.<sup>400</sup> Furthermore, immediately following the credit sequence we see the guests from Argentina arriving at the family home, with Alex framed as a beast of the underworld as she hides below the house and gazes on the new arrivals through the floorboards. Here a shot-reverse-shot sequence from Alex's and Álvaro's perspectives introduces the meeting between the two adolescents which will prove pivotal to the development of the characters throughout the film. This sequence of gazes also points to the economy of vision which is integral to the unveiling of Alex's secret in the narrative, and to which I will turn later. The opening, then, serves to alert the spectator to the spectral presence of the underwater monster.

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which terrorized sailors in Scandinavian waters centuries ago. The Kraken monster has also been used in literature and film, most famously in Alfred Tennyson's poem, 'The Kraken', published in 1830. John Wyndham also wrote the novel *The Kraken Wakes* (1953) and more recently the Kraken appeared as the sea monster in the second part of *Pirates of the Caribbean, Dead Man's Chest* (Gore Verbinsky, 2006).

<sup>400</sup> Given the subject of the film, it would also be possible to interpret a Freudian gesture here in that Alex attempts to 'cut away' that element of her genitalia which might be displeasing to her – her phallus.

### SPECIES AND CATEGORIZATION OF THE BODY

Alex's connection with the underwater world occurs time and again in the film, from the clownfish kept in a tank in the house, to the refuge she seeks in the water. These clownfish, which we see being fed by Kraken in an early scene in the film, are not just an indication of Alex's and her family's love for the marine world, but they also bear a symbolic weight in that the clownfish is also a protandrous hermaphroditic species, mutating from male to female with maturity. Indeed, the decision to include these fish in the *mise-en-scène* as a sign of Alex's gender indeterminacy points to the overt use of symbolism to accentuate aspects of her character.<sup>401</sup> Furthermore, a shot of the fish next to a photo of Alex as a young child underlines the parallel established between this hermaphroditic species of the marine world, and Alex. On a formal level, then, the symbolism of the clownfish suggests that the family is interested in permeable and mutating identities akin to Alex's own.

There is a further connection to the sea, however, in the character of her father, a marine biologist, who bears the name of Kraken. This naming strategy at once alerts the spectator to the myth of the marine monster in the film and to the special relationship that Alex holds with her father through their connection with the sea. In the film, Alex frequently assists Kraken with his work, not only pointing to her interest in the marine world but also providing narrative situations to make frequent suggestions of the similarities between the impulse to categorize animals and human beings. On a number of occasions the dialogue refers to humans as species, deepening the connections between the biological imperative to catalogue living organisms and humans alike. One such example occurs early on in the film, when Alex witnesses her father's naming of a stray turtle as *hembra* as he carries out his work in his 'consultation room'. Building on this initial parallel established between animals and Alex, her exposed position in the town is emphasized in another scene with Alex's friend Vanda and their respective fathers at the port. In this scene the tensions between Alex and Vanda – we find out that she broke his nose in a fight and Kraken assumes that he has betrayed her in some way – are also played out in the tensions between Vanda's father and Kraken. Here Vanda's father provokes Kraken by saying, 'hay demasiadas especies en extinción por acá', making

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<sup>401</sup> This prevalent use of symbolic short cuts to communicate Alex's hybridity is one aspect of the film which has elicited criticism. See Bernades, 'El saludable arte de plantear preguntas'.

an overt reference to Alex's vulnerable status in the community by convoking the notion of species in reference to Alex's otherness.

The references to species in light of Alex's condition are not, however, limited to other characters but also reflected in Alex's own comments, illustrating Alex's acute awareness of her alien position in society. In one scene Álvaro is playing with 'un bichito raro' on the beach when Alex confronts him with '¿qué sabés vos de las especies de mi casa?', once again inferring that her world is a world-apart, another universe. The parallels established between the categorization of species in the animal world and in the world of humans emphasize the borderland which Alex inhabits – she belongs to both marine and human, male and female realms.

#### FUSION WITH THE SEA

Additional to the explicit references to Alex's otherness in the dialogue of the film, the cinematography (executed by Natasha Braier) frequently highlights and visualizes Alex's fusion with the marine world. In one scene we see Alex lying half-naked on her bed next to a huge window which gives directly onto the water, and the sound of the sea invades her private, and intimate, space. The structure of the shot visually emphasizes the absence of a barrier between her and the water; they literally become one.

The character of Alex, then, is to be found at the intersection of myth and reality through her straddling of human and animal realms. Her behaviour is seen as rebellious, her attitude aggressive, and she is often associated with the animal kingdom through her connection with turtles and the colourful pet lizard she allows to roam her body. Indeed, the lizard, a colourful green reptile, is an extremely powerful evocation of otherness, a beast which often provokes fear, not fondness, in humans. Alex, by contrast, is relaxed with the lizard on her body, and lets it crawl over her skin freely. This scene is erotically charged as the camera lingers on the skin-on-skin contact between the reptile and Alex, and the camera cuts to Alex's extremities as the lizard explores her body, highlighting the marrying of the image of a scaly beast with Alex's perceived dangerous sexuality. The camera here rests on the lizard as it slithers across Alex's skin, lending the scene more than a hint of sexual overtones. Simultaneously, Alex is reading from a biology book that her

father lent her. Moreover, the extract she reads out aloud in the film, ‘en todos los vertebrados, incluyendo el ser humano, el sexo femenino es el primario, en un sentido evolutivo y embriológico’, reiterates the father’s desire to understand Alex’s bodily ambiguity in biological terms and designate Alex as female.

As mentioned above, Alex was conceived at the edge of the sea. Later on in the film Alex’s mother makes a point of returning, with the surgeon Ramiro and his wife, to the spot where Alex was conceived, where she recounts the sexual encounter which resulted in Alex’s birth. Given that the relationship between the three friends at this moment is fraught with tension as a result of the surgeon’s fascination with Alex’s body, it seems strange and certainly significant that Alex’s mother should want to emphasize the exact location of her daughter’s conception to the intruders in her family home. This serves to underline the fact that Alex’s very existence is intimately linked to the coastal setting and the marine world on a number of levels.

Alex’s otherworldly origins are further highlighted in a conversation which takes place between Kraken and the surgeon Ramiro. Here Kraken describes Alex’s birth and remembers that she was *azul* when she was born. Whilst Kraken, in the first instance, is actually referring to the fact that she could not breathe for forty seconds, her apparent blueness could also be interpreted as referencing Alex’s alien and other status (‘Alex nació azul, tardió 40 segundos en respirar’). Kraken continues by saying ‘era perfecta. Desde el primer momento en que la ví, perfecta’, evidencing his acceptance of her body in spite of its perceived irregularity. Moreover, Kraken’s account of Alex as ‘perfecta’ at birth emphasizes his desire to classify her as a girl and the special father-daughter relationship which they hold.<sup>402</sup> Yet this description also challenges society’s judgement that Alex should not be perfect, but a monstrous body that needs to be rectified. This classification simultaneously indicates the regulatory and constitutive nature of language. As suggested in the beginning of this chapter, language structures in dyads and genders,

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<sup>402</sup> Kraken’s recounting of his designating Alex as a girl at birth is reminiscent of Judith Butler’s analysis of the performative function of the phrase ‘it’s a girl!’ in *Gender Trouble*. Butler returns to this notion of the effect of this performative iteration at the birth scene in *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of ‘Sex’* (New York & London: Routledge, 1993), when she writes, ‘to the extent that the naming of the “girl” is transitive, that is, initiates the process by which a certain “girling” is compelled, the term or, rather, its symbolic power, governs the formation of a corporeally enacted femininity that never fully approximates the norm’ (p. 232). As Kraken reminds us later in the film when he states ‘no va a ser mujer toda la vida’, Alex’s corporeality is persistently discordant with what is normally expected of her.

at once constituting *and* regulating the very options available to the subjects who speak it.

### THE MONSTROUS FEMININE

The blueness that characterizes Alex's birth reoccurs throughout the film since her skin has an iridescent quality, emphasized by the grey and blue hues which mark the desolate landscape of the Uruguayan coast. Her skin, clothes and eye colour all complement the blue tones of the sea, underlining her familiarity with the marine world. On one occasion we see her seeking refuge in the sea following her sexual encounter with Álvaro, floating on the water's surface, as if at home there. Here the light is overexposed on her body giving her skin a bright quality, and the tag around her neck, actually used to trace turtles as they migrate, alludes to a monitored, alien identity. In this way the tag is representative of her belonging to the animal realm but also references a structure of control and monitoring which we observed in the previous chapter in reference to Ana's ID number in *La fe*.<sup>403</sup> The tag, or identity number, then, is doubly encoded, emphasizing how Alex seamlessly bridges the human and aquatic kingdoms as she does the male/female divide. This duality, or hybridity, renders her body akin to the monstrous figures of the past.

The reference to the Kraken monster through the repeated marine motif and Alex's father's name is a signal that her intersex identity appears monstrous to members of society. Indeed, her physical hybridity radically questions the very fundamentals of the normative, heterosexual and dualistic society in which many of us live.<sup>404</sup> As Foucault reminds us in *Abnormal*:

The monster is essentially a mixture [...] of two realms, the animal and the human: the man with the head of an ox, the man with a bird's feet—monsters. It is the blending, the mixture of two species: the pig with a sheep's head is a monster. It is the mixture of two individuals: the person who has two heads and one body or two bodies and one head is a monster. It is the mixture of two sexes: the person who is both male and female is a monster. It is a mixture of life and death: the fetus born with a morphology that means it will not be able to live but that nonetheless survives for some minutes or days is a monster.

<sup>403</sup> This monitoring of identities is a recurrent motif of many films, and may be attributed to the surveillance society which authoritarianism and neoliberalism endorse.

<sup>404</sup> It is worth noting that a number of anthropological and historical studies have also considered alternative, non-Western practices of conceiving of gender roles, sexuality and intersexuality. See Gilbert Herdt, 'Mistaken Sex: Culture, Biology and the Third Sex in New Guinea', in *Third Sex, Third Gender*, ed. by Herdt, pp. 419-446; and Will Roscoe, 'How to Become a Berdache: Toward a Unified Analysis of Gender Diversity', in *Third Sex, Third Gender*, ed. by Herdt, pp. 329-372, for two in-depth studies of these 'alternative' conceptualizations of the world.



Finally, it is a mixture of forms: the person who has neither arms nor legs, like a snake, is a monster.<sup>405</sup>

The corporeal ambiguity and hybridity which surrounds Alex's existence, then, is at the centre of her repression as she has persistently been taught that it is wrong to publicly acknowledge her 'in-between state'. Brought up to be ashamed of her difference, Alex is intensely aware of the labelling – evidenced through her wearing of the turtle identification tag – of her body as monstrous and the fascination that it provokes. At one point she even refers to herself as a monster in a discussion with Álvaro following their intimate sex scene: 'Andá, deciles a todos que soy un monstruo'. In this way, the fascination with Alex's body as a phenomenon bears a striking resemblance to the fascination with the deformities of monsters.

In an essay on the cultural representation of monsters from Antiquity until Descartes, the Portuguese philosopher José Gil writes, 'os homens precisam de monstros para se tornarem humanos'.<sup>406</sup> In other words, as a *limit body*, the figure of the monster represents a symbolic transgression of the norm, and provides the marker by which all 'normal' human beings should be understood. In *XXY*, Alex appears in the film as the daughter of Kraken, the sea monster, and possesses much of the same stubbornness which characterizes her father. Indeed, in one scene her father asserts that Alex is just like him and fights like him, once again underlining the affinities between father and daughter, monster and monster's offspring. Unlike the monsters of which José Gil writes, however, *XXY*'s monster, Alex, does not flaunt her physical difference in public as a show of excess. Rather, the act of seeing, looking at her body, in the film is codified as a violent and voyeuristic act, thus challenging the spectator to rethink the primacy of the visual in constructing notions of sex and gender identity. This is most clearly demonstrated in the lynching scene.

In this scene, which is extremely harsh and violent, Alex is attacked by a group of boys who want to know what lies beneath her clothes. Here we see the protagonist held down on a secluded beach and violated by the gaze of the boys, who pull her pants down to see if she really has a penis or not. Whilst there is in fact no penetration – all the boys keep their shorts on – the scene is encoded as a gang rape whereby we see Alex completely stripped of the clothes which rendered the source

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<sup>405</sup> Michel Foucault, 'Lecture: January 22, 1975', in *Abnormal: Lectures at the Collège de France 1974-1975*, trans. by Graham Burchell (London: Verso, 2003), pp. 55-79 (p. 63).

<sup>406</sup> José Gil, *Monstros* (Lisbon: Relógio d'Água Editores, 2006), p. 80.

of her difference invisible. Although Alex's difference in the film is not only at the genital level, this scene suggests that vision, the very act of seeing and acknowledging the hybrid body physically, renders Alex powerless. Moreover, the boys who reveal her secret get a sexual kick out of seeing her mixed-sex genitalia, pointing to the primacy of the visual in sexual interactions.

#### VOYEURISM AND VIOLENCE

Laura Mulvey's seminal essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' (1975) is instructive here in its analysis of voyeurism and scopophilia as integral to the architecture of cinema. This article, first published in *Screen* in 1975, theorized the relationship between the bearer of the look, the character being looked at (connoting 'to-be-looked-at-ness', as Mulvey referred to the experience) and psychoanalytic theory on gender difference. Drawing on the writings of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, Mulvey questions the formal elements of mainstream cinema with respect to its fetishization of the female body and its encouragement to identify with the male protagonist. Whilst this essay was published over thirty years ago, and Laura Mulvey herself has since revised its premises, it retains a singular importance in film theory as one of the first pieces of scholarship that highlighted the conflation of voyeurism and cinema alongside gender difference.

Mulvey's interpretation of the cinematic apparatus as a structure which colludes with patriarchal logic is, indeed, relevant to the present discussion of *XXY*. According to Mulvey,

The cinema satisfies a primordial wish for pleasurable looking, but it also goes further, developing scopophilia in its narcissistic aspect [...] Here, curiosity and the wish to look intermingle with a fascination with likeness and recognition: the human face, the human body, the relationship between the human form and its surroundings, the visible presence of the person in the world.<sup>407</sup>

Moreover, the gendered implications of Mulvey's seminal article – woman as spectacle – point to the possibility of interpreting the monstrous in the context of *XXY* as a specifically feminine construct. Indeed, as Rosi Braidotti has emphatically demonstrated,

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<sup>407</sup> Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen*, 16.3 (1975), reprinted in *Feminism and Film*, ed. by Kaplan, pp. 34-47 (p. 38).

The monstrous as the negative pole, the pole of pejoration, is structurally analogous to the feminine as that which is other-than the established norm [...] Within this dualistic system, monsters are, just like bodily female subjects, a figure of devalued difference; as such, it provides the fuel for the production of normative discourse.<sup>408</sup>

Braidotti then continues with a discussion of the way woman functions as a sign – a visual marker – and states that:

Woman as a sign of difference is monstrous. If we define the monster as a bodily entity that is anomalous and deviant vis-à-vis the norm, then we can argue that the female body shares with the monster the privilege of bringing out a unique blend of *fascination and horror*. This logic of attraction and repulsion is extremely significant.<sup>409</sup>

Thus, both Mulvey's and Braidotti's analysis of the power of the *gaze* and its fascination with the other, the woman, highlights the film's strategic mobilization of the motif of the monster through the body of an intersex girl in order to interrogate the structure of voyeurism in cinema and suggest the violence of the look in its objectifying form. The decision to use a female actress to portray the intersex character is fundamental here in the association of Alex with the female sex. Whilst Alex presents a border body in her representation of an intersex adolescent, it is evident that the parents have brought her up as a girl from birth and that society expects her body to comply with this categorization. The actress Inés Efron provides a polished performance of the complexities of Alex's embodiment and identity, and her casting also reiterates the character's notional definition as a girl. This, in turn, emphasizes the connection I make between the logic of the monster and the economy of the gaze in cinema.

The implication that the spectator is bound up in the structure of voyeurism, which delineates the characters in their power relations in the film, highlights the role that the gaze, and the revealing or obscuring of Alex's body, plays in the film. Throughout *XXY* the spectator is almost teased by the idea that s/he will see the 'offending' anatomy. Whilst there are at least four key moments when Alex's genitals are revealed to other characters in the film (the sex scene; the shower scene with her friend; the lynching scene; and the farewell scene between Alex and Álvaro) the spectator, in fact, never witnesses the physical secret. This withholding

<sup>408</sup> Rosi Braidotti, 'Mothers, Monsters and Machines', in *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 80.

<sup>409</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81.

device also provides much of the tension in the film in that there is always an expectation that at some point the 'truth' will be revealed, although the spectator does not know when or how.<sup>410</sup> *XXY*, then, builds on the possibilities of voyeurism in cinema to emphasize the violent nature of the gaze, culminating in the violence of Alex's lynching and subsequent derobing, whilst ultimately refusing the spectator a role in that structure of power.

According to Gil, 'ao exibir a sua deformidade, a sua anormalidade- que normalmente se esconde- o monstro oferece ao olhar mais do que qualquer outra coisa jamais vista. O monstro chega mesmo a viver dessa aberração que exhibe por todo o lado a fim de que a vejam'.<sup>411</sup> Herein lies the fundamental difference between the monsters of myth and the reality which is depicted in the film. Gil suggests that monsters actively expose their deformities, defying humans to see and acknowledge their difference. Alex, by contrast, does not reveal her own 'monstrosity', but is rendered monstrous by others. Indeed, as has been observed by a number of critics who consider the concept of the monster, the etymological origin of the word is closely related to the verb *mostrare*, the act of showing something publicly.<sup>412</sup> Alex is thus rendered monstrous through the act of unwillingly revealing her perceived deformity. The lynching scene, then, demarcates the realm of monster from the *real* experience of an intersex adolescent.

#### HAUNTING HOMOSEXUALITY

Over the course of *XXY*, however, it becomes clear that there is a second otherness which haunts the film. The surgeon's son, Álvaro, is a withdrawn teenager, struggling with his identity and his relationship with his father. Following the sexual encounter between Álvaro and Alex, where Álvaro realizes that he enjoyed being penetrated by Alex, the theme of dangerous homosexuality also invades the narrative. As Fausto-Sterling argues, 'the debates over intersexuality are inextricable from those over homosexuality; we cannot consider the challenges one poses to our gender system without considering the parallel challenge posed by the other'.<sup>413</sup> Historically hermaphrodites were forced to choose a sex at adulthood and then stick

<sup>410</sup> This same narrative strategy was exploited in the British film *The Crying Game* (Neil Jordan, 1992), which toyed with Dil's bodily secret throughout. *XXY* differs from *The Crying Game*, however, in that the genitalia are never actually revealed to the camera.

<sup>411</sup> Gil, p. 78.

<sup>412</sup> See Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, p. 65; and Braidotti, p. 91.

<sup>413</sup> Fausto-Sterling, p. 112.

to it for life in order to conform to the heterosexual matrix. Those individuals who chose to be considered male and then pursued relationships with men were considered homosexual and constituted a threat to the established social order. The imperative to denote a category for the human body at birth, either male or female, corresponds to society's anxieties surrounding homosexuality, perceived as a threat to the normative heterosexual matrix. Thus, the character of Álvaro supplies the narrative flipside of intersex identity. Álvaro's father, the surgeon, is concerned that his son may be gay, and Alex is unsure whether she likes men, women or both. Alex's parents, on recognizing that their daughter used her phallus (which according to her diagnosis is, in fact, a long clitoris) to penetrate another male, express concern for her development, once again highlighting the interconnectedness of genital ambiguity and concerns of homosexual propensity. These anxieties over sexuality haunt the film and evidence that it is much more than Alex's genital sex at stake in society's perception of her intersexuality. The possibility that she could, on a physical level, pursue sexual relations with both sexes constitutes a grave threat to the hegemonic order. This threat is illustrated in the repressive presence of the surgeon.

#### DISCIPLINE AND PUNISH

As in the repressive structures of power in *Bicho*, *XXY* presents the malevolent forces which repress Alex as male institutions, here embodied in the character of the surgeon, Ramiro. Ramiro is constructed as a harsh and unsympathetic father who is distressed at the idea that his son may be gay. When Álvaro, upset after the lynching of Alex, confronts his father in a fireside heart-to-heart, Ramiro admits to being disappointed in his son. In turn, Ramiro is relieved by the fact that Álvaro appears to have fallen for a girl, albeit an intersexual, as he informs his son 'tenía miedo de que fueras puto'. This anxiety over his son's sexuality is evidenced earlier in the film when Ramiro obliges Álvaro to drink some wine during a family meal, suggesting that his son should put something strong into his veins. These examples of Ramiro's dissatisfaction with his own son, and reluctance to accept a non-hetero sexuality, however, do more than merely illustrate his own narrow-mindedness. They explicitly reference this surgeon's fascination with abnormalities and his desire to correct bodies (and monsters). Ramiro's attempt to mould Álvaro into a *real* man by forcing

him to drink alcohol finds a parallel in his desire to mould Alex's body in accordance with normative sex-gender expectations. Furthermore, it recalls Seu Wilson's concerns over Neto's sexuality in *Bicho de Sete Cabeças*, exemplified in the above discussion of his exclamation of *veado* at the sight of his son's earring. The tension between father and child is thus configured in terms of the latter's sexuality in both cases.

Ramiro's profession is perceived as sinister from the moment he arrives in the family house as Kraken takes visible offence at his being invited in the first place. His fascination with Alex's 'case' is written in the surgeon's leading questions but also in his very sexualized gaze on his potential patient. In a kitchen scene, Alex is observed by Ramiro in a point-of-view shot to which she responds with a question: '¿Te gusta abrir cuerpos?'. Alex's astute remark and awareness of his profession is also referenced in a conversation between Alex and Álvaro in Kraken's workplace, when she asks her new friend '¿fuiste alguna vez ... al quirófano a ver como rebana cuerpos?', to which Álvaro replies 'no rebana cuerpos, los arregla'. The use of the verb *rebanar*, literally to cut or to slice off a member/limb, and *quirófano*, harks back to the violent repression during the Argentine Dirty War when the repressors used overtly medical vocabulary to refer to a range of torture practices.<sup>414</sup>

As Frank Graziano notes,

In 'dirty war' Argentina the torture rooms were denominated *quirófanos*, which translates to the English words "operating theatre." In addition to the metaphor's suggestion of surgical warfare (the removal of subversion as a disease in the political body) [...] and beyond the reference to the mock-surgical nature (with its operating instruments – among them the scalpel – and its attending physician), inverting the terms presents a common concept of military discourse: theatre of operations.<sup>415</sup>

The allusion made between the victim of torture and the patient at the end of the scalpel is relevant here in so much as it demonizes the institution of medicine for its corrective tendencies and failure to consult the patients first. Many victims of intersex normalization surgery are damaged in their potential to fully function in the genital area, making it difficult to urinate and enjoy sex. The striking resonances made here between the attempt to cut away the cancer (*los subversivos*) of society in

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<sup>414</sup> See Feitlowitz, *Lexicon of Terror*, for a thorough examination of the impact of the vocabulary used during the last dictatorship in Argentina.

<sup>415</sup> Frank Graziano, *Divine Violence: Spectacle, Psychosexuality, & Radical Christianity in the Argentine "Dirty War"* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992), p. 79.

the 'operating theatres' in the dictatorship era and the efforts to cut away the offending piece of anatomy from the intersex body point to the overtly repressive and dehumanizing treatment of individuals which continues in contemporary society.<sup>416</sup>

#### RESISTANCE AND HOPE

For all the repressive and controlling techniques used on Alex's body, the protagonist and her family actually present relatively positive approaches to intersex life. Alex's condition, congenital adrenal hyperplasia (CAH), is essentially a hormonal and enzyme irregularity which in severe cases may cause genital ambiguity.<sup>417</sup> The virilization of CAH children, which normally occurs in adolescence, is usually controlled by hormone therapy but in the film we see Alex refuse to take her medicine and throw the pills away. When the parents finally broach the subject of surgery with their daughter it is obvious that Alex does not think that it is a legitimate option. This is expressed by way of two scenes, one which takes place with the mother, where she throws away her pills and states 'quiero que todo siga igual', and the other with Kraken, her father. In the latter scene, which takes place towards the close of the film, Kraken obliquely references the option of surgery: 'Si querés, la hacemos, pero es tu decisión'. He then goes on to lament 'se va a enterar todo el mundo', to which Alex responds 'que se enteren'. Ultimately Alex is not entirely sure of what she expects of, and hopes for, the future, but for the time being, she wants to relieve herself of the burden of the secret and be able to acknowledge her ambiguous body publicly. Thus, her refusal of surgery or hormone therapy constitutes a rejection of the institution of medicine to 'correct' these unruly bodies.

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<sup>416</sup> As Débora C. D'Antonio remarks on the dictatorship context in Argentina, 'the organic metaphor of society as a biological entity from which it was necessary to eliminate cancer was projected in a kind of mystical way in order to establish the binomials health and sickness, good and bad, national and foreign. Excising these "infected tissues" meant reorganizing male and female roles'. See D'Antonio, p. 377.

<sup>417</sup> It is worth noting that the XXY condition of the title of the film is, in matter of fact, different to the condition which characterizes Alex. XXY (47) is a condition called Klinefelter's syndrome caused when several X chromosomes mix with one Y chromosome, potentially leading to genital ambiguity. This leads me to believe that the title was used as a signifier to communicate the mixed-sex thematic of the narrative. Not surprisingly, however, the disjuncture between the title of film and Alex's actual condition has led some groups to criticize the film for misrepresenting the complexities of the various conditions. UNITASK (Italian Association for Klinefelter's Syndrome) is one of the organizations which criticized Puenzo's film for such misrepresentation. See <<http://www.centrotecnomed.it/articolopetizione.htm>> [accessed 18 August 2008]. Also see Dreger, pp. 35-40, for a breakdown of the specifics of different intersex conditions.

By rejecting these disciplining forces, Alex's body essentially questions the rigid gender and sex categories to which we have become so accustomed. Her body represents a more flexible interpretation of the tensions between sex, gender and sexuality and as such defies control. Moreover, she is doubly unruly in the sense that she neither wishes to define her body as a stable entity, or behave according to heterosexual gender norms - *she* penetrates Álvaro in the sex scene. This fluidity is precisely what threatens to disrupt notions of sexual difference.

XXY, then, negotiates the cultural malaise that the intersex body provokes through the trope of the monster, thus underlining Alex's otherness in a society which seeks to monitor discrete categories of sex and gender. Alex's decision that everything should stay the same defies the secrecy which has characterized her childhood and proposes that she might lead a full life with whichever embodied identity she chooses. Alex's body suggests that it is possible to envision an approximation of scientific knowledge and social constructionism and write the body's physical corporeality back into questions of gender. In the words of David Hester,

Intersexed bodies demonstrate that bodies are not the passive means nor the performative 'ends' of gender. Instead, they raise a threat to gender altogether. As bodies without a place, bodies without identities or agency, bodies that live in a state of liminality, they do not signal the exception to the rule: they expose the limits that thereby disrupt the rule. They point out the way out of the current stalemate set up by the dichotomy of essentialism vs. constructionism. They are beyond the sex/gender division: they are postgender.<sup>418</sup>

Alex's body, then, is a limit body. Presented as otherworldly through its association with the marine myth, Alex becomes otherworldly in an alternative sense. Alex's body belongs to a world beyond the dualistic confines of the nature/nurture divide.

The tensions inherent in the film's use of the gaze and encoding of Alex as other by way of pre-existing tropes of difference, as expressed in the figure of the monster (Hermaphroditus, Kraken and woman), echo Dreger's concerns about the modernistic and postmodernistic approaches to intersexuality. The mobilization of the motif of the monster here, however, highlights the continuing concerns for tensions between modernity and postmodernity as discussed in the Argentine, and postdictatorship, context. Indeed, for Idelber Avelar, the postdictatorship period is

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<sup>418</sup> John Hester, 'Intersexes and the End of Gender: Corporeal Ethics and Postgender Bodies', *Journal of Gender Studies*, 13.3 (2004), 215-225 (p. 223).



concomitant with postmodernity.<sup>419</sup> *XXY*, then, suggests that additional to the post- of postdictatorship and the post- of postmodernity the post- of postgender is not only possible, but a reality for many.

In a different fashion *Bicho de Sete Cabeças* also draws on gendered interpretations of power dynamics in its approach to institutional violence, family tensions, and the repression of Neto. The latter, who at times appears strikingly feminized with his long hair and laid-back approach to women, also presents a challenge to the father in his otherness. Belonging to the urban counterculture of São Paulo he represents an entirely deviant vision of masculinity for Seu Wilson. His otherness, rooted in the generational shift between father and son, and underlined in his use of *pixação*, amongst other factors, is ultimately responsible for his punishment in the psychiatric institutions. Moreover, the film's references to the abuse of power and specific torture methods – namely the use of electricity which was also employed in the *picana eléctrica* - represent symbolic allusions to the dictatorship era.<sup>420</sup>

Given the intense association of medical intervention with the abuse of power in these films, it would be hard to disassociate them from the profoundly violent use of medical reason during the dictatorship periods in Brazil and Argentina. These films reiterate how

it is within the territory of the body that the pathology occurs and it is in abnormality or debasement that medicine conspires against the bodies of the victims. Medical discourse – in its authoritarian origin – is strengthened as the individual body becomes the organic metaphor for society. Thus the detainee is doubly ill, both in terms of the physical confines of his or her bodily suffering and in his or her ideas and beliefs.<sup>421</sup>

Both films draw attention to societal intolerance and the techniques institutions use to dominate the population, underlining how the authoritarian manipulation of medicine stakes out its ideology on the bodies of its victims. In so doing they engage with contemporary human rights struggles, but also illustrate the continuities between dictatorship logic and hegemonic patriarchal power more generally. The citations of authoritarian power in the films are thus employed as a framework through which to understand violence committed against the body.

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<sup>419</sup> Avelar, *The Untimely Present*, p. 79.

<sup>420</sup> Rejali, 'Electric Torture'.

<sup>421</sup> D'Antonio, p. 380.

## CHAPTER IV

**Body and City in *Um Céu de Estrelas* (Tata Amaral, 1996)  
and *Vagón fumador* (Verónica Chen, 2001)**

*'Film was a product of the era of the metropolis,  
expressing an urban viewpoint from the very origin of its history.'*<sup>422</sup>

- Giuliana Bruno

### THE BODY/CITY NEXUS

The body, specifically its relationship with the urban built and imagined environment, has developed into a rich and fruitful area of enquiry in recent years, in what has been termed the 'spatial turn' in scholarly research.<sup>423</sup> The work of cultural geographers such as Steve Pile and David Harvey, and feminist philosopher Elizabeth Grosz, combined with the theoretical legacies of Henri Lefèbvre and Michel Foucault, has attempted to come to terms with the specificities of cultural and individual experiences of space in an unevenly globalized world. Diverse disciplines such as architecture, sociology, film studies, geography and cultural studies have found in the city a crossroads, a vehicle through which to explore the ramifications of urban space on numerous aspects of lived experience and its representation. Although the majority of these theories *do* emanate from metropolitan centres, revolving around certain 'key' cities which are seen as paradigmatic 'nodes' of global communication,<sup>424</sup> they nonetheless remain relevant to the present analysis as they highlight, on many different levels, the impact of the built environment on the body and identity, and vice versa.

The interrelationship between the body and the city, then, points to the discursive formation of space and subjectivity, to the mutual imbrication of the self and the cityscape. As Elizabeth Grosz eloquently states,

The body and its environment [...] produce each other as forms of the hyperreal, as modes of simulation which have overtaken and transformed whatever reality each may have had into the image of the other: the city is

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<sup>422</sup> Giuliana Bruno, 'Motion and Emotion: Film and the Urban Fabric', in *Cities in Transition: The Moving Image and the Modern Metropolis*, ed. by Andrew Webber & Emma Wilson (London & New York: Wallflower Press, 2008), pp. 14-28 (p. 14).

<sup>423</sup> Mark Shiel, 'Cinema and the City in History and Theory', in *Cinema and the City: Film and Urban Societies in a Global Context*, ed. by Mark Shiel & Tony Fitzmaurice (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), pp. 1-18 (p. 5).

<sup>424</sup> Here I am referring to the numerous concrete examples given in the works of this group of scholars of cities like London, Paris, Los Angeles, New York, Las Vegas, and Melbourne.

made and made over into the simulacrum of the body, and the body, in its turn, is transformed, 'citified', urbanized as a distinctly metropolitan body.<sup>425</sup>

Film studies has, perhaps unsurprisingly, become a central actor in the study of the city. As a medium which has been intrinsically related to the development of urban centres and modernity, cinema portrays particularly clearly the body/city interface of which Grosz writes and which will form the focus of my final chapter. Indeed, as numerous critics have noted, the city has been a critical concern of many cinemas since its conception, either as its place of consumption, as a reflection of the modernizing process, or more explicitly at a thematic level in films such as *Metropolis* (Fritz Lang, 1927), *Berlin – Die Sinfonie der Grosstadt* (Walter Ruttmann, 1927) and copycat films produced in Latin America such as *São Paulo, Sinfonia da Metr pole* (Adalberto Kemeny & Rudolf Lustig, 1929).<sup>426</sup> Giuliana Bruno's analysis of cinema as a haptic medium which is embedded in the tension between movement and stasis, a tension particularly relevant to the development of the modern city, points to the relationship between travel and film. Bruno writes,

On the eve of the invention of cinema, a network of architectural forms produced a new spatio-visibility. Arcades, railways, department stores, and exhibition halls, among others, incarnated the new geography of modernity. They were all sites of transit. Mobility – a form of cinematography – was the essence of these new architectures. By changing the relation between spatial perception and bodily motion, the architectures of transit prepared the ground for the invention of the moving image – an outcome of the age of travel culture and the very epitome of modernity.<sup>427</sup>

As an art form, then, which evolved at the same time as the expansion of transport networks and the rise of consumerism in the metropolis, the cinema has been intimately linked to the city since its birth. Moreover, as Nezar AlSayyad suggests in the Introduction to his recent book *Cinematic Urbanism: A History of the Modern from Reel to Real* (2006), 'if we accept the premise that movies are an integral constituent of the urban environment, then cinematic technique and cinematic representation over time should reveal much about both urban theory and the urban

<sup>425</sup> Elizabeth Grosz, 'Bodies-Cities', in *Sexuality and Space*, ed. by B. Colomina (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Architectural Press, 1992), pp. 241-254 (p. 242).

<sup>426</sup> As Andrew Webber notes 'the early twentieth century was also the age of the definitive emergence of the modern metropolis, and the birth of film arises very much out of the material and imaginative conditions that this new version of the city constructed'. See Andrew Webber, 'Introduction: Moving Images of Cities', in *Cities in Transition*, ed. by Webber & Wilson, pp. 1-14 (p. 5).

<sup>427</sup> Giuliana Bruno, 'Siteseeing: Architecture and the Moving Image', *Wide Angle*, 19.4 (1997), 8-24 (p. 11).

condition'.<sup>428</sup> Film thus becomes a barometer with which to gauge shifts in the urban landscape and society.

#### PRIVATE / PUBLIC SPACE

Integral to the discussion of the changing nature of the city and its celluloid representation is the gendered and sexualized nature of public and private space. Long seen as two distinct arenas, with little if any overlap, the private is frequently restricted to domestic, intimate activities and the public to the space of politics. The Habermasian distinction made between the two realms, as articulated in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962), rests on the assumption that all sectors of the population have equal access to public space, where they may engage with political processes as *citizens* and demand that the governing body be held accountable for its actions. The modernist approach to urban planning, as epitomized in Haussmann's boulevards of nineteenth-century Paris, also emphasized the city streets and plazas as places of democracy, public spaces which would permit an even and universal access to the city. However, these same public spaces simultaneously regulated activities which should remain out of view, namely, although not exclusively, sexual relations.<sup>429</sup> In tune with the recognition of the discrepancies between different sectors of the population and their access as full citizens, feminist theory has significantly challenged the strict distinction between private and public space, proposing instead a more fluid notion of the two realms. This post-Habermasian shift is critical to the understanding of the two films to be analysed here, and will be further discussed below in relation to their questioning of the modernist ideal.

The two principal films to be examined in this chapter, *Um Céu de Estrelas* (Tata Amaral, 1996) and *Vagón fumador* (Verónica Chen, 2001) both question the distinction made between public and private spheres which has dominated scholarship until recent years. The films' problematization of the boundary between the domestic and the political, between activities supposedly *beyond* state control and those explicitly affected by it, suggests a more flexible conceptualization of space which in turn relates to the protagonists' subjectivity in the films. The films

<sup>428</sup> Nezar AlSayyad, *Cinematic Urbanism: A History of the Modern from Reel to Real* (New York & London: Routledge, 2006), p. 1.

<sup>429</sup> The public spectacle of sexual relations will come to the fore in my discussion of *Vagón fumador*, a film which engages with the illicit activities of prostitutes on the streets of Buenos Aires.

locate their narratives in the metropolises of São Paulo and Buenos Aires respectively, yet they are extremely different in their depiction of urban space. The Brazilian film, *Um Céu de Estrelas*, is set in a specific area of São Paulo, referenced explicitly in the opening and close of the film, yet the majority of the narrative unfolds within the four walls of the protagonist's house. *Vagón fumador*, for its own part, almost entirely takes place on the streets of Buenos Aires, with scarce references to the domestic space of the protagonist, who seemingly has no home. The two films are set up in dialogue here in an attempt to elucidate a detailed discussion of the collapse of the private/public border on screen and of the respective cinematic traditions which evoke the city.

Whilst the two films approach the connections between body, space and city in different ways, they both converge on the importance of space to subjectivity and particularly on the inter-pollination of public and private spheres. This pollution of domestic, 'private' space with discourses and influences from the public, 'political' world is at the heart of both Amaral's and Chen's urban narratives. Before proceeding to a discussion of the two films in question, I will briefly provide an introduction to the representation of the city in recent Latin American film, referencing São Paulo and Buenos Aires in detail.

#### LATIN AMERICAN CITIES ON FILM

The recent international successes of a number of urban-themed Latin American films, namely *Amores Perros* (Alejandro González Iñárritu, 2000), *Pizza, birra, faso* (Adrián Caetano & Bruno Stagnaro, 1998), and *Cidade de Deus* (Fernando Meirelles & Kátia Lund, 2002), have disseminated a largely dystopian vision of the city within Latin American cultural production. Moreover, these films, a number of critics suggest, constitute the 'coming of age of Latin American cinema', the pinnacle of over a century's achievements.<sup>430</sup> This view, as might be expected, is subject to much criticism, not least because of its Anglo- and Eurocentric assumptions on what constitutes an authentic Latin American vision and what satisfies the non-Latin American audience.<sup>431</sup> These films have, however, done much to inculcate a

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<sup>430</sup> See Stephen Hart, *A Companion to Latin American Film* (Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2004) for one such naïve analysis of the dynamics of Latin American cinema's funding, distribution and reception.

<sup>431</sup> Joanna Page has correctly criticized Hart's celebration of the successes of recent Latin American films on the basis that it equates private international capital in film funding with success, providing a

predominant aesthetic of the city, marked by handheld camerawork and location shooting and the striking inequalities which exist between distinct sectors of the population, usually associated with equally distinct zones of the city.

Nowhere is this more salient than within recent Brazilian film production, where the *favela* has become the epitome of the 'disjunctive democracy' which constitutes Brazilian society.<sup>432</sup> Within Brazilian film production, Rio de Janeiro has held a particularly important position in the creation of a celluloid imaginary of the nation, with its dramatic topography, tropical beaches and stark contrast between rich and poor illustrated in the image of the *morro* or *favela*, constituting a veritable 'museum of misery', to borrow Ivana Bentes's evocative phrase.<sup>433</sup> Indeed, the importance of the urban in Brazilian cinema has mirrored the huge migrations to the cities of the South from the arid North East, the favoured landscape of the 1960s *cinemanovistas*. As Teresa Caldeira observes in her study of citizenship and violence in São Paulo, by 1996 the population of Brazil was 157 million, of which an astounding 78 per cent was urban.<sup>434</sup> Nelson Pereira dos Santos's films *Rio, 40 Graus* (1955) and *Rio, Zona Norte* (1957) heralded the 'favelization' of the big screen, followed by Cacá Diegues's film, *A Grande Cidade* (1966), which also problematized the picture postcard image of Rio de Janeiro in contrast with its slum topography.

As the nation's capital until 1960 and the location for a number of foreign films, notably *Orfeu Negro* (Marcel Camus, 1959), Rio largely surpassed São Paulo in terms of the number of films set there. However, as the industrial hotbed of the country, São Paulo has enjoyed three distinct periods of cinematic fervency. The first was during the 1950s when the city attempted to import a studio system akin to the Hollywood model in the form of the short-lived Vera Cruz studios.<sup>435</sup> The second was during the late 1960s and early 1970s when the so-called *udigrudi* films, or

deeply 'apoliticized survey'. See Page, 'The Nation as the *Mise-en-scène* of Film-making in Argentina', p. 306.

<sup>432</sup> Teresa Caldeira and James Holston (1998) coined the term 'disjunctive democracy' to describe Brazil's 'contradictory processes of simultaneous expansion and disrespect for citizenship rights'. Cited in Teresa Caldeira, *City of Walls* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), p. 339.

<sup>433</sup> Ivana Bentes, 'The Aesthetics of Violence in Brazilian Film', in *City of God in Several Voices: Brazilian Social Cinema as Action*, ed. by Else R. P. Vieira (Nottingham: Critical, Cultural and Communications Press, 2005), pp. 82-92 (p. 86).

<sup>434</sup> Caldeira, *City of Walls*, p. 43.

<sup>435</sup> The films of this period have been discussed in Maria Rita Galvão, *Burguesia e Cinema: O Caso Vera Cruz* (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1981) and in Shaw & Dennison, *Brazilian National Cinema*, pp. 73-76.

*cinema marginal*, emerged in the Boca do Lixo area of São Paulo, an area known for its low-class prostitution and the production of porn movies.<sup>436</sup> The most renowned filmmakers of the *udigrudi*, Rogério Sganzerla and Júlio Bressanne, fostered an ‘aesthetics of garbage’, to borrow the term coined by Ismail Xavier, who analysed their work in his seminal study, *Allegories of Underdevelopment* (1997).<sup>437</sup> However, in the mid-1980s a generation of filmmakers who had studied at the Escola de Comunicação e Artes (ECA) at the Universidade de São Paulo (USP) would spawn a number of urban-themed films, such as *Anjos da Noite* (Wilson Barros, 1987), *A Cidade Oculta* (Chico Botelho, 1986), and *A Hora da Estrela* (Suzana Amaral, 1985), dubbed by critics the ‘jovem cinema paulista’ or the ‘cinema paulista dos anos 80’.<sup>438</sup> This cinema, according to Lúcia Nagib, cultivated a ‘brief phase of postmodern self-reflexivity and disbelief in history and narrative’, making parodic references to film *noir* whilst ‘basking in scintillating neon effects’.<sup>439</sup> Most recently, São Paulo’s violence and urban disintegration has found cinematic expression in *O Invasor* (Beto Brant, 2002) and *Linha de Passe* (Walter Salles & Daniela Thomas, 2008). Thus whilst the dramatic and easily identifiable landscape of Rio de Janeiro still tends to dominate the films which reach an international audience, São Paulo has a distinct body of urban films of its own. The Brazilian film to be analysed in this chapter, *Um Céu de Estrelas*, contributes to this growing corpus of films which focus on the urban environment of São Paulo, whilst differing dramatically from the characteristic ‘urban aesthetic’ of recent films, creating a dialogue between the specificities of the narrative’s urban environment and a tale of tragedy in a domestic environment.<sup>440</sup>

For its own part, the city of Buenos Aires has consistently provided a perspective with which to gauge the modernizing project of Argentina. As the renowned Argentine critic Beatriz Sarlo notes in an essay on the representational

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<sup>436</sup> The term *udigrudi* was a parodic distortion of the English word ‘underground’ and may be seen as one more example of Brazilian culture’s cannibalization of foreign forms akin to Caetano Veloso’s reworking of English words in his Tropicalist song lyrics.

<sup>437</sup> Ismail Xavier, *Allegories of Underdevelopment: Aesthetics and Politics in Modern Brazilian Cinema* (Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 18.

<sup>438</sup> For an appraisal of this cinema see Tales A. M. Ab’Sáber, *A Imagem Fria: Cinema e Crise do Sujeito no Brasil dos Anos 80* (Cotia, São Paulo: Ateliê Editorial, 2003).

<sup>439</sup> Lúcia Nagib, *Brazil on Screen: Cinema Novo, New Cinema, Utopia* (London & New York: I. B. Tauris, 2007), p. xviii.

<sup>440</sup> It is worth noting that Tata Amaral has directed three feature films, all of which are located in São Paulo and deal with issues of marginality and the *periferia*.

construction of the city during the 1920s, when the metropolis experienced dramatic changes:

Buenos Aires is interesting as a physical space and as a cultural myth: city and modernity presuppose one another because the city is the stage for those changes brought on by modernity, it exhibits them in an ostensible and sometimes brutal fashion, it disseminates and generalises them.<sup>441</sup>

Studies such as Laura Podalsky's *The Specular City* (2004) chart the physical and cultural evolution of the city and measure the relationship between the inhabitants and their urban surroundings. Furthermore, Buenos Aires is a recurrent theme and an integral character of many recent Argentine films. Verónica Chen's *opera prima*, *Vagón fumador*, is no exception to this tendency. Additionally, and as we have seen in association with both *Los rubios* and *La fe del volcán*, the relationship between the body and the city in Argentine culture assumes particular poignancy as a result of the country's troubled political past, specifically the Dirty War which lasted from 1976-1983. This relationship has been further affected by the demands of unrestrained neoliberal policy and society's attempts at restructuring the civil fabric of Argentina following both the recent military dictatorship and the economic crash of December 2001. The association between the body and the city, then, in this case specifically Buenos Aires, comes to the fore in the visual realm and it is my contention that Verónica Chen's film should be located within the critical tradition outlined above.

Whilst Buenos Aires has frequently contributed the backdrop for filmic narratives in recent Argentine cinema, one must observe its relevance to an earlier moment in the country's film history. The city became a central theme of the *Nuevo cine* movement of the late 1950s-early 1960s as a result of the socio-political changes occurring at the time. Sandwiched between the first period of Peronism and the short-lived second period, which would be brought to an abrupt end by the military coup of General Jorge Videla in 1976, the city witnessed a wave of newcomers migrating from the rural areas and neighbouring countries in hope of a better life. The broad implications of this period on the representation and reception of the city of Buenos Aires are charted in Podalsky's aforementioned book, *The Specular City*. Here, however, it suffices to say that the young renegade filmmakers of the 1960s frequently made use of Buenos Aires to explore the psychological

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<sup>441</sup> Beatriz Sarlo, 'Modernity and Cultural Mixture', in *Mediating Two Worlds: Cinematic Encounters in the Americas*, ed. by John King, Ana M. López & Manuel Alvarado (London: BFI Publishing, 1993), pp. 164-174 (p. 165).



implications of the city for their characters, and to question the utopian ideals of the 'modern(izing) metropolis'.<sup>442</sup> Podalsky writes,

The *Nuevo cine* favored location shooting that foregrounded the relative chaos of the city. Like their literary counterparts, the *Nuevo cine* films concentrated on the psychological states of their young middle-class protagonists and figured the city as a map of their psyche. Although the *Nuevo cine* petered out quite rapidly in the early 1960s for a variety of reasons, it did signal another way in which Buenos Aires was being reformulated through representational means.<sup>443</sup>

In a similar fashion, much of the contemporary cinema grouped under the umbrella category *Nuevo cine argentino* both uses the cityscape as a relief panorama to highlight the characters' alienation from or integration into the social space, and exploits the city's visual and rhythmic texture to perform the changes in *porteño*, and by extension Argentine, society.

Beginning with *Um Céu de Estrelas*, then, this chapter will consider the importance of the city as a co-protagonist in the narratives of Amaral and Chen, particularly highlighting the importance of systems of surveillance as an indicator of a disenchanting urban experience in the films, and underlining the films' respective dissection of cityspace. As stated above, whilst the location of *Um Céu de Estrelas* is unequivocally Moóca, São Paulo, the images rarely portray the city streets. Rather, they convey the protagonist Dalva's urban marginalization from the viewpoint of her claustrophobic home, with repeated shots through the windows of her house, revealing the urban landscape outside. Dalva's experience of the megalopolis of São Paulo points to the continuing reassessment of the city in recent Brazilian cultural production and suggests a gendered interpretation of the politics of space and urban disenfranchisement.

### UM CÉU DE ESTRELAS

Tata Amaral's (1961-) first feature film is an adaptation of the *romance* of the same name (1991) by Fernando Bonassi, who was also one of the screenwriters involved in adapting the novel for the film version.<sup>444</sup> Like the novel, the film has just three

<sup>442</sup> Laura Podalsky, *The Specular City: Transforming Culture, Consumption, and Space in Buenos Aires, 1955-1973* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004), p. 7.

<sup>443</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 21-22.

<sup>444</sup> In Lúcia Nagib's discussion of São Paulo cinema, Bonassi is highlighted as being of particular importance to the cultural effervescence of the city, collaborating on a number of recent films. See Nagib, *Brazil on Screen*, pp. 52-53.

main characters and one location. In the adaptation from novel to screen, however, the narrative undergoes some important changes, notably in the gender optic of the protagonist and in the downplaying of the socio-political context of the decline of the urban district of Moóca. In Bonassi's original the narrative is written from the point of view of the male character, the unemployed and frustrated Vítor, but in the filmic version it is his ex-girlfriend, Dalva, who assumes the lead role. Indeed, this shift in perspective reflects Tata Amaral's broader cinematic project of investigating female archetypes in the three feature films she has hitherto directed: *Um Céu de Estrelas* (1996), *Através da Janela* (2000), and most recently the film version of the highly successful Globo television series, *Antônia* (2006).<sup>445</sup> Moreover, Amaral has herself reflected on this process of adaptation, suggesting that the vision of the female character in the novel, if faithfully transposed to the screen, would be completely distorted. Thus, it was necessary to execute a certain reversal of the point-of-view:

A idéia da adaptação era inverter o ponto de vista narrativo em relação ao livro: lá, a história foi narrada do ponto de vista do homem, que vê a mulher de uma ótica deturpada. A personagem feminina, se fosse mecanicamente transposta para a tela, seria totalmente desfocada. Propus que a história fosse contada do ponto de vista da mulher que está sendo invadida e esta passou a se chamar Dalva.<sup>446</sup>

In this transposition, the female character is given a name and a profession, and rendered the central focal point of the perspective of the camera throughout the entire film.<sup>447</sup> However, the removal of many of the references to Moóca which were present in Bonassi's novel, also attempts to inscribe the characters' actions in the realm of the illogical.<sup>448</sup> By suppressing some aspects of the socio-political context which surrounds the characters, Amaral's version of *Um Céu de Estrelas* does not seek to explain the characters' actions in light of their surroundings. As Amaral has herself commented in relation to the process of the creation of the script, which involved a number of people, and numerous versions:

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<sup>445</sup> *Antônia* is cited as being 'uma virada radical' within the context of Amaral's other filmic projects. 'O Hip-hop Segundo Tata Amaral', *Revista Paisà*, 2.7 (February-March 2007), 14-15 (p. 15). Nonetheless, all three feature films are based in São Paulo and *Antônia* in particular brings the marginalization of the *favela* to the fore in its setting in Vila Brasilândia, in the *Zona Norte* of São Paulo.

<sup>446</sup> Tata Amaral, 'O Processo de Criação de *Um Céu de Estrelas*', *Estudos de Cinema*, 1.1 (1998), 23-38 (p. 26).

<sup>447</sup> Interestingly, Fernando Bonassi, when questioned on the changed perspective in the filmic adaptation of his *romance*, reportedly stated 'Não sei conduzir a narrativa pela ótica de uma mulher; todas as vezes que tentei, soou falso'. Bonassi cited in Luiz Zanin Oricchio, 'Um Céu de Estrelas É Dinamite Pura', *O Estado de São Paulo: Caderno 2*, 27 June 1997.

<sup>448</sup> Amaral, 'O Processo', pp. 33-34.

O contexto social é fortíssimo no filme. Porém não é utilizado como justificativa das ações dramáticas das personagens. Um exemplo: no livro, Vítor foi demitido da fábrica e leva a fora da namorada. Isso seria perfeitamente assimilável no roteiro, porque é verossímil. Mas os roteiristas entenderam que seria um elemento redutor da personagem Vítor que tivesse como justificativa das suas ações a demissão da fábrica e o abandono da namorada. Portanto, no filme, Vítor se demite [...] Não quero dizer que *Um Céu de Estrelas* não tenha referências sociais ou políticas, ao contrário, é todo construído a partir da existência de pessoas como Dalva e Vítor, a Moóca, etc. Mas essas referências são o ambiente dos personagens e não a justificativa das suas ações.<sup>449</sup>

In its transposition from page to screen, the film significantly recasts the novel, constituting an original 'text' in its own right. In so doing, it undermines an appraisal of its fidelity to the 'source text', highlighting the inadequacy of much adaptation theory which simply judges films in comparison with what are deemed their more worthy, effective and original literary counterparts.<sup>450</sup> Moreover, the tacit assumption that adaptations aim to faithfully transpose prose to screen is here problematized given Tata Amaral's strong direction regarding the changes in the narrative and characterization of Bonassi's novel.<sup>451</sup>

*Um Céu de Estrelas* tells the story of Dalva (Alleyna Cavalli), a young woman from Moóca, São Paulo, who has won a plane ticket to Miami to take part in a hairdressing competition. She dreams of leaving her mundane life in Moóca and aspires to a greater future away from her mother (Néa Simões) and her ex-boyfriend, Vítor (Paulo Vespúcio). Dalva's preparations, however, take a tragic turn when Vítor pays an unexpected visit to her house as she is packing her suitcase.<sup>452</sup> Vítor aggressively orders Dalva around her own home and demands that she give him

<sup>449</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>450</sup> For an in-depth analysis of the development of adaptation theory and its changing emphasis, see Robert Stam, 'Introduction: The Theory and Practice of Adaptation', in *Literature and Film: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation*, ed. by Robert Stam & Alessandro Raengo (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 1-52; and Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* (New York & London: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>451</sup> Whilst it is beyond the scope of this chapter to offer a detailed analysis of the film in light of the politics of adaptation, it is nonetheless important to recognize that recent developments in adaptation theory have increasingly challenged the fidelity criticism model, pointing to a more nuanced theorization of the multifaceted process of adaptation.

<sup>452</sup> As Dalva is making plans to leave Brazil so too were thousands of other Brazilians. As mentioned in Chapter I with regards to *Um Passaporte Húngaro*, the 1990s witnessed a significant population shift as for the first time in history Brazil became a country of *emigration* as opposed to *immigration*. Moreover, the rapid expansion of São Paulo, which had characterized the city's demographics throughout most of the twentieth century, gave way to a population growth rate of just 0.4 percent between 1991 and 1996. Figures cited in Caldeira, *City of Walls*, p. 45. Walter Salles and Daniela Thomas's film *Terra Estrangeira* (1996) also echoes these demographic changes in Brazilian society as the protagonist emigrates to Portugal.

another chance. Angry and dejected, he informs Dalva's mother that her daughter is planning to leave without telling her, and locks her in the bathroom. Later, he will shoot the mother through the bathroom door and continue to hold Dalva hostage to his violent outbursts. After the first shooting, however, the police are alerted and surround the house, encouraging Vítor to release Dalva and her mother, whom they do not realize is already dead, and turn himself in. After a series of dramatic confrontations between the couple inside the house, Dalva kills Vítor with his gun and emerges from the house, ashen and traumatized by the experience, under the watchful eye of the television reporter (played by Lígia Cortez) who is documenting the hostage situation.<sup>453</sup>

#### MOÓCA, SÃO PAULO, 1996: PRELUDE TO A CITY

Whilst the main feature film is indeed directed by Amaral, *Um Céu de Estrelas* opens with a short film by another director which literally maps the social and physical coordinates that provide the backdrop for the main narrative. The short, named 'Moóca, São Paulo, 1996' in titles which appear on the screen, was commissioned by Amaral to complement her feature and to extend its duration as she was advised that at barely one hour long her feature film was unlikely to secure theatrical release.<sup>454</sup> Amaral had already asked Francisco César Filho, with whom she had collaborated on the short film *Poema-cidade* (1986), to direct the prologue when she realized that, contrary to her expectations, she would not need it for the film's distribution after all. Irrespective of this, however, Amaral kept to her decision to incorporate the short introduction by César Filho into the structure of the film proper. The opening short, then, both serves to establish the location for the main film and dialogues with the central narrative in the repetition of aural motifs which appear on the soundtrack of both the short and the longer feature which comprise *Um Céu de Estrelas*.

Moóca, located to the East of the centre of São Paulo, was one of the principal zones of industrialization in the early twentieth century, when the city was

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<sup>453</sup> It is worth noting that the dramatic turns in the film, when Vítor kills Dalva's mother and when Dalva shoots Vítor at the end, were additional narrative twists incorporated into the script for the film version of the novel. See Amaral, 'O Processo', p. 28.

<sup>454</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

expanding its horizons and rapidly ‘modernizing’ its infrastructure and industries.<sup>455</sup> It was initially settled primarily by immigrant Italian families, amongst other European groups such as Spanish and Portuguese, who moved there to work in the industries. However, since the 1950s Moóca has suffered from the effects of deindustrialization as many factories have moved away from the centre of São Paulo to the periphery of the city. Once a vibrant *bairro* of activity, Moóca has, in fact, had a declining population since the 1950s, when many of its more wealthy inhabitants moved to other parts of the city. Those who remained in the area often moved away from the traditional housing provided for the workers to newer residential complexes at a distance from the old centre. Whilst there remains a strong Italian ‘flavour’ to the neighbourhood, the Italian migrant labour which characterized Moóca at the turn of the twentieth century has now been replaced by *nordestinos* who, as Caldeira’s work attests, are often held as scapegoats for the decline of the area.<sup>456</sup>

The short film which launches *Um Céu de Estrelas*, shot in Hi-6 video and in black and white, confirms the area’s foundations as an Italian neighbourhood, opening with insert shots of passport photographs of Italian immigrants, akin to the old passport of Sandra Kogut’s grandfather which appears in *Um Passaporte Húngaro*, discussed in Chapter I. These insert photos are accompanied by accordion music evoking a rural and ‘traditional’ past, possibly referencing a European cultural tradition that the immigrants may have brought with them to Brazil. Three of these passport photographs open the film, followed by a number of group photographs of families in a reception centre located in the Brás district, which distributed the immigrants to their respective work placements on arrival.<sup>457</sup> This prologue, then, emphasizes the Italian roots of Moóca, a traditional industrial *bairro* which has, perhaps, lost a sense of its identity since the dispersal of the community which was built around the factory buildings. Indeed, the theme of community disintegration and loss of identity, it could be argued, is central to *Um Céu de Estrelas*.

These photographs then cede to a white screen, before the camera rests on the image of a still urban landscape of factory chimneys with high-rise buildings in the background, effectively an establishing shot which determines the film’s urban location from the outset. Titles appear superimposed on the cityscape, alerting the

<sup>455</sup> The present paragraph borrows heavily from Teresa Caldeira’s discussion of the development of Moóca in *City of Walls*, pp. 13-14.

<sup>456</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>457</sup> Tata Amaral gives this information in ‘O Processo de Criação’, p. 31.

spectator to the exact location and time of the images, 'Moóca, São Paulo, 1996', and the noises of traffic and trains begin to sound. This quiet urban scene gives way to frenzied activity, with a musical score which punctuates the movements of factory work and the velocity of the modern city. The vertiginous camera explores the structure of factories and houses in the area from all angles, climbing the walls, traversing them and then descending them on the other side. The multiple tracking shots, which trace the graffiti and *pixação* on the walls, and people's faces as they walk on the streets, highlight the speed of the city, mirroring the motion of the train, which is captured in the shot on a number of occasions. The editing cuts in time with the frenetic percussion on the soundtrack and the camera changes direction of movement at frequent intervals. This movement of the camera, however, coupled with the hallmark sounds of a busy city, contrasts with the images of disused warehouses and factories, buildings in decay which had once been the edifice of modernity and industrialization.

On the streets of Moóca the camera records the faces of workers and dwellers who are in the midst of their daily travails. On occasion, the passers-by stop to look directly at the camera; on others the camera inadvertently captures moments of distress as, for example, when we see a young woman grimacing and crying on screen. The picture painted of the area is one of industrial decay, an area once full of opportunities reduced to unemployment. This portrait, whilst not present in the frame of the narrative which unfolds in Dalva's house, envelopes the action and highlights the specificities of the characters' urban environment. The urban setting thus becomes a backdrop for the narrative in the feature film which follows.

#### INTIMACY AND THE DOMESTIC: DISRUPTING THE PRIVATE/PUBLIC DIVIDE

In this way, the short film contributes to the subjectivity and characterization of Dalva and Vítor, who are both inhabitants of Moóca, with all its specificities. The film's relegation of the urban to the space *outside* the house refuses to justify the characters' actions in light of the circumstances in which they live.<sup>458</sup> The central narrative, filmed in 16mm, emerges as a counterpoint to the short film, both in theme and aesthetic style. The austere black, white and greys of the filmic prologue to *Um*

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<sup>458</sup> This, in fact, is one of the purported aims of the film. Amaral has stated that she did not want the characters' actions to be justified, but rather that their illogical decisions be brought to the fore. Tata Amaral, 'O Processo de Criação', p. 34.

*Céu de Estrelas* give way to the vivid colours of Dalva's home, creating a marked contrast between the shots of life on the streets of Moóca and the interior experience of Dalva in her home.<sup>459</sup> Indeed, critics of *Um Céu de Estrelas* have frequently considered the representation of the socio-political climate in Dalva's tragic story in terms of a change in perspective on the national in Brazilian film production, pointing to the importance of personal stories in recent filmic production.

Lúcia Nagib, in her analysis of the differences between the politically committed and utopian perspectives typical of the *cinema novo* films of the 1960s and more recent productions, suggests that the *retomada* films are not necessarily less concerned with 'national' themes and issues but more interested in *micro-narratives*, personal stories which make up the Brazilian 'whole'. Nagib states, 'instead of the political Brazil which the Cinema Novo film makers wanted to reveal, it is an intimate Brazil that they aspire to portray'.<sup>460</sup> Nagib goes on to observe that *Um Céu de Estrelas* is, in fact, a prime exponent of this 'cinema of intimacy' which surfaces in 1990s Brazil, as it 'concentrates obsessively on the individuality of the characters to the detriment of the social context, being limited basically to two protagonists enclosed in the tiny rooms of a poor house'.<sup>461</sup> Whilst I would agree that *Um Céu de Estrelas* does not attempt to self-consciously explain *away* the actions of the characters through an exposition of the decline of the neighbourhood in which they live, the narrative nonetheless makes frequent references to Moóca, both in the opening short film which locates the narrative in this lower-middle-class area and in the references to the area and its disintegration in dialogues between Dalva, Vítor and her neighbour. Moreover, Dalva's inscription in a 'popular' urban space relates to her characterization and experience of violence. Thus, as I will argue below, the film's attention to the domestic space of the protagonist does not undermine the social concerns the film expresses; rather, it establishes a tension between the interior and exterior perspective on the events which unfold in Dalva's home, epitomized in the arrival of the police and the television crew. The film's attention to the 'homescape' destabilizes the interpretation of 'domestic, private space as largely passive and separate from the public when, in fact, forms of organization, languages

<sup>459</sup> Marcus Bastos, 'A Dramaturgia Interior de *Um Céu de Estrelas*', *Estudos de Cinema*, 1.1 (1998), 75-93 (p. 77).

<sup>460</sup> Lúcia Nagib, 'The New Cinema Meets Cinema Novo: New Trends in Brazilian Cinema', *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media*, 42 (Summer 2000), <<http://www.frameworkonline.com/42ln.htm>> [accessed 28 November 2007].

<sup>461</sup> *Ibid.*

and actions in one space inform a complementary set of organizations, languages and actions in the other'.<sup>462</sup> Thus, the gendered configuration of power which is prevalent in the public realm does not cease to exist in Dalva's domestic space; rather, it becomes all the more apparent in a shocking example of sexual violence within the presumed safety of Dalva's home.

The film's *mise-en-scène* does much to emphasize the subjective 'private' world of Dalva, particularly in the camera's attention to kitsch items which decorate the house.<sup>463</sup> Indeed, as a film which has affinities with the melodramatic genre, focussing on the domestic sphere and the relationship between Dalva and Vítor, it is not surprising that the *mise-en-scène* should be so dominant in the film's architecture.<sup>464</sup> The interior of Dalva's house is covered in bright coloured posters, emphasized by the rays of light which filter through the windows, and with decorative items such as snowstorm ornaments and elaborate but cheap-looking, mass-produced clocks. The opening scene, with the protagonist applying red lipstick in her bedroom mirror, underlines the importance of colour from the outset of the film proper, and the mirror's decoration with magazine posters of stars and models signals the protagonist's 'popular' taste. This scene also represents the voyage of self-discovery which Dalva is about to undertake, in her trip to Miami, as the mirror image has become a recurrent trope of soul-searching *par excellence* in film.<sup>465</sup> As Beatriz Colomina writes in her analysis of the mirror, 'in Freudian theory the mirror represents the psyche. The reflection in the mirror is also a self-portrait projected onto the outside world. The placement of Freud's mirror on the boundary between interior and exterior undermines the status of the boundary as a fixed limit. Inside

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<sup>462</sup> Gareth A. Jones, 'The Latin American City as Contested Space: A Manifesto', *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 13.1 (January 1994), 1-12 (p. 3).

<sup>463</sup> I use the term private in inverted commas here as I do not want to accentuate the oft-made distinction between public and private, street life and domesticity. As will be discussed below, I suggest that *Um Céu de Estrelas* disrupts the boundaries established between public and private realms.

<sup>464</sup> Numerous film critics have highlighted the importance of *mise-en-scène* to the classical Hollywood melodrama, focussing on objects which express the female character's suffocation in a bourgeois and sheltered environment. See Mary Ann Doane, *Femmes Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 239; and Thomas Elsaesser, 'Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama', in *Home is Where the Heart Is*, ed. by Gledhill, pp. 43-74.

<sup>465</sup> There are countless examples in film of characters who confront their identities in the mirror. To mention just two recent examples, in *La Haine* (Mathieu Kassowitz, 1995) Vincent Cassell's character, Vinz, psyches himself up with gangster talk in the mirror. Edward Norton's monologue in Spike Lee's film, *The 25<sup>th</sup> Hour* (2002), also performs his character Monty's anger at the world and the city of New York in a mirror.



and outside cannot simply be separated'.<sup>466</sup> This juxtaposition of inside and outside in the figure of the mirror, resurfaces throughout the film both in another scene where Dalva reckons with herself in the bathroom mirror, and in the camera's attention to openings onto the outside world in the guise of windows, doors, and the audible invasion of music. The bedroom window, which becomes the central focus of the camera's lens during the opening scene, gives onto a cityscape with a grey sky, a city punctuated with the relentless sound of traffic and trains.<sup>467</sup> The doorbell buzzes and the camera zooms through the window frame to observe Dalva's immediate neighbourhood environment: a girl listening to loud music dances in her window and two elderly men play cards on their terrace. The camera lingers on these men as Dalva is presumably going to answer the door. In this way, the opening scene constructs the tension which exists throughout the film between the narrative contained *within* the frame and that which moves *beyond* it, the exterior world. Indeed, Amaral has herself discussed the opening scene in view of its use of 'espaço e som *off*', suggesting that this scene is in some way a homage to the opening scene of Jean-Luc Godard's film *Détective* (1985), which also problematizes on- and off-screen space.<sup>468</sup>

The friction between the domestic environment, where we see Dalva preparing for her future trip to Miami, and the diegetic elements which enter the narrative from *outside* the camera's frame, also suggests Dalva's containment and suffocation in domestic space. Indeed, much scholarly work has considered the development of the division of space in gendered terms and the prohibited 'public' sphere of the city streets for women citizens. Feminist scholars have particularly asserted the need to view domestic space as a sphere which is not beyond public institutions and policies but rather deeply affected by them, particularly in the case of domestic violence. As Nancy Duncan writes,

Paradoxically the home which is usually thought to be gendered feminine has also traditionally been subject to the patriarchal authority of the husband and father. Personal freedoms of the male head of household often impinge on, or

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<sup>466</sup> Beatriz Colomina, 'The Split Wall: Domestic Voyeurism', in *Sexuality & Space*, ed. by Colomina, pp. 73-128 (p. 86).

<sup>467</sup> Tata Amaral has commented on this scene, stating that the shot through the bedroom window reflects Dalva's own aspirations and hopes at this point in the narrative, when she dreams and believes that she will soon leave this restricted space. See Tata Amaral, 'O Processo de Criação', p. 32.

<sup>468</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37. Amaral states 'trata-se do espaço e som *off* bastante inspiradora de *Um Céu de Estrelas* e eu quis "decupar" a cena do quarto [in *Détective*] como uma homenagem a esse film. Um tributo ao mestre'.

in extreme cases, negate the rights, autonomy and safety of women and children who occupy these spaces. The designation of the home as a private space limits the role of political institutions and social movements in changing power relations within the family.<sup>469</sup>

Certainly, the violent domestic situation in which Dalva is caught up suggests that the home is far from a safe-haven removed from the daily practices of patriarchy. The film's depiction of domestic space as a platform on which to develop the violent and at times contradictory relationship which exists between Dalva and Vítor could also be seen to represent Dalva's restricted movement on the streets of the city. Indeed, the concern with the gendered division of space has been particularly debated in terms of the public woman, the wandering woman, the *flâneuse*.<sup>470</sup> Writing on the nineteenth-century modernist preoccupation with the city, Janet Wolff suggested in 1985 that

men and women may have shared the privatisation of personality, the careful anonymity and withdrawal in public life; but the line drawn increasingly sharply between the public and private was also one which confined women to the private, while men retained the freedom to move in the crowd or to frequent cafés and pubs.<sup>471</sup>

The continued association of women with the domestic and men with the public and political owes much to these modernist assumptions on gender roles and the nineteenth-century societal structure which effectualized this strict distinction between public and private realms. In *Um Céu de Estrelas*, however, the attention to Dalva's domestic space both offers a window onto the intimate experience of suffocation which characterizes her existence in this neighbourhood and family situation and, moreover, visually and aurally demonstrates the overlap of private and public concerns as the domestic *mise-en-scène* is frequently polluted with exterior influences.

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<sup>469</sup> Nancy Duncan, 'Renegotiating Gender and Sexuality in Public and Private Spaces', in *BodySpace*, ed. by Nancy Duncan (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 127-145 (p. 131).

<sup>470</sup> The trope of the *flâneuse* will be discussed in greater detail with respect to Reni's discovery of the streets of Buenos Aires in *Vagón fumador*. In the Brazilian context, the film *A Hora da Estrela* (Suzana Amaral, 1985) also interrogates the motif of the wandering woman on the streets of São Paulo, but challenges the opportunities of the city available to the protagonist of the film, Macabea, an impoverished *nordestina* who struggles to make a living and has no family. The film is based on the homonymous novel by Clarice Lispector (1977) but significantly shifts its urban location from Rio de Janeiro to São Paulo. For more information, see David William Foster's discussion of the film in terms of its gender politics and Macabea's romantic itinerary around the city, in Foster, *Gender and Society in Contemporary Brazilian Society*, pp. 70-82.

<sup>471</sup> Janet Wolff, 'The Invisible Flâneuse: Women and the Literature of Modernity', *Theory Culture Society*, 2.3 (1985), 37-46 (p. 41).

Dalva's quiet preparations for her travels and dream of leaving her family home and district are rapidly disturbed with the unannounced arrival of Vítor, her ex-boyfriend, at the door. Dalva first sees him through the bars on her front door, bars which once again alert the spectator to her suffocation and confinement within the four walls of her home. Moreover, these bars also point to the threat of external violence, exemplified in the disruptive force of Vítor who invades her private space, but also in the subsequent presence of the *polícia militar* outside her house. In this way the violence which disrupts Dalva's life is significantly configured as an exterior force which comes from the space of the city around her. After an initial confrontation between the former lovers, Vítor asks Dalva to get him a glass of water, and Dalva, ever obedient, goes to the kitchen to fetch him a drink. As the water from the filter is slowly trickling through the tap to fill the glass, Dalva takes a breath of fresh air at the backdoor, yet here too there are signs of her constraint in the symbolic wall which marks the end of the back yard and the sound of a plane taking off above, ironically referencing the proposed trip which she hopes to undertake, as she continues to acquiesce to Vítor's demands. Returning to the sitting room, the couple discuss Dalva's leaving for Miami, as the protagonist is pressed up against the barred windows of her living room where she looks out towards freedom. Indeed, the frequent shots of Dalva against openings in the walls, windows which are an aperture onto the world, emphasize her desire to leave home and escape her domestic space.<sup>472</sup>

Teresa Caldeira's discussion of what she terms the 'aesthetics of security' in modern-day São Paulo is illustrative here of the delineation of public and private space in the city.<sup>473</sup> Caldeira suggests that the increased use of surveillance systems, gates, barriers and bars on windows and doors, and the emergence of self-contained enclaves which erect fortified walls around themselves, points to the collapse of social relations in a city such as São Paulo which is fraught with fear and violence. Caldeira's analysis not only undermines the persistent distinction made between private and public realms, as both spheres may in fact 'feed' each others' practices,

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<sup>472</sup> According to Tata Amaral, 'esta sensação de opressão transcendeu o personagem e contagiou a equipe', as the crew had to control their movements and live within the same four walls during filming. This, Amaral suggests, is one of the reasons why she decided to 'free' Dalva at the end, and film her leaving the house, even though she is immediately re-captured in the form of both the television crew's camera and the police car which drives her away from the scene of the crime. See Amaral, 'O Processo de Criação', p. 32.

<sup>473</sup> Caldeira, *City of Walls*, p. 291.

but also highlights the importance of visual strategies of spatial demarcation. According to Caldeira,

The built environment is not a neutral stage for the unfolding of social relations. The quality of the built environment inevitably influences the quality of the social interactions that take place there. It does not determine them completely; there is always room for diverse and sometimes subversive appropriations of spaces and for the organization of social actions that counter those shaped by spatial practices. However, the material spaces that constitute the stage for public life influence the types of social relations possible on it.<sup>474</sup>

This spatial demarcation is brought to the fore in *Um Céu de Estrelas* in the repeated shots of bars across windows and doors as Dalva looks out from her 'private' space onto the 'public' space below.<sup>475</sup> Whilst Dalva may not be able to escape the home which is keeping her back from travelling to Miami, and holding her captive to the whims of Vítor and her mother, there are other 'external' elements which enter her carceral, domestic space, to which I will return below in my analysis of sound, the media and the police.

#### LIBIDINAL DESIRES: THE OEDIPUS COMPLEX AND GREEK TRAGEDY

Although Dalva and her mother are being held hostage in their own home by Vítor, it must be noted that Dalva does not initially obstruct Vítor's entry, nor does she refuse his aggressive demands. Seemingly scared of the consequences, she obeys his whims and gets him a glass of water, suggests making him a coffee and even, long after he has killed her mother, asks if she can make him something to eat. Perhaps most significantly for the understanding of her character, however, Dalva is undeniably sexually attracted to her violent ex-boyfriend, displayed in sporadic moments of tenderness and overt sexual gestures. Following the tragic and sudden killing of her mother through the bathroom door, Dalva's fit of rage at Vítor rapidly turns into an explosion of desire, as she feverishly removes his clothes. This sex scene, described as 'uma das melhores de todos os tempos' by Eduardo Valente, turns from being an active gesture on the part of Dalva to a sexually violent exposition of her suffocation

<sup>474</sup> Caldeira, *City of Walls*, pp. 298-299.

<sup>475</sup> It is also worth noting the attitudes expressed in the interviews Caldeira collected in Moóca on the increased use of bars and barriers in the neighbourhood. Where in some areas the use of these bars becomes an expression of the individual's status, in Moóca they are perceived as a necessary security device which makes the residents feel safe yet *incarcerated* in their own homes. See Caldeira, *City of Walls*, p. 290.

and confinement as she is pushed against the closed blinds of the window and reaches to grasp a breath of fresh air, evidently disturbed by the experience.<sup>476</sup> What would seem a blatantly sadomasochistic manoeuvre becomes yet another emblem of Dalva's irrationality and lack of prospects, as Vítor's violent actions and the death of her mother force her to retreat towards a past where she can no longer dream of escaping to Miami and leaving this all behind. Caught between moving towards the future and regressing towards her past with Vítor, Dalva is forced into the latter option.<sup>477</sup> Yet the characters are always responsible for their actions in *Um Céu de Estrelas*, thus avoiding a condescending perspective on them as helpless, poor people with no measure of agency. Dalva's agency is visually rendered in the frequent point-of-view shots from her perspective. Nevertheless, the film's portrayal of Dalva's decisions and prospects is forcefully linked to its depiction of a 'popular' world, devoid of ethics and possibilities.

The figure of the mother in the film, Lurdes Bartolotto, constitutes the antithesis of Dalva, representing a world which still has an order, a moral code, and respect. Her arrival at the house triggers a rapid disintegration of the situation between the former lovers, as it gives Vítor the possibility to manipulate the tensions which already exist between mother and daughter to his advantage, rendering Dalva a victim of her own secrecy as she had not yet told her mother that she was intending to leave. The mother thus embodies another obstacle for Dalva's departure, another person whom she sees as repressing her possibilities in the future. The mother's strong criticism of Vítor, whom she calls a layabout, 'um fracassado, sem futuro', reflects her opinion that Dalva cannot stand up for herself. Indeed, the mother criticizes her daughter precisely on these grounds, stating that 'você nunca soube cuidar da tua vida'. Following the mother's angry tirade at both her daughter and Vítor, the latter hits her hard across the face, knocking her to the floor, and subsequently drags her to the bathroom where he locks her up. The mother's distressed appeals continuously sound from within the bathroom, punctuated by *crente* prayer recitals, asking God for forgiveness and mercy.<sup>478</sup> Indeed, this is

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<sup>476</sup> Eduardo Valente, 'Tata Amaral e Bia Lessa: Duas Autoras em Busca de um País', *Contracampo*, 13-14 [n.d], <<http://www.contracampo.com.br/13-14/tataamaralbialessa.htm>> [accessed 28 November 2007].

<sup>477</sup> Ismail Xavier writes of Vítor as a 'figura regressiva' who activates Dalva's return to the past and suppression of the future. See Ismail Xavier in 'Cinema e Tragédia', p. 90.

<sup>478</sup> The term *crente* is used to describe a person who is a congregational protestant. More generally it may refer to a devout believer. John A. Guidry offers this definition in 'All God's Children: Narrating

another example of the tension the film establishes between on- and off- sound and images, as the mother's prayers reiterate the tension of the hostage situation and bring the film to a violent climax as the sound of her voice becomes unbearable and Vítor is compelled to stop it, irrespective of the cost. The daughter's inadvertent 'murder' of her mother, by permitting the perpetrator to enter their domestic space and wreak havoc, may, therefore, be seen as a Freudian oedipal gesture, in which the daughter's jealousy and rejection of her mother leads to the latter's death.<sup>479</sup> Moreover, Dalva's subsequent sexual initiative with Vítor could almost be interpreted as a gesture of gratitude for his eliminating this repressive maternal factor in her life. In this respect the film suggests that the maternal constitutes a force which must be overcome in order to assert one's individualism, thus colluding with a dubious gender politics. However, I would suggest that whilst the mother appears as an obstacle in the film, demanding silencing in order for the heroine (Dalva) to continue with her life, this narrative device contributes to the overall impression of a world devoid of possibilities and reason, a world intimately linked to the social depravity which surrounds the protagonist.

Additional to her overt disgust at her daughter's former partner, however, the mother deepens the association made between Dalva and popular culture in the film. Her anxious oration reflects the ever-expanding evangelical churches in Brazil, and their frequent manipulation of the desperation of poverty in their proselytizing discourse.<sup>480</sup> Indeed, the mother's staunch religiosity aligns her with a strict moral code which monitors and punishes carnal desires, thus implicating religion as one of the numerous mechanisms which repress Dalva as a poor woman. Moreover, the extreme evangelical churches have become the target of criticism in some recent

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Class and Popular Politics in Urban Brazil', in *Lusotopie*, 1997, special issue 'Lusotropicalisme: Idéologies Coloniales et Identités Nationales dans Les Mondes Lusophones' (Paris: Karthala Editions, 1997), pp. 125-170 (p. 158). It is worth noting that in some sources the spelling of the term is archaic and uses two 'e's instead of one [*creente*].

<sup>479</sup> Freud's formulation of the 'Oedipus Complex', built on his theory of castration complex, suggests that the parent of the same sex as the child becomes an object of jealousy for the child, leading to his/her death. In the case of girls, who purportedly become sexually curious about their fathers and jealous of their mothers, this complex was later dubbed the 'Electra Complex'. Freud's hypothesis on the Oedipus Complex was first discussed in 'The Development of the Libido and the Sexual Organizations' (1917), in his *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis, Vol. I*, trans. James Strachey (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), pp. 362-382.

<sup>480</sup> See David Martin, *Tongues of Fire: The Explosion of Protestantism in Latin America* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990) for an overview of the recent developments of Protestantism in Latin America; and Paul Freston, *Evangelicals and Politics in Asia, Africa and Latin America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 9-58, for a thorough history of the development of evangelical churches in Brazil. Also see *Pop Culture Latin America*, pp. 309-310, for an overview of the development of evangelical churches in Latin America.

Brazilian films, notably in *Amarelo Manga* (Cláudio Assis, 2002) and *Linha de Passe* (2008), where an unbridled faith in salvation, and the moral repression imposed on the faithful, often results in very violent acts of rebellion. The mother's involvement with religion in the film, which appears to have had at least a minimal impact on Dalva's own behaviour (her last resort is to prayer when held hostage by Vítor), then, implicitly forms part of their suffocation. Furthermore, Dalva's intermittent sexual outbursts emerge as uncontrollable urges in the context of repressed sexuality on the part of certain evangelical churches and by extension, her mother, who represents their code of conduct.

Seen in the context of a hostage situation, however, Dalva's apparent affection for Vítor is also reminiscent of the relationship between tortured and torturer. The Stockholm Syndrome, the condition which describes the victim's love and empathy for his/her repressor, is, indeed, a powerful metonym for the experience of dictatorship, rooted as it is in a powerful conflation of patriarchy and violence. Vítor's persistent sexual propositions to Dalva, and her tacit fear of violent reprisals on his part, culminate in his demand for oral sex towards the end of the film. Here the camera evinces a close inspection of the mechanisms of power and sexual violence as Dalva is brought to her knees and forced to swallow his semen. Indeed, the film as a whole is not shy of the couple's intimate relations, paying particular attention to the characters' glistening skin and raw, brusque movements as they are in the heat of passion. Amaral has herself elucidated the relationship between the body and her films, pointing to the importance of the corporeal to the elaboration of the characters in *Um Céu de Estrelas*: 'Em *Um Céu de Estrelas* tinham aquelas emoções que transbordavam pelos corpos dos personagens, suor, o desespero. Eu acho que o corpo é onde as coisas se concretizam. E para mim, de qualquer maneira, ele não é tabu. Eu não tenho problemas em filmar o corpo, acho que ele precisa ser filmado'.<sup>481</sup> Dalva's alternating desire for, and revulsion towards, Vítor could be seen as relating to the unfinished passion of their now terminated relationship, although it is left ambiguous as to whether Dalva has sex with Vítor as a way to give him what he wants and postpone the ensuing violence, or for her own pleasure, as a

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<sup>481</sup> Tata Amaral in interview with Ruy Gardnier, 'Entrevista com Tata Amaral', *Contracampo*, 18 (interview carried out 16 May, 2000), <<http://www.contracampo.com.br/18/tataamaralentrevista.htm>> [accessed 27 November 2007].

result of her ongoing emotions.<sup>482</sup> Irrespective of the reason, however, the relationship between the two is shown to be highly abusive and sexually violent, particularly in the scene where Dalva is obliged to perform fellatio in the *dénouement* of the film. Thus, the domestic space is incontrovertibly represented as a patriarchal and violent realm. Underpinning Dalva's repression in this space, however, is her association with the space of Moóca.

#### KITSCH AND THE POPULAR: AESTHETIC MARKERS OF DIFFERENCE

One of the perceived strengths of *Um Céu de Estrelas* is precisely its lack of judgement on a 'popular' universe, embodied in the decoration of Dalva's room and her musical taste. The film's commitment to conveying Dalva's perspective on events, epitomized in the point-of-view shots as she negotiates her apartment space, registers the experience of someone who acts irrationally but who is also threatened by the unpredictable actions of her bitter ex-boyfriend. Whilst the film seemingly makes no judgement on the character's actions and decisions, portraying them in their incoherencies and from Dalva's perspective, critics who have written on the film frequently reassert the class divisions which plague Brazilian society in their assessment of *Um Céu de Estrelas*. The markers of Dalva's 'popular' world – music, ornaments, clothes, religion and violence – are deeply associated with the connotations of place in the film, with Moóca renowned as a traditionally working-class area.

Pierre Bourdieu's seminal sociological study of taste, *Distinction* (1979), paved the way for an engaged discussion of the popular and its relation to high and low art, building on the premise that aesthetic choices express cultural capital and mark class distinctions. Bourdieu highlighted how the return of popular art items as kitsch objects of interest emphasizes how the focus on the popular often serves to reassert the class status of the person who is categorizing that same art as popular. The value-laden judgement that popular art is an art without meaning, produced for mere contemplation and superficial enjoyment, associates the popular with both women and the lower classes, deemed incapable of greater reflection. This marker of distinction, as Amelia Jones accurately points out, simultaneously defines hegemonic 'high' culture as much as it 'others' popular culture:

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<sup>482</sup> Amaral, 'O Processo de Criação', pp. 33-34.



Inasmuch as 'kitsch' is widely associated with women's crafts and the debased, 'primitive' cultural preferences of 'lower class,' often non-Euro-American ethnic groups, it points to the way in which gender and ethnicity are always already implicated in distinctions of class associated with taste. The psychic dimension of aesthetic judgment as a strategic mode of *othering* (of producing boundaries to define white, upper-middle class, masculine culture as superior in relation to a debased – non-white or 'primitive,' lower class, feminine – alternative) is relatively clear.<sup>483</sup>

Thus, the oppositional relationship between 'true culture' (read, highbrow) and 'kitsch culture' (read inferior form, frivolous and popular) is imbued with the gender dyad of male versus female modes of aesthetics. *Um Céu de Estrelas* performs Dalva's identity by way of her aesthetic sensibilities and dwelling in a peripheral district (albeit relatively close to the centre of the city), revealing her doubly marginalized status as woman *and* member of the lower social classes in a domestic milieu rendered devoid of prospects.

Music is fundamental to the depiction of this world and the narrative development of the relationship between Dalva and Vítor in the film. Indeed, on each occasion that we hear diegetic music, it emanates from outside, from car stereos and neighbours' sound systems. Moreover, on a number of occasions it is music which bridges the lived experience of the characters in the film both inside and outside the house. In the opening scene, as Marcus Bastos notes, it is music which provides a continuity between the interior and exterior space, as it first comes from off-screen space, which the camera then reveals as diegetic when it moves through the window and observes the neighbourhood scene: 'A música funciona, por conta dessa ambigüidade, como comentário extra-diegético e como elemento diegético'.<sup>484</sup> On a number of occasions, then, music emerges as social commentary in the film, providing background to the social class associated with the area and elucidating the characters' emotional state. As Lúcia Nagib notes in her analysis of the 'popular world' of *Um Céu de Estrelas*, 'it is easy to conclude that *brega* (kitschy) music is not exactly the taste of the authors of the film, who come from a different social background from the film's characters. However, a song by Carlos Sukowski, in the style of Roberto Carlos, plays at a revealing moment, moving the characters deeply

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<sup>483</sup> Amelia Jones, 'Art History/Art Criticism: Performing Meaning', in *Performing the Body/Performing the Text*, ed. by Amelia Jones and Andrew Stephenson (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 39-55 (p. 41).

<sup>484</sup> Bastos, 'A Dramaturgia Interior', pp. 81-82.

and nearly effecting a reconciliation: from the street comes the sound of the song playing on the radio of a car, from which a young man calls his girlfriend'.<sup>485</sup> Leaving aside the rather condescending and presumptuous views Nagib expresses on popular tastes here, foreclosing the possibility that someone from a higher social class could also like *brega*, this scene is worth highlighting for the role music plays in the portrayal of Dalva and Vitor's world in the film. Certainly music, which forms a crucial part of Dalva's soundscape and experience of Moóca, is shown to be integral to her 'popular' world and *cafona* tastes,<sup>486</sup> consolidating the décor of the house which is described by some critics as 'mau gosto'.<sup>487</sup> Indeed, *brega* as a musical genre has long been overlooked by musical historians as an apolitical and popular form of expression.

The term *brega*, according to Samuel Araújo, emerged in the mid-1980s in the press following the release of Eduardo Dusek's album *Brega-chique, chique-brega*.<sup>488</sup> Associated with sentimental and romantic lyrics and orchestration, the term has come to retrospectively define a genre of music which became particularly prevalent during the 1970s and which was championed by the internationally renowned singer, Roberto Carlos, who presented the well-known music programme, *Jovem Guarda* from 1964-1969.<sup>489</sup> Unlike the *música popular brasileira* (MPB) of the same era, *brega* music was not associated with protest against the military dictatorship; rather, it was seen as colluding with the dictatorship logic, providing *ufanista* lyrics for their nationalist project.<sup>490</sup> In recent years, however, a number of scholars, namely Paulo César de Araújo, have readdressed the role of *brega* music in Brazil, seeking a more nuanced view on the position of this musical style in Brazilian society as a marker of social class and expression of the troubles and

<sup>485</sup> Nagib, 'The New Cinema Meets Cinema Novo', pp. 10-11.

<sup>486</sup> Christopher Dunn describes *cafona* as 'a word of Italian origin akin to the notion of kitsch that is widely used in Brazil to describe any cultural manifestation that is banal, cheap, overly sentimental, or otherwise "low class."' See Dunn, review article of *Eu Não Sou Cachorro, Não: Música Popular Cafona e Ditadura Militar*, by Paulo César de Araújo, *Luso-Brazilian Review*, 40.2 (Winter 2003), 148-150 (p. 148).

<sup>487</sup> Carlos Alberto Mattos, 'Off É Fundamental para essa História de Amor e Ovo Frito', *O Estado de São Paulo: Caderno 2*, 27 June 1997.

<sup>488</sup> Samuel M. Araújo, 'Brega: Music and Conflict in Urban Brazil', *Latin American Music Review*, 9.1 (Spring-Summer 1988), 50-89 (p. 50).

<sup>489</sup> Roberto Carlos is described by John P. Murray as the 'King of Brazilian popular music'. See Murray, *Music in Brazil: Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 50-54.

<sup>490</sup> *Ufanismo* is the glorification and celebration of all things Brazilian in a distinctly nationalist tone.

desires of the lower-middle and working classes.<sup>491</sup> The continued association of *brega* with the popular classes, however, has not been displaced, as Samuel Araújo's investigation into people's definitions of the term attests: 'From the definitions which have arisen thus far, we can certainly infer that the term *brega* consistently implies a depreciative value judgment'.<sup>492</sup>

*Brega*, then, may be used to describe not only music but clothes, amongst other things, seen as belonging to the popular classes of Brazil.<sup>493</sup> Dalva's taste is thus imbued with class resonances in the film as markers of difference. The *cafona* decoration of the house, with its posters and ornaments, emphasizes Dalva's taste as belonging to the lower social classes, exaggerated with the bold colours of her domestic space. Integral to this depiction is the interior space of the home, as décor and *mise-en-scène* play a fundamental role in conveying the protagonist's popular world. Moreover, Dalva's dress sense, coupled with close-ups of objects which attract Dalva's attention, such as the snowstorm ornament on the sideboard, align the character with kitsch. In fact, even the title of the film is rendered through interior design in the form of an unsophisticated painting of a starry sky, which Dalva longingly gazes at, reflecting her ambition to leave for a place with brighter prospects.

#### SOUNDS OF THE CITY

Throughout the film noises penetrate the interior space from the neighbourhood, sounds frequently associated with the city such as trains, traffic and even police announcements given over megaphones. These sounds perforate the illusion of a hermetically sealed, domestic private space, as they collapse the perceived barrier which separates the two spheres. Moreover, they express Dalva's subjectivity and everyday life as she is permanently integrated into this soundscape. Indeed, sound, as a constitutive element of the urban experience, has long been ignored by scholars, who often posit an overtly visual definition of the relationship between body and city. However, as this film attests, there is much more to the city than the visual

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<sup>491</sup> Paulo César de Araújo, *Eu Não Sou Cachorro, Não: Música Popular Cafona e Ditadura Militar* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Record, 2002).

<sup>492</sup> Samuel M. Araújo, 'Brega: Music and Conflict in Urban Brazil', p. 84.

<sup>493</sup> *Brega*, as Lídia Santos observes, is Brazil's equivalent of kitsch and comes from an association with a street named *Nóbrega* in the red-light district of Salvador da Bahia. In this respect, the word is intimately linked to the 'appearance of a whore'. See Santos, *Tropical Kitsch: Mass Media in Latin American Art and Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2006), p. 74.

omnipresence of tower blocks and factories. As Sophie Arquette acknowledges in a recent article on the importance of space in urban studies, ‘space does not have an a priori character; it is defined and moulded by the subjectivity and social consciousness of those who experience and inhabit it. This has significant implications for understanding the role of sound as a component of urban experience’.<sup>494</sup> Indeed, the sounds which characterize city living in the twentieth or twenty-first century are not the same as in previous centuries, as the noise of vehicles and other modes of transport now constitutes one of the prime signifiers of an urban environment.

Additional to the sounds of urban movement in the film there is also the sound of urban security, as the police surround the house and clamour over megaphones. Helicopters circle overhead and the journalist who reports on the hostage situation from outside the house is integrated into the interior space as Dalva and Vítor switch on the television to learn what is happening beyond their four walls.<sup>495</sup> All these sounds are present in both the short ‘Moóca, São Paulo, 1996’ and the main feature, fomenting a kind of sound bridge between the two sections of the film. In fact, whilst the visuals were already completed when Amaral commissioned Francisco César Filho to direct the short film, she had not finalized the audio track, and thus the possibility of a certain ‘cross-fertilization’ of aural motifs was made possible between short and main feature.<sup>496</sup> The foreboding words of the journalist which close the film, ‘duas mortes aqui na Moóca, zona leste de São Paulo’ are repeated in the opening of the short, alluding to the tragic and violent episodes which are often made public knowledge in the hyperrealist coverage of tragedy by television networks in Brazil. Moreover, the sound of birds, trains and cars are also present in both sections of the film, once again underlining the cohesion between the two parts and highlighting the importance of sound to the experience of the city more generally.

The role of sound in *Um Céu de Estrelas*, then, contributes significantly to what Carlos Alberto Mattos has termed the ‘espaço off’ in the film, those elements which are not rendered visible in the frame but which assume an important role in

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<sup>494</sup> Sophie Arquette, ‘Sounds like City’, *Theory, Media & Culture*, 21.1 (2004), 159-168 (p. 160).

<sup>495</sup> Indeed, the role of the media in ‘packaging’ immediate, violent events for the Brazilian public has been thoughtfully explored in *Ônibus 174* (José Padilha & Felipe Lacerda, 2002), a film to which I will refer in greater detail below.

<sup>496</sup> Amaral, ‘O Processo de Criação’, p. 30.

the construction of the film's narrative as a whole.<sup>497</sup> As Mattos writes in his review of the film, 'é o inferno sonoro do subúrbio, assombrando pelos cultos, pela TV, pelo crime e pelo mau gosto. Nada aparece no quadro, mas penetra-o com virtual violência'.<sup>498</sup> Indeed, this 'virtual violência' is integral to the film's dissection of public and private space, and the media discourse which surrounds violence in the city of São Paulo today. It is to the issue of the media and its relation to reality in *Um Céu de Estrelas* that I will now turn.

#### MEDIA AND VIOLENCE

As outlined above, the drama of the film is accentuated as a result of the narrative's stifling confinement and limited number of characters. The suffocating atmosphere of Dalva's life and home is rendered palpable in the restricted movement of the camera, with its confined angles, and the film's *mise-en-scène* of her domestic space. Moreover, the film's action, which takes place in the space of one afternoon, unravels as if it were in real time, marked by the changing light of the sun in the interior of the house.<sup>499</sup> However, the 'espaço off' of the film comes to the fore in its representation of the overlap of private and public space in two key ways. Firstly, the 'off' action of the arrival of the police, which penetrates the *mise-en-scène* by way of the beams of the powerful spotlights used by the police which circulate the front room from outside, coupled with the sirens and megaphone appeals to Vítor to turn himself in, references a particularly flagrant public discourse on violence in the city.<sup>500</sup> This discourse is further illustrated in the second key 'off' action, namely the televised scenes of the *seqüestro*, which the spectator first sees along with the characters as they turn the television on to find out what is happening outside the walls of the house. Indeed, a number of critics have commented on the importance of television to Brazilian cinema of the *retomada*, suggesting that it often surfaces as a

<sup>497</sup> Mattos, 'Off É Fundamental'. Marcus Bastos has also acknowledged the importance of the film's 'off' narration, suggesting that *Um Céu de Estrelas* enacts, in one enclosed framework, two simultaneous levels of narrative: 'Torna-se possível, assim, a presença de dois tipos de narração em uma mesma película: uma, a narração visível nos quadros que se seguem na tela; outra, a implícita nos elementos não visíveis que compõem essa seqüência'. See Bastos, 'A Dramaturgia Interior', p. 82.

<sup>498</sup> Mattos, 'Off É Fundamental'.

<sup>499</sup> Hugo Kowenski & Jacob Solitrenik, 'Uma Imagem Feita de Sombras' in *Um Céu de Estrelas: O Acaso, a Tragédia, o Espectador e a Sombra*, *Cinemais*, 3 (1997), 75-94 (p. 93).

<sup>500</sup> As the cinematographer and cameraman Kowenski and Solitrenik underline, the lights used in the scene where the electricity was turned off are the same lights that the Grupo de Ações Especiais da Polícia Militar use in hostage situations, thus creating a realistic resonance in the lighting of the scene. *Ibid.*

mediator of dramatic events.<sup>501</sup> One of the film's chief concerns, then, is the tension between the visible and the invisible in the film, which finds its most pointed expression in the scene where the spectator witnesses, albeit aurally, Dalva's shooting of Vítor and her subsequent release from the house from the outside, accompanied by the televised reports of the media.

The television report outside the house engulfs the entire frame of the film as the protagonists watch the events from Dalva's home, thus juxtaposing the versions of events from inside and outside the house. The journalist's report appears with a small 'VIVO' to the upper right-hand corner of the screen, highlighting the immediacy of the event and exaggerating this *fait-divers* as an example of escalating violence in the society as a whole.<sup>502</sup> The reporter informs us that the GATE, a special branch of the military police in São Paulo, are poised for action 'com muitas armas pesadas' on the rooftops of neighbouring houses, as they await the fate of the hostages in Dalva's house. Given the recent revelations on the poor record of the military branch of the police in Brazil, who have proven to be the most lethal body of officers working in the name of civilian security, killing no less than 1,301 citizens in 1992, the presence of the GATE is more threatening than reassuring, irrespective of the journalist's attempt to illustrate to the spectator that all is in hand.<sup>503</sup> The possibility of another tragedy occurring in the film, namely that of impending illegitimate killings on the part of the military police, haunts the close of *Um Céu de Estrelas*. Additional to this detail, the reporter also informs the spectator of the full names of the people involved in the hostage situation, names which further embed the characters in the Italian heritage of Moóca (Dalva and Lurdes Bartolotto). Their ages, professions and personal history also feature in the reporter's version of events, information which has hitherto been withheld or only partially insinuated in conversations between the two former lovers. In this way, the film

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<sup>501</sup> See Ismail Xavier, 'Brazilian Cinema in the 1990s: The Unexpected Encounter and the Resentful Character', in *The New Brazilian Cinema*, ed. by Nagib, pp. 39-63 (p. 44); Fernão Ramos, 'Humility, Guilt, and Narcissism Turned Inside Out in Brazil's Film Revival', in *The New Brazilian Cinema*, ed. by Nagib, pp. 65-84 (p. 83); and José Carlos Avellar, 'ImagiNation', in *The New Brazilian Cinema*, ed. by Nagib, pp. 245-257 (pp. 247-248).

<sup>502</sup> In fact, the journalist chillingly predicts the prevalence of hostage situations in São Paulo. Caldeira has pointed out that 'kidnapping is the fastest growing crime in São Paulo. In 1996 [the year of the film], there were 12 cases in the state of São Paulo; in 2000 there were 63 cases, and in 2001, 307 cases'. Teresa Caldeira, 'The Paradox of Police Violence in Democratic Brazil', *Ethnography*, 3.3 (2002), 235-263 (p. 237).

<sup>503</sup> This figure is taken from the table included in Caldeira's discussion of the military police and their summary executions in *City of Walls*, p. 162.

delineates a boundary between the realism of the images of the *seqüestro* within the house, and the simulacra of reality created in the journalist's account of what is happening.

The 'spectacle' of violence which is referenced in *Um Céu de Estrelas* in the television report's predatory sensationalization of what is happening in the house is reminiscent of Guy Debord's commentary on the 'society of spectacle' and the increased importance of the 'real' and immediate in discourse more generally.<sup>504</sup> The direct discourse of the live television transmission mediates the 'action' for the spectator, literally transmitting it in its precise moment. Notwithstanding their narrative differences, a critique of the television and news coverage has become a recurrent theme in films of the *retomada*, most explicitly in both *Doces Poderes* (Lúcia Murat, 1997) and *Ônibus 174* (José Padilha & Felipe Lacerda, 2002). Lorraine Leu has written of the spectacle of violence in Rio de Janeiro, particularly concerning the Candelária massacre (1993) and *Ônibus 174*, which, Leu suggests, reimagines the urban topography of the *cidade maravilhosa* in terms of its portrayal of traumatic events which inform the current cityscape.<sup>505</sup> *Ônibus 174*, which portrays the bus hijacking which took place in broad daylight on June 12, 2000, in Rio, and which attracted widespread live media coverage, highlights the trauma of the live event and the society as witness. Moreover, it bears striking parallels with *Um Céu de Estrelas* in the sense that it conveys a disjuncture between 'inside' the bus – the film goes to great lengths to describe the hijacker's life and past – and the discourse portrayed 'outside', in the media's coverage of the event. Amaral's film similarly experiments with the inadequacies of media discourse, which cannot capture the true meaning of the hostage situation in which Dalva is involved, emphasized by the contrast between the frequent point-of-view shots from Dalva's perspective in the house and the television's objectification of her in the report.

*Um Céu de Estrelas* enacts a distorted *mise-en-abyme* of Dalva's situation, as the latter realizes that she has been *seqüestrada* only by way of the television images and journalist's report on the small screen in her kitchen. The power of the media to not only penetrate Dalva's experience but also *inform* it could be viewed as an example of the prevalence of 'reality' discourse in contemporary society. Indeed, the

<sup>504</sup> Guy Debord, *La société du spectacle* (Paris: Buchet-Chastel, 1967).

<sup>505</sup> Lorraine Leu, 'Spaces of Remembrance & Representation in the City: José Padilha's *Ônibus 174*', *Luso-Brazilian Review*, 45.2 (forthcoming in Winter 2008/9).

'return to the real', to borrow Hal Foster's term, is characteristic of the society in which many of us live, where 'live' television plays a crucial role in the construction of immediacy and spectacle.<sup>506</sup> The voyeuristic imperative of the live television event, exemplified both in contemporary news coverage and in the explosion of reality TV programmes, pervades city space, transmitting violence and fear to citizens who become increasingly insecure and retreat from the public spaces of transport, streets and squares.<sup>507</sup> This process of transmission is illustrated in *Um Céu de Estrelas* as Dalva actually becomes aware of the status of Vítor, as a *seqüestrador* who is threatening her, by way of the images on the television and the description the journalist gives of the situation, thus dramatizing the permeable boundaries between public and private as the former penetrates the latter and transforms the situation.<sup>508</sup> According to Ismail Xavier, in an article on the formal aspects of tragedy and melodrama in Tata Amaral's film,

O drama moderno tem vivido muito essa situação, essa impossibilidade de continuar trabalhando com a idéia de um drama privado. Não existe mais privacidade [...] O final desse filme nos apresenta uma instância típica dessa mistura do público do privado, tal como não aconteceria numa peça do século XIX, por exemplo.<sup>509</sup>

The film's tight, condensed dramatic structure, which took place entirely within Dalva's home, contrasts with the dramatic structure of the news item, simultaneously signalling the collapse of the distinction between private and public realms. This collapse is visually represented on screen in the spectator's subsequent involvement with the voyeuristic eye of the television camera, which mediates our involvement in the events which mark the end of the film, negotiating the spectator's gaze on Dalva as the cameras enter the house following the sound of the gunshot heard from outside. In the end it is the 'olho da cidade, através do olho da TV, que invade a casa, é o ambiente que cerca a casa [...] que leva à espetacularização da mídia frente ao problema. A tragédia se completa com a invasão da casa pela cidade/mídia'.<sup>510</sup> In

<sup>506</sup> Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century* (Cambridge, MA & London: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1996).

<sup>507</sup> Pierre Bourdieu has written of the role of television in society within the French context: 'Le principe de sélection, c'est la recherche du sensationnel, du spectaculaire. La télévision appelle à la *dramatisation*, au double sens: elle met en scène, en images, un événement et elle en exagère l'importance, la gravité, et le caractère dramatique, tragique'. See Pierre Bourdieu, *Sur la télévision, suivi de L'emprise du journalisme* (Paris: Raisons d'Agir Editions, 1996), p. 18.

<sup>508</sup> Tata Amaral comments on this realization in 'O Processo de Criação', p. 26.

<sup>509</sup> Xavier in 'Cinema e Tragédia', p. 91.

<sup>510</sup> Nilson Assunção Alvarenga, 'Trágico sem Catarse: Cidade e Cinema Brasileiro Contemporâneo', *Lumina* (Juiz de Fora, UFJF), 7.1-2 (January-December 2004), 133-151 (p. 141).



this way the structure of the film comes full circle, with the reinscription of the city, and Moóca, in the close of the film. The specific place where the hostage situation occurred is reiterated following the closing credits, all the while accompanied by the sound of urban disturbance characterized by police sirens and helicopters, when the reporter reappears to finally close *Um Céu de Estrelas* with the tragic words ‘duas mortes aqui na Moóca, zona leste de São Paulo’. Dalva’s tragedy is thus incorporated into a greater tragedy of violence in the city and the unfulfilled promise of citizens’ rights ten years after the reinstatement of democracy.

In contrast to other urban-themed films shot in São Paulo, which frequently emphasize the frenetic and relentless traffic and the panorama of a ‘concrete jungle’, *Um Céu de Estrelas* provides a different approach to the representation of the city in recent Brazilian filmic production. Indeed, city films in the Brazilian context are invariably rooted in the societal chasm which exists between rich and poor, and the racial divide that this inequality evokes. Tata Amaral’s film breaks with the common filmic techniques to represent the *periferia*, avoiding establishing shots of the city, the *favela* and the streets, and preferring to highlight the invasion of Dalva’s domestic space by the discourse of violence and marginalization.

Where *Um Céu de Estrelas* takes place almost entirely in Dalva’s home, *Vagón fumador* sustains a dialogue with the overtly public space of the streets of Buenos Aires. Intimate relations which, according to modernist approaches to city living, should be kept behind doors, here evolve in the plazas and cash machine cubicles of the Argentine capital. The police and the television reporter, who together constitute the ‘olho da cidade’ in *Um Céu de Estrelas*, find a parallel in another technique of panopticism: the watchful eye of the CCTV camera perspectives which mediates the spectator’s vision of events in *Vagón fumador*.

#### VAGÓN FUMADOR

Verónica Chen’s (1969-) first film, *Vagón fumador*, could ostensibly be described as an unconventional love story set in nocturnal Buenos Aires. The film speaks of the doubts and frustrations of the protagonist, Reni (Cecilia Bengolea), who dreams of moving ‘lejos’ to begin a more meaningful life. Her counterpart, Andrés (Leonardo Brezicki), is a rent boy who works in the confined, and overtly public, spaces of the *cajeros automáticos* in the city. Together, they present a vision of Buenos Aires as

simultaneously utopian and dystopian, in tune with their own views on personal freedom. The film's emphasis on futuristic symbolism, illustrated with rollerblades and the prevalence of neon lights, evokes a science-fiction aesthetic which destabilizes the realism of many of the images. This concern with technology is reflected in the narrative as they speak of 'hologramas' and communicate with each other via pagers.<sup>511</sup> Whilst Reni verbalizes feelings of alienation and disenchantment with the metropole, Andrés believes the city fulfils his needs and desires.

Loosely speaking, the film follows Reni and Andrés as they walk the streets of Buenos Aires making conversation. Like the friendship between Ana and Danilo in *La fe del volcán*, the boy-girl partnership presents contrasting views on the city. Structurally the narrative is not linear, although there is some consequential development of the relationship. Rather, it is circular and highly elliptical, framed by the opening and closing sequences and mirrored by the cinematography in parts in circular motion panning shots. Both characters are depicted within their respective 'work' environments at various points in the film, although these are perhaps not the most conventional milieus. Indeed, it has been remarked that showing the oft 'invisible' occupations of Argentines is also characteristic of recent Argentine cinema.<sup>512</sup> Reni works as a singer in a moderately successful band and is shown in rehearsal with band members on a couple of occasions, and Andrés works the streets in search of clients. Early on in the film we understand that Reni is not entirely welcome in the band as the other members believe her to be impeding their true success. Whilst her dismissal is not explicitly referenced, the cuts between the scenes of her with the band and her introduction to the world of prostitution through her meeting with Andrés imply Reni's increasing contact with alternative modes of 'employment', although she repeatedly insists that she does not believe in the exchange of money for sex ('yo no pago para hacer el amor'). Reni and Andrés's relationship unfolds into a doomed love affair, hinted at by their frequent disagreements on matters as diverse as sex, and to coin a phrase, the city.

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<sup>511</sup> Another recent Argentine film, *La sonámbula* (Fernando Spiner, 1998) deals with holograms in Buenos Aires in a more overtly sci-fi manner.

<sup>512</sup> Joanna Page writes of the effect of the recent economic crisis of 2001 and Argentine cinema's 'stock images of poverty and instability in Argentina at the end of the twentieth century: the unemployed rummage through rubbish for food and recyclable items, young boys wash the windscreens of cars momentarily held up at red traffic lights, and demonstrators bang empty pots and pans in protest'. Page, 'The Nation as the *Mise-en-scène* of Film-making in Argentina', p. 313.

Argentine film critics writing on *Vagón fumador* have laid particular emphasis on the role of the city in the film, suggesting that its original aesthetics, termed ‘visceral urgency’ by fellow director Edgardo Cozarinsky, command the film where flawed dialogue fails to provide direction.<sup>513</sup> One critic actually suggested that the representation of Buenos Aires is the film’s *raison d’être* and that its presence dominates the entire film: ‘La fuerza en la película de Chen radica sobre todo en sus imágenes, en la manera en que es capaz de tomarle el pulso a la ciudad, en cierto espíritu anarco que parece trascender a los personajes para apropiarse del film todo’.<sup>514</sup> Another mentions its ‘escenografía ciudadana y nocturna’, lending particular significance to the night-time setting of the city which provides the underworld climate at the centre of the film.<sup>515</sup> Even a US critic, perhaps unfamiliar with the city itself, disapprovingly comments on its urban and metropolitan aesthetic: ‘Verónica Chen’s strong vision of urban anomia, Buenos Aires style, often nullifies her shopworn misfits-passing-in-the-night plot’.<sup>516</sup> *Vagón fumador*, then, exposes the city as an integral part of the narrative, and demonstrates the different ways in which bodies circulate and communicate with their surroundings, presenting us with the underbelly – the dystopia – of the modernizing process.

#### PRIVATE SPACE, INTERIORITY AND LONELINESS

From the outset the film establishes a strong contrast between private, ‘solitary’ space and the public space of the city streets and buildings, emphasizing Reni’s ‘loner’ and marginal status which is central to her character. This contrast is highlighted when we first meet Reni in the opening scenes. She appears alone and naked in a bathroom, accompanied by the sound of running water in the bath. The camera is disorienting; it reveals the contours of her body in fragments, with extreme close-ups of her feet and waist, disturbing our sense of her physical whole. The camera watches as she undresses and then assumes her perspective as she submerges

<sup>513</sup> Edgardo Cozarinsky, ‘Letter from Buenos Aires’, *New Left Review*, 26 (March-April 2004), 105-116 (p. 115). Cozarinsky has also directed a film in the nocturnal streets of Buenos Aires. *Ronda nocturna* (Cozarinsky, 2005) also, curiously, focuses on the figure of the taxi-boy.

<sup>514</sup> Luciano Monteagudo, ‘El sexo en la vidriera de los cajeros’, *Página 12: Espectáculos*, 13 June 2002, <<http://www.pagina12.com.ar/imprimir/diario/espectaculos/6-6214-2002-06-13.html>> [accessed 30 May 2006].

<sup>515</sup> Martín Pérez, ‘La historia del taxi-boy que atiende clientes en los cajeros automáticos’, *Página 12: Espectáculos*, 12 June 2002 <<http://www.pagina12.com.ar/imprimir/diario/espectaculos/6-6179-2002-06-12.html>> [accessed 30 May 2006].

<sup>516</sup> Nick Rutigliano, ‘Tracking Shots’, *Village Voice*, 18-24 November 2002 <<http://www.villagevoice.com/generic/>> [accessed 25 October 2006].

herself in the water, blowing bubbles and looking up at the reflection above. This moment brings to mind the bubble-like existence of the baby in the womb, or at the very least, seems to appeal to the spectator's familiarity with the sensation of being underwater, in a 'capsule' as it were, isolated and simultaneously protected from exterior influences.<sup>517</sup> Reni's desire to be tranquil and distance herself from the rest of the world, coupled later in the sequence with the bleeding of her wrist, seems to be an initial indicator of her emotional instability but it also references the trope of distance which becomes so central to the film's dialogue with the gaze. This sequence finishes with a shot of the window above the bath, the outlet on to the world, which instead of openness and freedom seems to evoke confinement with its prison aesthetic of vertical bars. Indeed, these vertical bars hark back to Dalva's confinement and the 'aesthetics of security' echoing the same domestic enclosure of the Brazilian film in the *mise-en-scène* of the bathroom scene in *Vagón*.

This image of imprisonment contrasts starkly with the credit sequence which follows, depicting trees and sky shot from a train accompanied by the sound of a train travelling on tracks. The vast open space of the sky and the natural vitality of plants and trees viewed from the train work as the antithesis of the closed, blanched, interior space of Reni's bathroom. We then return to the private and intimate space of the bath scene to witness Reni smashing something on the floor and cutting her wrist with the sharp edge. The spectator can only hypothesize as to the significance of this event, but we are asked to contemplate her actions and body as the camera lingers on her blood dispersing in the water in slow motion. These images evidence the film's propensity for contemplation, and ethereal matter, not to mention its sensual and sensory appeal. They also, however, point to the theme of contamination

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<sup>517</sup> Indeed, the protective and insular space of the water is characteristic of Alex's sense of belonging in the sea in *XXY*, discussed in the previous chapter. Verónica Chen has herself reflected on the symbolism of being in the water in reference to her second feature film, *Agua* (2006), which dealt with male long-distance swimmers. In an interview she stated, 'desaparecen los problemas del mundo exterior y aparecen otros problemas. Tienen mayor grado de interioridad [...] Este mundo es totalmente interior. En el agua no se oye, no se ve, no se puede hablar con nadie'. Verónica Chen, in interview with Oscar Ranzani, 'Cuando la vida está bajo la superficie', *Página 12: Espectáculos*, 20 September 2006 <<http://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/suplementos/espectaculos/5-3858-2006-09-20.html>> [accessed 12 April 2008].

As Lúcia Nagib has shown in her work on utopian imagery in cinema, the sea is a repeated motif of Brazilian films, both from the *cinema novo* period and more recently in the country's cinematic revival, the *retomada*. See Nagib, *Cinema novo, New Cinema, Utopia*, pp. 3-30. A detailed study of water imagery in Argentine cinema has not yet, to my knowledge, been carried out, but merits attention, particularly given the recurrent protagonism of the Río de la Plata and its delta in film and the peculiar status this particular body of water occupies as former dumping ground for the victims of the recent dictatorship in the infamous death flights.

and pollution which becomes a central concern of the film's discussion of both prostitution and urban space. Furthermore, this introduction to the protagonist in many ways recalls the intimacy of Poliak's prologue to *La fe del volcán*, discussed in Chapter II. Whilst the images here accrue a more static and by default 'fictional' character when compared with the hyper mobile hand-held camera of the 'poltergeist' sequences in Poliak's home, Chen's protagonist is similarly framed in isolation and in despair, emphasized by the blurred images and white light of the bathroom. We are not, however, entitled to locate this bathroom in her 'home' or in a fixed place. Indeed, the camera reveals nothing more of private space throughout the film, apart from a brief return to the bathroom scene towards the end of the film. In a sense, then, this scene marks a rupture between the filming of the innocent experience of the body alone in the bath and the disturbance which causes her to cut herself, all the time drawing a line between the sterile interior environments and colourful exterior scenes which will characterize the aesthetics of the film as a whole.

#### VOYEURISM AND SURVEILLANCE

This introductory 'window' on the intimate space of Reni's bath-time schematizes one of the overarching themes of the film, namely that of voyeurism. The gaze of the spectator on the intimate bathing ritual of our protagonist in the opening scenes gains heightened relevance when one realizes that Reni too is implicated as a watcher within the film's narrative. Reni consistently deciphers her surroundings, including the human environment, through the gaze, most notably in the trope of looking at Andrés as he engages in sexual relations with his clients in the ATM spaces of the Banco Francés depicted in the film. Her 'reading' of the city propels the rhythm of the film as the editing cuts between objects of her gaze and intermittently slows down or speeds up the footage. This same technique is used to convey Andrés's looking as he seeks potential clients on the streets, marked by slow motion camera and circular movements as he scans his surrounding area.

*Vagón's* thematic emphasis on the economy of looking returns us to Laura Mulvey's theorization of the cinematic gaze and voyeurism as previously explored in Chapter III's analysis of *XXY*. In spite of the fact that Mulvey was herself making explicit reference to the mainstream (read 'Hollywood') film practices of classical

cinema, her discussion of the notions of looking and voyeurism as such makes it highly pertinent to the present analysis of *Vagón fumador*. Mulvey states, ‘the place of the look defines cinema, the possibility of varying it and exposing it. This is what makes cinema quite different in its voyeuristic potential from, say, strip-tease, theatre, shows and so on’.<sup>518</sup>

Responses to Mulvey’s article have often highlighted the passive role of the woman as object of the gaze, as receiver of the look, limiting any subversive politics of the gaze. Indeed, Mulvey herself describes ‘woman as image, man as bearer of the look’.<sup>519</sup> E. Ann Kaplan in her essay entitled ‘Is the Gaze Male?’ (1983) suggested that ‘women receive and return a gaze, but cannot act on it’.<sup>520</sup> She continued by asserting that the woman who seeks to ‘activate the gaze’ persists in finding herself trapped in the structures of power present in language and the subconscious which determine ‘the masculine position’, limiting any potential of resistance to the hegemonic visual order.<sup>521</sup> Furthermore, following the publication of Mulvey’s article, numerous articles surfaced considering the status of the *male* body on screen, perhaps as a reaction against the increasing prominence of feminist debates on the filmic representation of women. Studies such as Steve Neale’s ‘Masculinity as Spectacle: Reflections on Men and Mainstream Cinema’ (1983) and Richard Dyer’s ‘Don’t Look Now: The Male Pin-up’ (1992) set the stage for debates surrounding masculinity and the male body at the cinema in the early 1980s.<sup>522</sup> Thus, Mulvey’s 1975 intervention, together with the above examples, all highlight questions of voyeurism and the gaze as being integral to the visual apparatus of cinema.

Mulvey’s article, then, effectively brought to the fore the importance of what she terms ‘structures of ways of seeing and pleasure in looking’.<sup>523</sup> These structures, which permeate the form, content and reception of cinematic texts, are similarly delineated in Chen’s film. Immediately following the opening credit sequence and intimate bathroom scene discussed above, we are confronted with two clear

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<sup>518</sup> Mulvey, p. 46.

<sup>519</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>520</sup> E. Ann Kaplan, ‘Is the Gaze Male?’, from *Women and Film: Both Sides of the Camera*, reprinted in *Feminism and Film*, ed. by E. Ann Kaplan (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 119-138 (p. 121).

<sup>521</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 130.

<sup>522</sup> See Steve Neale, ‘Masculinity as Spectacle: Reflections on Men and Mainstream Cinema’, *Screen*, 24.6 (1983), reprinted in *Feminism and Film*, ed. by Kaplan, pp. 253-264; and Richard Dyer, ‘Don’t Look Now: The Male Pin-up’, in *The Sexual Subject: the Screen Reader in Sexuality* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 265-276.

<sup>523</sup> Mulvey, p. 35.

examples of looking and voyeurism. Reni's looking is first thematized through a shot of her staring directly at the cash machine area. Observing the two men in the confined area of the bank, the erotic pleasure and intrigue of looking is established by way of a point-of-view shot from Reni's perspective. Yet significantly here, Reni's curiosity, illustrated through her staring at the men, challenges the assumption that women are generally constructed as object of the gaze. The protagonist's intrigue for the sexual exploits of Andrés renders the man-on-man encounter a spectacle and reverses the classical construction of the woman's body as fetishized object. Whilst Andrés later emerges to hold a predatory sexualized gaze as well, and Reni's ultimate involvement in prostitution is far from liberating, it is significant that Chen's female protagonist should yield some aspect of scopic power. Indeed, the visual penetration of her surroundings is intrinsic to Reni's deciphering of the city.

There is, however, a more sinister watchful eye which is portrayed at this early stage of the film's narrative, illustrative of the urban surveillance culture commonly associated with late-capitalist societies. Characteristic of the tight regulation through surveillance, the security camera testifies to the protection of corporate interests in consumer environments. According to AlSayyad, 'in an era when cameras and other systems of surveillance are ubiquitous in both public and private spaces, the boundaries of the city are no longer defined by monumental entrances, but by electronic devices'.<sup>524</sup> *Vagón fumador* exhibits these controlling mechanisms of technology characteristic of the city by illustrating footage shot from a security camera. A centre establishing shot of the front of the Banco Francés in the city then switches to black and white CCTV footage of Andrés and his male client as they are filmed by the security cameras directed at the ATMs. The film then cuts back to the colour of the exterior world and the warm glow of Reni watching on her future lover Andrés as he negotiates his 'office' space at the interface of the public and the private in the bank's cash-machine area. Within the confines of the cubicle Andrés engages in sexual activities in exchange for money, all the time under the watchful eye of the security camera.

This juxtaposition of voyeur positions – the spectator of the film beyond the diegesis, Reni on the men in the bank, and the 'objective' but surveying eye of the security camera on the men – emphasizes *Vagón fumador*'s predilection for looking

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<sup>524</sup> AlSayyad, p. 147.

structures. Reni emerges as the prime mediator of the look, the bearer of the spectator's perspective and subjectivity, as she watches her future lover in the enclosed ATM space. Indeed, as soon as the exterior world, in this case represented by Reni, penetrates the insular space of the cash machine zone the film cuts once again to CCTV footage, thus emphasizing the role of the camera on the happenings inside the bank and the controlling function of such media on society in general. This controlling authority, the invisible voyeur-machine, is emphasized by the angle of the footage we are presented with; the spectator looks, by mediation of the security camera, down on the couple as they interact by the cash machine, illustrating the power hierarchy inherent in this structure of looking. Moreover, the use of the enclosed spaces of cash machines as the setting for the exchange of sex for money underlines the flows of capital in an increasingly unequal and consumer society. The exploitation of such a space to stage the narrative reveals a poignant prediction of the fast approaching economic crash which would unfold in late 2001. Whilst the director herself acknowledges that there was no intended connection to be made between the economy, consumerism and sex,<sup>525</sup> the film has undoubtedly been interpreted within these parameters in light of the economic crisis and the *corralito*.<sup>526</sup> Furthermore, Andrés himself underlines this connection as he willingly places a price on his body when he proclaims in the film 'Andrés es caro, el que quiere celeste que le cueste, Andrés cuesta \$150'. Andrés's statement also refers to himself in the third person, thus emphasizing his alienation and his detached status as a citizen. Accordingly then, the film's reception feeds off the association of the country's social exclusion with the Crisis. As Joanna Page comments,

The Crisis revealed the fundamental fragility of finance capitalism which, since the de-materialization of money, is now further and further removed from raw materials and labour, depending heavily on the confidence of individual bank users and gambling on the improbability of a nationwide run on banks; the fragility, too, of relationships of mutual dependency with which nations are ostensibly bound together in a globalized economic system.<sup>527</sup>

The contrast Chen establishes between the insular and cold bleached images of the bank's interior and the coloured blurred images of night on the streets, distinguishes

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<sup>525</sup> Pérez, 'La historia del taxi-boy'.

<sup>526</sup> The *corralito* was a measure instigated by the Economy Minister Domingo Cavallo in early December 2001 and limited the amount of money people could withdraw in cash from their bank accounts.

<sup>527</sup> Page, 'The Nation as the *Mise-en-scène* of Film-making in Argentina', p. 314.



the spatial environments and in turn the looking structures each one requires: the exterior defines Reni's desirous fetishized gaze on the two men, and the interior ATM space underlines the power of surveying.

#### **'THE VOYEUR-GOD': FLÂNERIE, PANOPTICISM AND THE CITY**

Voyeurism is not, however, singularly relevant to this discussion of *Vagón fumador* as a Mulveyesque exhibit of the structures of looking in a gendered sense. Rather, it plays a fundamental role in Reni's understanding of the city as she observes and interprets the people and places on the streets. This observational tendency, whilst radically different in terms of gender, class and epoch, harks back to the literary construct of the *flâneur*, which in turn reveals the film's concern for the experience of modernity. The *flâneur*, the elite male character who deciphers the arcades and boulevards of Paris in the texts of Charles Baudelaire, has become the subject of much critical enquiry of late, particularly regarding possible permutations of the character in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Fundamentally interpreted as an analytical tool to understand the changing urban environment in mid-nineteenth century Paris, the trope continues to inform theories on urban modernity and space. Furthermore, in its cinematic form, the *flâneur* expressly conflates voyeurism and power. According to AlSayyad, 'the advent of cinema itself has enabled a "new mode of *flânerie*", a wandering around the city and a new ability to conceive of it as a spectacle and a source of sensory experience'.<sup>528</sup> This wandering is fundamental to *Vagón fumador* as both characters explore the streets and rooftops of the city. Similarly, the 'sensory experience' of which AlSayyad speaks may be intuited throughout the film with the soundtrack's abstract chiming musical notes adding flavour to the nightscape of overexposed neon lights. This non-diegetic music, which brings to the narrative an ethereal tone, also recognizes the aural capacity of cinema which theories of the gaze have deftly ignored for so long. Indeed, and as I have repeatedly suggested throughout this thesis, whilst the gaze is undoubtedly intrinsic to cinema so too is the combination of the visual with sound and music.

AlSayyad's exploration of the modernist character of the *flâneur* also evokes the early twentieth-century character of the *blasé*, 'an individual so hardened by the brutality of the metropolis that he must deaden his senses' when confronted with the

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<sup>528</sup> AlSayyad, p. 35.

expansion of industrial capitalism.<sup>529</sup> The figure of the *blasé*, first investigated by the sociologist Georg Simmel in his 1903 lecture ‘The Metropolis and Mental Life’, is seen to be indicative of a stage of alienation in the metropolis, associated generally with a move from the security of small-town life to the disorientating consumer city.<sup>530</sup> In a sense, then, the characters of *Vagón fumador* embody both the leisurely urban meanderings of the *flâneur* and the detached ‘defense mechanism’ alienation of the *blasé*. Both Reni and Andrés inhabit their space differently, yet a mixture of sensory stimulation and apathy characterizes their relationship to their urban surroundings. Moreover, this conjuring of the *flâneur* and the *blasé* also suggests the rearticulation of these modernist tropes under the umbrella term of the *voyeur*:

Thus, in an age in which direct views have been replaced by screen views, the figure of the *flâneur* is reborn and magnified as the *voyeur*. The *voyeur* behind the screen or camera lens, like the *flâneur*, adopts the gaze as a means of knowing. However, the *voyeur* differs from the *flâneur* in his invisibility. He no longer occupies the spaces he observes, but remains physically remote, a ‘Peeping Tom’ behind the cloak of his technological devices. Although the city is exposed to him, he gains power by retreating into the panopticon’s opaque centre.<sup>531</sup>

Whilst AlSayyad here is literally talking about the *voyeur*’s use of video cameras to gain power, we may equally apply the notion of the ‘panopticon’s opaque centre’ to Reni’s attempts to gain visual control, and thus command, of her urban space.

The rationalizing utopian version of urban space is problematized in *Vagón* in a key scene where a panoramic view of the city elucidates the characters’ relationship to Buenos Aires. Writing about the perspective given to the person who looks at New York from the (now crumbled) heights of the World Trade Centre, Michel de Certeau states,

The gigantic mass is immobilized before our eyes. It is transformed into a texturology in which extremes coincide – extremes of ambition and degradation, brutal oppositions of races and styles, contrasts between yesterday’s buildings, already transformed into trash cans, and today’s urban irruptions that block out its space.<sup>532</sup>

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<sup>529</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 238.

<sup>530</sup> Georg Simmel, ‘The Metropolis and Mental Life’, in *The Urban Sociology Reader*, ed. by Jan Lin & Christopher Mele (London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 23-31.

<sup>531</sup> AlSayyad, p. 148.

<sup>532</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley, Los Angeles & London: University of California Press, 1984), p. 91.

Whilst Chen's film does not portray a racially cosmopolitan Buenos Aires, the visual domination which de Certeau presents comes to the fore of *Vagón fumador* in one scene where the couple look out from a roof top, dazed by the lights of nocturnal Buenos Aires. The height turns the characters into 'voyeur-god[s]' of the city, as they gaze and attempt to dominate and rationalize the space below them.<sup>533</sup> Here Reni talks of leaving Buenos Aires, to make a happier life for herself somewhere else, and Andrés gives her a pager so that she may contact him at any moment and from any location. Technology permits them to communicate, to connect, within the huge sprawling metropolis which lies below them, yet it is also what Reni seems to despise about the consumer culture of the city. Indeed, the film readily displays technology and visual culture as one of the defining characteristics of the city in its insistence on ATMs, video-game arcades, rollerblades and test-tube babies. Reni's description of Buenos Aires as a 'pulpo con miles de tentáculos' is effectively imaged as we trace the city's tentacles of lights at night, spreading out in different directions as the camera pans around the space, finally resting on the couple as the centre, the head, of the octopus. This shot explicitly reveals the interconnectedness of the characters and the city: Reni and Andrés are to be found at the centre of the monster, yet simultaneously they are isolated and distanced from the tentacles of activity. Integral to their physical representation, the city is continually linked to the exploration of their needs, desires and subjectivities throughout the film. Their vision of the city down below, however, does not enable a true grasp of the space and design of the city; rather, it appears as a mirage, an illusion and construct which will always remain intangible, beyond their reach. The Buenos Aires of *Vagón fumador* is divested of the promise of a future full of opportunity so typical of 'moving to the city' narratives. Yet it does not stand alone in its panoptic exploration of the cityscape as a centre of consumerism, as an unequal, unfathomable environment.

Reminiscent of films such as *La Haine* (Mathieu Kassowitz, 1995) or *The Edukators* (Hans Weingartner, 2004), the motif of young friends looking down on the city below and reflecting on injustices of the 'system' indicates the failures of the capitalist project and the feeling of the impotence of youth when confronted with the marginalizing forces of the metropolis. *La Haine*, in its depiction of disaffected *banlieu* youth *par excellence*, emphasizes the monumental vision of the unobtainable

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<sup>533</sup> de Certeau, p. 93.

city of Paris in a scene where from a rooftop the three men, Saïd, Hubert and Vinz, deliriously try to turn off the lights of the Eiffel tower by superimposing a cigarette lighter over the image of the monument. Ironically, a moment after the men have decided to abort this futile trick, the Eiffel tower's illuminations cease to glow. Similarly, in *The Edukators*, when the couple Jan and Jule look out over Berlin from a tower block at night it is to imagine what the people down below are doing, and to pass judgement on the city's consumer culture. Thus, the motif of alienated youth looking down on the nightlights of the city, often depicted as a romantic partnership, is a recurrent trope of many films. Persistent efforts to visually interpret and dominate 'alien' or alienating space reveal the cityscape to no longer be the modernist utopia once suggested, but rather a *dystopia* based on the inherent paradoxes of the modernist project which have come to light in late-capitalist societies. These paradoxes are dramatized in *Vagón fumador* and similarly draw on the motif of disaffected youth in the characters of Reni and Andrés.

#### URBAN SYMBOLS: MONUMENTS AND MEMORY IN THE CITY OF BUENOS AIRES

*Vagón fumador's* exploitation of the cityscape as *the backdrop for the narrative* in many ways echoes Lefèbvre's interpretation of urban space:

On its specific plane the city can appropriate existing political, religious and philosophical meanings. It seizes them to say them, to *expose* them by means – or through the voice - of buildings, monuments, and also by streets and squares, by voids, by the spontaneous theatricalization of encounters which take place in it, not forgetting festivities and ceremonies (with their appropriate and designated places).<sup>534</sup>

This 'theatricalization of encounters' becomes a particularly potent concept when considering the depiction of the cityscape in Chen's film. The urban aesthetic is emphasized in *Vagón fumador* by way of its attention to mobility and cruising on the neon-laden streets and roads of Buenos Aires. There are a number of sequences where the characters are driving at night and the spectator is granted point-of-view shots as they watch the passers by and nightlife of the city from the vehicle. The over-exposed neon lights blur into each other, emphasizing their visual dominance on the streets and drawing attention to the motion of the vehicle. The film's futuristic aesthetic is embellished as we see passers-by on rollerblades and the circular motion

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<sup>534</sup> Henri Lefèbvre, *Writings on Cities*, ed. and trans. by Eleonore Kofman & Elizabeth Lebas (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), pp. 113-114.

of the perspective shots viewed from the car as it travels by night. The most radical representation of urban space in *Vagón fumador* is, however, its reappropriation of the ‘monumental entrances’ of which AlSayyad wrote, offering an unconventional representation of Buenos Aires’s iconic landmarks.

The rearticulation of monumental space within Chen’s film comes to the fore in the setting of the Plaza San Martín, one of the main squares in central Buenos Aires commemorating the country’s liberator and ‘Padre de la Patria’, which features in the film as the hangout for prostitutes. One critic, Martín Pérez, has commented on the unrealistic use and portrayal of this monumental city space, but to my mind, the use of such a space *intentionally* establishes the narrative as fictional and writes some of these ‘marginal’ figures into the history of the city’s culture.<sup>535</sup> This square, which not only commemorates *el gran Libertador* but is also flanked by imposing militaristic buildings, such as the Palacio La Paz, which houses the Military Officers’ Association, and the annex building to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, here appears as a site of sexual transactions as the taxi-boys negotiate their next client’s rate, all the time circulating the plaza on rollerblades.

This particular interface between the body and the city contests the urban legislation which censors the occupation of space for non-normative practices. Indeed, in the context of Buenos Aires, this issue specifically came to the fore following the implementation of the *Código de Convivencia Urbana* in 1996, ‘que dió lugar a encendidos debates en torno del estatus (público) de los grupos de travestis y transexuales’.<sup>536</sup> This constitution repealed the existing laws governing homo- and transsexuality, and was finally approved in March 1998, although it underwent numerous amendments in the months which followed.<sup>537</sup> Both the media hype surrounding the *Código*, and the neighbourhood rallies against prostitution on the streets of selected *barrios*, enacted an ‘othering’ of certain sectors of the population, mapping sexual dissidence onto latent racial prejudice, as exemplified in the following exclamation by the prominent television personality, Mirtha Legrand: ‘Todo lo que es prostitución y travestismo ya llega hasta la zona de Recoleta, vienen

<sup>535</sup> Pérez, ‘La historia del taxi-boy’.

<sup>536</sup> Leticia Sabsay, ‘Representaciones culturales de la diferencia sexual: figuraciones contemporáneas’, in *Identidades, sujetos y subjetividades*, ed. by Leonor Arfuch (Buenos Aires: Prometeo Libros, 2005), pp. 155-170 (p. 156).

<sup>537</sup> Ana Gabriela Álvarez, ‘The City Cross-Dressed: Sexual Rights and Roll-backs in De la Rúa’s Buenos Aires’, *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies*, 9.2 (2000), 138-153 (p. 137).

de países limítrofes'.<sup>538</sup> Thus, the debate surrounding the *Código* redefined the 'city as resident-space, as an aggregate of neighbourhoods besieged by undesirables who did not belong, who, that is, were not residents'.<sup>539</sup> *Vagón fumador*'s central focus on prostitution, then, mirrors the changes in *porteño* society of the late 1990s and performs the middle-class anxiety of some city dwellers towards the illicit activities of the night through the perspective of the curious yet reluctant Reni.

In another scene in the film, Reni and Andrés spend time chatting at the Obelisco, the monument situated on the Avenida 9 de Julio which was built in 1936 and has since become the symbol of the city. The presence of this landmark in the film once again situates the characters at the monumental centre of the nation.<sup>540</sup> However, this scene, although visibly situated at the Obelisco, surrounded by electronic billboards vigorously promoting Sprite and other such goods, does not foreground the imposing white monument's presence in the frame. Rather, it appears illusory, in fragments in the background, unimportant and inconsequential for the characters' lives. This scene is also comparable to the role the same monument played in another recent Argentine film, *Pizza, birra, faso* (1998). In *Pizza, birra, faso* the four main characters also spend time in the area at the Obelisco's base, and make jokes about the monument in reference to its phallic form. More importantly, however, in one scene the youths actually ascend the monument to see the view from the top, where, on arrival, they complain they cannot see anything: 'No se ve nada'. Both the 'pulpo de tentáculos' scene in *Vagón* and the aforementioned Obelisco scene point to a decidedly frustrated attempt at dominating the urban environment through panopticism. The film, then, does not dwell on mapping recognisable places of Buenos Aires, but instead destabilizes landmarks of the city and nation by reworking their significance or by repositioning their centrality at the margins of the frame. Indeed, one could even suggest that Chen's film displays a certain playful irreverence at these sites of national pride. This disjuncture between the modernist dream of rational urban utopia, embodied in the monumental landmarks of Buenos Aires, and the reality of social exclusion, loneliness and uneven access to citizenship,

<sup>538</sup> Mirtha Legrand cited in Leticia Sabsay, 'La representación mediática de la identidad travesti en el contexto de la Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires', in *Identidades, sujetos y subjetividades*, ed. by Arfuch, pp. 171-191 (p. 176).

<sup>539</sup> Álvarez, 'The City Cross-Dressed', p. 138.

<sup>540</sup> It is worth noting that the Obelisco was once the site for executions. During the last military dictatorship there was also a reported case of a man 'abducted in a Ford Falcon, tied to the Obelisco and machine-gunned to death'. Feitlowitz, p. 157.

is at the heart of *Vagón's* depiction of the city. Moreover, the sinister commodification of the body in *Vagón* chimes with the privatization of public space associated with *menemista* Argentina. Whilst Reni and Andrés do not spend time in the archetype of privatized space, the shopping mall, Andrés's willingness to place a price on his body in a list which begins with 'Pizza, 1 peso, birra, 2 pesos, los rollers, 50 pesos, Andrés, 150 pesos' trivializes the alarming importance of market value in a society ravaged by uncontrollable consumerism on the one hand, and deepening social crisis on the other.

Besides the obvious connection with Menem's Argentina in terms of the commodification of society, however, *Vagón* also has a propensity to discuss simulacra and virtual reality, traits characteristic of the former president's technocratic rule. In one scene, as the couple discuss the nocturnal character of Buenos Aires, Reni refers to the *hologramas* which roam Buenos Aires, as she explains why she prefers the city at night. Reni says, 'me gusta la ciudad así, vacía, por la noche', indicating that an absence of bodies in the city is, in fact, preferable for her, simultaneously suggesting a disavowal of the very *real* connections which exist between the body and the city in Buenos Aires. Indeed, Reni's subsequent use of the word *desaparecer* highlights the nexus between body and city, pointing to the absence of people on the streets of Buenos Aires at night, an absence which also marked the dark years of the dictatorship. Reni goes on to complain, 'no desaparecen, te joden', further evoking the spectre of the disappeared body with the heavily loaded meaning of *desaparecer* since the Dirty War. In another scene, the film contemplates the fake, virtual body of a stuffed dummy, in slow-motion footage on the streets of the city as the camera captures a tango performer dancing with his prosthetic partner.<sup>541</sup> On another occasion Reni even suggests that she is a test-tube baby, created from a genetic experiment, without family nor home. All of these references to the body, additional to the countless shots of billboards of models, underscore the theme of simulacra, the virtual body and consumerism in the film, tropes which also characterize Menem's governing style.<sup>542</sup> Indeed, Menem's rule

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<sup>541</sup> This same motif, a tango dancer with a prosthetic partner, also appears in *La fe del volcán*. Furthermore, this prosthetic vision is echoed in *La fe's* discussion of mannequins and dolls.

<sup>542</sup> For a detailed discussion of these themes during Menem's presidency see Beatriz Sarlo, *Escenas de la vida posmoderna: intelectuales, arte y videocultura en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Editora Ariel, 1994).

has generally been discussed in terms of its emphasis on virtual reality and the expansion of private space, as underlined in the following analysis:

Simulacra over authenticity; theatrical rehearsal over spontaneous dialogue; and a host of regulations to monitor the effects of the real. The general aspects of the post-modern condition acquire grotesque proportions here, when correlated to the specific conditions of Argentina after years of military rule insofar as the violent past is repressed in order to create the illusion of democratic harmony.<sup>543</sup>

Menem's governing style, then, which strongly relied on televised appearances and the repression of 'problematic' memories of the dictatorship era, thus emphasized an image of coherence and virtual unity. Reni's apparent revulsion at consumer culture, underlined in the film by way of the repeated examples of simulacra which she seemingly wishes to escape and, of course, the theme of prostitution, ultimately leads to the disintegration of her love affair.

#### DESAMOR

The couple's doomed relationship and differing opinions are highlighted most acutely in their perspectives on sex. Following a heated discussion regarding the suitability of Andrés's nocturnal profession, without any mention of what he does by day, the couple finally reunites in a sweeping circular motion of the camera as they embrace. The push-pull love story, which emphasizes the characters' differences, ultimately serves to elaborate Reni's own quest for identity and her search for a place where she can feel at ease. This 'personal discovery' is reflected not only in her final decision on the outcome of the relationship, but also in the recurring images and sounds of trains in the film, the train acting as a metaphor for both the past and the brighter future. The prevalence of mobility, monuments and consumerism in *Vagón fumador* serves to emphasize the cityscape's dominance over the characters' lives and creates a greater contrast between the dream of an other (utopian) space and the city itself. This is clearly illustrated in a flashback scene towards the end of the film when Reni and Andrés escape to the 'country' to celebrate her birthday. Here an interstitial space emerges at the outskirts of Buenos Aires by the Río de la Plata, in the Reserva Ecológica Costanera Sur, with a beach by the river and the towers of the metropole's centre behind them, echoing Sarlo's description of *las orillas* as 'an

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<sup>543</sup> Masiello, 'Este pobre fin de siglo', p. 242.



indeterminate place between the city and the countryside'.<sup>544</sup> Furthermore, the pollution of the river, which prohibits the couple from bathing, references the all-pervasive influence of the metropolis and its contamination of space. Reni's attempts to leave the city thus seem continually undermined by the reassertion of the city in seemingly non-urban spaces.

The closing scene of *Vagón fumador*, however, implies Reni's escape from the city, as we see her look out of the train window, light up a cigarette and find a place of belonging as she leaves Buenos Aires behind. This scene once again demonstrates the oppressive effect of the city on Reni as she ultimately leaves Buenos Aires to the sound of jubilant, extra-diegetic music, evoking a positive transition to a different space. Thus, the oppositional relationship established in the film between the utopian place which lies beyond the limits of Buenos Aires and the city itself is brought to fruition in a third space, the no-man's-land of the train carriage which inspired the film's title. Furthermore, the travelling motif in *Vagón fumador* implies a search for a more positive space, distanced from the city where disappeared bodies are buried under newly constructed buildings.

Nonetheless, Reni's efforts to liberate herself are not entirely fulfilled – whilst on the one hand she appears to finally understand who she is and what she wants, on the other, she remains firmly under control in the contained and prohibitive space of the smokers' carriage. Furthermore, the screen of the train window, which separates Reni from the reality of the outside world, permits her to disengage, and avoid the trials of life protected by her cocoon space. As de Certeau insightfully pointed out, the 'traveller is pigeonholed, numbered, and regulated in the grid of the railway car, which is a perfect actualization of the rational utopia [...] A bubble of panoptic and classifying power, a module of imprisonment that makes possible the production of an order, a closed and autonomous insularity- that is what can traverse space and make itself independent of local roots'.<sup>545</sup> Reni's retreat to this monitored and enclosed space thus enacts a return to the panopticism of the city, even as she is seemingly in transit towards another space.

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<sup>544</sup> Sarlo, 'Modernity and Cultural Mixture', p. 169.

<sup>545</sup> de Certeau, p. 111.

## SPATIAL DISCOURSE AND FAILED PROJECTS OF MODERNITY

Podalsky, writing on two earlier films, *Sur* (1988) and *Buenos Aires Viceversa* (1996), which dealt with the legacy of the Dirty War, suggests that,

In these films the city is not a backdrop, but rather vital to the constitution of subjectivity. Characters inhabit the city and Buenos Aires ‘inhabits’ the characters, embodying their memories, their discoveries, and their hopes. It is a map for plotting the self in society, but not a traditional one; it has little power to ground the subject, to provide a sense of stability or fixity.<sup>546</sup>

This same description of the city as a map for plotting the self proves relevant when looking at the city in *Um Céu de Estrelas* and *Vagón fumador*, not only as a geographical strategy which guides and de-stabilizes the characters’ interrogation of their identities, but more importantly as a gauge for the importance of the body’s representation in contemporary São Paulo and Buenos Aires.

The unstable characters of *Vagón fumador* permit the film to comment on urban space and its relationship with the body on several levels. They highlight the failure of the city as a utopian project as we see freedom threatened by consumer culture, the memories of the dictatorship and the neoliberalization of spaces. Here the body is re-explored in its urban environment and the city in turn is reconfigured in tune with the disenchantment of our wandering protagonist. The characters’ vagrant subjectivities acknowledge the significant relationship that exists between space and the body, and Reni’s search for somewhere else depicts a Buenos Aires laden with the burden of a history of unidentified bodies and the failures of rampant consumerism. Furthermore, the film’s subversion of public space and monuments suggests an engagement with the increased monitoring of activities in the public realm in late-capitalism.

For its own part *Um Céu de Estrelas* also underlines the importance of schemes of vision and surveillance in the modern urban metropolis where the police and the media frequently penetrate and pollute the presumed ‘safe-haven’ of domesticity. The ‘olho da cidade’ of the media, which traverses the spectator’s perspective on events in the close of *Um Céu de Estrelas*, references the discourse on violence and exclusion in the city of São Paulo which penetrates the population, implicitly creating a climate of fear, and disrupting a facile distinction of home and street, private and public sphere. Like the *menemista* privatization of space which

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<sup>546</sup> Podalsky, *The Specular City*, p. 236.

enacted a retreat into enclosed spaces of the city, also reminiscent of the restricted use of public spaces during the dictatorship era,<sup>547</sup> *Um Céu de Estrelas* renders Dalva's home a spectacle of urban disintegration, a signifier of security and media discourse on violence under Cardoso's presidency (1995-2002).

Both the 'voyeur-God' and CCTV panopticism in *Vagón fumador* and the disjuncture between Dalva's subjectivity and the version of events presented by the media, reference the dissolution of promise in the urban milieu. Where once the city heralded a utopian future, with the possibility of equality and inclusion, here the cities of São Paulo and Buenos Aires emerge at moments of national upheaval in the filmic imaginary. In spite of the changed focus on the issue of the national and socially committed themes in the Brazilian *retomada* as identified by Nagib and others, *Um Céu de Estrelas* appeared at a time when the possibility of making films was reinvigorated with the change in state support for the film industry. As such, it contributes a vital perspective on the possibility of socially committed cinema, even as it differs from other Brazilian urban films which document exclusion and violence on the streets of the cities. For its own part, *Vagón's* prescience into the stark connection between bodily commodification and the economic crisis reveals the intimate connection of body and city on the streets of Buenos Aires, pointing to the uneven experience of the megalopolis and its inhabitants' rights. Both films, then, attest to the disjunctive experience of the metropolis in light of the heightened distinctions between public and private realms accommodated by neoliberal economic policy and urban planning. More importantly, however, these films cinematically contest these spatial distinctions in their dissolution of the border which separates public and private realms, thus pointing to the inter-pollination of the two spheres.

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<sup>547</sup> Guano writes of the perceived primacy of the private in the military dictatorship's discourse when it was intent on silencing public opposition. Whilst there are obvious differences between *menemista* spatial discourse and that of the military generals, the emphasis on enclosed, private spaces is nonetheless a common element of both regimes. Emanuela Guano, 'Spectacles of Modernity: Transnational Imagination and Local Hegemonies in Neoliberal Buenos Aires', *Cultural Anthropology*, 17.2 (2002), 181-209 (p. 187).

## CONCLUSION

### Afterthoughts on a Corporeal Cinematics

This project began as an interrogation of the diverse and multifarious ways to employ the body both in film criticism and in cinematic representations by women directors. The original aim of this thesis was to investigate the filmic production of Argentine and Brazilian women, and assess their creative manipulation of the body in light of the histories of dictatorship and neoliberalism in their respective countries. The study departed from the premise that women's cinema is often interpreted as a universalizing category which belies the varied aesthetics and themes which are explored by women directors. Rather than highlighting the possibilities of a specifically female, or *feminine*, perspective in filmmaking, I chose to emphasize the variety of themes and techniques in a selection of films. This selection elicited a variety of perspectives and aesthetics, thus supporting the idea that women's cinema may not be considered a genre *per se*. Furthermore, in order to address the diversity of these films, the thesis was structured in two parts, each focusing on a different approach to women's filmmaking, namely the autobiographical and the purely fictional.

Throughout this thesis I have argued that the cinematic and real bodies examined here are inextricably linked to the specific contexts related to dictatorial violence and the violence of marginalization; the spectre of torture, disillusionment and societal exclusion is never far from the main thrust of the narratives in question, even when they do not explicitly deal with these systems of repression. Central to my exposition of the body as a site *through* which to conceptualize cinema, dictatorial regimes and violent marginalization, are the countless resonances of specific examples of terror, metaphors for the broader context of state violence and societal disillusionment. The discrete yet overlapping axes of comparison – Body/Family, Body/Torture, Body/Medicine, Body/Space – have facilitated a wealth of critical standpoints and enabled the analysis of a variety of cinematic representations. Each chapter has considered a specific element of both the cinematic and the real body, and whilst the films and techniques studied here are varied, they coalesce in their desire to unveil the illegible bodies of contemporary Argentina and Brazil. The illegible bodies in question are thus the stateless, the disappeared, the orphaned, the tortured, the mad, the gender ambiguous, the prostitute and the popular

subject. In what follows I will briefly recapitulate the primary areas of study which have surfaced throughout the research, and highlight the commonalities between the films analysed.

#### FAMILY AND NATION

First, and beginning with the Body/Family axis, we have seen how national debates are frequently located within a family framework, albeit one which is permanently open to reconstruction. The genealogical quests of Kogut and Carri explored in *Um Passaporte Húngaro* and *Los rubios* have a direct corollary to the dispersal and destruction of the directors' respective families caused by repressive regimes in Europe, Getúlio Vargas's Brazil during the *Estado Novo* and dictatorial Argentina. The disintegration of the family in such circumstances thus appears as a potent metaphor for the destruction of social networks, and as something which impacts on the identity, official or otherwise, of Kogut and Carri. Despite their differences, however, both films suggest a fluid concept of identity which accommodates mutable and alternative forms of national identity, in the case of *Passaporte*, and of family, in the case of *Los rubios*. The two films' stitching together of family histories thus reflects the rebuilding of the nation along different lines to those conceived by the dictatorial repressors and state authorities.

In addition, the family appears as a central component, or structuring absence, in all of the films analysed in this thesis. In Chapter II, Danilo speaks of absent family members, a father who may or may not have been a *torturador*, and young Ana apparently has no family of which to speak. The women in *Que Bom Te Ver Viva* indicate motherhood as a coping mechanism for the ordeals they survived whilst detained and tortured under the recent dictatorial regime in Brazil, suggesting that in some instances the family appears as a weapon to combat the logic of death which prevailed in that period. The protagonists of the films discussed in Chapter III, Neto and Alex, both couch their difference and otherness in generational tensions and display resistance to their father's authority. The miscommunication between father and son in *Bicho de Sete Cabeças* leads to the institutional violence which Neto suffers in the *manicômio*. In *XXY*, Alex's intersexuality is permanently monitored by her parents who, whilst relatively understanding and sympathetic to her predicament, cannot help but interpret her 'in-between' state in terms of binaries of male *or* female. In Chapter IV, the protagonist of *Vagón fumador*, Reni, states that

she has no family, and was produced from a test-tube experiment, echoing the orphan status of many Argentines in the postdictatorship period. Similarly, Dalva, in *Um Céu de Estrelas*, appears to struggle against the authority of her mother in her quest for freedom, which ultimately leads to the latter's death. Thus, the family, its dismemberment and reconstruction, or indeed absence, is a continuum throughout all the films examined in the four chapters and frequently acts as a metaphor for the shifting status of the nation and its fractured identity in periods of crisis.

#### PLASTIC AND PANTOMIMIC BODIES

Secondly, from the beginning of the thesis right through to its end, the body appears as a plastic and malleable entity which can be used productively in film to perform different identities. Albertina Carri's decision to cast a body-double, an actress to play out her identity on screen, indicates a profound suspicion of the presumed knowledge which is conveyed by witnessing the *real* body of the subject in question. Similarly, Kogut's refusal to provide the spectator with a visual picture of her body, preferring rather to evoke her identity through personal stories and the voice which emerges from behind the camera, also highlights how faces may in fact be perceived as a 'barrier to representation'.<sup>548</sup> The selfhood of these two directors is at the centre of both narratives, yet Kogut and Carri conceptualize their identities in radically different ways. Where Kogut's fragmented and fleeting appearances on screen are reluctant to give a face to the person behind the camera, *Los rubios* literally splits at the seams with the multiplicity of Carri's identity.

The virtual body recurs time and again in the films studied in this thesis, highlighting the distinction between simulacra and reality. The Playmobil dolls in *Los rubios* reflect a child's perspective on traumatic events, simultaneously staging identity as a fluid concept as they change their outfits and personae with ease. The mannequins, dolls, and video-game characters in *La fe del volcán* highlight the separation between the virtual and real bodies which circulate in Buenos Aires, but they also evoke the disappeared bodies of the dictatorship and the predominance of technology in neoliberal Argentina. Moreover, the 'fallen angel' mobile which features in *Que Bom Te Ver Viva's* *mise-en-scène* also makes reference to the

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<sup>548</sup> Joanna Page, *Crisis and Capitalism in Contemporary Argentine Cinema* (Durham: Duke University Press, forthcoming in 2009), p. 51. This phrase was initially used in reference to *Mundo grúa* (Pablo Trapero, 1999), one of the principal films associated with the representational practices of the *Nuevo cine argentino*.

experience of the tortured woman by using an artificial, suspended body. Indeed, as Andrew Webber remarks, ‘the doll is a specific moulding of the body in urban modernity, representing its always potentially uncanny attachment to the twin forces of commerce and technology’.<sup>549</sup> Thus virtual and performative bodies become markers of the suffering of *real* bodies in postdictatorship Argentina and Brazil and simultaneously denounce the uneven process of modernity.

#### VOYEURISM, THE GAZE AND SURVEILLANCE SOCIETY

Thirdly, a number of these films bring the themes of voyeurism and surveillance to the fore through the trope of looking, exploring and problematizing the cinematic gaze. They do so not at the expense of other forms of sensorial experience, but in conjunction with them, as will be explored below. The notion that the press, television, medicine, the police and the state are continuously monitoring identities through vision and the gaze surfaces countless times throughout this study. Amongst these examples, the medical gaze synthesizes the concerns of the cinematic apparatus with the disciplining effects of the gaze in science, particularly considering the repressive dictatorial regimes’ manipulation of medicine for its own violent purposes. This microscopic gaze – or what Joanna Page has termed the zoological gaze and David Oubiña refers to as a ‘cine quirúrgico’ – is one of the perceived features of the *Nuevo cine argentino*, as a number of films focus on the minutiae of objects and bodies.<sup>550</sup> However, the gaze, as it features in *Bicho*, *XXY*, *Vagón* and

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<sup>549</sup> Andrew Webber, ‘Introduction: Moving Images of Cities’, in *Cities in Transition: The Moving Image and the Modern Metropolis*, ed. by Webber & Wilson, pp. 1-14 (p. 7).

<sup>550</sup> Joanna Page discusses the trends of naturalism and minimalism in the New Argentine Cinema, suggesting that they present a ‘zoological gaze’. Page, *Crisis and Capitalism*, p. 49. David Oubiña describes the *Nuevo cine argentino* as a ‘cine quirúrgico’, making an allusion to the famous Benjaminian analogy between a photographer and a surgeon. See Oubiña, *Estudio crítico sobre La ciénaga: entrevista a Lucrecia Martel* (Buenos Aires: Picnic Editorial, 2007), pp. 51-52. Key to this observational trend is the work of Lucrecia Martel, who has received a great deal of critical attention. Undoubtedly Martel’s films beg a corporeal analysis, given the emphasis on sexuality, adolescence and the materiality of the body more generally, but their relationship to postdictatorial reality in Argentina is more oblique than in the films included in this thesis, which explicitly focus on the relationship of the body to structures of power, surveillance and violence embedded in the socio-political climate. Whilst extremely original, Martel’s work did not easily fit into the distinct axes of comparison which I had established to pursue my research, and was thus not included in this study.

Recently, however, Joanna Page has made a compelling argument for interpreting Martel’s cinematic project as political, based on the tensions established between the public and the private sphere in her films and their quasi-allegorical relationship to postdictatorial and post-Crisis reality in Argentina. For more on Martel and her distinctive cinematic project, see Page, ‘Espacio privado y significación política en el cine de Lucrecia Martel’, in *El cine argentino de hoy*, ed. by Rangil, pp. 157-168. Also see the other three chapters dedicated to the director in the final section of *El cine argentino de hoy*, pp. 157-220; Dominique Russell, ‘Lucrecia Martel: “A Decidedly Polyphonic

*Um Céu* – significantly all films which pertain to Part II of the thesis, which considers the representation of otherness – also intersects with issues of power as it classifies, digests, and ‘others’ the bodies which feature in the above filmic narratives. Furthermore, in problematizing the gaze all the films, in their own distinct way, contest official identities and the monitoring of citizens, addressing similar concerns of marginality and difference. These concerns echo Francine Masiello’s suggestion that postdictatorship representation reveals an ‘attraction to society’s marginal or abandoned figures, those who cast a dilemma about the representation of otherness’.<sup>551</sup>

#### SENSATION AND BODILY AFFECT

Finally, a number of the films studied in this thesis explore the multiple perceptual avenues of cinema in order to produce sensations *through* the body of the spectator. As outlined in the Introduction, this thesis sought to consider the wide range of sensorial stimuli available to the cinematic medium, not only the visual, but also the aural and tactile effects which are produced in film. In tune with recent developments in film studies, a number of these films evidence a haptic sensibility, at least at moments, and provide cinematic experiences which resonate with Steven Shaviro’s description of cinema as an art form with a ‘visceral immediacy’.<sup>552</sup> This ‘visceral immediacy’ is reflected in the journey sequences accompanied by nostalgic music and reminiscent of old footage in *Passaporte*; in the disjuncture of sound and animated Playmobil dolls in *Los rubios*; in the wavering shots of Poliak in *La fe*’s autobiographical prologue and the powerful montage sequences of the same film; in the energetic handheld camera sequences of *Bicho*, coupled with the amplification of sound in the EST sequences to which Neto is subjected; in the mythological and otherworldly blueness of *XXY*, where the texture of water permeates the narrative; in the ethereal sounds, hazy vision and overexposed lights of *Vagón*, as the characters

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Cinema”, *Jump Cut*, 50 (Spring 2008)

<<http://www.ejumpcut.org/currentissue/LMartelAudio/index.html>> [accessed 12 November 2008]; and Leila Gómez, ‘El cine de Lucrecia Martel: La Medusa en lo recóndito’, *Ciberletras*, 13 (July 2005) <<http://www.lehman.cuny.edu/ciberletras/v13/gomez.htm>> [accessed 16 May 2006]. It is worth noting that Martel has received huge international acclaim, evidenced in the recent retrospective dedicated to her work in the seventh annual Discovering Latin America Film Festival in London in collaboration with the UK women’s film organization, Birds Eye View.

<sup>551</sup> Masiello, *The Art of Transition: Latin American Culture and Neoliberal Crisis*. Durham & London: Duke University Press), p. 4.

<sup>552</sup> Steven Shaviro, *The Cinematic Body* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 35.



are cruising round Buenos Aires; and finally, in the stifling atmosphere of Dalva's home, where the camera remains forever inside the apartment's four walls and captures the heat rising from the tower blocks outside through the windows. All these instances indicate a commitment on the directors' part to conveying experiences to the spectator which s/he in turn experiences to some degree. The textures and disjuncture of sound and visuals frequently envelope the spectator and demand a corporeal response, further imbricating the spectator in the production of meaning of the cinematic text. Moreover, a number of these corporeal cinematic techniques are embedded in particular connotations that the body has acquired in these postdictatorial cultures. In this way, the aesthetics of affect which appears at moments in these films is built on an awareness of the body's suffering and destruction as a result of dictatorship and neoliberalism. These powerful haptic moments thus demand an engagement with the respective histories of torture and disenfranchisement in Argentina and Brazil.

Given that the notion of a haptic cinema is rooted in sensation and embodiment, it is perhaps not too surprising to note its often tacit association with the feminine. The age-old connections made between woman and the body have enabled a system of dichotomies whereby the feminine is rendered passive, corporeal and intrinsically associated with the natural world. The perception that woman is aligned with nature, and man with culture, continues to resound in criticism to this day, as the association of the feminine with the haptic attests.<sup>553</sup> Giuliana Bruno's theorization of the haptic locates it as an alternative to gaze studies in film, suggesting its value as a feminist strategy to break with the predominance of the 'masculine' optical.<sup>554</sup> Furthermore, senses other than vision have, until recently, been relegated to secondary status, a move which has also enabled their association with feminine expression. However, as Laura Marks asserts, 'rather than embrace the notion of tactility as a feminine form of perception, I prefer to see the haptic as a visual strategy that can be used to describe *alternative* visual traditions, including women's and feminist practices, rather than a feminine quality in particular' [my

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<sup>553</sup> In her influential essay 'Sorties', Hélène Cixous rehearses this system of patriarchal binaries which have systematically defined woman as passive and thoroughly explodes the dialectical thinking on which it is based. The essay begins with a list of the oppositions Cixous interprets in patriarchal culture: Activity/Passivity; Sun/Moon; Culture/Nature; Day/Night; Father/Mother; Head/Heart; Intelligible/Palpable; Logos/Pathos; Man/Woman. See Cixous, 'Sorties: Out and Out: Attacks/Ways Out/Forays', in Hélène Cixous & Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*, trans. by Betsy Wing, with an Introduction by Sandra M. Gilbert, (London: I. B. Tauris, 1996), pp. 63-132 (p.63).

<sup>554</sup> Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion*, p. 16.

emphasis].<sup>555</sup> In line with Marks's view, I wish to avoid the trap of inscribing tactility as a feminine form of expression, as this would reinforce those very same hierarchical and patriarchal binaries which Cixous and others have so masterfully argued against. Even Marks's comment, which recognizes the danger of interpreting the haptic as a specifically feminine voice, falls back on the assumption that women's practices are necessarily 'alternative'. Whilst I concur with Marks in resisting the categorization of the haptic as a feminine form of perception, I do not align myself with her view that women's cinema necessarily belongs to the field of alternative visual traditions. Furthermore, as a number of the films explored in this thesis demonstrate, the sensorial may appear in tandem with the gaze, thus marrying concerns of affect and vision in the framework of the cinematic apparatus.

#### **WOMEN'S CINEMA: A THEORETICAL IMPASSE?**

Both the propensity to haptic, or sensorial, sequences or techniques and the perceived emphasis on marginality in the films analysed in this study facilitate a brief final discussion of the non-mainstream status of women's cinema. To enable this task, I return to the epigraph with which this thesis began:

Female authors, female directors, do not owe their importance to a militant feminism. What is more important is the way they have produced innovation in this cinema of bodies, as if women had to conquer the source of their own attitudes and the temporality which corresponds to them as individual or common gest.<sup>556</sup>

This quotation, taken from Deleuze's *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (1985), synthesizes some of the questions and perspectives which have been explored throughout this thesis, namely the concept of a corporeal cinema, and the latter's relationship to women's authorship. Deleuze suggests that women directors have produced a corporeal cinema as a direct result of their gendered identities and acute awareness of the body. Furthermore, the rejection of the legacy of militant feminism presented here is, seemingly, a position that some of the directors featured in this study share. More importantly, however, Deleuze posits that women filmmakers are in some way resistant to the mainstream; that they reinvigorate existing traditions and produce films which are intensely corporeal in nature. Whilst I object to certain generalizing assumptions that Deleuze makes here – namely that women have a

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<sup>555</sup> Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, pp. 169-170.

<sup>556</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema II*, pp. 196-197.

particular relationship to the body *qua women* and that they also experience their own particular temporality – I find his suggestion that women filmmakers are in essence ‘alternative’ a useful, if controversial, springboard for some concluding remarks on the theorization of women’s cinema. Indeed, Deleuze’s position is reflected in the increasing credibility of the notion that women’s cinema is, in fact, a minor cinema.

Minor cinema is a derivative of Deleuze and Guattari’s conceptualization of minor literature exposed in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (1975) and has principally been theorized in relation to women’s cinema by Alison Butler. According to Butler, ‘the plurality of forms, concerns and constituencies in contemporary women’s cinema now exceeds even the most flexible definition of counter-cinema. Women’s cinema now seems “minor” rather than oppositional’.<sup>557</sup> This nuance between oppositional production and minor production within a major cultural paradigm is one way out of the impasse which characterizes all women’s cultural production as necessarily oppositional to the hegemonic order. In this way, it recognizes the positioning of women’s cinema within a larger context - which, of course, also involves masculine production – and theorizes the relationship and cross-fertilization between major and minor modes. Indeed, Deleuze and Guattari found the concept politically compelling as a result of the freedom and room for experimentation available to the ‘minor’ artist. When applied to the concept of women’s cinema, it is possible to see female-authored films as pockets of production which are freed from the formal constraints of hegemonic cinematic practice and which revel in their liberties, producing aesthetic innovation and forever pushing the boundaries, as the frequent transgression and hybridization of fiction and documentary modes in the films studied in this thesis evidence. However, whilst in some ways the suggestion that women’s cinema is a minor cinema is persuasive, in many others it presents the same limitations as the oppositional model, repackaging the old concept with new terminology and reasserting the notion that women’s cinema is, in essence, revolutionary. Further theoretical work is required in this area, particularly concerning non-Euro-Anglo cinemas.

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<sup>557</sup> Butler, *Women’s Cinema*, p. 19.

It has not, however, been the intention of this study to reduce women's filmmaking to a set of coordinates, but rather, to analyse different examples of films directed by women in order to elucidate their shared themes and aesthetics and, more importantly, to emphasize the heterogeneity of their works. Furthermore, the thesis has not isolated these female directors from their male counterparts, but rather located them within their respective cinematic and socio-political contexts, drawing national and international comparisons where relevant. However, whilst women's cinema is often problematically theorized, it remains my belief that the concept demands greater attention, not necessarily in order to formulate a key - a set of rules and formal characteristics by which to assess women's films - but instead to generate new understandings of specific experiences on screen. Irrespective of the comments made by a number of prominent women directors from Argentina and Brazil, it remains imperative to remind ourselves that these filmic perspectives belong to a specific socio-cultural standpoint informed by the status of women in Argentina and Brazil and which is inflected by the experience of violent and repressive regimes. Given the surge in levels of production, women directors must be considered a defining feature of the new waves of cinema from Argentina and Brazil and allowed the recognition they deserve. It is hoped that as a project that forges a bridge between perspectives on women's authorship in cinema and the corporeal concerns which emanate from the repressive and violent systems of dictatorship and neoliberalism, the present thesis stands as a significant contribution to the growing bibliography on the recent cinemas of both Argentina and Brazil, and stimulates further research on women's cinema from both countries.

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