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The Politics of Photographic Aesthetics in Latin America:
Photography, Beauty, and Violence in Argentine and Brazilian Film in the Twenty-First Century

By

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Doctor of Philosophy

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Photography, Beauty, and Violence in Argentine and Brazilian Film in the Twenty-First Century

By

Janike Ruginis
B.A., Tulane University, 2008
M.A., Emory University, 2015

Advisor: Dierdra Reber, PhD, University of Pennsylvania, 2005

An abstract of
A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the
James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies of Emory University
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Abstract

The Politics of Photographic Aesthetics in Latin America:
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In this dissertation I trace a recurrent form of the photographic medium in the political history of Argentina and Brazil as represented in twenty-first century Argentine and Brazilian film. The films that compose this historical portraiture address within their filmic narrative cultural, social, and political concerns during periods of rapid economic and political shifts. This history spans the accumulation of capital via agricultural exports in the nineteenth century, followed by the rise of the labor-conscious revolutionary left and its oppression by dictatorial forces in the twentieth century, in turn followed by the implementation of neoliberal economic structures and the eventual destabilization of this economy in the wake of the 2001 economic crisis in Argentina. The thread that links these films is their common use of the photographic medium as a narrative tool. The films incorporate the photographic medium—either through its emergence as a photograph, a photographer, or via the cinematic evocation of a photographic moment—as a crucial element in articulating, demonstrating, and denouncing violence related to economic and political change within Argentina and Brazil. Each chapter becomes a portrait that maps the use of photography in exposing repressive political and economic structures. This dissertation demonstrates how photography comes to the fore as a narrative element that highlights this violence, as it is represented within the filmic narrative, while also offering the possibility of resisting the repressive state and/or economic structures exposed as the culprits of this violence. It is at the intersection of political meaning and beautiful representation that the films I analyze posit the photographic medium as a critical instrument for bringing to the fore socio-economic and political violence in Latin America while also posing the possibility of liberation from its repressive structures.

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# Introduction: The Politics of Photographic Aesthetics in Latin America

This dissertation traces a persistent form of photographic portraiture of the political history of Argentina and Brazil. Each chapter creates a political and economic portrait of key historical periods in Argentina and Brazil through twenty-first century films that demonstrate within their narratives a cultural, social, and political concern. Spanning the early twentieth century to the present moment, the films address periods of rapid economic and political shift in Latin American regional and national histories. The thread that links these films is the use of the photographic medium as a narrative tool. The films' use of photography incorporates this medium as a crucial element in articulating, demonstrating, and denouncing violence related to economic and political change within Argentina and Brazil.

In broad strokes, each chapter in this dissertation maps critical economic and political periods within Argentina and Brazil, two regions whose histories overlap in significant ways in the story of Latin American economic development.[1] Together, the

[1] The comprehensive study *The Economies of Argentina and Brazil: A Comparative Perspective* (2011), edited by Werner Baer and David V. Fleischer, maps the similarities and differences of the "giants of the region" regarding processes of "industrialization, agriculture, formal and informal service sectors, income distribution, the state and the privatization experience, regional development, inflation and stabilization politics, and foreign trade and investments"(xv; xvii). Identifying the economic importance of Argentina and Brazil within Latin America, the essays in the volume trace the overlaps between both countries' economies, including their "agro-exporting economics in the second half of the nineteenth century and the first decade and a half of the twentieth century," the large number of European immigrants paralleled to the "incipient industrial growth," "long periods of inflation, ultimately resulting in hyperinflation" during the twentieth century," then "falling victim to the debt crisis in the 1980s and experienced long periods of low growth and investment" which ultimately led to the implementation of neo-liberal policies advocated by the Washington Consensus of the 1990s (xv-xvii).

collective placement of the photographic image in these films tells the story of the past century in stages, each mapping a history of repressive political and economic structures that inflicted violence: first, the accumulation of capital via agricultural exports in the nineteenth century, followed by the rise of the labor-conscious revolutionary left and its oppression by militarized-cum-dictatorial forces, in turn followed by the implementation of neoliberal economic structures and the eventual destabilization of this economy in the wake of the 2001 economic crisis in Argentina which exposed the intimate relation between economic and social inequalities. In each film studied, photography comes to the fore as the narrative element that both highlights this violence, insofar as it is represented with the filmic narrative, and offers the possibility of resistance to its repressive source in state and/or economic structures. The camera is filmically represented as the key that holds the truth of the state of affairs and sheds light on the source of repressive violence within these critical periods. In the process of tracing the appearance of photography in film, a particular cultural use of the medium comes to the fore. Each film creates a mise-en-scène for the photographic image in which this image, invested with a consciousness of Latin American economic and political circumstance, plays between two dichotomies that are set up in a relationship of analogy: aesthetics and politics, and beauty and violence.

*Scholarship: A Survey of the Field*

Towards the end of the twentieth century into the twenty-first, there has been a wealth of publications that have made significant contributions to the establishment of photography in Latin America as a scholarly field of inquiry. These texts include *Images*

*and Memory: Latin American Photography, 1880-1992* (1998) by Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy Watriss, Erika Billeter's *Canto a la realidad: fotografía latinoamericana, 1860-1993* (1993), and *The Itinerant Languages of Photography* (2013) edited by Eduardo Cadava and Gabriela Nouzeilles.

Within this growing photographic canon, we can trace studies on photography within Mexico, offering insight into visual culture and the construction of national identity during the revolution and post-revolutionary periods as seen in Leonard Folgarait's *Seeing Mexico Photographed* (2008), Roberto Tejada's *National Camera: Photography and Mexico's Image Environment* (2009), and *Looking for Mexico: Modern Visual Culture and National Identity* by John Mraz (2009). Photography in Brazil has also been addressed, as noted in compilations such as *Fotografia Escrita: Nove Ensaios Sobre a Produção Fotográfica no Brasil* (2012) edited by Pedro Afonso Vasquez and *8 x Fotografia: Ensaios* (2013) edited by Lorenzo Mammì and Lilia Mortz Schwarcz, two texts that collect essays covering photography in Brazil as well as dealing with European and U.S. photographers. There are two texts that are particularly interested in the visual constructions of modernity as seen in Natalia Brizuela's *Fotografia e Império: Paisagens de um Brasil Moderno* (2012), as well as questions of aesthetics during modernist movements as seen in Esther Gabara's *Errant Modernism: The Ethos of Photography in Mexico and Brazil* (2008) who offers a comparative approach, covering Mexican and Brazilian photography during modernist movements of the 1920s and 1930s. These scholarly contributions span the entire Latin American region, and as the titles suggest, focus on photography as a way to approach issues of memory, identity, aesthetics, and visuality.

There has been a particular interest in tracing the relationship between photography and literary texts. Such studies include *Phototextualities: Intersections of Photography and Narrative* (2003) edited by Alex Hughes and Andrea Noble, Mary E. Schwartz's and Mary Beth Tierney Tello's collection of essays *Photography and Writing in Latin America: Double Exposures* (2006), Valeria de los Rios's *Espectros de luz: tecnologías visuales en la literatura* (2011), Magdalena Perkowska's *Pliegues visuales: narrativa y fotografía en la novela latinoamericana contemporánea* (2013), and most recently Dan Russek's *Textual Exposures: Photography in Twentieth Century Latin American Narrative Fiction* (2015).

Within academia, photography and film have been established as independent fields of research. Nonetheless, the intimate connection between both media is undeniable; from a series of photographs shown sequentially, our eyes can form a complete picture in motion. For its part, film has embraced photography through its material incorporation of cameras and photographers, and by adopting into its aesthetic photographic characteristics; the filmic camera conjures the notion of a photographic image on screen. Karen Beckman and Jean Ma's *Still Moving: Between Cinema and Photography* (2008) offers an extensive compilation of texts that focus on photography and film. The objective behind this anthology is to address questions of methodology and scholarship in two disciplines, Art History and Film Studies, that have been historically distinct yet are constantly overlapping. The editors note how photography and cinema become an access point into questions of "disciplinary gaze, the parameters of scholarship, and the relationship between art and technology" (3). They note how "the sense of disciplinary crisis […] emerge[s] most forcefully around photography and

cinema, whose essential hybridity and interconnectedness present a challenge to homogeneous and reductive notions of medium specificity and open an important site of overlap between art history and cinema studies" (3).

David Company contributes to this conversation in *Photography and Cinema* (2008). As he explores the relationship between photography and cinema, Company makes a distinction between their "shared technical base," "shared aesthetic concerns" and "cultural aims" (10). Ultimately, Company's analysis comes to rest on a distinction between technical aspects of both media and their cultural and social functions (12). Company contemplates film's treatment of photography thus:

> Film tends to overstate the photograph's difference, while presenting that difference as if it were its essence. We see the photograph exaggerated by those qualities that distinguish it from film: its stillness, its temporal fixity, its objecthood, its silence, its deathliness, even (96).

Company's analysis resonates with Laura Mulvey's *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image* (2006), which focuses on temporality within cinema and the use of stillness in film, linked to the photographic image. She notes that "[w]hile movement tends to assert the presence of a continuous 'now,' stillness brings a resonance of 'then' to the surface" which creates a new temporal dimension within film (13).[2] Mulvey draws from the work of Christian Metz, who delves into questions of temporality in photography and film. In his essay "Photography and Fetish" (1985), Metz highlights how photographs maintain their link to reality while film holds its social value as entertainment. This distinction affects their spatial-temporal manifestations, as

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[2] For further details on temporality in cinema see Doane (2010).

photography is immobile and silent and thus linked to death (Metz 83). Film, on the other hand, after appropriating the object, unfolds in a time "similar to that to life" (84). Dealing mainly with European and North American films and scholarship, Mulvey's and Metz's work explores the relationship between photography and film and highlights some points of entry into this line of inquiry.[3]

Within Latin American scholarship, as explored above, there has not been a comprehensive study of the uses and interpretations of photography in Latin American film in the sense of mapping photography as a cultural narrative tool that is shaped by a Latin American cinema concerned with politics and social denunciation. My research intends to be a starting point in addressing this open space of inquiry. The first step is to map photography as it is deployed within film in order to assess how the two media, with their particular artistic value and form, shape one another. The films in question were produced in twenty-first century Argentina and Brazil, two regions that have shared remarkably parallel economic and political histories over the past century.

The second step is to investigate how Argentine and Brazilian films are fertile grounds for this discussion, considering their tendency toward political commentary and denunciation of social, political, and economic violence. In Argentina and Brazil, film has historically been a source of expressing political discontent and promoting political action, constituting an important voice in the cultural sphere. In the past decades the medium has seen a revival in Argentina and Brazil, producing more films than ever

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[3] Other texts focusing on the study of photography and film include Burgin (1982), Dubois (1983), Stewart (1999), and Guido and Lugon (2012).

before, as noted by Laura Podalsky (2). This comes after both countries experienced a film production crisis in the early 1990s as cultural policies that limited or completely eradicated state support were instated. Under Brazilian president Fernando Collor de Mello, state policies closed down the state production and distribution company Embrafilme, the film regulating agency Concine, and suspended the Sarney Law, which provided tax benefits for cultural projects (Rêgo and Rocha 1). In Argentina, Carlos Saúl Menem's policies of the 1990s, similarly, cut production funding, making production difficult if not impossible. These changes in policies that limited film production can be linked to the establishment of neoliberal policies in Argentina and Brazil, as noted by Cacilda Rêgo and Carolina Rocha. Such policies altering the social, economic, and cultural spheres through the limitations placed on film production had a snowball effect: "the more ground these governments ceded to the marketplace, the less able they were to resist making further concessions to the increasingly powerful domestic and international market forces" (Drake 36). During this period there were noticeable economic shifts, with the rise of inflation, the decline of currency value, the fall of an internal market, combined with a dominating presence of Hollywood films in the cultural sphere that only increased as national film production fell (Rêgo and Rocha 2).

New laws were passed that looked to reinvigorate the film industry. In Brazil, the 1991 law known as the Rouanet Law (Law 8,313) encouraged investment in cultural projects, and the 1993 law known as the Audio-Visual Law (Law 8,586) provided an impetus for new funding strategies to take place, through tax incentive systems that offered tax exemption when sponsoring national cultural projects such as films (Rêgo and Rocha 2-3). In 1994, Argentina passed Law 24,377 that encouraged and regulated

production, through the creation of the Instituto Nacional de Cine y Artes Audiovisuales (INCAA; National Institute of Cinematography and Audiovisual Arts), and by establishing credit lines and subsidies (Rêgo and Rocha 2-3). These new policies provided the groundwork for the revitalization of the national cultural sphere, and the corresponding rise of film.

The reemergence of film production came hand in hand with a revisiting and rearticulation of the medium's cultural position. A prominent trend within films from Argentina and Brazil was the presentation of social, economic, and political commentaries. Adjusting to the economic and political environment surrounding the industry, including a neoliberal structure, economic crisis, and the subsequent rise of unemployment and socio-economic inequality, films became vessels through which to articulate social and political discontent (Rêgo and Rocha 5). While these films looked to bring visibility to sectors that experienced economic and state violence in the form of socio-economic disparities, the films were paradoxically criticizing the same social structures that had limited their production and now redefined the industry. Undoubtedly, economic and state policies under capitalism revamped filmic production, yet also reshaped the "financing, production and distribution of Argentine and Brazilian films due to technological advancements and the flow of information and capital" (Rêgo and Rocha 9). For example, roles such as that of producers took on the fundamental function of securing "agentes econômicos, como bancos, corretoras e captadores profissionais, para satisfazer o aspecto financeiro do projecto" ("economic agents, such as banks, insurance brokers, and professional fundraisers to meet the financial aspect of the project")

(Ballerini 51). The economic environment redefined and shaped the film industry, and yet filmic narratives continued to address socio-economic disparities.

We can turn to Jens Andermann to start to unravel and reconcile this paradoxical relationship identified within the film industry of the films' criticism of the very economic environment that supports them. Andermann affirms that we must focus on twenty-first century films' "critical movement back and forth from the economic and cultural conditions of enunciation under which a film is being made and the transformative intervention it performs into these conditions" (xviii). Within this movement, Andermann suggests that films are acting out "belonging to place as well as contesting it," meaning that filmic narrative is engaging with the site of production, the "universal context," as well as the places "we inhabit." Regardless of films' being blockbuster or non-mainstream productions, they are all focusing on how identities form within a global world. In the words of Rêgo and Cacilda, "one evident concern of the films […] produced in both Argentina and Brazil after the mid 1990s is the impact of globalization on these societies." Ultimately, films have political, economic, and cultural dimensions, given that they exist within a neoliberal structure and redefine and shape "public institutions, social relationships and individual and collective identities" (9). So, while the relationship between the environment that surrounds production and the filmic narrative (which denounces the structures that support it) can be described as paradoxical, ultimately, as noted by Joanna Page in the words of Andermann, "state funding of film production and screening venues in most Latin American countries […] remains crucial to the very survival of a 'national' cinema, however multiple now in its funding sources and aesthetic affiliations" (xix).

Turning back to the cultural narratives at play within these films, in *Latin American Cinema: Essays on Modernity, Gender and National Identity* (2005), Lisa Shaw and Stephanie Dennison highlight how film production in Latin America continues to deal with notions of national identity, averring that “the search for a sense of self has remained a favorite theme of Latin American movies” (5-6). As a result, the nation, and all its aspects, is placed as the central axis in the cinematic production of Argentina and Brazil (Rêgo and Rocha 6). These commonalities undergird two cinematic trends, the New Argentine Cinema and the Retomada and Pós-retomada in Brazil. New Argentine Cinema, moving away from traditional film narrative, “explore[s] both out of necessity and of aesthetic and political choice the possibilities of a more open, fragmented and improvisational process of film-making closer to the pulse of time” (Andermann, “New” xii). Similarly, the Retomada and Pós-retomada of Brazilian cinema of the 1990s rearticulate the notion established by Cinema Novo, the cinematic movement of the 1960s led by Glauber Rocha, advocating for films that focus on social denunciation while simultaneously benefitting from commercial and global trends (Nagib).[4]

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[4] Notwithstanding the political and social preoccupation dealt with in filmic narratives produced during these past decades, in *The Politics of Affect and Emotion in Contemporary Latin American Cinema* (2011), Podalsky notes that the rise of the new cinema post-1990s was met with skepticism from some due to its “excessive preoccupation with stylistic innovation and its inadequate grasp of past traumas and current socioeconomic problems (2). For example, Brazilian film scholar Ivana Bents “has belittled the more recent cinema for its ‘cosmetics of hunger’” (referring to Rocha’s aesthetics of hunger as articulate in his manifesto “A Estética da Fome” (1965) where he establishes the importance of film in exploring social and political discontent at an artistic level); she dismisses the portrayal of “socioeconomic inequalities in recent Brazilian films because they lack an overarching political project, and criticizes their attempt to dress up Brazil’s poverty in order to attract the eye of foreign consumers” (2).

In *The Politics of Affect and Emotion in Contemporary Latin American Cinema: Argentina, Brazil, Cuba, and Mexico,* Podalsky looks at the ways in which twenty-first century filmic productions in Argentina, Brazil, Cuba, and Mexico are aesthetically and politically engaged, demonstrating a "preoccupation with the recent past and its relation to the contemporary moment" and "a fixation on depth and surface evident in the innovative use of cinematography" (8). In her approach to understanding how cinema is participating in "larger sociocultural processes," she pays particular attention to the "sensorial and emotional appeals of recent Latin/a American films" meaning the way in which "the politics of affect is concerned with how certain works encourage their spectators to feel in ways that acknowledge alternative ways of knowing (about) the recent traumatic past of the 1960s and 1970s" (3). Podalsky's research contributes to an understanding of the importance of film as a vehicle in expressing political and social concerns, and establishing twenty-first century Latin American cinema as a unified medium that is articulating its own aesthetics as an expression of political thought.

While Podalsky's research establishes cinematic productions of the twenty-first century as expressing new ways of knowing about the historical past via "sensorial and emotional appeals," Eduardo Cadava and Gabriela Nouzeilles's *The Itinerant Language of Photography* and Dan Russek's *Textual Exposures* offer a point of departure in navigating the juncture between photography and film within the politically and aesthetically committed film medium. Russek identifies a literary use of photography that positions the medium as a fantastical element through which to comment on historical or political conditions. Yet he affirms that "writers are less concerned about determining the 'ontology' of the photographic image […] exploit[ing] the 'blind spots' of the image." I

would argue that this relationship between photography and literature is not unidirectional. As Cadava and Nouzeilles incisively state, the traveling nature of photography suggests that it “approaches, engages, and intersects with other mediums,” in an interactivity that can “transform our sense of photography itself” (19).

My research investigates the cultural uses of photography through individual readings of films where photography is at the core of the filmic narrative, either via its emergence as a photograph, a photographer, or via the cinematic evocation of a photographic moment. I have chosen a corpus of films in which photography comes to the fore as a crucial narrative tool in expressing and examining social and economic problems, as well as highlighting the violence that these problems inflict within key historical periods. My interest in this role of photography led me to gather together instances of similar treatment; after a time, I realized that I had compiled a critical mass of such texts—predominantly filmic, though also literary—that had either been made in Argentina and Brazil or by Argentine or Brazilian directors or authors. Why would the representation of photography as a medium capable of denouncing violence be concentrated in a kindred way in these two countries’ cultural production? My chapters will explore this intriguingly parallel relationship between national histories of violence and the role of photography in its cultural denunciation of those histories: Argentine and Brazilian films articulate social and political discontent during periods of heightened state and/or cultural violence (periods of nation formation, the fall of the left and the rise of right-wing military regimes, and neoliberal economic structures); it is their mapping of these histories onto the representation of photography that opens a window onto both the

violence of these national histories and the role of photography within a cinematic corpus concerned with social narrative.

*Photography as Truth: Picturing Violence and Beauty*

In contrast with film, which is associated with movement and dynamism, photography is conversely associated with stasis—in Company's above-cited words, with "stillness, […] temporal fixity, […] objecthood, […] silence, […] deathliness" (96). The notion of photography as still and fixed, evocative of something that "has been," to use the words of Roland Barthes, has contributed to its evidentiary and documentary value, though not without complications. Modern photography critics have discussed the system of meaning produced within a photographic frame, a discussion that has revolved around the concept of truth in photography—the degree to which reality may be imprinted faithfully onto paper. As an example of the truth value that has historically been conferred on the photographic image, we can refer to Lady Elizabeth Eastlake, who described it in 1857 as "the sworn witness of everything presented to her view […] facts of the most sterling and stubborn kind […] a new form of communication" (Newhall 85). Or to Joseph Nicéphore Niépce, inventor of the heliograph, who affirmed in a letter to his son in 1827, "These representations are so real, even in their smallest detail, that one believes that he actually sees rustic and wild nature, with all the illusion that the charm of colors and the magic of chiaroscuro can give it" (Newhall 17). Edgar Allan Poe noted how "the daguerreotype plate is […] infinitely more accurate in its representation than any painting by human hands" (Trachtenberg 38). Ultimately, the photograph was

considered in the nineteenth century as the vehicle through which reality could faithfully render itself, produce truth, and uncover details not visible to the human eye.

Given the accuracy with which the camera can capture reality onto photographic paper, photography has become a key component in documentary, testimonial, and evidentiary narratives. Photography has been attributed with the capacity of revealing bare truths to spectators because of the belief in an organic relationship between the photographic image and its referent; in other words, the referent of the photograph is believed to be reality itself.

Yet cultural analysis of photography from the mid-twentieth century forward has demonstrated a growing awareness of how this belief in photographic transparency lends itself to the political manipulation of the photograph, effecting what Barthes calls a process of “mythologization” (“Myth Today”)—that is, a resignification of this truth value in the service of ideological discourse wielded by political and economic elites. Cuban writer Edmundo Desnoes—whose 1965 novel *Memorias del subdesarrollo* would be adapted to film in 1968 by Tomás Gutiérrez Alea—effectively paraphrases this analysis from within Latin American discourse, stating that “photography is just as closely tied to economic and political interest as to dreams and art” (310). This link is exemplified for Desnoes in the photographic construction of Cuba’s identity abroad, in postcards or magazines, that focuses on constructing a vacation destination, divorced from any representation of the lived political and cultural experience. By the same token, Boris Kossoy, in *Realidades e Ficções na Trama Fotográfica* (*Realities and Fictions in Trama Photography*), affirms that “A imagem fotográfica seja ela anlógica ou digital é sempre um documento/representação” (“The photographic image, whether analog or

digital is always a document/representation") (31); he argues that the photographic representation of Brazilian modernity—its splendor and progress—erases social, economic, and political differences (14). Desnoes similarly notes that photography's link to reality enables the medium to fabricate realities with "a credible face" (313). Ultimately, these studies show how a reliance on the ostensibly transparent relationship between representation and referent allowed political elites to manipulate the photograph as an instrument for ideological discourse that was anything but realistic.

Susan Sontag and Roland Barthes are key photography critics who identified in their scholarship a particular relationship between photographic referent and reality. Neither goes so far as to claim that what we see in the image is not true; Sontag states that photographs in fact "furnish evidence" and Barthes affirms that the image is not distinguishable from its referent (Sontag 5, 119; Barthes 5). Yet they both affirm that there is a manipulation of the meaning of the image at play within the photograph, based on their common assessment that the photographic image is invested with an underlying meaning that comes to the fore upon closer inspection. While not suggesting that the photographic image does not convey truth, they examine how photography can in fact reveal one truth while concealing another. For example, Sontag notes how the camera hides more than what is disclosed in the image itself, just as Barthes affirms how the image is highly coded (Sontag 23; Barthes 51). The aesthetic content of the image, for Sontag, promotes detachment from any reality it might be purported to represent (even a photograph that is explicitly documentary); aesthetics, for Sontag, interfere with the conveying of political truth (111-12). Sontag and Barthes coincide in suggesting that it is only through the dismissal of the aesthetic value of the photographic representation that

the viewer can access the political truth that is undisclosed by the visual representation. In other words, the beholder of the photographic image has to circumvent—dig deeper than—its aesthetics in order to access any possible capacity for the representation of political truth.

Here I would like to argue that the relationship between aesthetics and the capacity to represent political truth is, in the Latin American filmic corpus I have gathered, exactly the opposite of what Sontag and Barthes claim. That is, where Sontag and Barthes claim an inverse relationship between aesthetics and politics in the photographic image, the representation of photography in the films studied in my chapters proposes that it is precisely their aesthetics of that representation that affords political insight. However, I will argue that this is so without dismantling Sontag's and Barthes's estimation of what is aesthetically beautiful as limiting and highly coded. In other words, I am not countering Sontag and Barthes when they assert the seductive value of aesthetic images, to be dismantled in order to access the political value of the photograph that they argue the seductive image obscures. Rather, I posit that what the Latin American filmic representation of the photograph that I study proposes is that the aesthetic image not only does not obscure political truth, but, on the contrary, it leads directly to its revelation and apprehension by the spectator. It is the very understanding of the aesthetic value within the photographic frame that opens up a consciousness of political violence for the spectator.

The political violence that the films address, which will be discussed in depth in the following chapters, is a product of economic policies put into place within key historical periods and the way in which those policies shape and infiltrate politics. As

articulated by the filmic narratives, the effects of such economic and political implementations directly affect the civil populace in ways that radically disrupt notions of identity. The violent unrest experienced in each film pushes the main characters to rearticulate their notions of self in ways that are separate from the economic and political structures that suppress their liberties. As each chapter will address, the films focus on how these greater economic structures sustained by state politics infiltrate and disrupt ways of life, from the restriction of womanhood within a nineteenth-century liberal framework that witnessed the agricultural boom in Argentina and Brazil, the physical and psychological violence of twentieth-century Cold War politics, and finally the push for a neoliberal economic system that has widened socio-economic disparities in the twenty-first century.

*Aesethtics, Photography, and Politics*

From its earliest beginnings, photography has been met by extensive discussions surrounding photography and aesthetics, perhaps best exemplified by the heated debates on its status as art. In 1859, Charles Baudelaire rejected the possibility of attributing any artistic value to photography, lamenting that society's obsession with truth "oppresses and smothers the taste for the beautiful" (85). The beauty he seeks in his text is one that contains the "element of wonder," and is considered to evoke a "divine art" which contains an element of man's soul (85; 88). As a result, Baudelaire suggests that aesthetics exists outside the realm of material reality. The latter space should, Baudelaire proposes, be occupied by photography, described by him as "the secretary and record-keeper of whomsoever needs absolute material accuracy for professional reasons" (88).

The notion of aesthetics living outside the realm of material reality reduces it to "questions of beauty, essentialism, artistic genius, and visual pleasure." This relegates aesthetics to the ahistorical and apolitical, an experience that lives separately from reality (Emerling 13).

Baudelaire leaves us with words of warning: "woe betide us!" if photography invades the aesthetic sphere (88). Yet, photography and aesthetics cannot live apart, and establishing an open line of communication between both opens the possibility of delving further into the politics of aesthetics. In response to the notion of an aesthetic that lives outside of history, Hal Foster theorizes what he terms the "anti-aesthetic"; far from alluding to the rejection of an aesthetic, this term should be understood as Foster's challenging of the notion of an apolitical aesthetics by locating the roots of visuality in politics and history:

> More locally, "anti-aesthetic" also signals a practice, cross-disciplinary in nature, that is sensitive to cultural forms engaged in a politic (e.g. feminist art) or rooted in a vernacular—that is, to forms that deny the idea of a privileged aesthetic realm. (xiii)

Foster's theorization of the anti-aesthetic places emphasis on the political aspect of aesthetics—that is, the construction of an image as politically and historically bound; not merely a form of pleasure, but also a means of establishing social and political critique.[5]

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[5] Nicholas Mirzoeff also traces visuality in history and politics in his work *The Right to Look: A Counterhistory of Visuality* (2011). Mirzoeff notes: "Authority is thus visibly able to set things in motion, and that is then felt to be right: it is aesthetic. Visuality supplemented the violence of authority and its separations, forming a complex that came to seem natural by virtue of its investment in 'history.' […] Visuality sought to present authority as self-evident, that 'division of the sensible whereby domination imposes the sensible evidence of its legitimacy'" (3).

Yet Foster's term "anti-aesthetic," meant to privilege the politics of the image, ultimately only reifies the opposition between aesthetics and politics that I seek to challenge as critically unproductive. Jae Emerling provides helpful conceptual scaffolding for the rejection of Foster's dichotomy by finding a hybrid middle ground in which politics are to be found in—and not outside or in spite of—aesthetics. For Emerling, the image is misused when deployed as either the "means for a socio-political commentary or, conversely, […] [for] remaking the image [as] a fetish" (38)—that is, in either a strictly political or aesthetic way, understanding these to be mutually exclusive. Rather, Emerling calls for the "reassessment of aesthetics as a multiplicity of local, *interruptive* affects created by imagery in order to think the image as an event" (38; emphasis added). Indeed, in the films studied herein, the photographic aesthetic is always in dialogue with the lived and emotional experience of its beholders—the films' characters, and even the cultural landscape as protagonist—in a way that constitutes an interruptive socio-political commentary and critique. In this way, I identify in these films a particular use of photography (the camera, the photographer, and its manifestation within the filmic aesthetic), a play, an interconnectedness between the reality depicted within the photographic frame and with the filmic narrative that challenges the Manichean relationship between aesthetics and politics.

On the basis of the relationship between aesthetic image and violence that I identify within each film, I have titled my dissertation a study of the politics of photographic aesthetics (the relationship between aesthetics and political violence) in Latin America. It is at the intersection of aesthetically beautiful representation and political value, I argue, that we encounter the key to understanding a persistent

representational thread of photography that has been operating within Latin American filmic production, as explored above. This relationship between aesthetics and politics that photography establishes within the text is critical in setting violence into relief and making a commentary on the position of the state and its economic policies as the culprits of that violence.

My analysis of this filmic corpus is not limited to the relationship I identify between photographic aesthetics and political violence as seen in the selection of films. As I will discuss in each chapter, in the process of incorporating photography as a narrative tool in exposing violence, each film in question brings visibility to sectors of society that would otherwise remain invisible to the state, all the while proposing affective communities (family or romantic relationships) as the new form of resistance to the restrictive and violent structures of state over citizenry.

Invoking an affective community as the alternative space from which to build identity, separate from the state, can be linked to what Dierdra Reber argues to be an epistemological shift. Meaning, there is a movement from the rational ("I think, therefore I am") to the affective ("I feel, therefore I am"):

> […] the casting of knowledge of self and world becomes a process of "coming to our senses"—that is, a coming into "reason" by way of the nonrational, in which feelings and togetherness become the new basis of forming knowledge and political action aligned with fundamentally horizontal—democratic—moral principles of equality and well-being." (xiii-xiv)

Through affective relationships the characters in the film find alternative ways of life within the state, not subject to economic and political policies and their volatility that

strip them of individual freedoms. Ultimately, these affective relationships lead the main characters in each film to reach a form of liberational agency, in which they are liberated from violent structures and establish themselves as free agents.

*A Nineteenth-Century Portrait: Argentina and Brazil's Agricultural Boom*

From an economic and commercial standpoint, nineteenth-century Latin America can be understood through its relationship with Great Britain. For Matthew Brown, this relationship is defined by the informal presence of Britain within the region. Brown uses the term "informal empire" to represent the informal processes that took place within commercial, capital, and cultural spheres and have limited the region's post-independence (Brown 21). Seminal historiographers of British informal empire John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson affirm that British history in the nineteenth century is its expansion, "the exports of capital and manufactures, the migration of citizens, the dissemination of the English language, ideas and constitutions forms, were all of them radiations of the social energies of the British people" (6). British industrialization extended and intensified the development of regions abroad, including Latin America and particularly Argentina and Brazil (Gallagher and Robinson 5, 10). The authors assert that economic expansion is not the only function of imperialism but becomes a dominant global paradigm: "Whether imperialist phenomena show themselves or not, is determined not only by the factors of economic expansion, but *equally by the political and social organization of the regions brought into the orbit of the expansive society, and also by the world situation in general*" (5; my emphasis).

By the early 1900s, British investments in the Latin American region were significant, particularly in Argentina and Brazil, whose governments that can be viewed as "collaborat[ing] in the general task of British expansion" (Gallagher and Robinson 10). In Argentina, which was recovering from the economic depression of the 1890s, Britain increased its investment in the region, manifested most visibly in the construction and expansion of railroads and a high demand for cereals and livestock. With this demand came the need to expand the agricultural landscape by developing regions that still remained largely untouched by European presence. As a result, Argentina underwent a period of rural expansion supported by intensifying waves of migration from Europe. Juan Bautista Alberdi highlights the ideologies at play at the time, with the proposal of "gobernar es poblar" ("To govern is to populate"). This prescriptive slogan embodies the fusion of political and social reorganization, a hallmark of this period of economic imperialist expansion.

In Brazil, during the same period, Britain likewise marked its presence on the rural landscape through the expansion of the railroad system into areas that were fundamental to sustaining the growing interest in coffee production, connecting them to established economic centers. By 1855 the Brazilian government, unable to secure funds for developing a railroad system that would connect Rio de Janeiro with regions such as Vale do Paraíba (fundamental to the sustaining of the coffee trade), established the Brazilian railroad company Estrada de Ferro Dom Pedro Segundo, renamed the Estrada de Ferro Central do Brasil in 1899, and partially government-owned. Despite its initial reluctance to invest, Great Britain later made heavy financial contributions to its development (see, e.g., Graham 52). Cristiano Benedito Otoni, the first president of the

Brazilian railroad company, noted that "without this loan the railroad would not have crossed the *cordilhera* (mountain range)" (Graham 52). As a result, Great Britain contributed to the establishment of a critical leg in the coffee railroad system into Vale do Paraíba.

This period of agricultural economic growth experienced in Argentina and Brazil from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century is the historical background that shapes Chapter One, "The Photographer's Lens: Visualizing Beauty in María Victoria Menis's *La cámara oscura* (*Camera Obscura;* 2008) and Júlia Murat's *Histórias que Só Existem Quando Lembradas* (*Found Memories*; 2011)." While both films discussed in this chapter are connected by an economic history that runs parallel between these two nations, it is the photographic camera that emerges as a fundamental link between these two filmic productions. It is a key narrative tool in the articulation of the social and cultural disruptions that are at play within the rapid development experienced in both countries.

María Victoria Menis's film *La cámara oscura* (2008) moves back in time to 1892 with the arrival of a Russian family to an Argentine port. As the family disembarks, the mother gives birth to Gertrudis on the plank that links the boat to Argentine land, immediately marking Gertrudis as neither Argentine nor Russian. She will therefore both represent and negotiate the cultural tensions that define the first generation of an immigrant Jewish family. The film follows the life of Gertrudis as the family settles in Entre Ríos, a province northeast of Buenos Aires, where she grows up, attends school, and marries a wealthy and prominent Jewish landowner. Gertrudis is a woman whose social identity is determined by her function within an agricultural male-dominant

system. Upon marrying León Cohen, her role is to sustain her husband's economic wealth by bearing children that will then be trained to be a part of the family business, as well as to keep order in the household. Despite her life being defined by her role as mother and caretaker, Gertrudis demonstrates her intellectual capacity, creativity, and desire to create beauty. This comes to the fore when foreign—that is, European—photographer Jean Baptiste arrives in Entre Ríos to take family portraits. Gertrudis's relationship with Jean Baptiste, an experimenter with surrealist photography, becomes key for Gertrudis in finding her assertive voice and establishing her agency.

Throughout the film, the camera is emphasized as a medium that highlights Gertrudis as an outsider: born a girl rather than the coveted boy, possessed of secretive intellectual proclivities, and considered physically unattractive. A key scene towards the beginning of the film explains Gertrudis's initial reticence before the camera, reflected by an impulse to hide that is patent within each photograph that frames her. In this particular scene, her mother, who is openly dismissive of Gertrudis, teaches her to look down towards her shoes instead of into the camera. This moment is critical, as it shapes Gertrudis's relationship with the camera and herself. From that moment onward, she does not identify with the beauty that the photograph presumes to highlight with every image; instead, these photographic images of Gertrudis tell a story of the greater violence that is not perceived within the photograph yet is explored within the filmic narrative: the repressive life dictated for Gertrudis by the formal and organized structures of education and family. Yet the film also affords Gertrudis the opportunity to exit this restrictive family structure through the same medium, namely, via Jean Baptiste, whose photographs draw to the surface of the photograph her other attributes: intellectualism and a desire to

create beauty. The camera, as a result, works in the film both as a revealer of a violent underlying socio-political truth as well as a liberational passage into female agency.

Photographer and camera are also central to the Brazilian film *Histórias que Só Existem Quando Lembradas* (2011) directed by Júlia Murat. While *La cámara oscura* takes the spectator back in time, *Histórias* takes place in present-day Brazil, and focuses on showing the social effects of the decline of the coffee boom in Vale de Paraíba. The film focuses on the fictional town of Jotuomba, an abandoned place that was once a thriving center for coffee production. What is left behind are abandoned train stations, houses, empty shops, no electricity, a small church, and a handful of community members. Lost in time and off the map, the members of Jotuomba rely on each other for survival, and have arranged a daily routine where each member participates according to their skills and contributions. Madalena, the main character of the film, is an aging baker. Her daily routine entails waking every morning to bake fresh bread, walking to Antônio's abandoned shop, where he makes them coffee which they sip as they discuss the weather. From that point on, the routine continues: after their coffee, they walk to church and meet other members of the community who then all gather for lunch.

The arrival of young photographer Rita shifts the monotonous mood of the film. Following the train tracks, Rita finds her way to Jotuomba and then to Madalena's house, where she decides to stay for a few days. Attracted to Jotuomba's abandonment, Rita sees beauty in the decay that defines the town, a decay that she carefully photographs. Madalena initially dismisses the photographs she takes of the town. In one scene, Rita shows Madalena the pictures she has taken of the abandoned trains and houses, which Madalena believes only show decay and ugliness. While Rita's camera beautifies the

decay, she also uses it to bring recognition to the members of the community, by creating small portraits of the members of the town. Her camera becomes a documentation of the remnants of a town that was born out of the coffee boom, its subsequent decline, and eventual disappearance because it no longer fulfills a function within the greater economic system. Through the persistence of Rita's photographic conviction in beauty, Madalena, on the eve of her death, finally sees herself in this same light, beholding her own worth, now ciphered as the inverse of economic decay.

Chapter One thus focuses on two films that document from two points of view the social effects of periods of rapid economic growth and development in nineteenth-century Latin America. While *La cámara oscura* focuses on the effects the economic expansion has on the female body, viewed as a tool within the agrarian system, *Histórias que Só Existem Quando Lembradas* sheds light on the long-term effects these economic booms, such as the coffee industry, have on communities that are born from and rely on the success of these booming economies, which, as the film notes, eventually fail, sounding a death knell for communities such as Jotuomba. In both instances photography comes to the fore as a complex narrative tool that sheds light on the restrictive nature of these economic structures: the female body is an instrument, the community a tool; both are disposable. At the same time, however, photography also offers itself as a medium for both female characters, Getrudis and Madalena, to break with the restrictive system that has oppressed their agency and liberty. The camera exposes—denounces—the truth of violence and, at the same time, holds the truth of the beauty that defines both characters and which emerges in contestation of structures of social violence.

*The Rise of the United States and of the Latin American Left*

British political influence in Latin America started to diminish after 1850, and at an accelerated rate during and immediately after the First World War (1914-1918). During this time the United States replaced Great Britain as the hegemonic power in the continent and the Monroe Doctrine, established in 1823, emerged in full force (Brown 11; Gallagher and Robinson 10). Named after U.S. President James Monroe, in its original form the policy emphasized a non-intervention policy limiting European presence in the region, and U.S. presence in Europe, establishing a barrier in cross-hemisphere recolonization processes. Nonetheless, within the rising independent nations in Latin America, the doctrine quickly came to be regarded with suspicion, for, while it adamantly called for the protection of the "New World" nations, it did not limit internal hemispheric colonizing. As noted by Mark Gilderhus, the Monroe Doctrine "took on various meanings and implications, depending upon shifting policies and preferences, but nevertheless consistently served as a mainstay in the articulation of U.S. goals and purposes in the Western Hemisphere" (6). As interpreted in 1904 by President Theodore Roosevelt, the Monroe Doctrine in fact legitimized U.S intervention not only in the face of European intervention, but also when "chronic wrongdoing, or an impotence which results in a general loosening of the ties of civilized society, may in America, as elsewhere, ultimately require intervention by some civilized nation, and in the Western Hemisphere the adherence of the United States to the Monroe Doctrine may force the United States, however reluctantly, in flagrant cases of such wrongdoings or impotence, to the exercise of an international police power" (Roosevelt). Although not directly linked to the Monroe Doctrine, the Spanish-Cuban conflict in 1898 gave way to a

reinterpretation of the doctrine, giving the United States the political authorization to exert its strength.

Under President Franklin Roosevelt (in office from 1933-1945), the Monroe Doctrine made a pendular shift back towards a noninterventionist interpretation known as the “Good Neighbor Policy,” within a context of economic depression in the U.S. in the 1930s and the Second World War (1939-1945), during which time Roosevelt was able to mobilize the greater Latin American region in support of the Allies (Gilderhus 13; Pike). Yet with the Cold War (1947-1991), there was a profound change in U.S. policies which were now unraveling through a “Cold War prism” (Gilderhus 14). With the Cold War and the spread of communism, the imperial force of the United States manifested itself. As Gallagher and Robinson observe, “it is only when the polities of these new [neocolonial] regions fail to provide satisfactory conditions for commercial or strategic integration and when their relative weakness allows, that power is used imperialistically to adjust those conditions” (6).

For the United States, the presence and establishment of a socialist economic system in Cuba with ties with the Soviet Union posed a threat to international security. With the Cuban Revolution (1953-1959) had come the fall of United States ally and dictator Fulgencio Batista and the emergence of the Movimiento 26 de Julio (26th of July Movement), led by Fidel Castro. The growing concern of the United States in regard to the establishment of a revolutionary government led to the U.S. attack on Cuba known in Latin America as the “Invasión de Playa Girón” (Bay of Pigs Invasion). To the dismay of John F. Kennedy’s presidency, the Bay of Pigs marked a loss for the United States and

was considered a significant win for the rise of the left in Cuba and its ideological forces throughout Latin America.[6]

For the United States, the loss profoundly affected its relationships with Latin America. The Monroe Doctrine took on a whole new face, facilitating and authorizing the United States to intervene in regions that were considered a threat to national and international security. The U.S sought to prevent the spread and settlement of left-wing ideologies and covertly supported military coups d'état that replaced leftist presidencies in Paraguay in 1954, Brazil in 1964, Bolivia in 1971, Uruguay in 1973, Chile in 1973, and Argentina in 1976. It continued to support these dictatorships through the international "Operation Condor" that served as the articulation of U.S. surveillance through violence and repression of leftism in the region (Grandin 4; Martorell and McSherry).

In Argentina, the pressure exerted by the United States from abroad converged with the internal political tensions that Argentina was experiencing. Upon President Juan Domingo Perón's death in 1974, his wife Isabel Perón succeeded him in the presidency and implemented the Alianza Anticomunista Argentina (Argentine Anti-Communist Alliance; Triple A) in response to the rise of leftist military movements on the continent. In 1975, as Marguerite Feitlowitz describes, "[t]he 'eradication' of 'subversive elements' was officially decreed. The decree (no. 261) also mobilized the armed forces for non-military, 'psychological' operations. The country, though nominally democratic, was essentially occupied and under siege" (6). The following year, in 1976, Isabel Perón was

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[6] On April 17, 1961, the CIA-funded counter-revolutionary military Brigade 1506 attacked Cuba and was defeated within three days by the Castro-led revolutionary forces. See *Playa Girón: Derrota del imperialismo*, Vols. 1-3 (Rasenberger, Jones, and Higgins).

ousted in a coup that saw the rise of the right wing military governance, marking the beginning of the Proceso de Reorganización Nacional (Process of National Reorganization) under the military junta. Feitlowitz highlights how the military junta was welcomed nationally and internationally: "Congratulatory editorials appeared in the major international dailies. The international monetary fund (IMF) and other lending institutions immediately responded with major loans" (7). In Feitlowitz's view, the proclaimed responsibility of the junta to "forever rid the earth of 'subversion'" in order to "'join the concert of nations'" through their process of national reorganization was in fact the beginning of a period of state violence (7). The Triple A consolidated its power through right wing death squads which surveilled, kidnapped, tortured, or murdered individuals with ties to the political left or those who were believed to be associated with the leftist political party. This period is known today as La Guerra Sucia (The Dirty War).[7]

Chapter Two, "Photographing Political Consciousness in Walter Salles's *Diarios de motocicleta* (*Motorcycle Diaries*; 2004) and Julio Cortázar's 'Apocalipsis de Solentiname' ('Apocalypse at Solentiname'; 1976)," addresses the history of the political left in Latin America, from the Cuban Revolution to the rise of right-wing military regimes. *Diarios de motocicleta* addresses the emergence of the leftist ideology that swept Latin America with the Cuban Revolution by focusing on the canonical and culturally mythical figure of Ernesto "Che" Guevara. Rather than offering a portrait of the icon during his most idealist and revolutionary years, the film takes a step further back in time to address how Guevara's political awareness came into being. The film

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[7] See Feitlowitz; Nouzeilles and Montaldo.

narrates the trip that Ernesto and his friend Alberto Granado, two medical students, take through Latin America by motorcycle, from Argentina, through Chile and Peru, to Venezuela. Along their journey through Latin America, they interact with people who have been robbed of their land, denied a formal education, and live in poverty. Ernesto's encounters with the socioeconomic realities of Latin America, to which he did not have prior access in the context of his bourgeois Buenos Aires lifestyle, propel him into an awareness of the realities of the region and lead him to formulate his revolutionary ideology.

Photography has a critical function within the film, as a visual tool that follows Guevara's evolving political maturity. In *Diarios*, photography appears not as physical photographs or enacted moments of photography but via what I call filmic photographs. By filmic photographs, I refer to the way in which the filmic camera adopts a photographic aesthetic by pausing in front of the subject and creating a still moment in black and white to resemble a photograph. What is particular about the function of photography in the film is how its appearance is linked to Guevara's evolving political awareness. Each filmic photograph registers Guevara's mounting awareness, culminating in a series of filmic photographs that form the foundation of his revolutionary ideological platform.

While *Diarios de motocicleta* idealizes Guevara's revolutionary leftism as a coming-of-age story, Argentine author Julio Cortázar's short story "Apocalipsis de Solentiname" (1976), published in the short story collection *Alguien que anda por ahí* (*Someone Walking Around*), articulates the author's political disillusionment with both the revolutionary left and Cuban politics, on the one hand, and the rise of right-wing

military violence spreading throughout Latin America, on the other. Cortázar, a Latin American intellectual living in Paris, creates a fictional autobiographical avatar in this story as his vehicle for expressing his own struggle between his literary aesthetics and the expression of political consciousness. Within the context of rising criticism from Latin American intellectuals that a bourgeois highbrow style did not effectively reflect the political struggle of the 1960s, Cortázar and other intellectuals became critical of what they saw as authoritarian cultural dictates emerging from Fidel Castro's regime. As opposition to Castro's government grew, the arrest of Cuban poet Heberto Padilla in 1971 for allegedly counter-revolutionary verses marked the breaking point. A group of intellectuals, including Cortázar, wrote a letter to Castro demanding explanations for Padilla's arrest. Castro responded by claiming that "pseudo leftist bourgeois liberals working in Europe had no right to make patronizing comments about real writers, real revolutionaries, and that none of these critics of the revolution were welcome in Cuba" (Standish 11).

Despite his estrangement from Revolutionary Cuba, Cortázar remained supportive of the leftist movement, and, in an attempt to reconcile his literary aesthetic and political commitment, he published a series of texts that focused on the rising political violence that was spreading throughout Latin America. These texts included *Alguien que anda por ahi* (1967), in which "Apocalipsis" appears. In this short story, Cortázar's fictional character travels to Isla Solentiname, Nicaragua, in the fictional company of real-life Nicaraguan poet Ernesto Cardenal.

Solentiname is the place where Cardenal established a monastic community founded on the politico-aesthetic ideology of liberation theology. Upon Cortázar's

fictional avatar's arrival to Solentiname, he is intrigued by a series of paintings made by members of the community. Cortázar's avatar photographs each painting, filling the frame with every detail. Eager to reexperience the aesthetic beauty of these paintings, back home in Paris he develops the film and projects the slides on a screen. To his surprise, the beautiful images of the paintings of Solentiname are replaced by scenes of violence, scenes that take place, as Cortázar's avatar notes, in Bolivia, Guatemala, Buenos Aires, and São Paulo. Each site mentioned is a state that was guilty of violent acts against the civil population during the 1970s as the authoritarian military regime in each country looked to combat leftist ideologies in the shadow of the U.S. cold war, which resulted in repression and violence on a massive scale.

Although Cortázar's short story falls outside the film genre, it nevertheless captures in its entirety the argument I am mapping out in this dissertation. "Apocalipsis de Solentiname" challenges the Manichean approach to aesthetics and politics by granting aesthetic representation a political dimension even though it may not overtly portray political violence. "Apocalipsis" does so by tracing in its narrative the movement from painting to photography to film, highlighting the evolution of visual art and different levels of representation that culminate in the moving image. In the story, it is the filmic sequence that discloses the political violence at play within the photographic images that, at the surface, hold a romanticized representation of the Latin American landscape. As a result, the textual narrative underlines the importance of film in political denunciation.

The thread that connects the film *Diarios de motocicleta* and the story "Apocalipsis de Solentiname" is the photographic medium, used to establish a play

within each narrative between a bourgeois approach to aesthetics that is concerned with the aesthetic value of the image, and the political aspect of photography that looks to document and expose. Despite Cortázar's and Ernesto's desire to revel in aesthtic pleasure, the aesthetic value of the photograph will always hold a political truth value even when violence is only obliquely represented.

*The Neoliberal Turn in Latin America*

The involvement of the United States in Latin America did not only manifest itself through political manipulation, ensuring governance by U.S. allies and thus creating a system of anti-leftist surveillance, but also through the imposition of neoliberal economic structures. To best understand the push of the United States for Latin American countries to implement a free market economy and to integrate within the global market system, we can turn to Chile. In an attempt to revamp Chile's economy under Augusto Pinochet's military regime, a group of economists known as the Chicago Boys were hired to implement their neoliberal theories, a culminating point in a cold war program begun in the 1950s to "counteract left-wing tendencies in Latin America" (Harvey 6). In Santiago, Chile, Chicago-trained economists dominated the Catholic University and by the 1970s, business elites had developed a working relationship with these economists and developed a group called "the Monday Club." This group opposed the government of democratically-elected socialist president Salvador Allende, who was deposed in the 1973 coup by a military junta from which General Pinochet would emerge as the nation's leader. In 1975, Pinochet brought in the Chicago Boys to integrate their neoliberal ideals into the national economy. As noted by Harvey, the Chicago Boys, working with the

IMF, “reversed the nationalizations and privatized public assets, opened up natural resources […] to private and unregulated exploitation […], privatized social security, and facilitated foreign direct investment and free trade. […] Export-led growth was favoured over import substitution” (8). Thanks in part to a short-lived economic growth experienced upon the implementation of neoliberal policies in Chile, the economic experiment the Chicago Boys undertook was interpreted as providing sufficient evidence of success that “supported the subsequent turn to neoliberalism in both Britain (under Thatcher) and the US (under Reagan) in the 1980s. Not for the first time, a brutal experiment carried out in the periphery became a model for the formulation of policies in the centre” (Harvey 9).

The push for neoliberal economies in Latin America intensified in the mid-1980s. Dubbed the “Washington Consensus” in the 1990s, it focused on free-market oriented policies and reducing the involvement of the state in the economy (Harvey; Margheritis and Pereira). Combining external pressures with internal interests, “international creditors […] became partners with domestic economic groups that benefited from reforms […]. Their leverage in economic policy making increased, along with their capacity to shape the public debate, and together they represented an important counterforce to opposing less advantaged social groups” (Margheritis and Pereira 36). As Harvey and William Robinson emphasize, neoliberal reforms in fact benefit an elite class and expand the socio-economic gap (19). Margheritis and Pereira likewise argue that “the inherently conflictive and exclusionary character of neoliberalism […] would always be at odds with democratic egalitarian values […]” (42).

Under President Carlos Menem, similar neoliberal economic reforms in Argentina were underway in the late 1980s (Margheritis and Pereira 27). Brazil experienced analogous economic reforms in the mid 1990s during Fernando Henrique Cardoso's presidency. In both countries, the turn toward a free market economy ultimately demonstrated its fragility by negatively registering the effects of fluctuations in the global market. In 1999, the Brazilian real's value dropped, a consequence of the Asian financial crisis in 1977, and Brazil was required to take certain measures such as tax and interest rate increases in order to maintain the value of its currency. Faced with a high-budget deficit and an overvalued currency, investors and traders lost confidence in the Brazilian economy and started to "scramble to cash out of the country," as put by Michael Hirsh in his *Newsweek* article. In what came to be known as the "samba effect," Cardoso attempted to safeguard the declining economy by lowering the value of the real, to the chagrin of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which urged the Brazilian government to either allow the market to define the real's value or implement a "rigorous fiscal fix" (Hirsch).

As Phil Davison wrote in his 1999 article for the British newspaper *The Independent*, "[…] Brazil is the locomotive that drives all Latin America economies […]. When Brazil's economy sneezes, Latin America catches a cold." By 2001, Argentina was feeling the effects of the weakening Brazilian economy. In 1999, economy minister Domingo Cavallo introduced a "convertibility plan," which pegged the dollar to the Argentine peso in a one-to-one relationship, in hopes of decreasing inflation and bringing in more foreign investment and buyers. However, the combination of the acquisition of foreign debt under Carlos Menem and the extensive privatization of the 1990s, which

heightened unemployment and caused the decline of local businesses, led to the collapse of the Argentine economy with the debt defaults of December 2001.

Daniel Burman's *Esperando al mesías* (*Waiting for the Messiah*) and Lucy Walker's *Lixo Extraordinário* (*Waste Land*) are films that demonstrate the failure of neoliberal policies within Argentina and Brazil through the stories of individuals who have experienced the socio-economic effects of a failing neoliberal economy. In both films, photographic portraits come to the fore as the medium through which to understand the possibility of rearticulating identities that are no longer constructed through the now markedly neoliberal state. Chapter Three, "Photographing Citizenship: Daniel Burman's *Esperando al mesías* (*Waiting for the Messiah*; 2000) and Lucy Walker's *Lixo Extraordinário* (*Waste Land*; 2010)," highlights the socio-economic effects on the formation of citizenship within a neoliberal structure. As *Esperando al mesías*'s filmic narrative articulates, the idea of citizenship is threatened and collapses along with the economic downturn. The film, taking the shape of a bildungsroman, follows the lives of Ariel Goldstein and Santamaría as they navigate the economic recession (1998-2002). Ariel, a young Argentine Jew, is shaken by the financial loss that has affected his family, and the sudden death of his mother. These two events are the catalyst for Ariel to initiate a search for meaning and individuality, as he challenges the social pressures of his Jewish heritage and seeks to expand the dimensions of his own sense of self.

While *Esperando al mesías* focuses primarily on Ariel and his road to self-discovery, Santamaría is another character who is crucial to a deeper understanding of the role of the state in this coming-of-age story. A banker by trade, Santamaría loses his job when the economic crisis forces the closure of the bank and his wife, who kicks him out

of the house the same day he becomes unemployed. With nowhere to live and no source of income, Santamaría quickly finds his feet and starts an informal business. The former banker walks the streets of Buenos Aires, searching in dumpsters for stolen purses and wallets. He takes it upon himself to contact the individuals whose wallet and documentations he finds, and returns their belongings in exchange for a donation. The significance of the documents he finds and returns is key in understanding the role of the state within the formulation of neoliberal citizenship.

Santamaría's and Ariel's paths connect when Santamaría finds Ariel's deceased mother's documents, stolen towards the beginning of the film. Ariel, a post-production editor at a TV station and Laura, a woman with whom he develops a romantic relationship, direct a segment that follows the life of Santamaría. In a pivotal interview, Santamaría expresses how he wishes to be seen once again, "alguien que se acuerde de la otra vida […] el banco, el club, las tarjetas de crédito" ("someone that remembers our past life […] the bank, the club, the credit cards"). His identity was constructed by his financial position, but with the economic downturn his financial position has been stripped from him he must now rearticulate an identity that is not attached to the economy. The significance of Santamaría creating a job that involves collecting and returning IDs comes into focus when we understand the importance of ID cards in state discourse. Each ID card and its photographic portrait, crucial in identifying and recognizing that person as a citizen of the state, loses value when the state can no longer uphold its own position as protector of individual freedoms. Within a neoliberal structure, the individual is subject to the precarious nature of the economy and, viewed as part of a free market system, stands to lose as much value as he stands to gain.

The film offers an alternative—establishing an identity, unattached to the neoliberal structure, which can be found in the formation of a family unit. Ariel finds a sense of independence and individuality after moving out of the family's home and reconciling with his long-term girlfriend Estela. Santamaría founds a family with Elsa and a child he finds abandoned in a dumpster. The documentary that Ariel and Laura produce serves as a catalyst for both characters to find their sense of individuality that leads them to form alternative (non-neoliberal) identities. Within the documentary space, a film within the film, Ariel, Laura, and Santamaría piece together a portraiture of the detriment of the neoliberal state, as seen through Santamaría's experience. This documentary marks the point in the narrative where the Ariel and Santamaría's pursuit for a new identity is solidified and in the subsequent scenes they come to articulate their identity as part of a family unit.

*Esperando al mesías*'s use of identification cards is the gateway to understanding the significance of photographic portraits as a form of dissent, opposing the neoliberal structure at play in the documentary *Lixo Extraordinário*. *Lixo Extraordinário* follows the Brazilian artist Vik Muniz as he embarks on a new art project called "Pictures of Garbage." The film documents Muniz's trip to Jardim Gramacho in Rio de Janeiro, the largest landfill in the world until its closing in 2012. Muniz's objective is to create a social project, openly expressing his desire to try to change the lives of people through the material with which they work. This is how Muniz meets a group of *catadores*, men and women who scavenge recyclable materials from waste brought to the landfill. As part of a larger system of recycling, the *catadores* are at the beginning of the long line of buyers and sellers of recyclable material and subject to the supply and demand of the

materials available on any given day. Muniz's art project consists of creating portraits of each *catador* using materials found in the landfill, which are, in turn, photographed and sold on the world art market. Muniz guides the *catadores* to become the artists and agents in the construction of their photographic identities. The documentary itself follows the lives of the *catadores*, capturing their individual lives outside of their role in creating art and their life stories. Ultimately, the effects of being part of this artistic project changes their individual perspectives.

The works of art become fundamental in bringing attention to the social inequalities a neoliberal economic framework produces through its free-market approach (Harvey; Gwynn and Kay). Muniz's artistic process entails an organization through aesthetic means of the chaos portrayed at the beginning of the documentary in a landscape where human bodies are unidentifiable within the overwhelming amount of garbage. Muniz organizes this chaos by framing each *catador* through photographic portraits. By framing the *catador* he creates pieces that become legible to a new public sphere that would otherwise not "see" the *catadores* because of their lowly position within society. This legibility is further enhanced by creating portraits that remake Western works of art, including Pablo Picasso's *Woman Ironing* (1904), Jacques-Louis David's *The Death of Marat* (1793), and Jean-François Millet's *The Sower* (1850), a portrait that evokes Madonna with children.

Through its appearance via portraits, photography is used as a tool in *Esperando al mesías* and *Lixo Extraordinário* to expose the failure of the neoliberal economic system, and thus the failure of the state in protecting its citizenry in periods of economic instability. These portraits of citizens, static and restrictive (as represented by the

identification cards in *Esperando al mesías*) can be broken away from their confined significance, as demonstrated by the artist Vik Muniz. In *Lixo Extraordinário*, photography is fundamental in creating art that can hold within its frame beauty and violence at once. In response to the traditional photographic portrait used in state identification, *Lixo Extraordinário* follows an artist that uses photographic portraits to articulate a form of social resistance to the marginalization that is generated by a neoliberal economic framework.

*Conclusion*

As the following chapters will address, this dissertation looks to trace the filmic use of photography in twenty-first century films from Argentina and Brazil that are concerned with socio-economic issues linked to significant historical periods within both countries. From the agricultural boom in the nineteenth century into the twentieth century, to the rise and fall of the left and the rise of right-wing military regimes that then gave way to the implementation of neo-liberal policies, Argentina and Brazil share key historical periods characterized by social violence. As my investigation will show, there is a consistent representational thread of photography within these Argentine and Brazilian films, in which photography is the narrative tool where aesthetically beautiful representations and political and socio-economic violence come to the fore. While photography is crucial in highlighting violence, it is also the tool that becomes the site of liberation, where the civil populace is offered the possibility of liberation from oppressive structures.

# Chapter One

## The Photographer's Lens: Visualizing Beauty in María Victoria Menis's *La cámara oscura* (*Camera Obscura;* 2008) and Júlia Murat's *Histórias que Só Existem Quando Lembradas* (*Found Memories*; 2011)

In the Argentine film *La cámara oscura* (*Camera Obscura*; 2008), directed by María Victoria Menis, and the Brazilian film *Histórias que Só Existem Quando Lembradas* (*Found Memories*; 2011), directed by Júlia Murat, the photographer's gaze and his/her photographs shape the experience of looking as the film's plot unravels. Each film's intimate portrait of its main character's interactions with the photographer and the camera shows how the photographer offers a new way of looking that subsequently shapes the main character's way of looking at herself—finding meaning within a structure that limits personal growth. Further, the inclusion of the medium shapes the way the spectator understands dominant political structures and their effects on the main character and the surrounding landscape. The use of photography in both films highlights an intimate collaboration between both media, constructing fictional narratives bound to history and reveals the underlying violent effects of periods of rapid economic growth in nineteenth-century Argentina and Brazil. At the same time, nonetheless, the photographic medium comes to the fore as a tool that offers a utopian possibility of a future that breaks free from restrictive structures.

At a historico-political level, *La cámara oscura* and *Histórias que Só Existem Quando Lembradas* address critical periods of nation formation at the turn of the twentieth century. The post-independence years were a formative period in the region, at a political and economic level. Liberal policies were implemented and supported by

governments that aimed to integrate the Latin American economy in the global market, while also struggling to define the notion of a unified nation (Skidmore, Smith, and Green 40). As per Bob Jessop's definition, "ideologically, liberalism claims that economic, political, and social relations are best organized through formally free choices of formally free and rational actors who seek to advance their own material or ideal interests in an institutional framework that, by accident or design, maximizes the scope for formally free choice" (453). Despite the ideal of political freedom being paired with a free market system, this development of a liberal framework in Latin America—and, as will be discussed, particularly in Argentina and Brazil—was characterized by rapid economic growth, which went hand in hand with the transformation of rural landscapes into sites of agricultural production and an increasing socioeconomic gap.

The economic push supported by political reforms "was all part of free trade, the dogma that had arrived in Latin America with enlightenment philosophy and the post-independence commitment to the principles of liberalism. Applying this dogma was the most significant economic policy decision in nineteenth-century Latin America" (Skidmore, Smith, and Green 38). As exports increased significantly between 1830 and 1850—beef and wool in Argentina, coffee in Brazil—the independent nations looked to strengthen two key aspects of the economy: land and labor (Skidmore, Smith, and Green 38, 40). The main areas of expansion and development were through the support of European migration and the improvement of transportation networks (heavily supported and financed by Great Britain in both Argentina and Brazil). As Europe continued to focus on industrialization, its increasing demand for goods strengthened the economic ties between Europe and Latin America via "trade, investment, financing, technology

transfer, migration" (Skidmore, Smith, and Green 41). Argentina and Brazil looked to populate rural areas in order to transform their land into fruitful agricultural grounds. Argentina focused on instituting policies that encouraged and promoted immigration from Europe, while Brazil transformed rural areas into prolific coffee regions. With these economic periods of increasingly rapid growth, the shortcomings of a free trade system anchored by the landowning class became salient in the form of minimal growth of the domestic industry and a "highly stratified socioeconomic structure" (Skidmore, Smith, and Green; Avni; French; Gallo; Rock).

*La cámara oscura* and *Histórias que Só Existem Quando Lembradas* are two twenty-first-century cinematic productions that address these overlapping historical periods in Argentina and Brazil and speak to the cultural and socio-economic effects of a liberal system that promoted rapid industrialization. The use of photography as a narrative tool gains importance given that it functions within each film as a medium that articulates and denounces the violence that is visited upon the civil population as a result of the liberal structures. By looking closely into the composition of the photographs that appear in each film and understanding the dissonance between the photographic reality and the contextualizing backdrop of the broader filmic reality, the violence of this latter reality becomes visible and intelligible. Through an intimate portraiture of the interaction between the main character in each film with the camera and photographer, combined with the film's incorporation of photography in its aesthetic, the denunciation of politico-economic violence, as well as a contestatory possibility of liberation from those structures of violence, is voiced in each film.

*Beauty and Disorder in María Victoria Menis's* La cámara oscura *(2008)*

The opening scene in Menis's film *La cámara oscura* focuses on David, the eldest son of the film's main character, Gertrudis. David wakes up to an untidy dining room table, covered in dirty dishes from the night before. Calling out Gertrudis's name with no response, David's concern tells the spectator that something has happened. The filmic camera shifts focus and centers on a series of photographs marked "1929, Colonia Villa Clara, Entre Ríos." The photographs include portraits of men standing stoically in a field in traditional Argentine garb, men at work, two women posing as they rest against a tree, and a family portrait. The camera then centers on the family portrait, daughters, sons, father, and the lowered gaze of a woman. This woman, Gertrudis, appears as a hidden figure, hidden behind the body of her husband. What at first glance seems to be a typical image of a family is shaken by Gertrudis's disruption of a staged portrait: her face, rather than looking at the camera, is staring downward. Through a close-up of the filmic camera, Gertrudis's face fills the frame and marks the beginning of the story of this character, whose presence is, ironically, visually obscured. The first appearance of the photographic medium in the film is through photographs that represent scenes of labor and leisure, which in turn reveal the family's status as successful landowners. Nevertheless, there is the emergence of a question, which is critical to the plot: why does Gertrudis avoid looking at the camera?

*Cámara oscura,* based on the eponymous short story by the Argentine writer Angélica Gorodischer, narrates the life of Gertrudis, the daughter of a first-generation Russian-Jewish family in Argentina. The story begins with the arrival of the family to Argentina by boat in 1892: the father, the mother, pregnant with Gertrudis, and two older

siblings. Upon their arrival to an Argentine port, Gertrudis's mother goes into labor, and Gertrudis is born on the plank that links the boat with Argentine land, making her neither Russian nor Argentine. From that moment on, Gertrudis's life is marked by otherness and rejection based on gender and looks; the older brother looks at the baby and points out how ugly she is; for her part, her mother claims that she was not prepared to name a girl because she was expecting a son. The newborn baby girl enters Argentina under the name Gertrudis, a suggestion given by a port official who is registering the entrance of the family, because it's his girlfriend's name and "bien argentino" ("very Argentine").

Gertrudis grows up and the film follows her life as a child, her school years, her graduation, her subsequent marriage to León Cohen, the birth of her children, and her role within the family unit. Throughout the film, Gertrudis is navigating her own perception of self and how others perceive her. Whenever she finds herself alone, her world is defined by beauty, as symbolized by the small garden of wild flowers of different colors, shapes, and sizes that she lovingly tends, and by her passion for reading and learning. As part of the family structure, Gertrudis's role is defined by her gender: she is in charge of tending to the family's needs within the household by cooking, doing laundry, and keeping order, in stark contrast with her husband's role as provider and businessman. Her role as mother takes on a more utilitarian form: her husband sees her only as a housekeeper and bearer of children, and she is ignored by her children who flock towards their father. This dissociation between Gertrudis's self-perception and the perception of her by others begins to be resolved with the appearance of Jean Baptiste, a foreign photographer traveling through Argentina who is hired by Cohen to take family portraits and photograph the land and their work. Through his photographs, Baptiste sees

Gertrudis through the optic of her eccentricity, and through the photographs she establishes her individuality and builds self-confidence. The film ends exactly how it begins, with David calling out her name. Yet, as spectators we now know that she has run away with the photographer, leaving a life that defined her as a tool within her husband's agrarian business.

Historically, late nineteenth-century Argentina experienced massive migration movements during a period of nation formation and economic expansion. At the close of the nineteenth century, the Argentine economy was recovering from the depression of the 1890s, and saw an increase in foreign investment from Great Britain through railroad expansion and demand for cereals and livestock (Avni 46; French; Rock; Gallo). The need to populate the rural landscape in order to support the growing economy and meet foreign demand dominated political thought, crystallizing in the notion of expansion. Argentine Juan Bautista Alberdi epitomizes this expansionism with the idea that "gobernar es poblar" ("to govern is to populate"). In "Immigration as a Means of Progress," Alberdi quickly asserts in the opening paragraph that the integration of European civilization into Argentina is critical for the progress of the country, given that European immigrants would bring with them "fresh spirits," "work habits," and "civilized ways" (Nouzeilles and Montaldo 95). Not only does Alberdi equate the arrival of Europeans to Argentina with progress, but he proposes to ensure legal rights for such foreigners through their acquisition of land "guarantee[ing] respect for their natural rights to hold property, their civil rights, their safety, their right to acquire wealth, and their freedom of movement" (Nouzeilles and Montaldo 97). President Nicolás Avellaneda himself claimed that "la cuestión frontera es la primera para todos…es el principio y el

fin…poblar el desierto" ("For all, border issues come first …it is the beginning and the end…to populate the desert"; Gallo 90). The political ideology that positioned European influence as a means of purifying a decadent Argentine race gave way to legal structures that encouraged European migration movements in order to populate rural areas in Argentina.

This notion of modernization via expansion into rural areas resulted in massive migration movements from Europe to the coastal Pampean region, which included Entre Ríos, where the film takes place. With the arrival of foreigners, the agricultural and cattle sector expanded significantly. The hope was that through expansion, the vast rural territory would develop, transforming the land as well as the social makeup; the prevailing political belief was that "Europeans had to come to Argentina not merely to bring civilization to the country, but also to mold a new kind of Argentine" (Vohansen). This political history is the background for the fictional arrival of Gertrudis's family to Argentina, which also historically coincides with the foundation of the Jewish Colonization Association (JCA), supported by Baron Maurice de Hirsch. The JCA created and supported a colonization project that funded travel and agricultural opportunities for Russian Jews in Argentina (Avni 33-37). Despite the hardship experienced upon arrival (crop failure, difficult living conditions, lack of jobs, lack of skill sets to work within the agricultural economy), the Jewish population established a community, founding religious and educational institutions, as well as newspapers and cultural and social organizations (Avni 85).

The historical political background to which the film refers is critical in understanding the function and central role of photography in *La cámara oscura*, given

its significance in the development of the main character and the plot through Gertrudis's relationship first with the camera and then with the photographer, Jean Baptiste. I propose that this relationship reveals the violence to which Gertrudis, as a tool in the accumulation of capital, is subject within the family structure, as a tool in the accumulation of capital. The photographs also highlight the intricate connection between the image's aesthetic value (the depiction of idyllic scenes of land, labor, and family), and the reality of servitude that Gertrudis inhabits; these are at odds with one another. I argue that what becomes visible in this disjuncture is the violence of the family structure that subjugates Gertrudis, a violence that is perpetuated by the political economy that predominated in that historical period.

Upon her graduation from high school, Gertrudis is married off to León Cohen, a landowner who is considered a "partido soñado" ("good catch"). Although Gertrudis's family is surprised by his decision to ask for her hand in marriage—because Gertrudis is viewed as unattractive—they are supportive, the benefit of her marriage being self-evident. Her union guarantees Gertrudis's economic future and benefits the family by linking it to a well-off landowner. Cohen's true intentions are revealed during his visit to Gertrudis's family home. A flashback reveals that Cohen is in fact a widower, once married to an attractive and unfaithful woman. The viewer gathers that Cohen is interested in Gertrudis precisely because he realizes that her unattractiveness is valuable, as he will avoid having the same issues as with his deceased wife: Gertrudis will be faithful and an ideal housewife.

Through her marriage to León Cohen, Gertrudis's body is inserted within a particular social and economic system. In her family's eyes her marriage guarantees

economic security. Gertrudis's mother is intrigued by Cohen's land ownership: "¿Usted conoce el campo del viudo Cohen? Enorme el campo" ("Have you seen the widower's land? It's enormous"). Cohen underscores his own value by mocking Gertrudis's father who, he notes, may have been an excellent tailor back in Russia but as a farmer was a disaster; "¡Lo que era acá como un campesino era un desastre!" ("Here, as a farmer, he was a disaster!"). Yet, in reality, Gertrudis enters the union only as an instrument/tool for the amassing of capital and the furthering of her husband's (and father's) economic success. León articulates as much during a conversation with Gertrudis's parents when he defines a good wife, describing the union as one in which he does not need to invest in the romantic element of the relationship. Rather, the woman serves the purpose of bearing children and maintaining the household. The need for a child-bearing spouse becomes evident and pronounced by Cohen himself. When visiting her parents, Cohen says, "Con una buena esposa y muchos hijos las tierras se pueden convertir en las más prósperas de Villa Clara" ("With a good wife and many children, my land can become the most prosperous of Villa Clara"). Her fate is marked as an object introduced into an economic system, a body that will serve the purpose of bearing children and laboring. These children will sustain Cohen's economic system as workers, contributing to the success of Cohen and his land.

The scene that follows Gertrudis's birth shows the making of a family portrait; the year is 1897. The family's interaction reinforces the dynamics that were established upon their arrival to Argentina. In this scene, the mother's despair over Gertrudis is evident while her father's love for her seeps through; the father places a flower crown over her head with pride. The following shot shows Gertrudis standing next to a doll with chubby

cheeks, curly brown hair, and a white lace dress and comparing their looks, implicitly assessing their respective beauty. When the photographer places Gertrudis in the middle of the image with her other siblings, the mother is displeased. She moves Gertrudis to stand next to her father, which would place her at the edge of the photographic frame. The mother instructs her thus, lowering her daughter's face to stare at her feet: "Gertrudis, vení acá. Acá está mejor. Acordáte que cuando mirés a la cámara tenés que bajar la cabeza…muy bien" ("Gertrudis, come here. Over here is much better. Remember to lower your head after you've looked at the camera…very good"). Seconds before the family portrait is taken, Gertrudis grabs the doll she had seen before, and the instant the photograph is taken she lifts the doll up, replacing her own visage with the face we have already watched her evaluate as the more delicate, attractive, and desirable of the two. This experience marks her for life; every time she feels rejection or shame, she lowers her head and stares at her feet. Whenever she needs to appear in a photograph, for example in her class photos, she walks away or hides herself behind someone else in the image, which prevents her face from being captured by the camera. Gertrudis is taught from a young age that she is not worthy of being photographed because she is considered unattractive, which comes to epitomize her feeling of invisibility and not belonging.

In stark contrast with the photograph of León Cohen that appears on screen—stoically standing, in his best attire, emphasizing economic status—the photographic image captures Gertrudis's feelings of isolation and rejection. This negatively-charged invisibility within the family unit portrayed within the photograph is a reflection of Gertrudis's treatment by her husband León Cohen and her children. Gertrudis enters a marital union as an object, stripped of any individuality. During the wedding, Gertrudis

wanders off to her new house during the reception, not participating in the celebration—her discontent is evident. Upon arriving home, she notices the mess on the table and starts to organize and clean. The notion of maintaining everything in its place will be a constant throughout the rest of the film. The film jumps ahead twenty years, with scenes showing this same tidy home and Gertrudis starting her day by setting the table and making breakfast. The family has grown; two daughters and three sons sit at the table having a warm and friendly conversation with the father. What is noticeable in this scene is Gertrudis's absence from the dining room table. Rather than sitting with her family, Gertrudis serves her family and then sits in the kitchen; we are given the impression that this is their daily routine.

Although up to this point in the film Gertrudis is portrayed as submissive and detached from family life, her personality and strength are unveiled during a conversation with her eldest son, David. She sits him down and asks him when he plans on completing his high school education, to which he has no answer. While she makes a case for the importance of his receiving a degree in order to move beyond his position as farmer, Cohen can be heard off screen calling out for David to join him in the fields and start their day at work. David eventually shrugs off Gertrudis's comments and tells her that he must go to work. The following scenes that exemplify a day in Gertrudis's life show two different worlds that are established within the film. On one hand, Gertrudis, even as she tends to her family, is also, seemingly unbeknownst to anyone else, guided by imagination, freedom, beauty, and the intellect, all of which, though hidden, suggests itself as an autonomous force of self- determination. On the other hand, the economic system that is alluded to through Cohen is marked by order. While Cohen tends to his

agricultural system, Gertrudis steals away to tend to her garden, filled with colorful flowers, offering an alternative relationship, a rewriting of Cohen's farming, with nature that is defined by beautiful chaos in stark opposition to the rigid nature of agricultural development.

Photography is critical in the construction of the Gertrudis's character. I have traced up to this moment how photography captures Gertrudis's emotional state. She is a woman who was taught to be ashamed of her physical appearance and was rejected by her mother from birth. Her relationship with the camera, and as seen in the photographs taken of her, contrast with the other individuals that take part in the images: their position is relaxed and they show an eagerness to be a part of the composition. Symbolically, these photographs highlight the restrictive family and the economic structures in which its members all participate. Upon the arrival of the French photographer to the area her relationship with the camera and her sense of self takes a turn. Previously a war photographer, Jean Baptiste has been traveling through Argentina for the past nine months before arriving to Villa Clara. Cohen hires Jean Baptiste to stay at their home to take family portraits and photograph the family and his employees at work, all with his extensive property as a backdrop.

The first photograph Jean Baptiste takes is a family portrait, in a scene that is key to Gertrudis's transformation. Gertrudis decides not to take part in the image and stays on the sideline, tending to her small garden. Rather than ignore Gertrudis, as the majority of the characters in the story she interacts with do, the photographer approaches her, requests her presence and acknowledges what it feels like to not want to be photographed. But he insists, "Si alguien tiene que salir en esta foto es usted, señora" ("If

there is anyone who must be in this photo, it's you, ma'am"). His comment, an attempt to connect with Gertrudis, emotionally moves her and propels her, though not without lingering reluctance, to participate in the family portrait. Rather than echo Gertrudis's mother by placing Gertrudis on the sidelines, Jean Baptiste positions the family such that Gertrudis is central to the composition, acknowledging her importance within the family structure. Although Gertrudis hides behind her husband just as the photograph is taken, Jean Baptiste has clearly shifted something in Gertrudis.

That same night, over dinner, the French photographer talks about his experience as a war photographer. He describes the violence, the wounded, and the pain felt by him and those around him: "No había días o noches. Era una pesadilla que no terminaba" ("There were no days or nights. It was a never-ending nightmare"). His feeling of helplessness comes with the realization that his main role is to record the violence around him with his photography. During this conversation he makes an important point which dialogues with the intricate relationship between truth and violence, exemplified through the creation of surrealist art:

> El arte estaba cambiando, no fue el mismo después de la guerra. […] Este cambio en el arte fue una necesidad. Después de la guerra todos los artistas, y me incluyo, yo con mi modesta cámara, tuvimos necesidad de reinventar una nueva forma de belleza, una forma que demostrara también el lado oscuro del hombre y del mundo. Lo que está oculto a simple vista pero que aparece a través de los sueños y de las fantasías que todos tenemos. Así apareció el arte surrealista.
> (Art was changing, it wasn't the same after the war [ . . . ] This change in art was necessary. After the war, artists, including myself, I with my modest camera, had

> the need to reinvent a new form of beauty, a form that would also show the darker side of man and the world. All that is hidden at plain sight but which emerges through dreams and fantasies that we all have. This is how surrealist art came to be.)

Jean Baptiste, in reference to the emergence of surrealist art, acknowledges the importance of creating a new form of art that does not only display beauty at its surface, but that can at the same time reveal a darker side, that which is "oculto a simple vista" ("hidden at plain sight"). As a result, Baptiste experiments with photography, creating images with fish flying in the sky and giant forks standing in a vast meadow with cattle. These works function in deep contrast with the documentary images that overtake the screen as he speaks to the family about his experience during the war: photographs of soldiers wounded and dead.

Surrealism, founded in 1924 with André Breton's manifesto, was an artistic movement that looked to break with realistic and logical depictions and understanding of the world. Breton affirms that logic and rationalism limit the freedom of thought that otherwise manifests itself freely through our dreams and fantasies—in Breton's definition, embedded in his manifesto: "SURREALISM, n. Psychic automatism in its pure state […] Dictated by the thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern" (26). Surrealism, ultimately, became the manifestation of the upheaval of social order and the emergence of a cultural resistance that looked to articulate a new political position via art (Nicholson; Bürger).

I propose that Jean Baptiste's dual role as a war photographer, as an individual capturing violence, and as a photographer employed to produce ostensibly beautiful

images of family and scenery in Villa Clara, establishes an unexpected parallel between both. While at first glance Jean Baptiste has moved from photographing explicit images of violence to idyllic images of family, work, and the Argentine landscape, it is my contention that he continues to photograph violence: the violence at play in the Cohen family. Though perhaps not an explicit violence, in Gertrudis's photographic portraits there are subtle indications: each photograph taken of Gertrudis shows her hiding, her head lowered, blurry because she moves at the last minute to obscure herself. These instances within the photograph push the spectator to look beyond the constructed image to focus on Gertrudis and to wonder why she has this reaction.

The integration of surrealism into the film's plot is not entirely unexpected. Gertrudis's creative intellect manifests itself in the film not only through reading, concern for her children's education, and explicit interest in creating a wild garden amid the rigidity of the land surrounding her, but also in her imagination. Towards the beginning of the film, we see Gertrudis as a child hiding in a shed out in the fields reading a book titled *La Reine des Fleurs* (*The Queen of the Flowers*). She starts to play with her shadow on the wall and the scene breaks into an animated cartoon, in which Gertrudis, just a silhouette, runs frantically through the woods and suddenly trips over a log. The overwhelming darkness of the animation shifts to bright colors and the appearance of a beautiful woman, whom we assume is the Reine des Fleurs. She is standing in the middle of a beautiful meadow, with flowers and butterflies surrounding her. She looks at Gertrudis with love and kisses her on the forehead, at which point Gertrudis's silhouette cracks open, releasing a colorful butterfly. This scene foreshadows the arrival of Jean

Baptiste, whose photography and passion for breaking away from artistic norms serves as the gateway for Gertrudis to openly manifest her desire for an alternative life.

While Gertrudis resists the camera during the first part of the film, a resistance that underscores the violent politics of her life as a servant of masculine-dominated agricultural capital, photography becomes a source of escape for her. The connection established between the main character and the photographer is one of mutual understanding: the camera enables Jean Baptist to see Gertrudis for who she is as a human being, in the element of her true beauty. In turn, she suddenly discovers in the camera—the same device that previously caused her shame—a newfound source of release. In a scene towards the end of the film, the family has gathered to eat at a table outside the house in honor of their guest Jean Baptiste. As one of the daughters sings to the tune of a violin, the filmic camera shifts to show the scene from above, slowly transforming into a black and white photograph. The stillness of this photograph is then infused with movement, and the picture of the family is fragmented into little pieces and replaced first by a flower in bloom, then by the gaze of Baptist's eyes, and, finally, by flowers that become representative of Gertrudis. These images become significantly more surrealist, as the scene continues shifting and intertwining images, showing a female body, eyes, the ocean, and flowers. This sequence of surrealist images represents the union of Baptiste and Gertrudis in a dreamlike world and foreshadows the ultimate fragmentation of the family that will come when Gertrudis leaves with the photographer.

The filmic narrative comes full circle, the last scene being a repetition of the opening scene: David, waking up to an untidy home, calling for his mother. The order that characterized the home is now unsettled. Now, at the film's close, the spectator can

appreciate this lack of order as a sign of Gertrudis's absence and of her newfound freedom. Without Gertrudis, as an instrument for maintaining order and routine in the movements of the capitalist machine that her home/land constitutes, the home being the domestic sphere of the fields that produce value, the economic system fails. Moreover, this untidiness signals her rejection of her role as a producer of capitalist value.

The last sequence of the film takes us outside the dominant frame of Cohen's farm and the broader national economic machine it symbolizes. Filmed in black and white, the mood of the scenes shifts from calm and steady to dynamic movement from one shot and angle to another. Gertrudis appears on scene with Jean Baptiste, in front of a lake surrounded by a beautiful meadow. As opposed to Gertrudis's signature retreat from view when being photographed as an instrument of capitalist labor, she now engages with the camera and the photographer, as she opens up and looks straight into the device, with a smile on her face. Gertrudis emerges from her shell, and her confidence is expressed by her bold state of undress; we discover her in her undergarments, for the photographer and the camera, exposing her true beauty, which can only become manifest when she is not yoked to the grid-like order of capitalist value production.

*Beauty and Decay in Júlia Murat's* Histórias que Só Existem Quando Lembradas *(2011)*

While Menis's film takes place in the early twentieth century, *Histórias que Só Existem Quando Lembradas* (*Found Memories*) (2011) directed by Brazilian filmmaker Júlia Murat, is set in contemporary twenty-first-century Brazil. The film focuses on a ghost town whose ruinous state evidences the downturn of the coffee boom experienced in Brazil between the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. During this

period, coffee production, despite its constant fluctuation as a function of the international market, was nevertheless the most reliable national economic stimulus (Skidmore, Smith, and Green 316-18). *Histórias*, whose film title is translated literally from Portuguese to English as "stories that only exist when remembered," is a film that sets out to do exactly what its title suggests: bring back to life the history of a small town that has been forgotten in the slow downturn of the coffee boom. As noted by Skidmore, Smith, and Green, coffee production developed so extensively, organizing the social system around coffee baron landowners and masses dependent upon this economic agriculture, that the eventual withering of the coffee industry resulted in "a path of abandoned plantations, stretching from Rio de Janeiro and Minas Gerais down into São Paulo and its vast interior" (Skidmore, Smith, and Green 317).[8] Jotuomba becomes a representation of these towns that rose and fell with the coffee boom. The film itself proposes that only through memory can new life be given to this forgotten place, and it is through photography that this is accomplished.

*Histórias*'s opening scene is characterized by darkness, an element that will remain a constant throughout the film. A flicker of light gradually comes to life, coming from a gas lantern turned on by an older woman, Madalena. She wakes and shuffles down the hallway towards the kitchen where she starts to carefully, methodically, bake. The following scene is set in a valley with lush vegetation that surrounds Madalena as she walks along the railroad tracks and hums a song. The richness of the green landscape

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[8] Particularly between 1889 and 1930, "the center of the Brazilian economy moved south and southwest. The primary push came from the 'arch' of coffee cultivation, as planters found it cheaper to break new ground than to recycle the plantation soils whose yields were dropping" (Skidmore, Smith, and Green 317).

on the left of the screen is interrupted by the railroad tracks that cut through the grass. While on the left of the scene we see the wild landscape, on the right we notice a dirt road that runs parallel to the tracks and is lined by rundown houses. This moment establishes a rupture between scenes, one highlighting the lush nature of the region and the other illustrating its development and decay. Upon her arrival to the small town, abandoned, desolate, ghostly, she meets her friend Antônio. He proceeds to open the doors of what seems to once have been a lively shop, now taken over by dusty bottles and empty cabinets. Once Antônio has made them coffee, they sit outside on a bench, Antônio eating bread and remarking on the weather, as the sound of church bells is heard in the distance. The following scene shows Madalena, Antônio, the priest, and another eight members of the community attending mass. Madalena's day continues by visiting the town's cemetery that has been closed to the public, cleaning the path that leads to it and placing flowers right outside the locked gate. She then attends a community lunch for which each member contributes part of the meal. Her day comes to an end as she walks slowly back home following the railroad track. She then writes a letter to her deceased husband, Guilherme, and goes to bed. The next morning this same series of events happens once again. Madalena's life is defined by a daily routine that shows little to no variation.

The film sets the mood for the story quickly. The fictional town of Jotuomba, located in Vale do Paraíba, Brazil, feels trapped in time. This rural area, seemingly far from any main city, has crumbling architecture, no electricity, no human activity other than the members of the community, and no true economy. The railroad, as the film quickly makes clear, no longer passes through the area, causing Jotuomba to fall off the

map, which, combined with the lack of economic activity, has caused the town to enter into a long period of sleep. Even death becomes unimportant. The monotony of daily life has allowed the community to forget about both life and death. This is evidenced by the locked cemetery and the fact that the community no longer writes down the dates of people's deaths on the church wall—they lack meaning, importance, and thus no longer need to be recorded. Antônio himself says, "Aqui a gente se esquece de morrer" ("People here forget to die").

Murat's 2008 documentary *Dia dos Pais* (*Father's Day*), produced as part of the director's research for the film *Histórias*, offers insight into the historical past and present of towns like the fictional Jotuomba that once had seen their fortune through the coffee boom.[9] *Dia dos Pais* documents the trip that Júlia Murat and Leonardo Bittencourt make through Vale do Paraíba, visiting forgotten towns that sit by abandoned railroad tracks. Murat's journey into the region as she searches for answers into her family's past in Bananal becomes the gateway for documenting a region that rose and declined with the coffee boom. The documentary captures the overall feeling of the town, showing how all signs of prosperity are a thing of the past and that life is now marked by older generations that quietly exist and the absence of younger generations that have moved to other regions in search for jobs. The documentary shares the mood of the narrative film, emphasizing the vast silence and emptiness that surrounds the community, the abandonment seen in the infrastructure and inside each home, and the routines of the

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[9] The documentary *Dia dos Pais* begins with the statement: "Feito a partir de uma pesquisa realizada para o filme *Histórias que Só Existem Quando Lembradas*" ("Produced as part of the research done for the film *Histórias que Só Existem Quando Lembradas*).

community. As noted by the voiceover of an older man, the town once was filled with movement and now, since the closure of the trains in 1976, there is nothing ("Father's Day").

The weight, emptiness, and abandonment seen in both *Histórias* and *Dia dos Pais* seem to reify routine, life lived in a circular motion. Yet the turning point in *Histórias* comes when this routine is interrupted by the arrival of a photographer, Rita. Young and vibrant, with her digital camera and a slight attitude, Rita arrives on Madalena's doorstep and asks if she can stay with her for a few days. Madalena agrees, and from that point onward Rita's presence and the relationship that she establishes with Madalena changes them and the rest of the town. Rita finds herself in a town that, like a photograph, remains static—the town dwellers are performing daily routines mired in monotony. Through her photographs and presence, Rita interrupts this monotony by photographing her surroundings and connecting with Madalena, who, just before her death, shares her story with Rita. By following the train tracks, Rita has found the sleepy town of Jotuomba and followed the tracks towards a long history that the railroads represent, histories that have been forgotten and, as the story progresses, will be remembered and immortalized by Rita's camera.

The location of the fictional town of Jotuomba, Vale do Paraíba, and the empty railroad track that cuts through it, are significant at a historical level and are critical to the understanding of the condition of the town and its people in the film. By the nineteenth century, coffee had already been introduced to the Brazilian market and an intensive search for fertile lands to expand the crop was well underway. Vale do Paraiba, in the state of Rio de Janeiro, proved to be the ideal location given its fertile soils and

temperatures (Andrade Lima 194). These areas had not been colonized until then, and by the 1820s, a period that marks Brazil's independence under Emperor Pedro I, the increase in coffee production led to the expansion of the crop and the construction of large coffee plantations. What supported the industry was the high demand of coffee in the international market and the availability of enslaved labor (Andrade Lima 195). The concentration of wealth led to the rise of a new hegemonic system, where land was in the hands of few families, establishing them as the coffee barons of the region. By the mid nineteenth century, the region had expanded into a strong economic center, exemplified by the transformation of the rural setting by new infrastructure, including railroads (Bethell and Carvalho 1985). But the exhaustion of the region's soils witnessed the collapse of the coffee industry (Andrade Lima 197). Small towns that had flourished because of the movement of goods and people and the establishment of haciendas declined with the economy. What remained of these towns were the train tracks, abandoned train stations, and desolation. Given the growth of mayor cities, these rural areas, devoid of utility for the current economy, fell into a state of sleep.

The fictional town of Jotuomba is representative of the effects of the rise and subsequent decline of a booming economy. What remains of what was once a lively town are buildings in decay and a mere eight community members who survive through mutual support. Evidence of a once booming economy lingers in the landscape, seen through the railroad tracks that Madalena follows every morning to get into town, the train station that is used as a court for men to play games, and the now empty cabinets that cover the walls of Antônio's store. Photography becomes critical in highlighting within this fictional town the detrimental effects of state abandonment given the lack of economic

benefit; in *Histórias*, Rita's camera photographs and documents the aftermath of an economic boom. Without Rita's presence, as a symbol of modern youth, and her camera, Jotuomba would have remained off the map, and its members would have continued their routine in oblivion. The photographs prevent the town from being forgotten and insert life into the community before its inevitable disappearance—there is no younger generation that will inherit this land.

The photographs that Rita takes, it is important to note, are documentary in as much as they show her surroundings. Yet, the way in which this is done is almost nostalgic and romantic: Rita photographs with a pinhole camera that she makes out of tin cans. By using this technology, she moves back in time. Her photographs have a more ethereal composition given that the shadows are much more prominent and movement is not as defined as it would be with a digital camera. Her primary focus is to photograph the town, its architecture, abandoned trains, objects, and its people. These elements come to life in her images as romanticized, as she idealizes the town that is in disintegration. Yet, what becomes evident is the way in which her documentation is twofold, revealing death in the very act of infusing life. As Rita brings to life the abandonment that surrounds her, she is shedding light on the consequence of an economic downturn, the exploitation of land, people, and their subsequent oblivion—in other words, the violence of an exploitative economy that yielded human ruin as its only long-term fruit.

The pictures that Rita takes are overcome by a sense of darkness, similar to the darkness that takes over scenes that take place in Rita's home. Some of her photographs, in black and white, focus on the infrastructure of the town. Rita also photographs the local elders, which become significant portraitures as documentation of human

abandonment. In one particular image, she photographs three men sitting on a bench at the abandoned train station. The structure behind the figures appears somewhat in detail, yet the bodies of the men are ghostly; they appear faded in comparison to the static lines of the architecture behind them. A series of pictures she has taken of the people of the town follow this initial photograph. In all instances the bodies of those photographed take on a ghostly shape. In one photograph, a woman is sitting on what seems like a bench, leaning against the wall of a building behind her. The woman is in the middle of the composition, between two doors or windows that appear as two black boxes. Her body, her flesh, is only highlighted because of the lighter colors that are behind her—her face, arms and legs, are one shade of black. He facial features are indistinguishable, and her body is only visible because of the lighter colors that frame it: the white scarf over her head and her white blouse and skirt; she is the negative of a photograph. The following photograph, once again, has a background that can be seen in detail—a wall of wood panels, perhaps a barn, with a field in the background. In front of the structure is a spectral figure, with facial features that are once again indistinguishable; one can barely see the shirt and what seems to be a hat. These photographs capture the bodies of individuals as fading figures; the camera traps them into the frame, while their material aging bodies wither away, which alludes to their condition in the real world. Rita's photographs are immortalizing the images of the inhabitants, yet at the same time are portraying the condition of the individual: trapped in ghostly town that remains lost in time and lost on the map.

While photography reenters the film through the arrival of Rita, photography is already present in Madalena's home. Madalena keeps a gallery wall that has turned into a

museum of past memories of people that used to live in the town, evidence of a vibrant past, but who have since passed away or moved on. In one scene, as they both walk down the hallway in Madalena's home, Rita observes a series of photographs of different people and, pointing at a picture of two women, asks Madalena if one of the women is she. It is not.

> Madalena: As pessoas foram indo embora, e eu fui ficando com as fotos.
>
> Rita: Por que você fica com fotos que não são suas?
>
> Madalena: Mas, a final, o que você veio fazer aqui? Tirar fotos da cidade vazia?
>
> (Madalena: People started leaving, and I started keeping their photos.
>
> Rita: Why do you keep pictures that aren't yours?
>
> Madalena: Well, in the end, what are you doing here? Taking pictures of an empty city?)

In this exchange the absurdity of collecting images of people one does not know and of photographing a city that is empty is highlighted. The question that remains is, what is the importance of the photograph? Why the eagerness to keep and capture photographs of faded people and a faded city? Madalena becomes a keeper of memories, a keeper of individual stories of people that have passed on and have been forgotten. In this way she is similar to Rita, whose photographs capture the beauty of the decaying town that surrounds her while documenting the remnants of an economic boom.

Madalena herself has a particular relationship with photography. She keeps photographs of people she does not know, but she also is leery of how people interact with the camera, reflecting her personal views on its function within society. Her antipathy for the medium is linked to the death of her one-year-old son. Concerned by a

sudden illness, she takes him to a hospital, and, to her dismay, has to bury him the next day. A year later she learns that the woman who had been charged with his care was so eager to photograph him that she placed him on a table from where he fell and hit his head. What provoked the death was a concussion that was not treated, and it all happened because the woman wanted to take his photograph: "tirar retrato," she says with agony ("to take a picture").

Her disregard is further articulated in a brief conversation with Rita, who shows Madalena some pictures she has taken of the town. Madalena scoffs, and notes out loud that the images are just of old things; where Rita finds beauty in her surroundings, Madalena only sees decay. Madalena then reminisces about how there once was a photographer who would visit the town when she was younger. The members of the community would dress in their finest clothing for the pictures, ostentatiously performing wealth for relatives that lived elsewhere:

> Madalena: Quando era mossa, tinha um fotografo que vinha aqui. Todo mundo punha melhores roupas, arrumava o cabelo. Os pobres se fantasiavam e vinham correndo para tirar fotografia. Até os mais rampeiros pareciam filhos de barão. Aí eles mandavam as fotografias para os parentes que moravam longe, que era para fingir que estavam bem de vida.
>
> (Madalena: When I was young, there was a photographer that would come here. Everyone would dress in their finest clothes and brush their hair. Even the poor daydreamed, and would come running to get their picture taken. Even bums looked like sons of barons. They would then send those photographs to their family members that lived far away, pretending that their lives were good.

This brief conversation with Rita—a brevity that characterizes dialogue in the film—reveals Madalena's own disregard for photography and the societal uses of the medium. In this instance, photography is a means through which people create a representation that differs from reality because they can pretend that they are doing well financially—an indirect way for the film to affirm the socioeconomic disparities that functioned during the coffee boom in this region.

Working in response to these performative photographs that Madalena recalls, the filmic camera itself takes on the aesthetic of photography by creating still moments that become portraits of each member of the community. When Rita arrives to Jotuomba and shares her first lunch with the community, she meets each member for the first time. As they enter Antônio's shop, the old objects, the cash register, dusty bottles, and empty cabinets captivate Rita. As they continue to walk through the shop and Madalena introduces Rita to the community, the filmic camera takes a moment and pauses in front of each member, creating a living portrait. Each portrait depicts its subject in detail, capturing a worn face and an overwhelming sense of sadness. These moments create documentation faithful to the individual identities, rather than performing something that they are not.

Rita and Madalena's relationship evolves over time, and Rita becomes part of Madalena's routine—Madalena teaches her how to bake bread, takes her on her walks into town, shows her how to organize the bread in Antônio's store, and invites Rita to have lunch with the community. Rita's presence as photographer and as part of a younger generation that is no longer present in the community sparks life in Jotuomba. For example, Madalena's morning conversations with Antônio evolve from comments on the

coffee or weather to more profound conversation about life, the past, children, and death. As the days progress, Madalena feels increasingly comfortable with Rita, and decides to bequeath her house and everything in it to her: "Pois então eu vou deixar tudo isso para você" ("So, I will leave all of this to you"). Yet, Rita feels that she can no longer pretend that she belongs to Jotuomba. Madalena refuses to accept Rita's goodbye and insists that she stay a few more days, giving Rita the key to her home.

In a successive scene, Madalena expresses her fear of death to Antônio, wondering why he won't die too:

> Madalena: Porque no morre você também?
>
> Antônio: E o café? Quem o faz?
>
> Madalena: O café ruim que você faz?
>
> (Madalena: Why don't you also die?
>
> Antônio: And the coffee? Who will make it?
>
> Madalena: That bad coffee you make?)

The role of each individual in this small community is critical for survival. If any of them pass away, their skill will no longer be accessible, and this will alter the routine; if Antônio passes away, he will no longer be able to make coffee and there is no one there who will take on the job. This conversation also reveals, at a symbolic level, the role of coffee within the region. Antônio, human embodiment of the production of coffee, is at the foundation of the functioning of the community, and through its "bad" taste, the coffee itself embodies the ill effects of the coffee boom and bust on the community.

Death gains importance as *Histórias* comes to an end in the same measure that Madalena foresees her death. The gathering of the community interrupts the silence that

had consistently taken over the town. Dancing to music coming from a phonograph, they are together laughing, and eating, all in their best attire. That same night, Rita photographs Madalena with her pinhole camera. Rather than wearing her best clothes, she is photographed naked. Considering her dismissive reaction in regards to those who would foolishly dress up to exude wealth, Madalena is symbolically stripping herself of clothes and thus of any performative act. The act of having herself photographed before her passing away becomes a powerful act of remembering. With just a lantern as light, she stands in front of a wall in her home. At first skeptical, her face slowly changes from afraid to proud. She lowers her hands that are protecting her and smiles into the camera. The filmic camera frames the scene and holds still, focusing on Madalena standing against the wall. As a result, this screen shot resembles a photographic moment. After this scene, the product, the photograph itself, comes onscreen, showing the cracks on the wall, the faded paint, and a blurry vision of Madalena. We then see a series of photographs taken by Rita: they are photographs of the cemetery, once closed but now being opened for Rita. The photographs depict tombs and graveyard statues from various angles. The doors of the cemetery have not only been opened to Rita, but also to Madalena, who passes away the day after her final photograph is taken.

The final scene of the movie starts like the beginning of the film, with darkness being broken by the lighting of a gas lantern. Instead of seeing Madalena's face, we see Rita, who then gathers her belongings, luggage and camera, and heads out. It is the break of dawn, and she slowly opens the door. Rita smiles as she sees Antônio standing in front of the doorway, with the rest of the community behind him. Antônio explains: "Minha filha, agora não tem ninguém para fazer o pão" ("My daughter, now we don't have

anyone that will make bread”). His comments suggest their hope that Rita, who has inherited Madalena’s skills as baker and knows the routine, will stay in Jotuomba. The film ends on this question mark, with the possibility of Rita’s staying in Jotuomba to replace Madalena standing as a glimmer of hope for the sustenance of the town and its continued functioning in years to come.

*Conclusion*

*La cámara oscura* and *Histórias que Só Existem Quando Lembradas* are films that open a space for comprehending the social and economic effects of politics upon the population of a given region. Within these films, it is through the development of Gertrudis’s and Madalena’s characters and their respective relationships with camera and photographer that the medium becomes central in granting access to an understanding of the effects of nineteenth-century agricultural booms. While both films focus on different regions and historical periods, *La cámara oscura* and *Histórias* establish within their narratives a circular structure that is representative of the hegemony within which Gertrudis and Madalena circulate. Gertrudis is bound to the daily routines that sustain the agricultural body, and Madalena is bound to the routine of maintaining a decaying community. They are both trapped in a perpetual circular state of being that inflicts violence on their bodies.

Yet, photography becomes the medium through which both women can break away from the circular structure of darkness, propelling them into rebellion. The main female characters, Gertrudis and Madalena, articulate their individual voices and agency in their relationship with the camera. Both films end on this similar open-ended note,

establishing an intimate connection between them. Gertrudis, for her part, who expressed her dislike of photography by hiding herself in each photograph taken of her, finds that she can in fact establish her agency through her portraits. Dressed in dark clothes throughout the film, at its close she undresses, thus establishing her own agency, empowered by the camera and by Baptiste, both offering her the possibility of extracting herself from a male dominant agricultural system. Madalena, as well, also establishes her agency, as she stands naked in front of the camera. She strips herself of clothing and allows Rita to photograph her in her purest form. Rather than creating a documentary photograph or a purely aesthetic image of decay, Madalena’s portrait is bringing life to a body that has been forgotten. Both female characters strip themselves of their clothes, and their bodies become the site of liberation. These last photographs break away from structural, traditional portraits or documentary photographs. Through the normative photographs of family, work, architectural decay, and portraits of the members of the community, as spectators we are given a sense of the identity of those who have been oppressed by a capitalist economic structure and who are also left with a final utopian possibility of liberation as both female characters break free from the perpetual state of violence to which they have been subjected.

# Chapter Two

## Photographing Political Consciousness
## in Walter Salles's *Diarios de motocicleta* (*Motorcycle Diaries;* 2004) and Julio Cortázar's "Apocalipsis de Solentiname" ("Apocalypse at Solentiname";1976)

Brazilian director Walter Salles's film *Diarios de motocicleta* (*Motorcycle Diaries;* 2004) and Argentine author Julio Cortázar's short story "Apocalipsis de Solentiname" ("Apocalypse at Solentiname"; 1976) map through their narratives the tumultuous history of the rise and fall of the left in Latin America, from the Cuban Revolution to the rise of right-wing military dictatorships. In particular, these historical narratives articulate the individual intellectual effects of violent state politics via the narrative construction of political consciousness, individual experiences through which we can trace the evolution of the left in Latin America. Within this mapping, photography functions in both texts as a fundamental tool in developing and exposing the political consciousness of their respective historical characters, Ernesto "Che" Guevara and Julio Cortázar.

In Salles's *Diarios de motocicleta*, the director presents a young Ernesto Guevara, before he has become the mythical revolutionary figure of "el Che." It is precisely the stripping of Ernesto's bourgeois consciousness to give way to broader political awareness that the film stages. As Guevara's political consciousness develops and is strengthened, so does the appearance and frequency of what I will call filmic photographs. By filmic photographs I am referring to the process through which the filmic camera takes on a photographic aesthetic through the use of stillness and the shift from color to black and white scenes. What is remarkable about these filmic photographs is the fact that, instead of showing a photograph on screen, the scene is itself being held

still, with the subjects in the frames of these filmic photographs evincing an animated state through a slight movement and a steady gaze towards the camera. This technique creates a living continuous portraiture of the individuals that Ernesto encounters throughout his journey. Whereas *Diarios de motocicleta*'s employment of photography highlights the evolving maturity of Guevara's political consciousness through portraits of the individuals he encounters who have been marginalized by an oppressive and elitist state, photography in the literary text "Apocalipsis de Solentiname" emerges as the medium that exposes the crude reality of the violence that overruns Latin America in response to the Cuban Revolution. While the filmic photography in *Diarios* depicts the source of inspiration for the Cuban Revolution to come, the historical failure of the leftist revolution in achieving economic and social justice, free of a neocolonial status vis-à-vis the United States and of oppressive right-wing military dictatorships, is foregrounded in "Apocalipsis de Solentiname."

As I have previously explained, through his story Cortázar articulates his own political ambivalence as a leftist Latin American intellectual via his fictionalized autobiographical avatar. Cortázar's avatar revels in the aesthetic beauty of paintings made by left-wing Nicaraguan artists, paintings that become symbolic of the possibility of achieving some kind of beauty despite the violence being experienced in Nicaragua and the rest of Latin America in the 1970s. Yet the paintings also paradoxically represent Cortázar's bourgeois approach of engaging with aesthetics as apolitical. Cortázar photographs the paintings as a result of his desire to capture their beauty so he can continue to enjoy this aesthetic moment once he returns home to Paris. However, once back in Paris and ready to enjoy the photographed paintings' aesthetic, Cortázar's avatar

is confronted with photographs that, rather than showing the idyllic landscapes of Latin America, project violent scenes of death, torture, and destruction, the reality of the political scene in Latin America, far from the idyllic propositions of the left. Ultimately, photography comes to the fore as a critical narrative tool within both texts to trace the political consciousness of two political figures linked to the Latin American left. In these stories that map the rise and fall of leftist ideologies in Latin America, photography is cast as the medium that will always hold the truth.

*Photographic Memories in Walter Salles's* Diarios de motocicleta (2004)

Salles's *Diarios de motocicleta* is a road trip film that takes the shape of a coming-of-age story of the mythical leftist figure of Ernesto "Che" Guevara and his friend Alberto Granado. *Diarios de motocicleta* follows the transformative journey of the two friends' trip through Latin America, from Argentina to Venezuela, from 1951-1952.[10] Based on Guevara's *Notas de viaje* (*Notes on a Journey*; 1994) and Granado's *Con el Che por Sudamérica* (*Traveling with Che Guevara*; 1986), the film brings to the big screen the story of Ernesto Guevara, a medical student and soon-to-be doctor who develops a social and political consciousness on this journey through Latin America. Guevara's voiceover at the beginning of the film explains the objective of their trip: "explorar el continente, el que sólo conocemos por los libros" ("to explore the continent that we only know in books"). In an effort to experience and discover a "real" Latin America, the two friends set off on the beloved motorcycle nicknamed "La Poderosa"

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[10] Their specific route in the film is Buenos Aires to Patagonia, Chile, the Andes, Machu Picchu, the Peruvian Amazon, and, finally, Venezuela; Guevara's final real-life stop in Miami is omitted from the film's narrative.

("The Powerful One") in January 1952, heading south towards Patagonia, Argentina, to then cross over to Chile. As the two friends exit the city, the camera shifts to show an empty road before them leading to the vast pampas of Argentina. Ernesto romantically notes: "Ante nosotros se extiende toda América Latina. […] Me alegro haber dejado atrás lo que llaman la civilización, y estar un poco más cerca de la tierra" ("Latin America extends itself before us. […] I'm happy to have left behind what they call civilization and be a little closer to the land").

Described as an inspirational film that offers us "intriguing ways of seeing the nation-state and the world," *Diarios de motocicleta* has also been subject to strong critiques that identify the engagement of the filmic narrative with an idealized and mythologized notion of the leftist revolutionary figure of "Che" Guevara (Cohen 518; Sadlier 127). David Foster Wallace, in a dismissive tone, notes that the film created a "Disneyesque caricature of Guevara in a film so filled with Hollywood clichés, plotted so absolutely predictably, and so uninspiring in its ideological pretensions as to lead one to wonder if it was not planned as a grotesque burlesque of Guevara's and Granado's motorcycle trip […]" (192). It is undeniable that "el Che" has remained in the collective memory as someone who "died for the liberation of the oppressed, the romantic hero, […] the myth of rebellion, of resistance," as described by Fernanda Bueno, unapologetically elegizing his mythical figure (107). Anthony Daniels and Frans Weiser observe that Guevara's memory has been sustained in no small part through his image's strong commercialization, forever immortalized in the iconic photograph of the revolutionary figure by Alberto Korda taken in the 1960s (Weiser 700; Daniels 23). In connection with the film and the commercialization of Guevara's photographic image,

Daniels notes that "the film is […] the cinematic equivalent of the Che Guevara T-shirt[:] it is morally monstrous and emotionally trivial" (26). Despite these critiques and the patently idealistic and romantic tones of the film, *Diarios de motocicleta* does attempt to recuperate an image of "el Che" that engages with his more human persona, constructing a character with flaws.

In the words of historian Louis A. Pérez, "something extraordinary occurred in Cuba after 1959," and the role of Guevara within the Revolution as Fidel Castro's right-hand man was crucial, even beyond the grave, in sustaining the Revolution's ideological tenor (x). With the triumph of the Cuban Revolution (1953-1959), Cuba emerged as a site of radical change in Latin America. The leftist revolution had successfully deposed the U.S.-backed authoritarian presidency of Fulgencio Batista and could now implement socialist ideologies that promised progress and change (Skidmore, Smith, and Green). The Cuban Revolution was spearheaded by Fidel Castro's *Movimiento 26 de Julio* (The 26 of July Movement; M-26-7), founded in 1955 as a nationalist and anti-imperialist revolutionary movement based on José Martí's ideologies.[11] This movement emerged in

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[11] José Martí was critical in the organization of Cuban politico-military agencies in the fight for Cuban independence from Spain and its non-annexation to the United States, culminating in the 1890s "with the organization of the Cuban Revolutionary Party (PRC), the appointment of the command hierarchy of the Liberation Army, and in February 1895 the renewal of the separatist struggle" (Pérez 4-5). Martí died early on in the Cuban independence war and did not live to see the U.S. entry into the war, which secured Cuban independence from Spain but led to Cuba's quasi colonial status under the U.S. with the incorporation of the Platt Amendment into the independent Cuba's constitution, which granted the United States the rights to intervene in Cuban political affairs, and to establish a naval base on Guantánamo Bay. Cuba entered into a period of armed intervention and military occupation, diplomatic and political meddling, economic penetration and dependency and the transfusion of "new ideas and new methods" to justify "North American colonial tutelage" (Pérez 23; 53). This outcome of the Spanish-American War reflected a certain strain of U.S. political belief, as articulated in 1899, "that a system of colonial government such as exists in certain other parts of the world is

opposition to Batista. Initially elected on a populist platform, Batista's first presidency (1940-1944) came on the heels of Cuba's transition from "military dictatorship in 1934 to a nominal constitutional democracy in 1940" (Whitney 440). As Pérez explains, "the effects of nearly a decade of graft, corruption, and malfeasance at all levels of civilian government had more than adequately paved the way for the return of army rule in 1952," when Batista staged a military coup and established dictatorial power (83). The social policies and progressive character of his earlier presidency were overshadowed by a violent and corrupt dictatorship that supported the U.S. government's interest in profiting from Cuba's economy.

Resistance to the Batista regime came from outside established political parties (the Auténticos and the Ortodoxos) under the leadership of Fidel Castro, who organized the failed armed assault on the Moncada barracks in Santiago de Cuba on July 26, 1953 (Pérez 83). Reemerging two years later as the Movimiento 26 de Julio—nominally commemorating the Moncada assault—Fidel Castro, together with his brother Raúl Castro and Guevara, organized another urban uprising in Santiago de Cuba with the same outcome (the "Granma uprising"). The surviving members then moved into the mountains of the Sierra Maestra where they officially organized as a rebel army. As they began to successfully defeat Rural Guard stations of the Batista regime, the army of the rebellion grew in number, necessitating the creation of a command hierarchy that would contribute to the Revolution's success and sustained growth (85). Ernesto Guevara, who,

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best suited for Cuba. The Cubans are excitable and naturally cannot yet fully comprehend the benefits which will come to them through a safe and beneficent government […]" (Pérez 42).

after meeting Castro in Mexico, had returned with Castro to Cuba as part of the rebel army Movimiento 26 de Julio, made significant contributions in establishing administrative networks in the areas that had been liberated, including "constructing military repair shops, good dispensaries, and training centers for recruits and publishing a clandestine paper, *El Cubano Libre*" (Pérez 86). Pérez explains that "in two years the insurgent army had developed into a multifunctional entity" and, citing Guevara, took the shape of a "small government" (87; 88). In January 1959, the rebel army overthrew Batista, assuming responsibility of Cuba and "the maintenance of national order and tranquility" (Pérez 89). The rhetoric of the newly established revolutionary leadership focused on sustaining the constant struggle that continued to affect Cuba; "[a]s long as revolutionary leaders perceived themselves in conditions of struggle, the Rebel Army—the vanguard of the revolution—would continue to discharge the responsibilities and duties acquired initially during the armed campaign" (Pérez 89).

The presence and establishment of a revolutionary leadership promoting socialist ideals was a threat to international security according to U.S. policy. This prompted the invasion of Cuba in an attempt to overthrow the government in April 1961, known in Latin America as the "Invasión de Playa Girón" (Bay of Pigs Invasion), which failed, to the dismay of the United States (Pérez 96). This event forced the Castro-led government to reinvigorate the military mission of the Rebel Army; as articulated by Raúl Castro, there was now the "necessity of forming a powerful army capable of defending the revolution from the appetite of the imperialists" (Pérez 96). The failed Bay of Pigs Invasion prompted the strengthening of the Revolution and its army, the organization of

the Cuban Communist Party (PCC), and the strengthening of Cuba's ties with the Soviet Union (Pérez 97).

The United States developed policies that sought to limit the success of the Cuban revolutionary government, including the attempt to remove Castro, welcome Cuban exiles, combined with the "strangulation" of the Cuban economy through the economic embargo established in late 1960 under President Eisenhower (Skidmore, Smith, and Green 138-39; "Fear" Pérez). The Cuban revolutionary government looked to grow Cuba's economy beyond its reliance on the export of sugar mainly to the United States. Guevara established a four-year plan that aimed to diversify agricultural practices and industrialize the country (Skidmore, Smith, and Green 140). Cuba's lack of raw material, combined with the strengthening of the U.S. embargo as other nations joined it, led the Revolutionary government to rely heavily on the Soviet Union, with mixed results in funding and support. At this juncture, Guevara, admitting the failure of his economic plan, pushed for spreading the revolution abroad which would lead to the fundamental "radical break with the capitalist past" (Skidmore, Smith, and Green 141). Guevara was at the head of implementing this idealist strategy and mobilizing the guerrilla movement abroad, becoming a "nemesis to the CIA and the Latin American Military" (Skidmore, Smith, and Green 142). Guevara started his spread of revolutionary ideals in Bolivia where he encountered U.S.-trained Bolivian troops who killed him in 1967.

By 1970, Castro admitted to the failure of the idealistic model in a speech where he openly welcomed a critique of the Cuban revolution; "Guests and comrade workers, today we are not going to make a commemoration speech. […] Today we are going to talk about our problems and difficulties; our setbacks rather than our successes […]"

(Castro). In the view of some historians, “the economic failure was obliterated by revolutionary theatre” (Skidmore, Smith, and Green 143). The “revolutionary theatre” included the use of “Che” Guevara’s image as symbol of the revolution after his death. David Kunzle maps the wide dissemination of Guevara’s image, tracing the first appearance in poster form of Korda’s famous photograph of Guevara to 1967, when it was used by Castro, who posted it on the exterior of the Ministry of the Interior in Cuba to confirm his death in Bolivia (Kunzle, *Che Guevara*). From that moment on, Kunzle avers, “the idea of revolution began literally to smile and sweeten, to become poetic and aesthetic—a serene vision of the future rather than the anguished imperative of the present” (“Chesuchristo” 99). Guevara’s image as a symbol of the Cuban Revolution, of socialist ideologies, was replicated and appropriated over time to come to represent a range of political messages; “Che has become a primary advocate of peace, social justice, and humanitarianism, the embodiment of noble sacrifice, selflessness, the egalitarian striving of social democracy if not of socialism itself” (Kunzle, “Chesucristo” 99).

*Diarios de motocicleta* is a filmic attempt to steer away from the iconic image (despite the film’s undeniable idealistic and romantic tones) in order to portray a more human figure, prior to the establishment of his revolutionary persona. Within the narrative, photography takes on a central role in developing a character that is maturing in relation to his worldviews and in the manifestation, strengthening, and establishment of Guevara’s political consciousness. As the film progresses, mapping the travels of Ernesto and Alberto, Ernesto’s initial disconnect with the social reality of Latin America as a well-off middle-class medical student transforms into an engaged leftist political consciousness. In the same measure that his experiences are strengthening his awareness

of the social and economic injustices in Latin America, the filmic use of a photographic aesthetic documents his visions, establishing a physical manifestation onscreen of his memory that will ultimately culminate in his awareness of the violence inflicted upon workers and peasants. What becomes significant is how the appearance of photographic "stills" through the lens of the filmic camera mirrors the development of Ernesto's political consciousness. The photographic medium itself becomes a crucial narrative tool in conveying the awakening of this consciousness that is at the foundation of Guevara's political career.

Overall, the cinematography of the film and the Latin American landscape that serves as background to Ernesto and Alberto's journey take on a significant role within the film's narrative (Bueno 109); Sadler calls attention to Salle's "nostalgia for natural landscapes" (138). The Argentine Pampas and the Chilean Andes create a romantic setting that depicts the beauty of the land in clear juxtaposition with the violent social realities experienced by the workers, landless and living in poverty, whom the two travelers meet. Visually this juxtaposition between nature and violence points towards the political ideals of returning to the land and to the historical past. These ideals are articulated by Ernesto at the end of the film when he declares that "[c]onstituimos una sola raza mestiza desde México hasta el estrecho de Magallanes" ("we are one single mestizo race, from Mexico to the Magellan Straits").

A series of filmic photographs—created by the filmic camera taking on the aesthetic of a photograph—are created when the camera holds still, pausing, to create a photographic moment. The subjects within the particular scene being "photographed" pose in that moment as if in a photographic portrait, looking straight at the camera. In

these instances, the filmic camera is incorporating a photographic aesthetic; as spectators we are allowed a moment to observe the composition in front of us as if we were beholding a photograph. The appearance of these photographic instances coincides with the manifestation of Ernesto's political consciousness. Towards the beginning of this development, the filmic photographs are simply still moments, such as the camera's pause in front of a group of miners in Chile. As the narrative progresses, these filmic photographs solidify in that the stillness is now presented in black and white (as opposed to color as in previous filmic photographs), creating a visual rupture between the main filmic narrative and the photographic moment. These instances become symbolic for their documentation of civil victims of social injustices, as well as Ernesto's registering in his memory an awareness of the social and economic disparities that become increasingly evident to him as the trip goes on.

The beginning of *Diarios de motocicleta* quickly defines Ernesto's character as one attached to the privileges of his social status. Dierdra Reber notes that "we see him using his inhaler while playing rugby, a sport inherited from British neocolonialism that signals Ernesto's well-to-do social status" (162). Establishing a parallel between Ernesto's asthmatic condition, a marker of his bourgeois background, and the development of his political consciousness, Reber highlights how "he will fight to overcome his asthma in the same measure that he struggles to reject bourgeois culture" (162). Before chronicling Ernesto's definitive rejection of his bourgeois background, the beginning of the film takes time to emphasize his attachment to this lifestyle, thus positing his disconnect from the social realities of Argentina or Latin America. His bourgeois background blinds him to the possibility of seeing the reality of violent

injustice that the filmic photographs will progressively register in Ernesto's political consciousness. A clear manifestation of their carefree and oblivious spirit is seen each time Ernesto and Alberto are in a difficult situation. Using their status as medical students, they obtain goods and services for free, including shelter, food and drink, and repairs for their motorcycle. For example, when they arrive in Chile penniless with a useless motorcycle that desperately needs repairs, Ernesto stops at the local newspaper, *El Diario Austral*. The next day, the newspaper runs an article about the prestigious doctors from Argentina that have arrived to the area: "[La ciudad] se vio honrada por el arribo de los dos más prestigiosos leprólogos de América Latina. […] Los carismáticos científicos aventureros, expertos en su especialidad, han tratado tres mil pacientes en todo el continente" ("[The city] was honored by the arrival of two of the most prestigious Latin American specialists in leprosy. […] The charismatic and adventurous scientists, experts in their fields, have treated more than three thousand patients in the continent"). Grossly exaggerating their medical careers and prestige, the objective is to use this article to convince a local mechanic to repair their bike for free, which works.

During their time in Chile, Ernesto's political consciousness starts to manifest itself as they continue to travel, meet, and engage with the communities they visit. Their interaction with locals is facilitated by the final breakdown of the motorcycle "La Poderosa," which obligates the travelers to continue their journey by foot. This shift forces Guevara and Granado to abandon "the remove of bourgeois status" and enter into "an intimacy of unrestrainedly democratic encounter[s]" (Reber 163). Their travel by foot puts the friends in the path of locals, creating powerful moments of storytelling. On their way to the Atacama Desert they meet a married couple of itinerant workers that has a

critical impact on Ernesto's social and political awareness. The couple that Ernesto and Alberto meet is on their way to a mine, where they hope the husband will find a job. During their conversation around a campfire, the couple, unnamed, tell Ernesto and Alberto about the land that they had once owned, passed down to them by a grandfather, but which was taken away from them by a landowner. In the couple's own words, "No teníamos mucho, sólo unas tierras secas y difíciles. […] Eran nuestras hasta que llegó un terrateniente y nos sacó a patadas. […] Y a eso le llaman progreso" ("We didn't have much, just some difficult dry land. […] It was ours until a landowner came and kicked us out. […] And they call that progress." In fact, the couple had fled their land because the police was persecuting them for their affiliation with Communism. Now, landless, they travel around looking for short-term jobs, like the one they are hoping to obtain in the mines.

The couple asks Ernesto and Alberto about their travel plans, if they are also looking for work. Ernesto, taken aback and overcome by what seems to be embarrassment, simply says no, further explaining, upon being pressed by the woman, that they in fact are traveling "just to travel"—"viajamos por viajar"—to which she responds, "Bendito sean. Bendito sean esos viajes" ("Blessed be. Blessed be those trips"). As they continue their conversation, over mate, Ernesto's voiceover offers more details about the couple:

> Esos ojos tenían una expresión oscura y trágica. Nos contaron de unos compañeros que habían desaparecido en circunstancias misteriosas y que al parecer terminaron en alguna parte en el fondo del mar. Esa fue una de las noches

> más frías de mi vida. Pero conocerlos me hizo sentir más cerca de la especie humana. Extraña, tan extraña para mí.
>
> (Those eyes had a dark and tragic expression. They told us about some comrades that had disappeared under mysterious circumstances and that seemed to have ended up in some place at the bottom of the ocean. That was one of the coldest nights of my life. But meeting them made me feel closer to the human species. So foreign, so foreign to me.)

This moment of interaction with the communist couple "emphasize[s] the disparity between the middle/upper classes, for whom travel is a leisure pastime or an existential choice, and the peasantry, for whom travel connotes exile and a fight for survival" (Sadlier 137). Ernesto becomes aware of the vastly different definitions each pair has of travel, which marks the awakening of Ernesto's political consciousness, and which is successively registered by the first use of a filmic photograph. As Ernesto's voiceover notes how foreign the human race is to him, the camera shifts to show the male miner sipping on mate, then leaning forward to continue passing it around the group of travelers. The camera pauses to sustain the miner's gaze in a perspective shot—the spectator understands that he is looking straight at Ernesto—so both Ernesto and the spectator can register the face of those living in fear, in poverty, and at the margins of society.

Meeting this couple marks the turning point in Ernesto's character and the beginning of the appearance of filmic photographs. Ernesto and Alberto accompany the itinerant couple to the mines, Mina de Chiquicamata, owned by the historical North American Anaconda Mining Company (1881-1983). The camera once again takes a

moment to capture the mining couple as well as all the other people that are there with the sole objective of finding a short-term job with the company. The filmic camera, taking on a photographic aesthetic, documents the scene and the people, the multiple bodies that will endure inhumane conditions for unfair pay and no water or food (Reber 164). As the mining manager selects a few people from the group, loading them like cattle on the back of a truck, Ernesto is visibly upset at the way in which this manager is treating the workers, and firmly rebukes him, "¿Pero usted no se da cuenta que esta gente tiene sed? ¿Por qué no les da un poco de agua, carajo?" ("Can't you see that these people are thirsty? Damn it, why don't you give them some water?"). The manager firmly notes that he will kick them out because this is private property, leaving Ernesto feeling helpless upon seeing such violence. As they leave that area, Ernesto's awareness of the economic and social disparities is heightened: "Al salir de las minas sentimos que la realidad empezaba a cambiar. O éramos nosotros. A medida que nos adentramos en la cordillera encontramos cada vez más indígenas que ni siquiera tienen un techo en lo que fueron sus propias tierras" ("As we left the mines, we felt that reality started to change. Or maybe we were. As we continued to travel through the mountain range, we met with many more indigenous people that don't even have a roof over their head in what was their own land").

Upon their arrival to Cuzco, Peru, described by Ernesto as "el corazón de América" ("the heart of America"), Guevara continues to interact with the people he encounters along the way. In Cuzco, the social reality he experiences intertwines with colonial history, as when Ernesto and Alberto are walking around Cuzco, talking to indigenous women in the plaza and traveling the ruins of Machu Picchu. Their guide

notes how “los españoles […] empezaron a destruir todo” (“the Spanish […] began to destroy everything”) as they walk through Machu Picchu, leading Ernesto to reflect on their surroundings, and the Incan civilization. Ernesto admiringly notes how the Incan civilization had “alto conocimiento de astronomía, medicina, matemáticas, entre otras cosas” (“high level of knowledge in astronomy, medicine, math, among other things”) and yet, despite their intellectual and economic wealth, they were overcome by weapons during Spanish colonization. Ernesto wonders, “¿Cómo sería América hoy si las cosas hubieran sido diferentes?” (“What would America be like today if things had been different?”).

Alberto’s idealist personality comes to the fore when he shares with Ernesto his idea of starting a revolution:

> Mirá lo que se me ocurrió. Casarme con una descendiente de un Inca, fundaríamos un partido indigenista en estas condiciones. Incentivamos todo el pueblo a votar, reactivamos la revolución de Túpac Amaru, la revolución indoamericana. ¿Qué te parece?
> (Listen to what just occurred to me. I marry a woman of Incan descent, we found an indigenous movement under these conditions. We would encourage people to vote, we would reactivate Túpac Amaru’s revolution, the Indo-American revolution. What do you think?)

Ernesto turns to Alberto and, looking straight at him, counters, “¿Una revolución sin tiros?” (“A revolution without gunshots?”), meaning that for Ernesto a revolution without guns is not a revolution.

This description of the intellectual and cultural wealth of the Incas is juxtaposed with the indigenous reality that the travelers encounter. In Cuzco they meet indigenous women who tell them about their limited access to education and to work. They also meet a farmer on the side of a road who tells them how he was exploited by a landowner. He explains that he had helped to work the land and that once the work was done, the landowner, with the police, drove him off the land in order to avoid payments. The man explains that his experience was not unique, so as a community such farmers started to organize themselves with others that had also been denied fair work and pay, in order to create a support network similar to that of a workers' union. These interactions and the stories that they impart have an impact on Ernesto and are at the base of the construction of his political consciousness, born out of the desire to vindicate a past that is considered the height of the indigenous civilization, destroyed to give way to a colonial history of destruction, economic, and social disparities.

Upon the arrival of Alberto and Ernesto to Lima, they meet with Doctor Hugo Pesce, their contact for the leprosy colony in San Pablo in the Peruvian Amazon where they will be interning for three weeks. While there, Pesce notes in Ernesto and Alberto a "gran idealismo" ("great idealism") and introduces them to the writing of Peruvian authors César Vallejo and José Carlos Mariátegui. In one scene, we see Ernesto reading Mariátegui's text *Siete ensayos de interpretación de la realidad peruana* (*Seven Interpretative Essays on Peruvian Reality*; 1928). Mariátegui, founder of the Peruvian Communist Party, explores in his text how "the indigenous way of life is fundamentally Communist and should be looked to as a model for a more just society" (Reber 164). As elaborated by Pesce's voiceover, "Mariátegui fundamentalmente habla sobre el potencial

revolucionario de los indígenas y campesinos de América Latina. Dice que el problema del indio es el problema de la tierra y que la revolución no será calco ni copia sino la salvación heroica de nuestro pueblo" ("Essentially, Mariátegui talks about the revolutionary potential of the indigenous people and farmers of Latin America. He says that the main problem of the indigenous people is the problem of the land and that the revolution will be neither copy nor imitation but the heroic salvation of our people"). This text by Mariátegui is framed by the film as a foundational intellectual influence on Ernesto's definition of revolution within the Latin America he is experiencing. Unsurprisingly, filmic photography is used once again within the narrative to establish the relationship between Mariátegui's text and the construction of Ernesto's political self. As Ernesto reads, the filmic camera shifts between a view of him lying on a bed with the book in his hands and filmic photographs of the people that Guevara has encountered along his journey up to this point. In contrast to the previous filmic photographs that appeared in color, these filmic photographs now shift to black and white, the camera holding still in front of the subjects: an indigenous man and a boy, the men at the mine, an old woman wrapped in a scarf in Cuzco, and a group of men, women, and indigenous children, who all look straight into the camera. The shift to black and white filmic photography strengthens the filmic photographic aesthetic, and represents the political awareness that is emerging in the mind of the future leftist revolutionary.

The photographic moments continue to intensify in the film from this point onward. On their way to the Amazonian leprosy colony, Ernesto looks out over the ledge of his boat onto the river. He sees a much smaller boat filled with many more people, hooked up to the larger ship on which he is riding. While the larger boat is the site of a

casino, prostitution, and travelers who are engaging in conversation and looking at the scenery, symbolizing the leisure of the bourgeoisie, the smaller boat is crammed with people sleeping in hammocks and traveling with livestock. Ernesto registers this moment of class divide via a filmic photograph. The filmic camera, shifting to a scene in black and white, looks straight onward into the small boat. The filmic photograph fills the screen, showing in the center an older man in a hammock, now sitting erect and looking straight ahead while other men and women surrounding him do the same. Then the camera shifts again to show Ernesto, his gaze looking straight forward as if observing at the scene previously captured photographically, imprinting this picture of social disparities into his political consciousness.

When Ernesto and Alberto arrive to San Pablo, the travelers meet with the nuns and doctors who run the leper colony. During their stay, Guevara notices symbolic gestures performed by the nuns and doctors that contribute to the marginalization of the people that are sick. Geographically, the colony is divided in two, with the sick on one side of the river and the main buildings on the other. This separation is further heightened by the use of gloves, a requirement when visiting the sick. Both Ernesto and Alberto refuse to wear them, arguing that the people with leprosy are not in fact contagious, rendering the use of gloves a purely symbolic enactment of the divide between the healthy and the sick. As time passes, both Alberto and Ernesto become attached to the community, participating in daily activities, from labor to sports (Reber 165). During their stay, Ernesto's political consciousness is fully developed. This can be seen when the community, in solidarity with Ernesto and Alberto, who were refused food by the nuns because they did not attend mass, comes together to bring them food. The lepers "defy

institutional repression by secretly preparing and serving two plates of food to their new friends, thus committing their first act of principled—protorevolutionary—insubordination […] this nutritional seed of revolution is figured as an act of affective communal care" (Reber 165).

A day before Alberto and Ernesto's departure, the community on the "healthy" side of river celebrates Ernesto's birthday. During this celebration, Ernesto gives his first political speech where he articulates mature political views, fueled by his experience up to that point:

> Creemos, y después de este viaje más firmemente que antes, que la división de América en nacionalidades inciertas e ilusorias es completamente ficticia. Constituimos una sola raza mestiza desde México hasta el Estrecho de Magallanes. Así que tratando de librarme de cualquier carga de provincialismo, brindo por Perú y por América unida.
> (We believe, stronger now after this journey than before, that the division of America into unstable and illusory nations is a complete fiction. We are one single mestizo race from Mexico to Magellan Straits and so, in an attempt to free ourselves from narrow-minded provincialism, I propose a toast to Peru and to a united America.)

After this political speech, Ernesto wanders down to the river in a pensive state. As he looks over to the other side of the river, Ernesto declares that he will celebrate his birthday "del otro lado" ("on the other side"). Unable to find a raft to take him there, he plunges into the river and swims over, despite his asthma and in defiance of Alberto and the nuns' pleadings to not do so. Bueno sees this moment as critical in supporting the

construction of an idealistic and romantic figure, for, "in its enormous humanity and expressiveness, [it] reaffirms the mythic Che Guevara of our imagination as the expression of our eternal unfulfilled desire for equal and just societies" (112). Further, this is the culmination of his journey into his revolutionary spirit. For Reber, "this is the coming alive of the interpellative stills we have seen—the tableaux vivants that have gazed on him in wordless expectancy. The lepers represent the vital awakening of the downtrodden that Ernesto is meant to help" (166). Ernesto, in this symbolic act of crossing the river, has "bridged the social divide" that has thematically filled the filmic narrative until this point, shedding once and for all his bourgeois self and embracing his position within an egalitarian community (Reber 167).

Ernesto and Alberto finally arrive in Caracas, Venezuela, in July 1952, where they part ways. Alberto stays behind to pursue his career in medicine, while Ernesto returns to Argentina. As they say farewell, Ernesto simply looks at Alberto and observes how "Todo este tiempo que pasamos en la ruta sucedió algo, algo que tengo que pensar por mucho tiempo. Cuánta injusticia, ¿no?" ("During this whole time we were on the road, something happened, something that I need to think about for a long time. So much injustice, isn't there?"). Ernesto has fundamentally changed and is ready to transition into the full-fledged leftist revolutionary that we know today as the mythical figure of "el Che." As the plane with Ernesto takes off, we hear his voice once again reflecting on the journey that he is leaving behind:

> No es este relato de hazañas impresionantes. Es un trozo de dos vidas tomadas en un momento en que cursaron juntas un determinado trecho. […] ¿Fue nuestra visión demasiado estrecha, demasiado parcial, demasiado apresurada? ¿Fueron

> nuestras conclusiones demasiado rígidas? Tal vez. Pero ese vagar sin rumbo por nuestra mayúscula América me ha cambiado más de lo que creí. Yo ya no soy yo. Por lo menos no soy el mismo yo interior.
>
> (This is not the story of impressive feats. It's a fraction of two lives, taken in a moment in which they traveled together on a determined path. Was our vision too narrow-minded, too biased, maybe too hasty? Were our conclusions too rigid? Maybe. But to wander aimlessly in our America with a capital "a" has changed me more than I would have thought. I am no longer myself. At least, my inner self is no longer the same.)

The film ends on a political high note: the transformation of an individual who has traveled across Latin America and taken notice of the social and economic disparities. Reber describes this moment as Salles's proposal to "wipe clean the otherwise fated slate of history, to begin anew, to take this transformational journey as a starting point for the initiation of a new revolutionary campaign for the global age" (168). This history is precisely the failure of the left:

> The Bolivian military captured and executed Guevara with the clandestine training and assistance of the United States government, Africa has fallen into cycle after cycle of genocidal civil war, Cuba has slowly shriveled up into a shell of its former revolutionary self under four decades of economic embargo and extreme material privation, and Bolivia remains the poorest and most malnourished country in all of Latin America. (Reber 168)

*Diarios de motocicleta* ends on the articulation of future possibility, of starting anew a history past, this time with the possibility of a new outcome.

The filmic narrative continues after the last scene via filmic photographs. The screen goes dark and starts to display a series of filmic photographs in black and white that mark the visual culmination of Ernesto's emerging political ideology. Each photograph shows the people that he encountered along the way, the filmic camera pausing and allowing for the spectator to take in each photograph—the leper colony, the guide in Cuzco, the men and women in front of the great walls in Machu Picchu, men and women of the working class in a market in Chile, and indigenous women and farmers. The last image to appear onscreen is the face of the Communist farmer turned itinerant miner that Ernesto and Alberto met in the Atacama Desert. The man's face looks straight ahead at the camera, at us, closing this chapter and alluding to what is to come for Ernesto Guevara as the powerful leftist figure "el Che."

*Napoleón a Caballo: Photographic Violence and Beauty in "Apocalipsis de Solentiname"*

In the short story "Apocalipsis de Solentiname" (1976), Cortázar masterfully explores the intricate connection between photography, politics, and aesthetics, as he intertwines history and fiction. In this fictional-historical story, the narrator, Cortázar's fictional avatar, travels to Islas Solentiname, Nicaragua, with priest, poet, and leftist activist Ernesto Cardenal, during a period of political turmoil under the Anastasio Somoza Debayle military regime characterized by corruption and violence (Jaffe; Pons). Upon their arrival to Solentiname, the fictional Cortázar comes across paintings that strike him for their beauty. Created by locals, the paintings depict idyllic landscapes of Latin America and are described by the character as "la visión primera del mundo, la

mirada limpia del que describe su entorno como un canto de alabanza" ("looking at the world as if for the first time, the pure gaze that describes their surroundings like a song of praise") ("Solentiname" 98). Although native to Latin America, Cortázar is at that moment in time a bicultural Belgian-born expatriate living in Paris (this is true for both his real and fictional self). His instinct propels him to eagerly photograph the paintings of these bucolic scenes, transforming the paintings into personal photographic souvenirs of small representations of a romanticized Latin America. In the story, Cardenal calls Cortázar a "ladrón de cuadros, contrabandista de imágenes" ("painting thief, smuggler of images"), to which accusation he arrogantly responds, "Si […] me los llevo todos, allá los proyectaré en mi pantalla y serán más grandes y más brillantes que éstos, jódete" ("Yes […] I'm taking all of them, [back in Paris] I'll project them on my screen and they will be bigger and brighter than these, screw you") ("Solentiname" 100). Upon Cortázar's fictional avatar's return to Paris, he is eager to experience once again the idyllic images of the paintings he saw in person. To his surprise, Cortázar is confronted by a different set of images. Instead of seeing the paintings he photographed, the photographer is confronted with scenes of torture, violence, and death taking place in Nicaragua, and then extending to Guatemala, Argentina, and Brazil. Each photograph becomes representative of the political environment during 1970s Latin America characterized by authoritarian regimes. The once bucolic representations of rural life unravel before him as a violent cinematic sequence.

Like the films I have traced up to this moment, Cortázar's "Apocalipsis de Solentiname" underscores photography and film as two narrative tools that work together to disclose and decry the political violence at hand. I propose that in Cortázar's

engagement with photography and film, the fictional avatar is collpasing a Manichean understanding of aesthetics and political engagement. In other words, Cortázar's fictional character, through his relationship with the photographic medium, establishes aesthetics neither as politically engaged nor as a manifestation of beauty and pleasure, but rather as both in a relationship of mutual inclusivity. This would not be possible without the inclusion of a filmic moment that heightens the violent political value of the photographs through their movement on screen. It is thus that a literary text informs our understanding of film as a medium through which to articulate political discontent and, moreover, proposes, for the spectator, alternative ways of understanding and engaging with state violence.

"Apocalipsis de Solentiname," written in 1976, was published in 1977 in *Alguien que anda por ahí*, a collection of short stories. The stories included in this volume share a historical-fictional approach. As described by Maria Cristina Pons, "crean ficción a partir de la situación histórica concreta de la violencia en América Latina" ("they create fiction based on concrete historical violence in Latin America") (184). The violence that is salient in each story is directly linked to the violent environment that dominated the political sphere in the 1970s in Latin America, which saw ideological violence between left- and right-wing groups, linked to the fact of the Cuban Revolution (1959) and the subsequent rise of right-wing military regimes throughout the Latin American region (Pons 183-84). "Apocalipsis de Solentiname" combines history, politics, autobiographical references, and elements of Cortázar's well-known fantastical style. "Apocalipsis" is the historical-fictional account of the author's real-life trip to Solentiname in 1976, accompanied by Nicaraguan writer Sergio Ramírez, Costa Rican

filmmaker Oscar Castillo, and Nicaraguan poet Ernesto Cardenal, all of whom were figures that sustained links with the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN; Sandinista National Liberation Front), the left-wing guerrilla group opposed to the Somoza family regime.[12] That year, Cortázar had received an invitation by the Costa Rican government to participate in a series of conferences in San José in commemoration of the first edition of his canonical novel, *Rayuela* (*Hopscotch*; 1963), published 13 years earlier.

The commemoration of *Rayuela* in connection with Cortázar's trip to Solentiname offers significant insight into Cortázar's fictional avatar's character as well as Cortázar's position as a Latin American intellectual. *Rayuela*'s "Tablero de dirección" ("Table of Direction") forewarns its reader by saying, "A su manera este libro es muchos libros, pero sobre todo es dos libros. El lector queda invitado *a elegir* una de las dos posibilidades […]" ("In its own way, this book is many books, but ultimately it is two books. The reader is invited to *choose* one of the two possibilities") (*Rayuela* 7). From the outset, the author establishes two critical elements with regard to this novel. The first is the rupture of temporality; the reader initially engages with the text in numerical order, until chapter 56, and from that point on can decide whether to finish there or continue on

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[12] The FSLN was formed a period of heightened spread of leftist ideologies, propelled by the successful leftist win during the Cuban Revolution in 1959 and strengthened in opposition to the subsequent emergence of military regimes, characterized by repression of all political liberties. Named after Augusto César Sandino, a revolutionary and nationalist leader against the U.S military occupation of Nicaragua (1927-1933), the FSLN fought for civil and political liberties and the establishment of a socialist Nicaragua. In 1979, the FSLN successfully overthrew Anastasio Somoza Debayle (in power since 1974), bringing the family's regime to an end. See Juan José Monroy García's *Tendencias ideológico-políticas del Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSNL) 1975-1990*. México: Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México, 1997. Print.

chapter 73 and follow the directions left at the end of each chapter. This particular relationship that the author generates between the reader and the text points to the second element of the book critical for my analysis: the reader and his/her role in deciphering the text (Juan-Navarro).

In *Rayuela,* Cortázar's fictional literary theorist and protagonist Morelli, whose literary theories are woven into the main narrative, articulates the importance of the politically-engaged reader. Morelli articulates two types of readers within his unfinished notes that are then analyzed by those characters that read them. The first reader that Morelli highlights is the "lector-hembra" ("female-reader"), the reader who engages with the text as a "mero escribir estético" ("merely aesthetic writing"). This reader is described as a "tipo que no quiere problemas sino soluciones, o falsos problemas ajenos que le permiten sufrir cómodamente sentado en su sillón, sin comprometerse en el drama que también debería ser el suyo" ("type that doesn't want problems but solutions, or wants someone else's fake problems that allow him to comfortably suffer sitting in a chair, without implicating him in the drama that should also be his") (*Rayuela* 562). In opposition stands Morelli's ideal reader, the "lector cómplice" ("reader as accomplice"), a complicit and engaged reader. Morelli yearns for a reader that can engage with the text and be open to the possibility of being transformed and unsettled by the author, who, as proposed by Morelli, should also demonstrate his political commitment by writing novels that mutate, displace, puzzle, and alienate the reader, "ponerlo en contacto con un mundo *personal*, con una vivencia" ("put him in touch with a *personal* world, with an experience") (*Rayuela* 557). So, while Morelli is searching for the ideal active reader, he is also proposing narratives that don't feed a message or look to be understood, but rather

give a "[…] fachada, con puertas y ventanas detrás de las cuales se está operando un misterio que el lector cómplice deberá buscar (de ahí la complicidad) y quizá no entrará (de ahí el compadecimiento)" ("façade, with doors and windows behind which a mystery is being operated, that the reader as accomplice must look for (thus his complicity) and maybe not enter (thus his sympathy)" (*Rayuela* 507). In Todd Price's view, "the surmounting of difficulties becomes a central aspect of the aesthetic experience" (494). From *Rayuela*'s chapter 62, Cortázar's novel *62: modelo para armar* (*62: A Model Kit*; 1968) was born. This text becomes the novelistic incarnation of Morelli's literary theories, pushing the modernist novel to its limits, particularly for the reader who was challenged by the works being read to develop new reading strategies (Price 494).

By 1976, when "Apocalipsis de Solentiname" is published, the story registers a shift within Cortázar's writing style, coinciding with a historiographical shift following the Cuban Revolution. The shift from a highly modernist and fantastical style to a pessimistic tone, as is highlighted by Maria Cristina Pons, is evident throughout the collection of stories in *Alguien que anda por ahí,* including "Apocalipsis." The Cortazarian style has taken on a sad and pessimist tone regarding human existence (Pons 186). Pons is quick to note that this stylistic change and tone can be linked to the failure of the Cuban Revolution that promised the successful rise of the political left:

> El fracaso de las guerrillas urbanas y el resurgimiento de las dictaduras militares en Latinoamérica en la década de los setenta, resquebraban el optimismo y la visión utópica de un hombre y un orden nuevo que predominaban en los intelectuales progresistas de la década precedente. El crimen institucionalizado y

> sistemático de las corporaciones militares y paramilitares en el poder azota al Cono Sur. (187)
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> The failure of urban guerrillas and the resurgence of military dictatorships in Latin America in the seventies, fractured the optimism and utopian vision of a new man and a new order that prevailed among the progressive intellectuals of the previous decade. The institutionalized and systematic crime of military and paramilitary corporations in power plagued the Southern Cone.

The story's opening paragraph offers clues for understanding the change in tone, the combination of Cortazarian elements and historico-political components in the narrative that allude to this sense of despair and discontent towards the political situation (Pons 199).

Upon Cortázar's fictional's character's arrival at a press conference in Costa Rica, the first stop before traveling to Solentiname, he is bombarded with questions:

> ¿Por qué no *vivís en tu patria*, qué pasó que *Blow-Up* era tan distinto de tu cuento, *te parece que el escritor tiene que estar comprometido*? ("Solentiname" 95; emphasis added)
>
> (Why don't you *live in your homeland*, what happened with *Blow-Up* that it was so different from your story*, do you think the writer has to be politically committed*?)

The questions revolve around Cortázar's political engagement as an author, both geographically, since Cortázar is at that moment living in Paris, and via literature.[13] The

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[13] Cortázar's short story, "Las babas del diablo" ("The Devil's Drool"), was adapted to the British film *Blow-Up* (1966) by Italian film director Michelangelo Antonioni. As Cortázar indicates in "Apocalipsis", *Blow-Up* is based, but only loosely so, on the short

latter question gains importance as it becomes the focus of the plot of "Apocalipsis," which interrogates the notion of political engagement in the context of Cortázar's fictional character. The fictional avatar continues by claiming:

> […] ya sé que la última entrevista me la harán en las puertas del infierno y seguro que serán las mismas preguntas […] *¿a usted no le parece que allá abajo escribía demasiado hermético para el pueblo*? ("Solentiname" 95; emphasis added)
> (I already know that my last interview will be at the gates of hell and I am sure that I will get the same questions […] *don't you think that down below your writing was too inaccessible for the people*?)

These questions directly relate to the controversies that surrounded Cortázar and his intellectual position as a writer and his leftist ideological commitment. While Cortázar had been profoundly influenced by the Cuban Revolution, this did not prevent his writing from being highly criticized as elitist and inaccessible, as articulated in an open letter of 1967 to Cuban intellectual Roberto Fernández Retamar. Questions regarding the role of the Latin American intellectual continued to surround him and his work throughout the latter half of the 1960s and into the 1970s. In a public debate with Colombian author Oscar Collazos and Peruvian author Mario Vargas Llosa, Cortázar stated that "literature ... had to play a crucial part in carrying the revolutionary process beyond its initial stages,

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story; the short story will be discussed further on in the main text. *Blow-Up* follows the life of a London fashion photographer, Thomas, in 1960s so-called "Swinging London"; London's cultural revolution was characterized by optimism and hedonism, manifesting itself in fashion, art, and music scenes. Antonioni's film, along with Cortázar's short story, "suggest in strikingly similar terms the inauthenticity of certain forms of representation of reality," as both film and story bring to the fore the relationship between photography and the truth about violence (D'Lugo 23). It is also important to note that the film put Cortázar on the international cultural map.

beyond its material aspects, and fostering 'total revolution'" (Standish 10). Nonetheless, in a public debate with Vargas Llosa, Cortázar also asserted his position as a writer, his "solitaria vocación de cultura, empecinada búsqueda ontológica, juegos de la imaginación" ("solitary vocation of culture, persistent ontological search, games of the imagination"), yet not from an ivory tower, as noted by Standish (10). Within these debates we can see Cortázar's intellectual struggle, trying to reconcile his aesthetics with his political commitment, which, at this time, were viewed by leftists as irreconcilable.

By the late 1960s the Cuban regime was starting to be critiqued by a circle of Latin American intellectuals initially supportive of the Revolution. The breaking point that sealed the rift was the imprisonment of Cuban poet Heberto Padilla in 1971 by the Cuban government for allegedly counterrevolutionary writing, which demonstrated the authoritarian aspect of Castro's regime (Standish).[14] Over fifty Latin American intellectuals, including Cortázar, wrote a letter to Castro demanding an explanation. In response, Castro claimed that "pseudo leftist bourgeois liberals working in Europe had no right to make patronizing comments about real writers, real revolutionaries, and that none of these critics of the revolution were welcome in Cuba" (Standish 11). Despite this rupture with Cuba, Cortázar remained supportive of the leftist movement and shifted his attention to other spheres of Latin American politics. Yet the left continued to mark him

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[14] El Caso Padilla (the Padilla Affair) refers to the imprisonment of Heberto Padilla in 1971. After being awarded a prize by the Unión de Escritores y Artistas Cubanos (UNEAC; the National Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba) in recognition of his text *Fuera del juego* (*Out of the Game*; 1968), it was published with a prologue by the UEAC warning its reader of the counterrevolutionary content (Standish 11). As described by José de la Colina, "el libro evocaba la dureza de los sacrificios exigidos por el socialismo en nombre de bellos horizontes siempre inalcanzables" ("the book evoked a toughness in the sacrifices demanded by socialism in the name of beautiful and always unattainable horizons").

as elitist while Cortázar continued to stand his ground on his views regarding an author's liberties, refusing to accept prescribed aesthetics. His attempts to reconcile his literary aesthetic with political commitment became a central topic in texts such as *Vampiros multinacionales* (1975), *Libro de Manuel* (1977), and *Alguien que anda por ahí* (1977). The latter is the short story compilation in which "Apocalipsis de Solentiname" appears, which explains the change of tone and the appearance of critical questions regarding Cortázar's role as an "autor comprometido" ("a politically committed author").[15] The notion of a committed and active intellectual is explored within the short story, where the role of photography is pivotal in understanding and identifying Cortázar as an intellectual and author with ties to the left.

In the story, upon Cortázar's fictional avatar's arrival to Costa Rica he is met by the Latin American intellectuals Castillo, Ramírez, and Cardenal, all of whom then travel together to Solentiname, Nicaragua. As articulated by Castillo in real life, the objective was that Cortázar "pusiera su nombre, prestigio y solidaridad a servicio de la lucha contra Somoza, y traerlo de regreso a San José, sano, salvo, informado y contento" ("put his name, prestige, and solidarity in the service of the fight against Somoza, and bring him back to San José, healthy, safe, informed, and happy") (Battista). This autobiographical moment marks Cortázar's fictional avatar's arrival to Solentiname, affirming his commitment to the leftist cause in Nicaragua, a country whose government at the time was actively persecuting political opposition.

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[15] Julio Cortázar's *Vampiros multinacionales* (1975) brings attention to the evils and the harm done by multinational corporations, while *Libro de Manuel* (1977) narrates the kidnapping of a diplomat by a revolutionary group, in exchange for the liberation of political prisoners, a narrative that responds to the increasing levels of state violence in Argentina and Latin America during that period.

Nicaragua in the 1970s, the time period during which the story is written and takes place, was characterized by oppression, violence, and corruption under the Somoza family military regime. The Somoza family's position of power began in 1936 with the rise of Anastasio Somoza García and lasted until 1979, when Anastasio Somoza Debayle, son of Luis Somoza Debayle (in power from 1956-1963) was overthrown by the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN; Sandinista National Liberation Front) (Jaffe; Pons; Monroy García). Somoza Debayle's military regime registered high levels of social repression, censorship of the press, and national violence, motivated by an ideological war against the left fueled by Cold War ideologies that were prominent during the time and gave the right-wing military a sense of authority and power over the civil population (Galván 109-115; Dávila 2). Somoza Debayle's greatest source of power was the military police known as La Guardia Nacional (the National Guard). Under Somoza Debayle, the National Guard went through its most repressive and violent period, when one of its main functions was to monitor, combat, and suppress the FSLN guerrilla movement in both rural and urban areas. As María Dolores Ferrero Blanco explains, "Los gobiernos militares se sintieron en guerra contra un amplísimo sector de la población a la que calificaban enseguida de 'terroristas' y 'comunistas' y el resultado fue una persecución indiscriminada de la población campesina […] [y] de verdaderas campañas de terror en la ciudad […]" ("The military governments considered themselves to be at war with a large sector of the population, which they marked instantly as 'terrorists' and 'communists' with the result being an indiscriminate persecution of the farmer population […] [and] of true terror campaigns in the city […]") (360-67).

Within this political context, Ernesto Cardenal, an outspoken opponent of the Somoza regime and an iconic figurehead of liberation theology, arrived in 1966 to Islas de Solentiname, an archipelago at the southern end of Lago de Nicaragua, where he founded a religious, almost monastic, and artistic, community. In an interview published in the journal *El Ciervo* in 1972, Cardenal articulates the leftist ideals that were at the core of his politics and which shaped the community:

> En realidad, yo personalmente me he politizado con la vida contemplativa. La meditación, la profundización, la mística, me han dado la radicalización política. Yo he llegado a la revolución por el evangelio. No fue por la lectura de Marx, sino por Cristo. Se puede decir que el evangelio me hizo marxista. (Schwarzer de Ruiz 15)
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> (In reality, I personally have become more political through a meditative life. Meditation, awareness, mysticism, has given me a political radicalization. I have become a revolutionary through the Gospel. It wasn't reading Marx, but Christ. One can say that the Gospel made me a Marxist.)

In this statement, Cardenal voices the fusion between Christian ideals of serving others and Marxist ideals of establishing a society based on equal production, contribution, and distribution of goods and wealth (Henighan).

The union between God and Socialism would further the creation of an "hombre nuevo" ("a new man"), described by Cardenal as "el hombre de una sociedad socialista [quien] vive en función de los demás, para servir a los demás […] [,] [sociedad] en la que el hombre ya no explota al hombre, en la que uno no vale por lo que quita, sino por lo que da a los demás" ("The man of a socialist society [who] lives as a function of others, to

serve others […] [,] a society in which man no longer exploits man, in which one no longer is valued by what one takes away, but by what one gives to others") (Schwarzer de Ruiz 15). In a 1974 publication of *El Ciervo*, under the title "El evangelio en Solentiname: Magnificat," Cardenal articulates the basis of his liberation theology: "[E]l pueblo no puede ser liberado por otros, él mismo es el que se libera. Dios sólo lo guía a la Tierra Prometida, pero es él el que tiene que ponerse en marcha"; "Si Dios está contra los poderosos tiene que estar entonces con los humildes"; "María ha cantado aquí la igualdad. Una sociedad sin clases sociales. Todos parejos" ("[T]he people can't be liberated by others, they liberate themselves. God only guides them to the Promised Land, but they are the ones who must start the march"; "If God is against those that are powerful he must then be with those that are poor"; "Maria sings here about equality. A society without social classes. Everyone equal") ("El evangelio" 7). Cardenal's politico-religious ideology is articulated through the foundation of the Solentiname community, and the establishment of its artistic dimension. Members of the community created and sold crafts, such as oil paintings, pottery, and wood carvings of turtles and fish. The money generated by the crafts was redistributed into the community as a supplement to income generated by agricultural practices. Cardenal's fictional avatar explains to Cortázar's avatar that "la venta de las pinturas ayudaba a tirar adelante […]" ("The sale of the paintings helped us keep going") (Schwarzer de Ruiz 14; "Solentiname" 98).[16]

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[16] During Ernesto Cardenal's time in Antioquia, Colombia, he came into contact with liberation theology through Colombian priest Camilo Torres. Soon after, in 1965, Cardenal was ordained a priest in Nicaragua and by 1966 had founded his religious community with the help of family donations and with Rome's approval. Stephen Henighan notes that Cardenal's monastery was "unconventional" and he became known as a "radical theologian." Cardenal viewed Solentiname as a utopian community that reflected the future of Nicaragua. During his 1970s visit to Cuba, Cardenal affirmed his

In "Apocalipsis de Solentiname" the paintings that catch the fictional Cortázar's attention and which he eagerly photographs are precisely those created by the Solentiname community founded by Cardenal. These paintings and their descriptions are crucial to the plot and to the understanding of how the photographic medium is deployed within the textual narrative, as these paintings will be photographically reproduced by Cortázar's fictional avatar who praises their aesthetic beauty:

> […] [T]odas tan hermosas, una vez más la visión primera del mundo, la mirada limpia del que describe su entorno como un canto de alabanza: vaquitas enanas en prados de amapola, la choza de azúcar de donde va saliendo la gente como hormigas, el caballo de ojos verdes contra un fondo de cañaverales, el bautismo en una iglesia que no cree en la perspectiva y se trepa o se cae sobre sí misma, el lago con botecitos como zapatos y en último plano un pez enorme que ríe con labios de color turquesa. ("Solentiname" 98)
>
> ([A]ll so beautiful, once again the vision of the world as if seeing it for the first time, the pure gaze that describes their surroundings like a song of praise: tiny cows in a meadow of poppies, the sugar hut from which people exit like ants, the horse with green eyes against the sugar fields, the baptism in a church that doesn't

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commitment to the leftist revolution and his position as a socialist. Henighan identifies Cardenal's *En Cuba* (1972) as the "sustaining support for Castro among Latin American intellectuals and students in the face of public denunciations by influential former allies such as Mario Vargas Llosa and Carlos Fuentes." While he continued to be a radical theologian, he did adhere to his non-violence approach to the revolution within an increasingly violent regime under Somoza. Upon the radicalization of his community and the sustained articulation of a liberation theology practice, Pope John Paul II suspended Cardenal from administering the sacraments, whereupon Cardenal turned to his writing. It was not until 2014 that his suspension was revoked by Pope Francis (Henighan).

> believe in perspective and climbs and falls over itself, the lake with little boats that look like shoes and in the background an enormous fish that smiles with turquoise-colored lips.)

The character's description highlights the idyllic and romantic elements of the paintings and is devoid of any element that might link the artistic representation to the political atmosphere of the time. The way in which the representation is constructed evokes a biblical moment of creation; the "visión primera" ("first look") and "mirada limpia" ("pure gaze") suggest a landscape that remains pure and edenic, absent from sin.

Through the political and historical contextualization of the fictional-historical narrative, the romanticized representations of the Latin American landscape are revealing. Focusing on the paintings and the beauty they depict in and of themselves, we can interpret them as visual emblems of the leftist revolution that sought to reestablish democratic politics, in "aquel casi paraíso de Solentiname" ("the almost paradise of Solentiname") (Cardenal, "Lo que fue" 25). Nonetheless, these paintings are more revealing when we focus on what is not within the visual representation, the political violence that is not depicted. These paintings are devoid of elements that might suggest or refer to the political oppression and violence that is being experienced in Nicaragua or Latin America. As a result, we might suggest that if the paintings do not depict the lived experience, the truth of such experience lives outside of the frame. These paintings, then, effectively enact a fracture in the link between visual representation and reality, which will later inform the relationship between the photographic representations of the paintings.

While the paintings that appear in the story do not represent the political environment, Cortázar's fictional character is aware of the extra-artistic political reality and makes mention of it within the textual narrative. As Cortázar's avatar describes a typical Sunday in the community of Solentiname, he brings to the reader's attention the politics that surround what seems like a tranquil morning:

> Al otro día era domingo y misa de once, la misa de Solentiname en la que los campesinos y Ernesto y los amigos de visita comentan juntos un capítulo del evangelio que ese día era el arresto de Jesús en el huerto, un tema que la gente de Solentiname trataba como si hablaran de ellos mismos, de la amenaza de que les cayeran en la noche o en pleno día, esa vida en permanente incertidumbre de las islas y de la tierra firme y de toda Nicaragua y no solamente de toda Nicaragua sino de casi toda América Latina, vida rodeada de miedo y de muerte, vida de Guatemala y vida de El Salvador, vida de la Argentina y de Bolivia, vida de Chile y de Santo Domingo, vida del Paraguay, vida de Brasil y de Colombia. ("Solentiname" 99)
>
> (The next day was Sunday and the eleven o'clock mass, the mass in Solentiname in which all the farmers and Ernesto and his friends who are visiting comment together on a chapter from the gospel, which on that day was about Jesus's arrest in the garden, a topic that the people in Solentiname regarded as if they were speaking about themselves, the threat of being attacked at night or in broad daylight, that life of permanent uncertainty on the islands and the mainland and all of Nicaragua and not only Nicaragua but almost all of Latin America, life surrounded by fear and death, life in Guatemala and life in El Salvador, life in

> Argentina and Bolivia, life in Chile and Santo Domingo, life in Paraguay, life in Brazil and Colombia.)

While we can initially approach "Apocalipsis de Solentiname" as a fictionalized personal anecdote that tells the story of the author's trip to Solentiname during the Anastasio Somoza Debayle military regime, the dimensions of the story quickly expand in this textual meditation from local (Solentiname) to national (Nicaragua) to regional (Latin America), in a mapping of loci that are experiencing levels of cold war violence. Given that Cortázar's fictional avatar has an understanding of the violence that dominates the political field of Latin America, the way in which he is drawn into the paintings suggests that their appeal is due to the fact that they are *not* visual representations of politics. The narrator seems to be drawn to the pureness and sweetness of the landscapes he sees in the paintings, visions that are untainted by violence. The paintings are removed and detached from political history, affording the spectator a relief from politics.

As Cortázar's fictional avatar undertakes the long return trip to Paris, he stops in Costa Rica and Havana, Cuba, where, he casually notes, "anduve por ahí haciendo cosas" ("I walked around doing stuff") ("Solentiname" 100). Once in Paris, Cortázar is wandering the streets of the "Barrio Latino" when he recalls the camera films that his partner, Claudine, had dropped off to develop. He picks them up and, eager to experience once again the paintings of Solentiname ("era grato pensar que todo volvería a darse poco a poco" ["It was nice to think that everything would happen again little by little"]), he sets up the slide projector and makes himself a drink ("Solentiname" 101). As he prepares to watch the slides an internal debate commences:

> […] después de los cuadritos de Solentiname empezaría a pasar las cajas con las fotos cubanas, pero por qué los cuadritos primero, por qué la deformación profesional, el arte antes que la vida, y por qué no, le dijo el otro a éste en su eterno indesarmable diálogo fraterno y rencoroso, por qué no mirar primero las pinturas de Solentiname si también son la vida, si todo es lo mismo. (“Solentiname” 101)
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> ([…] after the little paintings of Solentiname the pictures of Cuba would follow, but why the small paintings first, why the professional deformation, art before life, and why not, the other said to him in his eternal rigid dialogue, fraternal and resentful, why not look at the paintings from Solentiname first if they are also life, if everything is the same.)

The internal debate, we can presume, is between a Cortázar who engages with aesthetics as pleasure (and thus detached from politics) and a Cortázar who is aware of the political environment that is at play within Latin America, the latter being linked to the photographs taken in Cuba. We can assume through the dichotomy he establishes between the Cuban photographs and the Solentiname photographs, that the images taken in Cuba expose the political aspect of the region, making them representations of reality itself—in keeping with the prescriptive aesthetics that the real-life Cortázar disavowed, yet clearly continues to negotiate in this story—conversely positioning the Solentiname photographs as images of pleasure. Cortázar’s aesthetic inner self scolds his political inner self, affirming that the aesthetic photographs “también son la vida” (“they are also life”), resolutely casting the photographs of the paintings as a valid perspective on life. The other persona, the political inner self, fights back and claims that these photographs

of paintings are simply art, a “deformación profesional” (“professional deformation”) of apolitical life. Ultimately, Cortázar, dispirited, ends the inner conversation with a simple “si todo es lo mismo” (“if everything is the same”). This tone of resignation links back to Cortázar’s position, previously discussed, as a Latin American leftist intellectual, struggling to resolve the union between his own literary aesthetics and leftist ideological commitment. Further, and most importantly, this tone of despair is also significant for a greater understanding of how photographic aesthetic emerges within this narrative text. By dismissing in its totality this internal struggle between aesthetic freedom and political commitment, the narrator is also effectively dismissing the Manichean relationship between art as aesthetic and not politically engaged in contrast to the documentary images that expose politics.

Cortázar’s fictional avatar’s internal debate engages with a historical conversation regarding the status of aesthetics, linked either to pleasure or to politics (the latter type of aesthetic being circumscribed to the documentary image). Roland Barthes, in his 1973 *Pleasure of the Text*, makes a distinction between two types of texts: the text of *plaisir* (pleasure) and the text of *jouissance* (bliss). For Barthes, the pleasurable text is a text that “comes from culture and does not break with it, is linked to a *comfortable* practice of reading” (*Pleasure of* 14). The *jouissance* text “imposes a state of loss, the text that discomforts […], unsettles the reader’s historical, cultural, psychological assumptions, the consistency of his tastes, values, memories […]” (Barthes, *Pleasure of* 14). This distinction is in direct conversation with the complacency of bourgeois culture:

> I am interested in language because it wounds or seduces me. Can that be a class eroticism? What class? The bourgeoisie? The bourgeoisie has no relish for

> language, which it no longer regards even as a luxury, an element of the art of living […], but merely as an instrument of décor […]. (*Pleasure of* 38)

This recalls the distinction made by Cortázar in *Rayuela* between the "lector cómplice" ("reader as accomplice"), open to being alienated, surprised, and transformed, versus the "lector-hembra" ("female-reader") that is intrigued by the pleasurable aesthetic of the text. What is significant about these analogous distinctions proposed by Barthes and Cortázar is their polar political homologization with right-wing bourgeoisie ideology and leftist revolutionary commitment.[17] The *jouissance* text and the "lector cómplice" have a leftist revolutionary commitment to dismantling the naturalized images of the bourgeoisie, in turn represented by the "lector-hembra," that is only intrigued by the text of *plaisir*—that is, by pleasurable aesthetics.

When Cortázar's fictional character sees the paintings in Solentiname, he engages with them at an aesthetic level, as a consumer of art, and this is why the fictional Cardenal calls him a "ladrón de cuadros, contrabandista de imágenes" ("painting thief, smuggler of images"). By engaging with the images at an aesthetic level, he is evincing a bourgeois approach to art. This engagement with bourgeois culture is only reaffirmed upon the fictional Cortázar's return to Paris where his partner Claudine awaits him at the

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[17] In Barthes's earlier work, *Mythologies* (1957), he explores the "ideological abuse" he identifies within the naturalization of culture and history by the bourgeoisie (*Mythologies* II, 131). While bourgeois ideology is concerned with myth-making, the job of the revolutionary left is to create a counter discourse, a politicized speech that dismantles right-wing myth-making. Barthes notes that "Revolution is defined as a cathartic act meant to reveal the political load of the world, it *makes* the world […] The bourgeoisie hides the fact that it is the bourgeoisie and thereby produces myth; revolution announces itself openly as revolution and thereby abolishes myth" (*Mythologies* 146).

airport. Nostalgic upon his return, after having been away for two months, he defines his lifestyle as a series of bourgeois attributes that he again takes up:

> […] de vuelta a París con un cansancio lleno de nostalgia, Claudine calladita esperándome en Orly, otra vez la vida de reloj pulsera y merci monsieur, bonjour madame, los comités, los cines, el vino tinto y Claudine, los cuartetos de Mozart y Claudine. ("Solentiname" 100)
>
> ([…] back in Paris with an exhaustion filled with nostalgia, Claudine quietly waiting for me at Orly, once again the wrist watches and merci monsieur, bonjour madame, the committees, the movie theaters, the red wine and Claudine, Mozart's quartets and Claudine.)

Paris is articulated as a bourgeois center characterized in the same vein as an aesthetics of pleasure: enjoying films, wine, and classical music. In opposition to this bourgeois center, Latin America and Solentiname are positioned as the geographical locus of the left whose commitment to revolution aims to dismantle the bourgeois approach to aesthetics. Cortázar's fictional self attempts to bring the photographs that he has taken of the small paintings of Solentiname into the apolitical logic of bourgeois pleasure, but there is a plot twist that destabilizes if not completely ruptures Cortázar's avatar's expectations. Rather than seeing the romantic idealization of Latin America in his photographs, the images of beauty are replaced by images of violence.

Some consideration of the truth-value associated with the photograph is helpful in order to understand this twist and its political import. Cortázar's fictional avatar's act of photographing the paintings in Solentiname alludes to the photographic capacity for imprinting a real referent into a photographic frame, the photographic image therefore

being possessed of truth value for being reflective of reality. After observing the paintings and noting the brightness of the colors in the afternoon light ("la luz delirante de mediodía" ["the delirious midday light"]), Cortázar's fictional avatar carefully photographs each painting: "Sergio que llegaba me ayudó a tenerlos parados en la buena luz, *y de uno en uno los fui fotografiando con cuidado, centrando de manera que cada cuadro ocupara enteramente el visor*" ("Sergio arrived and helped me hold them straight up in the good light, *and one by one I photographed them carefully, centering them in a way that each painting filled completely the viewfinder*") ("Solentiname" 99; emphasis added). The act of carefully filling the photographic frame with each painting is a nod towards the weight given to photography as a medium that can reproduce reality and, in this instance, reproduce beauty. Through this careful process of photographic reproduction, Cortázar's act is parallel to that of consuming, despite his political awareness. When Cortázar's avatar tells Cardenal's fictional character about his having photographed each painting, Cardenal laughs and calls him a "ladrón de cuadros, contrabandista de imágenes" ("painting thief, smuggler of images") ("Solentiname" 99-100). Cardenal's fictional character's reaction marks Cortázar as a consumer, engaging with the photographs for their aesthetic appeal rather than with a conscience of the politics at hand (Jaffe 23).

While Cortázar's avatar's act of photographing seems to affirm the direct link between photographic image and referent, the character himself is drawn to what he considers the elusive nature of photography, which complicates this seemingly organic relationship between the photographic image and what it represents. The first mention of photography in "Apocalipsis" registers Cortázar's fascination with instant cameras,

specifically, the way in which the photograph is taken and then the image almost magically appears; “[...] una cámara de esas que dejan salir ahí nomás un papelito celeste que poco a poco y maravillosamente y polaroid se va llenando de imágenes paulatinas […] me llenaban de asombro” (“[…] one of those cameras that release a light blue paper which little by little and marvelously and polaroid fills gradually with images [...] filled me with amazement”) (“Solentiname” 97). The part of the process that fascinates the character is the moment when the image slowly appears on paper: “Primero extoplasmas inquietantes y poco a poco una nariz, un pelo crespo, la sonrisa de Ernesto con su vincha nazarena” (“First, unsettling ectoplasms and then, little by little, a nose, a curly hair, Ernesto’s smile with his Nazarene headband”) (“Solentiname” 97). Cortázar’s avatar suggests the possibility that, in the moment of transition from pressing the button and the image’s appearance, instead of the photographed referent appearing, a completely different image appears instead in its place: “Qué pasaría si alguna vez después de una foto de familia el papelito celeste de la nada empezara a llenarse con Napoleón a caballo” (“What would happen if after taking a family photo the light blue paper, out of nowhere, would start to fill in with Napoleon on horseback”) (“Solentiname” 97).

One way that we might read this playful question is as a more serious suggestion by Cortázar’s avatar that within a photograph there is an unexpected internal level of meaning that does not appear at first glance. The significance of using the image of Napoleon on horseback as an example of that internal meaning that comes unexpectedly to the fore is twofold. First, this image can be productively understood as shorthand for a dual set of meaning: while Napoleon Bonaparte’s visual representations are connotative of the liberal ideals disseminated through the Western world during the French

Revolution, *liberté*, *égalité*, and *fraternité*, these representations articulate a mythic version of Napoleon that do not articulate the authoritarian and politically violent regime that he founded (Hazareesingh; Lefebvre). Secondly, in the same way that Napoleon's classically pleasing image and the ideals it connotes bear an "under"-history of violence, Cortázar's use of this image to represent the emergence of an unexpected referent foreshadows the replacement of the pleasurable images of the Solentiname paintings with images of political violence.

Cortázar's questioning of the neat relationship between photographic image and referent is not anomalous; contemporaneous twentieth-century art and photography theory posits a clear rupture in this relationship. Susan Sontag, in *On Photography* (1977), and Roland Barthes, in *Camera Lucida* (1980), echo this concern, focusing on the intricate relationship between representation and referent that has historically been held up as the source of the photograph's truth value. On one level, both Sontag and Barthes subscribe to the photograph's capacity for truth value. Sontag states that "photographs furnish evidence" in that they show us things "as-they-are" or what we have not seen in plain sight. Similarly, Barthes affirms that a "specific photograph, in effect, is never distinguished from its referent" (Sontag 5, 119; Barthes, *Camera* 5). These approaches establish the photographic image as fundamentally attached to its referent.

Yet both Sontag and Barthes complicate this relationship between image and referent in a way that echoes Cortázar's imagined revelation of the ostensibly unphotographed "Napoleón a caballo" within the photographic frame. While Sontag and Barthes do not go so far as to imagine the appearance of an unphotographed referent, they do essentially make the same query on a more abstract level by questioning the status of

photography as a conveyer of truth. While neither suggests that what we see in the photographic image is not true, both, nevertheless, do consider how photography can paradoxically show truth while concealing it. Sontag notes, for example, how "[…] the camera's rendering of reality must always hide more than it discloses" (23). Barthes examines the two levels of meaning produced within the photographic image through his theorization of the *studium* and the *punctum*. Barthes suggests that while the image itself is imbued with cultural meaning, the *studium*, the *punctum* is what establishes a fundamental emotional reaction in the spectator. The *punctum*, as he describes it, is the "sting, speck, cut, little hole—and also a cast of the dice. A photograph's *punctum* is that accent which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)" (27). For Barthes, whereas "the *studium* is ultimately always coded, the punctum is not" (51). The *punctum,* the spectator's emotional experience, serves as an access point into the internal level of meaning within an image.

The theorization of photography by Sontag and Barthes gives us two ideas that are consonant with "Apocalipsis de Solentiname": first, both writers conceive of two systems of meaning within the photographic frame—the visible surface-level meaning and the deeper unseen and even felt meaning—and both problematize the relationship between image and referent as a question of the capacity of aesthetic composition (what is at the surface of the image, the representation itself) to convey truth (the referent). Barthes describes our initial connection to an image as an aesthetic attraction: "*I like/I don't like*" (27). Sontag is also quick to note that "nobody ever discovered ugliness through photographs, but many, through photographs, have discovered beauty" (85). In both instances, the aesthetic aspect of the photograph is what is found explicitly on the

surface. In Sontag's view, the fact that photography cultivates an awareness of aesthetics becomes problematic, given that it promotes emotional detachment from reality (111). She further suggests that the "camera's ability to transform reality into something beautiful derives from its relative weakness as a means of conveying truth," meaning that there is an inverse relationship between the aesthetic aspect of the image and its capacity to convey truth (112). Ultimately, both Sontag and Barthes view the aesthetic value of the photographic representation as suspect in the sense that it tends towards an eclipsing of any truth which the photographic representation might possess, this truth having an important political value. Both critics suggest that it is only by placing the aesthetic value into question that the viewer can access truth at a level of underlying meaning.

By destabilizing the direct correlation between photographic representation and truth, a space opens to allow this second level of meaning to come to light. Returning to Cortázar's avatar in "Apocalipsis de Solentiname," it is upon his return to Paris that he gains access to the secondary system of meaning that is foreshadowed by the mention of the imaginary referent of "Napoleón a caballo." Cortázar's avatar prepares his surroundings so he can comfortably enjoy his slide show and relive the aesthetic experience that he had in Solentiname: "armé la pantalla […] [y] el proyector con su cargador listo y su botón de telecomando" ("I put together the screen […] and prepared the projector with its carrousel and remote") ("Solentiname" 101). Once he starts the slide show, slowly passing from one photograph to another to enjoy each image in its entirety, he is taken aback by what he sees in front of him. As he clicks through the slides, admiring the "pequeño mundo frágil de Solentiname rodeado de agua" ("small, fragile world of Solentiname, surrounded by water"), he is surprised and confused by the

image that appears before him, that of a man whose body, moving forward, is collapsing due to the bullet that is going through his forehead:

> "[U]na cara ancha y lisa como llena de incrédula sorpresa mientras su cuerpo se vencía hacia adelante, el agujero nítido en mitad de la frente, la pistola del oficial marcando todavía la trayectoria de la bala, los otros a los lados con las metralletas, un fondo confuso de casas y de árboles." ("Solentiname" 101-02) ("[A] wide and smooth face, filled with incredulous surprise, as his body dropped forward, the clearly-defined hole in the middle of his forehead, the official's gun still marking the bullet's trajectory, the others off to the side next to the machine guns, a confusing background with houses and trees.")

Instead of the idyllic landscape of Latin America, what appears onscreen are images of violence, provoking a strong physical reaction in the spectator.

For Cortázar's fictional character, his "Napoleón a caballo" emerges as a series of scenes that are linked to state violence in Latin America. As he is unable to stop clicking through the slides, the images appear continuously onscreen, evoking a filmic sequence. Cortázar's fictional character describes these scenes in detail:

> Tampoco mi mano obedecía cuando apretó el botón […] gente amontonada a la izquierda mirando los cuerpos tendidos boca arriba, sus brazos abiertos contra un cielo desnudo y gris; había que fijarse mucho para distinguir en el fondo al grupo uniformado de espaldas y yéndose […] dos mujeres queriendo refugiarse detrás de un camión estacionado […] una cara de incredulidad horrorizada [ …] la mesa con la muchacha desnuda boca arriba y el pelo colgándole hasta el suelo, la sombra de espaldas metiéndole un cable entre las piernas abiertas, los dos tipos de

> frente hablando entre ellos, una corbata azul y un pull-over verde. ("Solentiname" 101-03)
>
> (My hand stopped obeying as it pressed the button […] on the left, people piled up, looking at the bodies lying face up, their arms open against the grey naked sky; one had to look closely to distinguish in the background the group in uniform facing the other way and leaving […] two women wanting to find refuge behind a parked truck […] the table with the naked girl facing up and her hair falling down to the floor, the backward-facing silhouette inserting a cable between her open legs, the two guys facing forward speaking between themselves, a blue tie and a green sweater.)

The fictional character continues inventorying the images he sees projected onscreen, linking them to the broader region of Latin America. As Cortázar narrates the images in front of him, he mentions Bolivia, Guatemala, Buenos Aires, and São Paulo, a geographical catalog that challenges the borders of representation of the photograph by creating images that represent multiple referents despite having been taken exclusively in Solentiname: "y alcancé a ver un auto que volaba en pedazos en pleno centro de una ciudad que podía ser Buenos Aires o São Paulo," "caras ensangrentadas y pedazos de cuerpos y carreras de mujeres y de niños por una ladera boliviana o guatemalteca" ("and I managed to see a car blowing up into pieces in the middle of a city that could be Buenos Aires or São Paulo," "bleeding faces and body parts and women and children running on a Bolivian or Guatemalan hillside") (103). Each referent, in this case, is a site where the state is guilty of violent acts against the civil population—during the 1970's, Bolivia, Guatemala, Argentina, and Brazil experienced the establishment of military regimes, a

product of the anticommunist ideologies that dominated world politics at the time and which sought to combat leftist ideologies through authoritarian regimes, resulting in widespread repression and violence (Galván; Dávila; Klein; Levine; Levine and Crocitti; Pozzi and Pérez; Ferreira; Grandin and Levenson; Torre). Cortázar's fictional character is overcome by physical discomfort as he sees these images of violence: "todo era un solo nudo desde la garganta hasta las uñas de los pies […] en el baño creo que vomité, o solamente lloré y después vomité" ("Everything was one lump from my throat to the nails on my toes […] in the bathroom I think I threw up, or I only cried and then threw up") ("Solentiname" 104). What unsettles the spectator is the viewing of an implicit truth that beauty has concealed at plain sight—the aesthetically beautiful images that Cortázar's fictional avatar photographed back in Solentiname transform into images of political violence that constitute the underlying contextual reality of the paintings themselves.

Our deepest understanding of "Apocalipsis en Solentiname" demands our conceptual transcendence of the opposition between aesthetics (as apolitical) and the politics of photography. As Emerling astutely notes, an approach that can think of the visual image as not one that is merely "means for a socio-political commentary or, conversely, […] remaking the image a fetish, [ …] would necessitate a reassessment of aesthetics as a multiplicity of local, *interruptive* affects created by imagery in order to think the image as an event" (38; emphasis added). Similar to Bertolt Brecht's alienation effect, intended to denaturalize the experience of the spectator from the aesthetic and produce the highest political consciousness of its content, photography in "Apocalipsis de Solentiname" likewise divorces the spectator from the seductive aesthetic value of the image: Cortázar can no longer contemplate the idyllic images of the Latin American

landscape, but is instead made aware that the photographs he took were merely an aesthetic gesture, and that he must then engage with the political sphere.[18] Nevertheless, before arriving at this political awareness, it is precisely his attraction to the beauty of the paintings that leads him to capture the idyllic painted scenes through the photographic image: "Allá [en París] los proyectaré en mi pantalla y serán más grandes y más brillantes que éstos, jódete" ("[Back in Paris] I'll project them on my screen and they will be bigger and brighter than these, screw you") ("Solentiname" 100). Photography offers the possibility of capturing, reproducing, and circulating the beauty of the paintings as well as, and most importantly for the main character, magnifying that beauty. Interestingly, it is not until the paintings are photographed that the spectator gains access to the political aesthetics that are imbedded within the frame; the external and internal meaning within the photograph work in conjunction to generate a powerful political message.

Cortázar's fictional avatar's tone of despair ("si todo es lo mismo" ["if everything is the same"]) effectively collapses the Manichean approach to aesthetics and politics that the text itself is struggling to reconcile. As mentioned above, in real life, Cortázar was struggling to make this same reconciliation between his own writing style and his political commitment, a relationship that was the stuff of critique along the political

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[18] In his essay "Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting," Brecht theorizes his alienation effect: "the efforts in question were directed to playing in such a way that the audience was hindered from simply identifying itself with the characters in the play. Acceptance or rejection of their actions and utterances was meant to take place on a conscious plane, instead of, as hitherto, in the audience's subconscious" (91). The play itself purposefully alienates the spectator so that he or she does not establish an emotional connection to the play. Rather, by reminding the spectator of the artificiality of the play, the play's objective is to produce in him/her a consciousness of reality. This works in opposition to bourgeois theater, which "emphasized the timelessness of its objects. Its representation of people is bound by the alleged 'eternally human'" (Brecht 96).

spectrum: "[a]t their most extreme, those on the Right accused him of betraying his bourgeois roots, while those on the Left attacked his intellectualism and demanded that he write in the demotic" (Standish 12). The transformation of pleasurable images into violent images might be understood as an expression of the internalization of this divide between aesthetics and politics. While Cortázar's fictional self is engaging with the images as an aesthetic of pleasure, upon viewing the photographs on a screen the Cortázar who is politically engaged can no longer deny his political consciousness and his commitment to the left, despite his disillusionment with the Cuban Revolution.

This internal relationship with the dual levels of photographic meaning is further emphasized by its absence in Cortázar's partner Claudine. As noted above, Claudine is part of the Parisian bourgeois society in which Cortázar mingles. As the violent images that Cortázar's fictional self is watching come to an end, Claudine arrives and asks Cortázar's fictional character if she may see the images, inquiring whether he has liked them. Unable to speak, he simply restarts the slide show, sits her down in a chair, and exits the room to make her a drink, incapable of experiencing the violent images once again or of seeing Claudine's reaction. To his surprise, he does not hear Claudine, or the expected cry. On the contrary, the apartment is overcome by silence. As he enters the living room, Claudine has just finished going through the sequence and simply turns off the projector, happily telling him, "Qué bonitas te salieron, esa del pescado que se ríe y la madre con los dos niños y las vaquitas en el campo; espera, y esa otra del bautismo en la iglesia, decime quién los pintó, no se ven las firmas" ("They are so pretty, the one with the smiling fish and the mother with the two children and the small cows in the field; wait, and that other one of the communion in the church, tell me who painted them, you

can't see the signature") ("Solentiname" 104). Cortázar's avatar remains silent, and ends his story by invoking Napoleon:

> No le iba a decir nada, qué le podía decir ahora, pero me acuerdo que pensé vagamente en preguntarle una idiotez, preguntarle si en algún momento no había visto una foto de Napoleón a caballo. Pero no se lo pregunté, claro. ("Solentiname" 104-05)
>
> (I wasn't going to tell her anything, what could I tell her now, but I remember that I vaguely thought in asking her a stupidity, ask her if at any moment she had seen a picture of Napoleon on horse. But I didn't ask her, of course.)

Claudine and Cortázar's fictional avatar do not share the same experience. Claudine enjoys the aesthetics of the photographs, and, seemingly oblivious to the political aspect of his trip abroad, only voices curiosity about the authors of the paintings. The fact that Claudine is concerned only with not being able to see the signatures on the paintings emphasizes her detachment from the political aspect of the image and establishes her as representative of the Parisian bourgeois cultural approach to aesthetics, unable to see the political violence that Cortázar's avatar has just beheld or even to understand the power of the collective (rather than the individual) that lies behind the paintings. Cortázar, for his part, despite his intention to engage with the photograph strictly on the level of pleasure, cannot elude his leftist Latin American intellectual consciousness. His confusion at Claudine's apparent experience of pleasure without violence leads him to dismissively contemplate his own notion of "Napoleón a caballo" as a stupidity ("una idiotez") but even so he lingers in his internal tug-of-war between aesthetics and politics.

In “Apocalipsis de Solentiname,” photography is the medium that retains the truth of Cortázar’s commitment, albeit conflicted, as a Latin American intellectual. Cortázar’s fictional avatar, as the photographs of violence that unravel before him prove, cannot remain a “lector-hembra” (“female-reader”), a reader that engages with a text as a source of pleasure, remaining at arm’s length from the political violence that surrounds him. The short story becomes the manifestation of Cortázar’s struggle to reconcile his modernist aesthetic style and the complexities of his socio-political commitment to the left as an author disillusioned with the Cuban Revolution and aware of oppressive military regimes being established in the Latin American region. As he negotiates his own politics, Cortázar’s avatar wavers on his commitment when he is attracted to the aesthetic beauty of the Solentiname paintings, defending until the last moment his decision to revel in the pleasure of the photograph; brought into Nicaragua so he could put his “nombre, prestigio y solidaridad a servicio de la lucha contra Somoza” (“name, prestige, and solidarity at the service to the fight against Somoza”), Cortázar’s avatar, despite his knowledge of the political violence that surrounds him, is interested in photographing and taking with him a piece of Solentiname for his own pleasure (Battista). Yet despite his efforts to maintain an aesthetic relationship with the photographs of the paintings, these same photographs retain the truth of his consciousness, which is aware of the leftist truth of the paintings themselves, the promise of a landscape not overtaken by political violence, and the truth of that violence, which surrounds the artistic community as a constant threat. The photographs, as a result of retaining the integrity of the leftist project, become the medium for the political truth to come to the fore in the form of a hidden violence, while at the same time retaining the beauty of the image which is the manifestation of a

different perspective, still meaningful and revealing, the beauty of a political utopia that may be a source of pleasure. The photograph itself becomes the "lector cómplice" ("reader as accomplice"), the committed medium that embodies the consciousness of the left in revealing both beauty and violence.

Up to this point, I have traced the importance of photography within "Apocalipsis de Solentiname," focusing on how the medium is used within the text to pose questions about the relationship between photographic aesthetics and politics in Latin America. While certainly commenting on the complexity of photographic representation—the elusive character of the referent when captured by the photographic camera—Cortázar is also pointing towards the importance of film within the creation of visual representations, politics, and aesthetics. Returning to that moment in "Apocalipsis" when Cortázar's fictional avatar prepares himself to sit and project the slides onto a screen, I view the narrative description that follows as a sequence of moving images, similar to that of a filmic sequence or montage.

When the fictional character sits to watch the slide show, he quickly realizes that the bucolic images have been replaced by gruesome images of violence and cannot stop clicking through them: "lo único posible era seguir apretando el botón," "seguí apretando y apretando el botón entre ráfagas de caras ensagrentadas y pedazos de cuerpos" ("The only thing possible was to continue to press the button," "I kept pressing and pressing between bursts of bleeding faces and body parts"). The images are on a constant thread of movement, as is evident when Cortázar claims that "nunca supe si seguía apretando o no el botón" ("I never knew if I continued pressing the button or not") ("Solentiname" 103-03). The continuous movement from one slide to another, combined with the consecutive

use of verbs in the present progressive within the description, reminds us of photographer Eadweard Muybridge's *The Horse in Motion* (1878): through the consecutive play of pictures of a moving horse, the viewer's eye is tricked into creating one moving image.[19] Within this historical-fictional and magical literary space, Cortázar's text points towards the link between photography and film, demonstrating the striking power of moving pictures.

This is not the first time that Cortázar connects photography and film. In his earlier story, "Las babas del diablo" ("The Devil's Drool"), published in the compilation *Las armas secretas* (*Secret Weapons*; 1959), Cortázar, while exploring the limits of text and visuality, incorporates the same play of photography as a magical medium that transforms meaning and evokes the moving image. In "Las babas del diablo," the main character, Roberto Michel, is both a translator and a photographer in Paris. The narrator describes Michel as "culpable de literatura, de fabricaciones irreales" ("guilty of literature, of unreal fabrications") (156). Against the backdrop of a text that operates as a source of fictional narratives, photography emerges in this story as a medium through which to reach truth, a truth, however, that is questioned throughout. While taking pictures around the city, Michel photographs a man and woman in a park. Back at home, he develops the film and cannot stop looking at the image, to the degree of placing his desk with his typewriter in front of the enlarged photograph at the same distance at which he photographed it in the park. As he obsessively stares at the image, suddenly the

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[19] In "Explanation of an optical deception in the appearance of the spokes of a wheel when seen through vertical apertures," Peter Mark Roget speaks of the capacity of the human eye to retain an image for a second after it has passed. This means that through the persistence of vision, the eye can create a moving image when shown a consecutive set of images. For more details, see Joseph Anderson and Barbara Fisher (1978).

elements that have been photographed (the park, man, woman) come to life and recreate the events of that day as if in a clip from a film. The filmic recreation of the events of that day unveil a truth that Michel had not seen while he was taking the photograph or once the photograph was developed. Photography, then, is a bearer of truth in as much as it reveals a reality that the naked eye cannot see. This photographic eye and gaze are fundamental to the story. As Michel photographs the scene at the park with the man and woman, he believes he is just taking a picturesque image with an ordinary couple. Although he feels that the scene has an “aura inquietante” (“unsettling aura”), the narrator notes: “Pensé que eso lo ponía yo, y que mi foto, si la sacaba, restituiría las cosas a su tonta verdad” (“I thought that I was adding that, and that the photograph, if I took it, would reinstate things to their silly truth”) (“Babas” 155). Yet the photograph contains and ultimately reveals—in the approximation of filmic form—an unseen truth: Michel has in fact photographed a violent scene of an unconcluded murder that he interrupted in the act of photographing the scene back in the park; the photograph is presented as a filter through which the spectator can access reality, a reality that the world itself obscures to the naked eye.

Walter Benjamin’s canonical essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1936) best exemplifies the revolving discussions around photography and film in relation to ideological warfare. The World War II period during which the essayist writes shapes his approach to filmic and photographic reproduction, since propaganda via film and photo collages were prominent in the spread of fascist ideologies. Benjamin explores the element of reproducibility of both media, a defining characteristic of both, which alters the relationship between the masses and art. One of his main concerns is the

use of film as a powerful political tool among the masses, as he notes, "[…] the film industry is trying hard to spur the interest of the masses through illusion-promoting spectacles and dubious speculations" (232). Considering the power of film and its reproducibility, Benjamin is ultimately exploring within his text the dangerous use of film by fascism. So, he proposes, if fascism is rendering politics as aesthetic, then "communism responds by politicizing art" (242). The notion of politicizing art becomes fundamental to the emerging aesthetic practices of photography, as a medium in its own right and in its manifestation in cinema.

Cortázar is writing during a time when Latin American cinema had already been established as a critical cultural vehicle through which to denounce political discontent, a circumstance that helps to explain why film is incorporated in his literary texts as a narrative tool. Historically, the Cuban Revolution marks a turning point in Latin America where politicized art resonates; with the first successful leftist triumph, tensions heightened between the U.S., the Soviet Union, and leftist governments. North American state fear of communism in South America and Europe and the rise of capitalism manifested as a twin phenomenon in Latin America. This combination of historical events created a cultural space in which Latin American aesthetics explored the position of Latin America within a rising capitalist structure and neocolonial processes.

In the 1960's Brazil, Cinema Novo (New Cinema) articulated a counter narrative to the established cinematic productions that created a romanticized notion of Brazil. One of the main representatives of this movement, Glauber Rocha, expressed the driving concepts of the movement in his manifesto "A Estética da Fome" ("An Aesthetic of Hunger") (1965). The manifesto's message revolves around *fome,* hunger, and its

manifestation at a social, political, and artistic level. For Rocha, Brazil's condition as a neocolony works to deprive the nation and its people of internal reflection of their very condition as such, perpetuating a self-ignorance that underwrites an exoticized view of Brazil from a foreign perspective and perpetuates Brazilian shame in accepting the cultural condition of neocolonization that shapes politics and aesthetics without articulating Brazil's *fome*. Cinema Novo proposes that rebellion and strength come from denouncing and highlighting hunger; this is the only way to reflect upon the Latin American condition that has led Brazilian political and cultural production into a "raquitismo filosófico e a impotencia" ("weakened philosophy and impotence"). Cinema Novo is fundamental, notes Rocha, precisely because of "seu alto nível de compromisso com a verdade, foi seu próprio miserabilismo, que, antes escrito pela literatura de '30, foi agora fotografado pelo cinema de '60; e, se antes era escrito como denúncia social, hoje passou a ser discutido como problema politico" ("its high level of commitment to the truth was its own misery, that, written before by literary movements in the 1930s, has now been photographed by film in the 1960s; and, if it was written before as a social denunciation, it continues to be discussed today as political issue").

Argentine cinema experienced a similar discontent with the established film industry. The 1969 art exhibit, Tucumán Arde, marked an artistic shift where artists pushed against the established art world that, from their perspective, was lacking political and social force and abided by bourgeois notions of art, censorship, and cultural colonialism. For Beatriz Sarlo, "es parte de lo que fue un movimiento de contestación social global, que conduce tanto a la crítica de las formas estéticas tradicionales como a la de las formas tradicionales de hacer política" ("it is part of what was a movement of

global social contestation, leading as much to criticism of traditional aesthetic forms as to traditional ways of doing politics") (King 59). The same year, 1969, filmmakers Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, members of *Grupo Liberación*, published the manifesto "Hacia un Tercer Cine" ("Towards a Third Cinema"). In this manifesto, the filmmakers expressed their discontent with the film industry by criticizing neocolonialism and capitalist structures (del Valle). The film *La hora de los hornos* (*The Hour of the Furnaces*; 1968) best exemplifies the notion of a revolutionary and socially activist cinema. In the opening credits the following text defines the film as a function of leftist politics: "Este film habla del neocolonialismo y la violencia cotidiana en la Argentina y por extensión, de los demás países del continente que aún no se han liberado, por ello, la exposición del tema no abarca a Cuba, primer territorio libre de América" ("This film speaks about neocolonialism and the everyday violence in Argentina and by extension, about the rest of the countries on this continent that still have not been freed, given which, the exposition of this topic does not include Cuba, the first free territory in America"). The textual message is explicit and the narration and images that follow sustain a revolutionary discourse.

The revelation of political violence through the appearance of a film-like sequence towards the end of "Apocalipsis de Solentiname," as a result, should be understood within the broader context of film within the Latin American landscape: Cinema Novo in Brazil, and Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano in the rest of Latin America. At the time the story was published, films were gaining momentum and power as a vehicle through which to articulate discontent by the political left. By integrating film, Cortázar concludes his short story with a medium that is different from, yet born of

photography, a medium we can consider an intensification of the static image through its movement.

*Conclusion*

In October 1977, a year after Cortázar wrote “Apocalipsis de Solentiname,” and the same year it was published in *Alguien que anda por ahí*, members of the Solentiname community participated in a Sandinista attack on the National Guard in San Carlos. The National Guard retaliated, resulting in Sandinistas being wounded, killed, arrested, and tortured (Henighan). The community of Solentiname was dismantled. In November of 1977, *El Ciervo* published a letter from Ernesto Cardenal titled “Lo que fue Solentiname.” The opening of the letter describes the evolution of the community from a community based on the union with God to one defined by a union between God and political commitment:

> Dios nos llevaba en primer lugar a la unión con los campesinos, muy pobres y abandonados. […] La contemplación también nos llevó después a un compromiso político: la contemplación nos llevó a la revolución; y así tenía que ser, si no, hubiera sido falsa. (24)
>
> (God guided us first in establishing a union with the farmers, poor and abandoned. […] After, contemplation guided us towards a political commitment: contemplation led us to the revolution; and it had to be that way because it would have otherwise been fake.)

With a tone of pride, Cardenal affirms his support for those who fought against the National Guard, actions viewed as a defense rather than an aggression in the face of

repression by the Somoza regime: “quisiéramos que no hubiera lucha en Nicaragua, pero eso no depende del pueblo oprimido que tan sólo se defiende” (“we wish that there were no uprising in Nicaragua, but that doesn’t depend on the oppressed people who only defend themselves”) (“Lo que fue” 25). Cardenal concludes his letter by highlighting how, once the vision of what Nicaragua could be, Solentiname and its destruction becomes a representation of the violence that has taken hold of the nation and to the work that still must be done in order for Nicaragua to realize its full potential: “Pienso en la tarea mucho más importante que tendremos todos, que es la reconstrucción del país entero” (“I think of the much more important task that we will all have, which is the reconstruction of the whole country”) (25). Cortázar’s “Apocalipsis de Solentiname” becomes an eerie foreshadowing of the collapse of the community of Solentiname, while at the same time turning into a symbol of the political decay of the Latin American region, riddled with military regimes engaged in human rights violations. The elements of warning in the title itself should not be overlooked; the word *apocalipsis*—apocalypse—is filled with notions of catastrophe, and the title reveals the future of Solentiname, the fragility of leftist ideology, and the violence of the right.[20]

“Apocalipsis de Solentiname” brings to the fore an ongoing and international discussion regarding aesthetics in relation to politics. Rather than defining aesthetics within a Manichean framework polarizing pleasure and politics, “Apocalipsis” proposes a

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[20] As the 1853 *Diccionario Nacional* of R. J. Domínguez defines it, “apocalipsis” is a “situación catastrófica, ocasionada por agentes naturales o humanos, que evoca la imagen de la destrucción total” (“catastrophic situation, resulting from natural or human agents, that evokes the image of total destruction”). The word *apocalipsis* also, of course, has a biblical sense of the end of days. Derived from the Greek *apokálypsis* meaning "unveiling" or "revelation,” it highlights the meaning of the *Book of Revelation*, where John describes a series of prophetic visions.

continuity between the two that the photograph makes possible. In the short story, the photograph is a medium that discloses truth, a truth outweighing the aesthetic aspect of the image. In this sense, there is no such thing as an aesthetic obscuring of reality because the photograph will always disclose the political truth, making its aesthetics bound to this truth. As demonstrated by Cortázar, the aesthetic of the Solentiname paintings are in fact representations of a Latin America as seen through the leftist revolution, positioning Solentiname as an example of the promise of the revolution of the left.

The promise of the left manifests itself in *Diarios de motocicleta* through the coming-of-age story of the young medical student Ernesto Guevara, who towards the beginning of the film has yet to discover the political, social, and economic realities of Latin America. As the journey of Ernesto and Alberto progresses throughout the film, socio-economic injustices unfold before them as they interact with the different people that they come across. Similar to what happens in the Cortázar story, the filmic photographs symbolize Ernesto's emerging political awareness that in turn contributes to the stripping away of his bourgeois shell. The filmic photographs of workers and farmers, individuals stripped of their land and denied access to education, depict the realities of Latin America and index the development of the political consciousness of Ernesto. Ultimately, in both *Diarios de motocicleta* and "Apocalipsis de Solentiname," photography, within this Latin American context, is shown to always hold the truth. Despite the effort to revel in beauty (as seen in Cortázar) or to sustain a peaceful obliviousness to reality (as in the young Ernesto), photography will reveal the inner structures of a political atmosphere that inflicts violence upon the civil population in Latin America.

# Chapter Three

## Photographing Citizenship:
## Daniel Burman's *Esperando al mesías* (*Waiting for the Messiah*; 2000) and Lucy Walker's *Lixo Extraordinário* (*Waste Land*; 2010)

In *Esperando al mesías* (*Waiting for the Messiah*; 2000), directed by Daniel Burman, and *Lixo Extraordinário* (*Waste Land*; 2010), directed by Lucy Walker, photography plays a key role within the filmic narrative as a medium through which to articulate and represent identity. The distinctive ways in which identity is constructed within the photographic representation and deployed within the film pose crucial questions regarding the position/role of the state vis-à-vis the assertion of citizenship within a neoliberal economic system. Through the appearance of photographic portraits, photography becomes the vehicle through which both directors shed light on the formulation of identity within a neoliberal economic system and the violence inflicted upon individuals that circulate within the state defined by this politico-economic structure.

*Esperando al mesías* serves as the point of departure in understanding photography's link to the construction of identities and its deployment as a device that challenges and reconfigures identities within a neoliberal system. In this film photography does not take on a central appearance; its seemingly minor role occurs in sudden shots of photographic portraits from *tarjetas de identidad*, national identification cards. Some of the questions that the film asks in relation to the focus on the construction of identity are how citizenry is established and defined by the photographic portraiture of a state document, how identity shifts when the state fails to fulfill its role as protector of

its citizen during an economic crisis, and how the filmic narrative responds to the loss of citizenship. *Lixo Extraordinário* expands and responds to these questions. The film focuses on the Brazilian artist Vik Muniz and his art as a rearticulation of identities. Photography is a crucial element in his artistic processes and it is through photography that the final work of art becomes the platform upon which Muniz's portraits intend to transform and rearticulate the identity of a population that is at the margins of the state by creating photographic portraits that heighten individuality and visibility.

In both films photography opens a space to discuss the construction of identities within a neoliberal structure. In particular, the films allow for questions of how identities are linked to notions of citizenry, how such citizenry functions within a neoliberal framework, and how, within these narratives, the neoliberal framework in fact perpetrates and perpetuates social violence. Thus, the photographic portrait becomes the frame through which to redefine identities, reestablish citizenship, and denounce the economic structures that overlook citizens' rights. In both films, photographic portraitures are crucial within the filmic narratives to bring to the fore the political structures that surround the portraits and the violence that surrounds the subjects within the portraits.

From its inception, photography quickly became the preferred medium through which to portray individuals and families.[21] As defined by David Bate, "the photographic portrait is a shorthand description of a person […] whether it is in the public sphere, used

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[21] Photography enabled people to acquire depictions of themselves on a mass scale. John Tagg notes: "In March 1840, what *The New York Sun* called 'the first daguerreotype gallery for portraits' was opened in New York. […] By 1842, exposure times had been reduced to between forty and twenty seconds, and portrait studios began to open everywhere. It is estimated that more than ninety per cent of all daguerreotypes ever taken were portraits. […] By 1853, three million daguerreotypes were being made annually and there were eighty-six portrait galleries in New York City alone" (42-43).

to certify our legal identity […], in our private life […], or for another social purpose […], the portrait aims to say, 'this is how you look'" (68). Nonetheless, despite the transparency between representation and referent, photographic portraits, similar to portraiture in painting, are vehicles of representations through which the subject can perform identity and thus create representation of self, albeit mediated through the photographer. John Tagg posits that the "transparency of the photograph was its most powerful rhetorical device," meaning that "the portrait is therefore a sign whose purpose is both the description of an individual and inscription of social identity" (35; 37).

Ruth Iskin elaborates on this construction of a sense of self by linking Lacan's developmental stage in childhood, the mirror stage, to photography. For Iskin, when Lacan states that he is being "photo-graphed," he is invoking "the understanding that the self is constituted as it is made visible to itself under the spell of a variety of mediations, be they verbal or written language, or images in a mirror, a photograph, or a painting" (Iskin 47-48).[22] Iskin continues:

> The mirror-stage links the formative forging of one's sense of self in the preverbal stage with visually seeing an image recognizable as oneself. Thus images and

[22] Ruth Iskin defines the mirror-stage as follows: "Lacan posits a 'self' forming in its early phase by seeing a visual image in the mirror. The young human (of six to eighteen months), whose notions of subject are as yet unformed, encounters an image in the mirror and identifies with it while distinguishing it as an image 'of' itself, and therefore 'other' than itself. Thus for Lacan the mirror-stage is an early instance of our misapprehension of 'the subject' as unified in the regime of what is visible in waking life. This encounter produces a simultaneous sense of 'self' and 'other,' an 'I' and a 'non-I'" (51). Also see Kaja Silverman, "The Subject," in *Visual Culture: The Reader*, eds. Jessica Evans and Stuart Hall (London: Sage, 1999); and Jacques Lacan's *Four Fundamental Concepts*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1978), where he elaborates on his theory.

> looking play a major role in the process of identification, projection, and positioning through which one's ‘self’ is constituted. (51)

Ultimately, this sense of self is being mediated by a representational medium. Yet, despite its physical existence and “transparent” relationship to a referent, there is “no guarantee of a corresponding pre-photographic existent” (Tagg 2). What this means is that the link between what he denominates as the pre-photographic referent (the object/subject photographed in the real world) and the sign (the photograph itself) is “highly complex […] and can guarantee nothing at the level of meaning” (Tagg 3).

So while the photograph, the visual representation of an individual, is important in how we see ourselves, there is a complexity that belies what seems to be a direct relationship between the visual representation and the self. Tagg avers that the photograph itself has no “essence” or “absolute” but rather must be placed within cultural and historical processes; we must therefore look directly at “the conscious and unconscious processes, the practices and institutions through which the photograph can incite a phantasy, take on meaning, and exercise an effect. What is real is not just the material item but also the discursive system [to which] we must therefore turn our attention” (4). Despite the alleged “transparency” of the photograph—to use Roland Barthes’s words, “a pipe, here, is always and intractably a pipe,” that is, there is a faithful representation of subject by image—photographic portraits, as noted by Barthes, never coincide with the “real-self”:

> What I want, in short, is that my (mobile) image, buffeted among a thousand shifting photographs, altering with situation and age, should always coincide with

> my (profound) “self”; but it is the contrary that must be said: “myself” never coincides with my image. (12)

In the process of “imitating” himself, “suffer[ing] from a sensation of inauthenticity, and becoming an ‘imposture,’ he is made into object, a ‘Total-Image’” (14). Barthes then emphasizes on how he becomes “[d]eath in person” upon being photographed. Tagg’s proposal is to understand how the “total image” is in fact not linked to a pre-photographic moment and is rather shaped and surrounded by a series of effects, interventions, and choices (3).

As a result, we arrive at an understanding of how portraiture, the imprinting of a subject onto a photographic image, is in fact linked to the construction of social and cultural identities that are shaped by cultural and historical factors. For Tagg, these social constructions are connected to the creation of portraits in the context of power and surveillance within an emerging industrialized culture in the nineteenth century, where portraits became a form of social regulation during a period of instability:

> What I go on to argue is that the coupling of evidence and photography in the second half of the nineteenth century was bound up with the emergence of new institutions and new practices of observation and record-keeping: that is, those new techniques of representation and regulation which were so central to the restructuring of the local and national state in industrialized societies…disciplinary institutions—the police, prisons, asylums, hospitals, departments of public health, schools, and even the modern factory itself. (5)

Within this historical context, the portrait in and of itself, the pose and posture of the subject within the frame, has a dual significance as a record keeper and also as a signifier

of social status. Whereas the aristocratic posture would assume a three-quarters profile, in contrast, “rigid frontality signified the bluntness and ‘naturalness’ of a culturally unsophisticated class […].” By the 1880s the straightforward snapshot of an individual was a marker of social inferiority and indicative of representations of subjects that were object of state surveillance (Tagg 36-37). These documents then evolve into what we know today as identification cards, passports, and other forms of state identification.

Within this discussion regarding photographic portraits, what is significant is the dual function of this portraiture as a construction of identity that is both documentary and symbolic. If portraiture can be viewed as the visual construction and representation of identity, *Esperando al mesías* and *Lixo Extraordinário* offer distinct approaches regarding the question of how photographic portraiture can challenge and respond to the position of the subject within a neoliberal economic system linked to the commodification and marginalization of the body. While *Esperando al mesías* focuses on and challenges the significance of state documentation, particularly the *tarjeta de identidad* (identification card), as a marker of citizenry, *Lixo Extraordinário* proposes a reconfiguration of traditional portraits by creating artistic portraits of individuals that are marginalized within an economic structure.

The question that has to be addressed first is how citizenry is defined within the neoliberal economic system. Since its incorporation in Latin America as the dominant political structure, neoliberal policies have reconfigured and redefined the position of the individual within state economy (Gwynne and Kay; Williams; Kingstone). As discussed by David Harvey, at an ideological level, neoliberal policies promote the implementation of a free market and free trade economic system with limited state intervention. These

policies are intended to lead to the security of human dignity and individual freedoms (5; 7). This economic philosophy emerged as a response to the active state intervention in market processes, as the market was “surrounded by a web of social and political constraints and regulatory environment” which intended to ensure the “right blend of state, market, and democratic institutions to guarantee peace, inclusion, well-being, and stability” (Harvey 10; 11). As liberalism unraveled, the answer was to undo the active participation of the state in national economies. By the mid-1970s the focus was on “liberating corporate and business power and reestablishing market freedoms” through neoliberal policies that purported to “safeguard individual liberties” and “liberate individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills” (Kingstone 46; Harvey 2). Thus the main pillar of the neoliberal conceptual framework was founded on Western ideals of individual freedoms and human dignity (Harvey 5).

With the gradual establishment of neoliberal policies in the Latin American region, starting in the 1970s in Chile and gaining force by the 1980s and into the 1990s, and exemplified with particular notoriety by Carlos Menem’s presidency (1989-1999) in Argentina and Fernando Henrique Cardoso’s presidency (1995-2002) in Brazil, governments “committed to neoliberal policies have tended to stress the political and economic advantages of creating a more technical, strict and transparent approach to macro-economic management” (Gwynne and Kay 13,14; Kingstone 47). Nonetheless, neoliberal economic reforms have in fact widened the socio-economic gap given that the policies tend to reflect the interests of “private property owners, businesses, multinational corporations, and financial capital” and, as a result, have in fact aggravated social exclusion (Harvey 7; Gwynne and Kay 3-4). In Harvey’s view, neoliberalism is “a

political project to reestablish the conditions for capital accumulation and to restore the power of economic elites" (19). Some of the fundamental reforms at the center of neoliberal policies include fiscal reforms, which have been used to justify "the slashing of public expenditure, particularly in economic sectors but also in social areas," the privatization of state enterprises, and the restricting of labor markets (Gwynne and Kay 14).

The implementation of a neoliberal framework within Latin America brought under scrutiny the new position of the citizen of a state (Clarke and Howard). Gareth Williams argues that while the liberal economy that dominated Latin America prior to the establishment of neoliberalism was a "modernizing drive of the national-popular period of development," meaning that the focus of the state was to create a sense of nationalism, "the contemporary orders of Latin America (now generically termed the neoliberal order) signify the demise of the people as a constituted force visible exclusively in its relation to and through the nation-state, its discretely bordered territories, and its forging of national social and cultural hegemonies" (7). If the state is no longer the center through which citizenship is defined, then how is citizenship reconfigured under a neoliberal framework? The aforementioned notion of personal freedom is at the root of this redefinition of how people relate to one another and the state. Yet this ideal of freedom is redefined and interpreted as a combination of individualism, competition, and consumerism, parallel to and in function with the free market and trade structures that define neoliberalism (Harvey 16; Chase 2). Efraín Gonzales de Olarte argues that this individualism leads to a utilitarian behavior in which individuals base decisions on cost-benefit analysis, meaning that individuals are constantly maximizing profits, which leads

to a culture in constant competition (30-31).

As a result, by neoliberalism's insistence that "the social good will be maximized by maximizing the reach and frequency of market transitions" and that it "seeks to bring all human action into the domain of the market," it has transformed individuals and all human action (including labor) into a "commodity like any other." Thus value is derived from a system of supply and demand, where individual freedoms are overshadowed by the needs of the market (Harvey 3; 171). As a result, citizenship becomes a "negotiated status, since active participation by citizens may alter their rights and obligations, while government may concurrently seek to limit these changes and the nature of popular participation" (Clarke and Howard 322). In an attempt to strengthen the presence of lower classes that are affected by the increased levels of economic inequalities within the neoliberal framework, "trade unions in Latin American cities have been an important forum for the representation of citizenship" (Clarke and Howard 322). Citizenship becomes attached to a free market that looks to increase the wealth of an elite sector, relying on the labor and skills of such citizens. Yet, given that labor is also viewed as a commodity, the position of the worker becomes precarious in its attachment to market success and failure, and the supply and demand of any given moment. So, within a neoliberal market that commodifies labor and the body, how can citizens claim their individual identities and bring visibility to the violence inflicted upon the civil population through the unequal distribution of wealth? How is citizenship destabilized within these systems and how is it rebuilt? These are the questions that are being proposed in these films. Photography becomes crucial in creating a narrative that responds to a neoliberal structure that erases individuality and ties citizenship/individual freedoms to a volatile

market by proposing new ways of viewing identity separate from the state.

*Returning Identities*

In Daniel Burman's *Esperando al mesías* (*Waiting for the Messiah;* 2000), photography has an oblique onscreen presence via *tarjetas de identidad* (identification cards). Its surrounding filmic narrative opens a space to discuss the formation of identities within a neoliberal framework and how identities are reconfigured when the neoliberal state is destabilized by an economic depression. Within the instability that comes with an economic depression, the *tarjetas de identidad* take on a central role in raising questions regarding how citizens develop their identities within an economic structure that has heightened the social economic gap and defines economic relations as a function of productivity and economic interest. While the photographic portraitures that authorize the *tarjeta de identidad* focus on creating a documentary portrait that identifies and recognizes the individual as an extant part of the state, the appearance of the identification card tending toward this static type of representation within a film that focuses on identities in crisis in the context of the economic downturn asks us to revisit notions of identity as anything but static in nature.

Between 1998 and 2002, the Argentinian economy was experiencing an economic recession that revealed "the profound weaknesses of the neoliberal model" (Carranza 66). President Carlos Menem's government (1989-1999) implemented a series of neoliberal policies with the objective of targeting the high employment rates, social inequality, and poverty (Carranza 66). Yet, the policies that were implemented, such as the privatization of state institutions and the weakening of labor unions through labor policies, provoked a

spike in unemployment, resulting in popular discontent and protests (Carranza 67-68). One of Menem's most significant policies ideated by Economy Minister Domingo Cavallo was the currency-convertibility system that pegged the peso to the U.S. dollar, which would in practice decrease inflation. Yet the privatization of state-owned industries created monopolies and the free market system integrated Argentina's already weak economy into a competitive global market, which consequently deindustrialized the country and further increased the rate of unemployment (Carranza 68). By mid-1999 Argentina was in full recession. Under Fernando de la Rúa's administration from 1999 to 2001, the economy did not see major improvements as he juggled to pay down external debt and revamp the economy (Carranza 69). De la Rúa did not abandon the Menem administration's policies and continued to apply structural reforms in support of the free market system (Carranza 70). De la Rúa reappointed Cavallo as finance minister with the objective of resolving the crisis without devaluating the currency—the peso was still pegged to the U.S dollar—yet Cavallo's attempt to raise and collect taxes and reduce government expenditures did not reverse the increasing international distrust in the Argentine economy and the increasing foreign debt (Carranza 70). By December 2001, the distrust in the economy led to bank runs, and, fearing the complete collapse of the foreign currency reserves, the government responded by restricting the amount of bank withdrawals, now known as *el corralito*. The rise of protests increased, as Argentines took the streets to express their discontent towards the government and the seizure of middle-class bank deposits.

The opening scenes of the Argentine film *Esperando al mesías* speak directly to the economic and social environment of the time and establish the historical-political

background that is critical to the development of the fictional characters in the film, Ariel and Santamaría. These scenes show the widespread anxiety and uncertainty experienced during Argentina's economic recession. As the film starts, there is a radio voiceover breaking the latest news:

> Estamos recibiendo una serie de cables muy preocupantes desde el sudeste asiático, donde se nos está dando la confirmación de que el gran Banco del Oriente habría tenido que cerrar hoy sus puertas dado una quiebra estrepitosa que habría dejado un tendal de víctimas entre los ahorristas que confiaron a este banco, tan fuerte o por lo menos tan reputadamente fuerte, desde el punto de vista internacional, los ahorros de toda una vida.
> (We are receiving a series of notifications, highly concerning, from Southeast Asia, confirming the Orient Bank, which has had to close its doors given its definitive bankruptcy, leaving an enormous amount of victims that entrusted to this bank—a strong bank, or at least strong by reputation from an international point of view—their lifelong savings.)

The scenes that follow show the New York, Tokyo, and Frankfurt stock markets before shifting to Buenos Aires where protestors have taken over the streets. The camera shifts to show protestors and the main character, Ariel Goldstein, outside a bank, part of a crowd that we presume is looking for answers as to the closure of banks and to claim their investments and savings to which they no longer have access. In this scene, the filmic camera is positioned from inside the bank looking out towards the street and the multitude of faces, Ariel's in the foreground, only separated by the glass. Slowly, a man is covering the window's glass with white paint from the inside, gradually erasing the

faces that are outside looking in. This erasure becomes symbolic of the erasure of identity and upheaval of citizenry within a period of economic turmoil, both being the guiding thread of the plot of the film.

*Esperando al mesías* takes the shape of a coming-of-age story, a *Bildungsroman*, in that the main characters "'come of age' and develop regardless of where they started, at what point they finish, and what outcomes may be" (Kushigian 15). *Esperando al mesías* is in fact part of a trilogy of films that focuses on the same figure of Argentine-Jewish male identity as explored in different roles and different stages of life, and loosely related through the use of the same first name: Ariel Goldstein in *Esperando al mesías*, Ariel Makaroff in *El abrazo partido* (*Lost Embrace;* 2004) and Ariel Perelman in *Derecho de familia* (*Family Law;* 2006). In all three films, the main character, Ariel, is constantly negotiating notions of identity, masculinity, father-son relationships, and his position within an Argentine-Jewish community, while at the same time raising important issues regarding the economic position of Argentina: unemployment and foreign debt ("Jewish Cinematic Self-Representations" Rocha; Ruffinelli; Kaminsky; España)

The first film of the trilogy, *Esperando al mesías*, focuses on Ariel Goldstein, a young post-production editor. Having lost his mother, Sara, and his financial security due to the effects of the economic recession on the family business, a small restaurant-café called Estrella de Simón (Star of Simon), named for his father, Ariel is faced with important questions regarding his Argentine-Jewish identity and position within his family and Jewish community ("Identidad masculina" Rocha 26*).* As characterized by Tzvi Tal, the film "[interpela] al público con narrativas de la clase media urbana acongojada por la subsistencia económica y los conflictos familiares" ("[interpellates] the

public with narratives of the urban middle class anguished by economic survival and family conflicts") (*Migración y memoria* 430). Ariel enters a stage of dissatisfaction with the confines of his traditionally defined life, and this moment of economic crisis and affective loss becomes a time for change and the search of new ways of life that Carolina Rocha calls a quest to "probar otros 'yo'' ("test other "I's") (27). While the film focuses primarily on Ariel and his coming-of-age story, this story line runs parallel to and eventually intersects with that of a secondary yet important character called by his surname, Santamaría. Santamaría is a middle-aged man who is experiencing a similar crisis to Ariel's. In the financial crisis, Santamaría loses his job at a bank and, as a consequence, is kicked out of his house by his wife, as he can no longer fulfill his role as provider. In the face of these sudden disruptions, Santamaría fashions a business returning lost or stolen wallets in exchange for voluntary monetary contributions at the discretion of his clients.

The film becomes a coming-of-age story for two grown men who, with the disruption of their lives due to the Argentine economic crisis, are catapulted into a ground-zero search for meaning which calls for reevaluating notions of identity. The intersection between economic decay and identity is embodied in the film through the representation of what Tal calls the "catástrophe neoliberal refiriéndose a un imaginario urbano y doméstico en descomposición" ("neoliberal catastrophe in reference to an urban and domestic imaginary in decay") (*Terror, etnicidad y la imagen*). Ariel, for example, after his twin familial and financial losses, questions the expectations laid out for him by his family and community, which he summarizes under the rubric of the "plan perfecto." This "perfect plan" would include his taking over the family business and marrying

Estela, his long-term Jewish girlfriend. Ariel clearly feels a comfortable and habitual level of identification with his community, as evidenced when he films his neighborhood, El Once. In this documentary film, Ariel asserts: "Este es mi barrio, se llama El Once, un lugar muy activo, muy ruidoso, donde vivimos muchos judíos, rodeado de telas […]" ("This is my neighborhood, called El Once, a very active place, very loud, where a lot of us Jews live, surrounded by fabrics"), bar mitzvahs, and weddings, a description that seems to mark his community as a place of belonging ("Jewish Cinematic Self-Representation" Rocha 40).

Nonetheless, Ariel questions the path that has been set for him, describing this world as a "burbuja," a "bubble" where social and cultural expectations are defined by family and religion:

> Ariel: Los viernes a la noche, el templo, el club, primos ricos, los abuelos, Simón, el restaurant, Dios, son un montón de cosas, Estela […] vivir en esta burbuja, siempre, eh, ¿no te sentís burbuja? ¿No? No sé, yo quiero, quiero ver, quiero ver qué pasa.
>
> Estela: ¿Dónde?
>
> Ariel: Allá, allá fuera.
>
> (Ariel: Friday night, the temple, the club, the rich cousins, the grandparents, Simón, the restaurant, God, it's so many things, Estela […] to live in this bubble, always. Don't you feel the bubble? No? I don't know, I want, I want to see, want to see what happens.
>
> Estela: Where?
>
> Ariel: There, out there.)

Ariel's desire to explore beyond his community is facilitated by his new late night job at a TV station. This new job, "out there," encapsulates the neoliberal world. On his first day on the job, his boss gives him a quick rundown of his new workplace:

> Aquí lo mas importante es no dormirse, ¿está claro? Y por la mañana, cuando lleguen los de la limpieza y mojen el piso, agarra sus cosas y se va. Acá nos manejamos mucho con iniciales, síntesis, velocidad, economía de recursos, ¿sí? […] ¿Te pasa algo? Te veo muy preocupado. […] Escúcheme a los ojos. A.G., usted pasó un rigurosa selección, ha conseguido un buen trabajo, tiene un buen sueldo, buen horario, […], ¿qué mas? Pues, ¿entonces de qué se preocupa? (What's important is to not fall asleep. Is that clear? And when morning comes, when the cleaning crew comes in and starts to clean the floor, you grab your stuff and leave. Here we function with initials, synthesis, speed, economic use of resources, ok? What's wrong? You look worried. […] Look me in the eye. A.G., you have passed a rigorous selection process, you've found a good job, a good salary, a good schedule, […] what more [is there]? Well, then why are you worried?)

Within this workspace, Ariel's identity is synthesized and distorted to his initials ("A.G.") and reduced to a degree of invisibility. But he also meets Laura—an outsider to his social and religious network—who also works the night shift with him, and they form a friendship that evolves into a romantic attraction, further pushing Ariel away from his family and community. Laura, like Ariel, feels herself to be an outsider because of her primary lesbian identification and previous relationships. Meanwhile, as Ariel explores his relationship with Laura, his family continues to move forward: Estela works at the

restaurant and sings using the new karaoke machine that Simón bought for the reopening, and they celebrate the holidays. Estela continues to wait paitently for Ariel, and Simón also notes his son's absence when he visits his wife's grave and somberly says "y Ariel que consiguió un trabajo y conoció gente nueva, claro que te extraña" ("and Ariel found a job and met new people, of course he misses you"). As time passes, Laura eventually moves on, as does Ariel. One year later, Ariel and Estela appear on scene, talking at a café. Ariel shares that he has moved out of his father's house and is now living by himself, learning to be independent despite the difficulties ("Vivir solo es raro, se pierde mucho tiempo, pagar los impuestos, descongelar la heladera, desayunar, cambiar el papel higiénico […] plancharme las camisas, […] uno se adapta, ¿no?") ("Living alone is strange, you lose a lot of time, pay taxes, defrost the fridge, have breakfast, change the toilet paper […] iron my shirts, […] you adapt, right?"). As the conversation comes to an end, Estela candidly confesses that the bubble in fact does work for her ("en fin, la burbuja funciona" ["at the end of the day, the bubble works"]), referring back to those moments of discontent that Ariel had expressed. It is insinuated by the end of the film, a year later, as Ariel articulates a sense of independence and maturity, that he has come full circle and is ready to reintegrate into the "perfect plan" that he had come to question and from which he was eager to escape. The final scene shows Ariel and Estela leaning in to kiss, sealing their union.

While Ariel's story takes on a central role within the film, Santamaría's story line, which runs parallel to Ariel's, engages and highlights the film's main concern with identity as linked to photography and neoliberal structures that destabilize identities and families. As noted above, on the same day that Santamaría is fired by the bank, his

marriage comes to an end and he finds himself on the street with only the belongings he can fit on top of a rolling chair: "Me dejó. Aprovechó el asunto ese del banco y me echó. Yo quise explicar lo de China, la diferencia horaria, economía globalizada" ("She left me. She took advantage of the issues at the bank and kicked me out. I wanted to explain about China, the time difference, globalized economy"). Despite the sudden position in which he finds himself, Santamaría emerges as a pragmatic character who adapts quickly to his present situation: Santamaría establishes an informal business of recuperating stolen wallets and returning them to their owners in exchange for a donation: "Señora: ¿Cuánto le debo? Santamaría: Su voluntad, señora" ("Lady: How much do I owe you? Santamaría: Your will, ma'am"). Rocha notes: "el personaje de Santamaría exhibe una gran capacidad de adapatación y la seguridad interior de un hombre que ha perdido todo y aún consigue reinventarse" ("Santamaría's character shows a great capacity for adaptation and the internal strength of a man who has lost everything but still manages to reinvent himself") (29). It is precisely the product of his reinvention, his informal business of returning identities, in which I am interested. As someone who returns stolen wallets, meaning he is returning identification cards and credit cards, markers of state and financial personhood, Santamaría's character and story line establishes a direct link between the photographic portrait, the precarious nature of citizenship, and the neoliberal state.

Ariel and Santamaría's paths intersect when Santamaría contacts him regarding Sara's documents found in front of the Hospital Israelita, the place where his mother's purse had been stolen. At this moment in the film, Sara has already passed away, and Ariel is confronted with the idea of having to recuperate his mother's documents, documents which would signify her presence despite her physical absence: "¿Para qué

quiero los documentos si mamá no está?" ("Why would I want mom's documents if she's no longer here?") Ariel tells Laura about Santamaría and she is immediately intrigued by his peculiar job: "Santamaría, qué interesante conocerlo. Me gustaría contar su historia. Mucho. Un hombre con un trabajo tan particular. Devolver identidades" ("Santamaría, how interesting it would be to meet him. I would like to tell his story. A lot. A man with such a peculiar job. Returning identities."). As a producer of TV segments that focus on following and documenting the lives of people, Laura is interested in creating a segment that would document Santamaría and his life prior and posterior to his employment at the bank.

Ariel and Laura begin the documentary, which is to be titled either "Las calles de Santamaría" ("Santamaría's Streets"; preferred by Santamaría given its urban—and homeless—vibe) or "Las identidades de Santamaría" ("Santamaría's Identities"). The film opens with a tour of the now abandoned bank where Santamaría had worked. The documentary camera within the film registers the abandonment of the space through the chaos that is evident in the debris, empty registers, trash, and paper that cover the desks and floors. This sense of abandonment is also evident in the emotional and physical abandonment experienced by Santamaría. In his interview for the documentary, he shares with great lament how he wants to be seen once again, to be seen as himself prior to the market crash and losing his job:

> Que alguien me reconozca, alguien que se acuerde de la vida de antes, de, que sé yo, de la otra vida, el banco, el club, las tarjetas de crédito….algún amigo, algún compañero, alguien que me agarra y me diga: Santa, viejo, ¿cómo estas? Alguien que me devuelva al mundo.

> ("[I wish] [t]hat someone [would] recognize me, someone that remembers our life before, I don't know, that other life, the bank, the club, the credit cards… a friend, a colleague, someone that grabs me and says: Santa, how are you? Someone that brings me back to the world.")

Santamaría is articulating a rupture in his sense of identity. Prior to his unemployment, his financial position is the space through which he develops his sense of self. He associates his identity with notions of pleasure provided by financial comfort: "el club, las tarjetas de crédito" ("the club, the credit cards"). Now that the financial sphere no longer plays a dominant role in his construction of identity, like Ariel, he searches for a new sense of self, which he eventually finds with the foundation of a new family. This documentary, which comes into play towards the end of the film, serves as a catalyst for Ariel and Santamaría, marking the film within the film as a portraiture, a moment of self-reflection of Santamaría's traumatic break from his financial identity. This allows Ariel and Santamaría to officially establish their new identities, outside of the neoliberal structure.

After being fired and kicked out of his house, Santamaría has no place to live. The filmic narrative shows him navigating the streets of Buenos Aires. We see him look for clothes and wallets in dumpsters and find shelter in an abandoned train station building, where he showers, washes his clothes, and presumably sleeps. It is at this abandoned train station where he meets Elsa, a middle-aged woman who has decided to continue working as an attendant in the train station bathroom despite the fact that the station itself has closed:

> Elsa: El estado vende, los trenes, el papel higiénico, los baños, venden todo. […] Voy a esperar. No pueden cerrar la estación para siempre. Esto se tiene que arreglar. Si no ¿cómo va ir la gente a trabajar? ¿En bicicleta? ¿Como los chinos? (Elsa: The state is selling, the trains, the toilet paper, the bathroom, they are selling everything. […] I'm going to wait. They can't close down the station forever. This has to be fixed. If they don't, how are people going to go to work? By bicycle? Like the Chinese?)

Despite the uncertainty she is facing due to her precarious financial position as a result of the economic instability, Elsa finds comfort and strength in sustaining her daily routine: working at the bathroom in the train station and writing letters to her husband, who is in jail. On one of those days she is surprised by a stranger, Santamaría, in the women's bathroom. From this encounter, their relationship forms into a friendship and then a romantic connection, by means of which Santamaría and Elsa enter into a new routine: Elsa provides Santamaría with a home while he offers her company and support via his business. This relationship is sealed when Santamaría finds an abandoned baby in a dumpster. This baby becomes a symbolic messiah that promises stability and union between Elsa and Santamaría, revealing Santamaría's new role and identity in the life he has constructed post-unemployment with Elsa. Elsa seals his new position within the family when she firmly tells him "Vaya a comprar pañales para el chico. Y no se entretenga con eso de los documentos" ("Go buy diapers for the boy. And don't get distracted with that business of the documents"), reassigning his informal business as a distraction from his new responsibilities as a family man.

Rocha and Kasinsky both discuss the construction of masculinity and heteronormativity in *Esperando al mesías*, interpreting the role that Santamaría takes on as family man towards the end of the film as the recuperation of a sense of masculinity of which he was dispossessed when his wife turned him out of his house after he lost his job. Rocha notes that Santamaría "exhibe una masculinidad mas clásica" ("exhibits a classic masculinity"; 29). Kasinsky concurs, affirming that "en el apuro de Santamaría se ve claramente cómo la normatividad de la pareja heterosexual llega a simbolizar la estabilidad social" ("in Santamaría's hardship we can clearly see how the normativity of the heterosexual couple comes to symbolize social stability"; 990). Undoubtedly, masculinity is central to understanding the construction of Santamaría's identity. His sense of self is defined by his role as provider, stripped from him upon losing his financial position, and which is then reconstructed as head of household through his relationship with Elsa.

I am particularly interested in focusing on Santamaría's moment of transition: the in-between space marked on one end by his losing his sense of identity along with his job and wife, and on the other by his reestablishing himself within a family structure with Elsa. That in-between moment is defined by his role of collecting and returning identities, an appropriate task considering that he himself is in a period of rearticulating his own identity. Santamaría's own words of yearning for recognition ("que alguien me reconozca" ["that someone recognize me"]), define this transitional moment by its lack—non-recognition—which has the effect of directly correlating visibility as a social possibility with the financial sphere. When he loses his job, Santamaría becomes invisible.

This notion of visibility runs parallel to the visibility that the identification cards provide to citizens. The *tarjetas de identidad* are physical objects that establish the individual in the photograph as part of the state, which in turn verifies the responsibility of the state to protect "human well-being" (Harvey 2). When the neoliberal state fails, as established at the beginning of the film, it can no longer provide for the citizens of the state. As the economy collapses, society undergoes dramatic shifts exemplified by poverty and unemployment. If, as the film argues, social identities are formed through the financial sphere and the state, then when the state is unsettled, identities are shaken.

Santamaría's job recovering and returning identities is fitting for his character, considering that Santamaría, as discussed above, builds his notion of self in relation to the financial sphere of the state. When Ariel meets with Santamaría to recover his mother's documents, there is a moment when the camera shifts to capture Ariel's point of view as he looks down on his mother's picture in the identification card. Santamaría asks him if all documents are in the wallet:

> Ariel: Sí, casi todo, falta un dinero que había ahí.
>
> Santamaría: Sí, claro, no estamos en Disneylandia. Pero digo del resto, lo importante.
>
> (Ariel: Yes, almost everything, there is some money missing.
>
> Santamaría: Well, of course, we aren't in Disneyland. But, I mean the rest, what's important.)

Santamaría gives importance to documents that link the individual to the state and its financial space: identification cards and credit cards. This moment alludes back to, and creates a juxtaposition with, the moment when Ariel's mother was robbed leaving the

hospital. Ariel considers running after the thief but his mother stops him and says, "Ariel, escucháme, Arielito, ¿Papá estaba adentro de esa cartera? ¿Estela estaba adentro de esa cartera? […] Entonces no había nada importante en la cartera" (Ariel, listen to me, Ariel, was Dad inside the purse? Was Estela inside that purse? […] Then there wasn't anything important in the purse"). While Santamaría positions himself as the bridge between lost and found identities, identifying the importance of recuperating official documentation that proves the link between citizen and state, Ariel's mother, conversely, highlights the importance of flesh-and-blood family and loved ones over documents, the latter of which are replaceable. While the importance of family is reiterated for Ariel at the end of the film when he comes back to Estela after his identity-seeking sojourn in the neoliberal business world, the significance of family is also highlighted for former banker Santamaría. The concluding scene of his storyline shows him with a baby he has found in a dumpster and Elsa, enjoying the Christmas holidays together; the baby and Elsa become his new center of identity.

*Esperando al mesías* proposes to reconsider the articulation of identities from within and in relation to the state. While state documents identify citizens and confirm their rights as such, the message is that identities should not be defined by state structures. Rather than construct identities through a neoliberal structure, as these identities become vulnerable to the fluctuation of markets, the film's conclusion suggests that identities can be separate from and not defined by the state and financial positions. Ultimately, within the narrative of the film, identities can be founded on other principles, such as family and community. As Santamaría's experience demonstrates, when the notion of self is constructed through the state, it means that identities are bound and

susceptible to the ups and downs of the market. This is highlighted when Santamaría meets Elsa in the train station bathroom. As he is washing his clothes in the sink, some hung up to dry and others dried with the bathroom hand dryer, Elsa catches him amid the wet laundry. Surprised, she demands to know who he is, to which Santamaría responds with confidence, "Santamaría, bancario" ("Santamaría, banker"). In this moment we see a fracture in his identity: despite having lost his job and finding himself in a precarious position because of it, he perseveres in asserting his identity through his former financial position. From that point forward, Santamaría's storyline takes him on a journey of self-exploration, ultimately proposing a model of self-definition where the neoliberal state is no longer the dominant center through which to construct identities.

In Burman's *Esperando al mesías*, the photographic portraits that appear in a symbolic role and through a momentary physical appearance in the filmic narrative gain strength when they are used as a focal point through which to understand the film. Santamaría's financial and familial loss and his articulation of self via the financial sphere, which is highlighted through his informal business of returning lost identities, pose critical questions regarding the construction of identities and their precariousness when constructed from within a neoliberal framework, a framework that has unsettled all spheres of life within the film.

Whereas *Esperando el mesías* concludes by offering a way of approaching identities that are not formed through and based on the neoliberal state, Lucy Walker's *Lixo Extraordinário* offers a view on how such identities can be rearticulated within photographic portraits. In *Lixo Extraordinário* Vik Muniz's art is framed by a filmic

narrative that brings to the fore photography as a medium through which to reconfigure and construct identities that are marginalized within a neoliberal economic structure.

*Waste Land*

Brazilian visual artist Vik Muniz's art is characterized by the play on perception (Chang). Using a variety of material and photography, Muniz creates photographic images that, as he explains in an interview for *Bomb Magazine*, find power in representation (Magill 34). Muniz looks to expose the inner mechanics of representation by allowing the viewer to see the materials that compose the greater image, "slow[ing] down the perceptual input of the image […] so that you actually see them as a form of narrative." Yet at the same time the viewer has the capacity of seeing the greater image and the narrative that sustains that representation:

> There's something redeeming in using the barest mechanics to produce an image. I don't want to amaze you with my powers to fool you. I want to make you aware of how much you want to believe in the image—to be conscious of the measure of your own belief, rather than of my capacity to fool you. You see it, but at the same time you see how it works. I have been called an illusionist, but I have always considered myself a twisted kind of realist. (Magill 33-34)

Filmed over the course of three years, the documentary *Lixo Extraordinário* (*Waste Land*; 2010), directed by Lucy Walker, follows Vik Muniz as he starts a new art project, "Pictures of Garbage," which embodies Muniz's approach to art. The documentary exposes the political inner mechanics that drive the artistic creation, which juxtaposes with the beauty that characterizes the final artistic product.

With the intention of steering away from the fine arts, which Muniz describes as restrictive, he states, “what I want to do is to change the lives of a group of people, with the same material that they deal with every day.” Taking this idea as point of departure, he chooses to work with garbage. This is where Jardim Gramacho, considered one of the world’s largest landfills until its closing in 2012, comes into play. Located on the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro, Jardim Gramacho is the physical site where all of Rio de Janeiro’s garbage arrives. It is home to a large community, including a group of people working as *catadores de materiais reciváveis*, collectors of recyclable material. The *catadores* of Jardim Gramacho are critical to the functioning of the larger industry of recyclable materials. At the starting point of the system, the *catadores* navigate and search the landfill for recyclable items, with the selection defined by the needs of the market on any given day. Once they have collected the requested items, these are then sold to a second private party. *Lixo Extraordinário* constructs a narrative that focuses on the *catadores* as marginal figures that gain visibility through Muniz’s artistic portraits of a select group of these *catadores* (Salgueiro Marques and Senna 7).

Muniz begins his project with a critical question: can art be a producer of social change? His objective is to answer this question by “[…] showing [the *catadores*] another world, another place. Even if it’s a place from which they can look at where they are. It just changes everything.” The documentary takes on the shape of a social documentary as it follows the lives of the individuals, a small group of *catadores*, that will take part in Muniz’s art work, focusing on their everyday lives and roles within the society in which they circulate and on how they are perceived by the greater society. The art itself, while it is shaped by the notion of social change, veers away from the

documentary, and integrates within it its desire to generate social awareness, emphasizing the power of the aesthetic value of an image.

The opening scene of *Lixo Extraordinário* is a collage of *carnaval* scenes in Rio de Janeiro. The filmmaker marks the beginning of the documentary with the dancing, music, costumes, and liveliness associated with a romanticized notion of Brazilianness. The camera then captures participants stripping themselves of their costumes that, along with other forms of waste, are thrown away and later picked up by the sanitation workers when morning comes. Abruptly steering away from romanticized notions of Brazilianness, the documentary is visually proposing to trace the waste that Brazil—and Brazilianness—produce. This waste will give the spectator access to an area of society, the *catadores* of Jardim Gramacho, that is overlooked by the state and disengaged from with nationalistic/romanticized notions of Brazil.

Jardim Gramacho is described by Muniz, as he looks at photographs of the area: "Check out the geography, this is like the end of the line, this is where everything that's not good goes, including the people." The people that come into focus are a group of *catadores*, men and women who pick recyclable materials from the landfill to then be sold. The director of Muniz's art studio in Rio de Janeiro describes this "garbage land," seemingly characterized by a sense of chaos, as nevertheless having the underlying order of an established and systematic physical stock exchange in motion. At the beginning of this recyclables market are the *catadores* who pick the material from the landfill, depending on the demands at any given time set by the recycling wholesalers. The film's narrative describes how the *catadores*

> [s]ell the materials right here at the landfill. And then it goes to the recycling wholesalers, the intermediaries. There they process it, removing the bottle caps and so on. From there it goes to another company for shredding. The shredded material gets sold again to companies who mold it into car bumpers, buckets, et cetera.

While the garbage and recyclable materials that the *catadores* work in and with might be viewed as waste, it is in fact a form of capital, and an integral part of a larger market. Within this production of value, the role of the *catadores* is fundamental, as they are the individuals that are at the beginning of the process.

In order to protect the *catadores*' rights, the foundation of the Associação dos Catadores do Aterro Metropolitano de Jardim Gramacho (Association of Recycling Pickers of Jardim Gramacho; ACAMJG) became critical in organizing and voicing the concerns of the *catadores*. Jose Carlos da Silva Bala Lopes, a *catador* better known as "Zumbi," observes, "we have to think about the future because I don't want my son to be a picker. Although if he is, I'd be very proud, but I'd rather he be a lawyer to represent the pickers, you know? Or a doctor to care for the pickers in the association." This consciousness is evident in the scene where Sebastião Carlos dos Santos, the president of ACAMJG, known as "Tião," is protesting outside of the local mayor's office. Chanting "The pickers united will never be defeated," and holding banners that read "Senhor prefeito o senhor disse que o terreno era nosso e agora loteou" ("Mr. Mayor, you said that the land was ours and now you want to divide it into lots"), the pickers are there because of the imminent closing of Jardim Gramacho, which will result in the displacement of around 3,000 *catadores*. The proposed closing highlights the state's lack of recognition of

the importance of the *catadores*' role within a greater economy and their efforts to build a recycling infrastructure for the city. Tiaõ confronts this situation head-on: "Mr. Mayor, you haven't even built anything and now you want to sell off the land. The federal government gave that land to build a recycling center. Thanks to the pickers, our association built a recycling center without a single cent from the city. And now you are pretending that we don't exist!" This community of *catadores* is kept at the margins of society, despite their economic contribution to the recycling business. What comes to the fore is how, despite the community's efforts to establish a local and organized business, the state sees more profit in the land that is being used and developed. By overlooking the community's organization, the state emphasizes the neoliberal economic system which is defined by the market and looks to succeed despite the social ramifications of closing a recycling center which would lead to the loss of thousands of jobs.

As a result, in *Lixo Extraordinário*, the significance of the neoliberal framework becomes salient. For David Harvey, a neoliberal framework "holds that the social good will be maximized by maximizing the reach and frequency of market transactions, and it seeks to bring all human action into the domain of the market" (3). Human action includes the use of the body as a site on which neoliberal transactions occur and are made possible. The weight over the body as a site of production and ultimately consumption inserts the body within the free market system where it is directly affected by the volatility of such a market. Within this system, the body of the *catador* is not valued in the sense that it is not officially recognized by the state; thus the push for *catadores* to create a union in order to create a space of representation to claim rights. Even so, the

state looks to take away and close down Jardim Gramacho, which will eventually come to pass in 2012.

These bodies of the *catadores*, which seem to have just been left behind as described by Muniz, gain recognition and value when they are transposed into an artistic frame: this is the object of the "Pictures of Garbage" project. Within this project, the human body—in this case, that of the *catador*—its portrait and the recyclable materials used to make it, are enclosed within a frame. In this context, the value of the *catador* body increases given the artistic value it is accorded. Muniz uses this additional value to social advantage by shedding light on the conditions in which this sector of society lives. This is a truth that is imbedded in his art via the portraits and the garbage that bring it to life, and via the documentary itself, which gives exposure to the daily lives of the *catadores* of Jardim Gramacho.

Muniz starts the artistic process by photographing a series of portraits. These portraits are of *catadores* Tião, Zumbi, Isis Rodrigues Garros, Leide Laurentina da Silva, known as "Irma," Magna de França Santos, and Suelem Pereira Dias. Magna's profile and smile are the center of her portrait, while Irma's portrait emphasizes her strength through her facial expression. The other portraits are renditions of Western works of art, such as Isis's portrait that remakes Pablo Picasso's *Woman Ironing* (1904); Tião's, which is a rendition of Jacques-Louis David's *The Death of Marat* (1793); Zumbi's portrait in the image of Jean-François Millet's *The Sower* (1850); and Suelem's a classic pose of the Madonna with children. These portraits are then transformed through the use of the recyclable materials the *catadores* work with. This is done by first projecting the photographs at high magnification onto the floor of a warehouse. Muniz serves only as

guide in the process and hands over a large part of the creative process to the same *catadores* that are being portrayed. The *catadores* become the creators of their own images; they become agents in their representation, and create an artistic product that they can claim as their own. The group of *catadores* collects the materials that are to be used to create the background of the images, the image itself is demarcated by using what seems to be a dark dust that follows that projected lines of the body; the photograph becomes a negative, the foundation over which to create a work of art. These materials are fundamental to the composition of the image as they are the same materials that the *catadores* work with on a daily basis. Staying true to Muniz's vision—of changing the lives of a group of people using the same materials they work with every day—the materials that the *catadores* work with are the materials that become the portrait. Once the image is recreated, it is photographed from above, yielding the final photographic representation of the physical object.

The final works of art come together as a collection under the rubric "Pictures of Garbage." With the objective of raising funds for ACAMJG to support projects that will benefit the community, one of the portraits, "Marat (Sebastião)," is sent to London for auction. In the photograph, Tião evokes the original portrait by David: lying in a trashed tub, the garbage of the landfill in the background, Tião reclines with some black plastic garbage bags as his blanket and a shirt over his head. This particular representation is imbued with meaning, as Tião is paralleled to Jean-Paul Marat, a French revolutionary figure, appropriate given his advocacy of the *catadores*, supporting and providing basic rights to the community (Connor). The objective behind auctioning off the portrait in London, according to Muniz, is to do something "that is made out of garbage, and that

can sell for a lot of money, and that they can put their hands on and they can feel that it has actually helped them. And they are not going to say that Vik did it, we did it." Vik is articulating in this statement the multiple functions that these works of art hold. On one hand the creation of a work of art combines both aesthetic and social components. In addition, the funds the art will generate at auction will be reinvested into the community, which furthers the social aspect of the creation of the work of art in the first place. "Marat (Sebastião)" is sold in London for 28,000 pounds, roughly $44,000 dollars.

The work of art made of trash is thus inserted in other cultural and social spheres, gaining visibility beyond the border of Jardim Gramacho, which raises questions regarding the politics of art and art's function as a generator of empowerment for social change. The process of creation, as supported by the documentary and individual interviews with the *catadores*, has generated within the *catadores* a shift in how they perceive themselves, giving them a critical perspective on the economic system that degrades and marginalizes their position as *catadores.* Isis, for example, affirms that after being part of this project she sees herself "as a person, not as a mule," and no longer feels ashamed to work at Jardim Gramacho. Irma acknowledges that "sometimes we see ourselves as so small, but people out there see us as so big, so beautiful," referring to their portraits that were at that moment on exhibit at Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro.

The notion of being seen as "beautiful," in Irma's words, highlights the power of the aesthetic value that is produced within each portrait, given that the materials that begin as garbage are transformed into artistic materials that can generate something beautiful. The portraits created by Muniz live outside of the images of Jardim Gramacho,

where the landscape is overrun by garbage and where the human factor disappears. The objective of each photographic portrait is that each individual, who becomes invisible within the garbage in Gramacho, is given an individual space within the frame, restoring visibility to the *catador*, which in turn empowers the *catador* to see him/herself as art, as beautiful. These aesthetically pleasing images gain power through their representations of beauty.

Nonetheless, Muniz's art accomplishes more than creating beauty from chaos. By offering a view of reality through a play on perception in which trash becomes the raw material of art, he reveals the inner mechanics of the production of an image, which in turn provides the spectator access to develop a political, social, and cultural narrative of the marginalization of the human body, a body equated to waste, and the artistic spotlight restoring centrality and visibility to those same bodies. Before starting the project, Muniz invites Isis, Irma, Tião, Zumbi, and Suelem to the studio, and takes a moment to explain the process of viewing that Muniz aims to generate with his art. Muniz explains how people interact with art in a museum, through their body and eyes:

> They go like this (he leans forward) and then they go back, maybe take a little step back. And then they see the image. Let's imagine it's a beautiful landscape with a lake and a man fishing. They look and see the man fishing. And then they lean in and everything vanishes and becomes paint. They see the material. They move away and see the image. They get closer and see the material. They move away and see the idea. They get close and see just the material.

What Muniz is describing, seeing the image from afar and the materials used up close, is the relationship that Muniz is developing with his artwork. Intentionally, he creates

images that play on perception: when observed from afar, the spectator can see the complete landscape, and when looking closer the spectator interacts directly with the material that has created the image. In the portraits created of the *catadores*, the material that creates the image itself is recyclable material. It is precisely those materials that give the spectator access to the political dimension of the aesthetically beautiful portraits that the spectator can see when he/she steps back away from the material.

The museum becomes the vehicle through which this process of viewing, critical to the deepest meaning of his artwork, can take place. The museum in itself is a space where artwork is "framed, contained and stage-managed," meaning that its organization, which determines how the spectator navigates and visually reads the artwork, is articulating a "preferred legibility" (Farago and Preziosi 143). The process of framing and containing art comes to the fore in Muniz's art process as seen in the documentary. As the film navigates the artist's creative process, there is a clear process of staging, organizing, and framing his subjects, shifting from a sphere of chaos (the landfill) to a controlled sphere (the frame, the art gallery, then the museum). In this process of organizing the chaotic image that Muniz observes in Gramacho, he is making illegible bodies, obscured by the waste they work with, legible to a new public. Hana Musiol explains that the act of reconfiguring the bodies of the *catadores* as Western artwork is not insignificant:

> By first staging and literally framing them, [Muniz] constructed [the *catadores*] as objects of another's aesthetic scrutiny, enabling them to 'earn' the look of empathy or approval associated with legal personhood. […] To generate recognition and empathy and then, in turn, to gain rights, the pickers must be

> transformed from human refuse into beautiful things. They must be selected, arranged, and displayed, just as artifacts are, and not accumulated into an indistinguishable pile, as trash is (164).

In the process of turning the marginalized figure of the *catador* into a recognizable aesthetic object, Muniz is using the very sphere of fine art that he describes as "restrictive" in order to articulate an expansive political message. It is, of course, arguable that the same portraits that intend to free the *catadores* by bringing them visibility by staging them as Western works of art, in fact reinscribe, to some extent the violence they presume to liberate them from by not portraying them as individuals but as "others."

While Muniz is fulfilling his objective of creating a place from which the *catadores* can "look at where they are," ethical questions arise. Towards the end of the film, the documentary attempts to capture the shift in perspective that might have been generated by working with Muniz—to wit, Isis's self-affirmation: "I don't see myself in the trash anymore. I don't want to go back to the garbage. I see myself as a person, not as a mule." During individual interviews with Irma and Tião, what becomes noticeable, however, is a displacement of their own subjectivity that occurs as the result of a disjuncture between their individuality and the portrait itself (Rangel Diogo 3). Irma, for example, as she admires her portrait that Muniz has gifted her, says, "this image has traveled all over to China and Japan. I didn't go, but it did. I'm famous out there"; Tião, similarly, marvels, "I never imagined I would become a work of art." Their portraits become the vehicle through which the *catadores* enter a public sphere and gain visibility within a new public sector, while the artistic process has initiated a transformation, for

some *catadores*, in their sense of self that leads them to no longer identify with their position as a *catador*. Tião expresses this duality when he says, “It’s really worthwhile to work on behalf of the pickers, to become recognized as an official sector of the recyclable materials industry. And it’s also worthwhile becoming a work of art.”

In the documentary, the narrative of making “illegible humans accessible to a new public” raises ethical questions regarding the portrayal of the *catadores* and the position of the artist in the documentary narrative (Musiol 164). Kevin Corbett argues that the documentary “gloss[es] over the economic and political conditions that are as much part of these people’s lives as is the garbage they work in” (132). Tina Kendall proposes that the film uses its affective value to take attention away from the “thorny ethical questions about the material and social relations” by using art to “transform feel-bad poverty and human suffering into an uplifting, feel-good message, while absolving us of responsibility for what we see” (53-54), because as spectators we are not asked to recognize our place within the economic system that sustains marginalized communities. Rather, “the film instead focuses our attention on the possibility that hardship can be redeemed once this ‘waste land’ is left behind” (Kendall 54). Further, Meredith Wrigley highlights the dichotomy “us/them,” which she observes in the conversation between Muniz and his wife prior to his trip to Rio de Janeiro when both of them refer to the *catadores* as “they,” implying a world that lives outside the artists’ lived experience: “How is it going to be, like the whole health issue-wise, if you work with *them*? It’s not exactly safe to do what *they* do,” Muniz’s wife asks him, a point that is further underscored by the fact that Muniz’s project, for the *catadores*, is just a temporary job which ends with the artist’s departure (110-11; Wrigley’s emphasis).

Steven Butterman, for his part, strongly expresses his ethical issues with the documentary, stating that the documentary's intentions are "paternalistic," "disingenuous," and "offensive," in that the filmmakers assume that the *catadores* do not possess "human dignity" or "are led to dis-cover or un-cover a newly formed sense of dignity, previously hidden under the heaps of garbage which surrounds their daily lives." Butterman goes on to note that "this attitude not only infantilizes the 'characters' who populate the film and whose real lives are exploited within it, but actually serves to dehumanize them by refusing to accept that they possess free will." Ultimately, for Butterman, this documentary robs the characters of their agency.

While Corbett, Kendall, Wrigley, and Butterman raise important points regarding the narrative developed by the documentary, there is an awareness within Muniz about the complexity of proposing a social project. Muniz himself asks, "How art can change people, but also, can it change people? Can this be done? And what would be the effects of this?" The documentary answers these questions with a firm "yes": art can change and transform identities, and art can be a platform for a sector of society to gain visibility within other areas of the public sphere. Towards the beginning of the documentary, there is an effort to develop a narrative that establishes a complex portrait of the economic and social position of the *catadores*, highlighting their marginal position within a competitive free market. Yet, the narrative is overshadowed by the documentation of Muniz's artistic process. Becoming more concerned with the effects of the art, the documentary overlooks the complex and continuous role of the politics and economic structures at play within the *catadores*' reality as well as within the artistic framework. Rather than delving deeper into the function of the art itself, the documentary offers a lighthearted ending by

demonstrating how both artist and subject have changed due to the artistic process. So, while the documentary offers a resolution for the impact that the artistic process has had on the *catadores* and on Muniz, what remains unresolved is our position as consumers within this larger system. What also remains unresolved is the economic situation in which the *catadores* remain. While the documentary answers the question of whether art can transform with a resounding yes, the better question to ask is: to what degree and to what depth is art in fact transformational? Is this a temporary fix? Is it a visibility that will remain in the high art museum realm, these bodies forever on exhibit, or will it in fact generate awareness that will produce change at the ground level of the subjects' economic reality?

*Conclusion*

The photographic portrait comes to the fore in *Esperando al mesías* and *Lixo Extraordinário* as the medium through which identities are captured, formed, and circulated. As a medium that records a representation of self and symbolic construction of identity, the photographic portrait is used within the filmic narratives to demonstrate the fragility of identities that circulate within a neoliberal economic structure as well as the power of the portrait in challenging the violence inflicted on citizens of the state.

*Esperando al mesías* is the point of departure for understanding how the photographic portrait, as seen in identification cards, is a document that, in its function of identifying citizens of the state, reveals the precarious nature of citizenry within a neoliberal economic system. Within the narrative of economic failure established in *Esperando al mesías*, the identification card becomes significant in highlighting how

citizenship is established within the photographic portrait and how these identities are vulnerable to the fluctuation of the market. When the state is confronted with an economic downturn, it fails to fulfill its key role in protecting the citizenry. Thus identities are shattered and, as Ariel and Santamaría show, the characters must rearticulate identities that are no longer defined through the state.

While *Esperando al mesías* focuses on the significance and the failure of the state in its role in protecting citizenry within an economic downturn, as is symbolically noted through the widespread loss of photographic identification, *Lixo Extraordinário* responds to the limits of the identification card by proposing in the documentary a way in which photographic portraitures can reconfigure the representation of individuals that are marginalized within the neoliberal economic structure. The documentary follows the Brazilian visual artist Vik Muniz, who creates portraits of *catadores* using recyclable materials. Each portrait intends to bring visibility to individuals that remain marginalized and invisible by other sectors of society. Despite their fundamental role within the recycling business, their importance is defined by the market and monetary gain. Muniz uses the artistic sphere to bring visibility to these bodies that are marginalized by society. Both films ultimately shed light on how citizenship is a volatile concept within the neoliberal economic system, an economic structure that enhances forms of individualism and competition, where the violence of the state is manifested through social and economic marginalization perpetuated by neoliberalism.

# Conclusion

This dissertation, "The Politics of Photographic Aesthetics in Latin America: Photography and Violence in Argentine and Brazilian Film in the Twenty-First Century," traces a recurrent pattern in which photography appears as a critical narrative tool within twenty-first century filmic production in Argentina and Brazil. It is at the intersection of aesthetically beautiful representations and political value that we encounter a persistent representational thread of photography in Latin American films and fiction that map critical historical periods characterized by socio-economic and political violence.

In Chapter One, "The Photographer's Lens: Visualizing Beauty in María Victoria Menis's *La cámara oscura* (*Camera Obscura;* 2008) and Júlia Murat's *Histórias que Só Existem Quando Lembradas* (*Found Memories*; 2011)," photography is used to set in relief the violent outcomes of periods of nation formation during the nineteenth century into the twentieth century in Argentina and Brazil, which experienced the implementation of liberal policies that looked to integrate Latin American economy into the global market. These periods were characterized by rapid economic growth noticed through the development of rural regions into sites of agricultural production. Within these films, photography not only exposes violence, but is also critical in offering a break from the restrictive structures it denounces, ending on a utopian note of freedom.

Menis's *La cámara oscura* follows the life of Gertrudis, daughter of a Russian-Jewish family that arrives in Argentina as part of the government's policies that encouraged immigration, as it sought to develop rural areas in support of a growing agricultural economy. Leading a life of rejection from birth, through her marriage with

landowner León Cohen, Gertrudis's marginalization is heightened by fulfilling the function of wife and child-bearer, two roles that are crucial to the sustenance of her husband's agricultural economy. Jean Baptiste's arrival offers Gertrudis a source of liberation. Gertrudis sees in the photographer and his photographs the source of power in her rebellion against her position within the oppressive family structure and agricultural economy.

*Histórias que Só Existem Quando Lembradas* moves forward in time and depicts the socio-economic effects of the coffee boom experienced in Brazil. Jotuomba, a fictional town in the historical coffee region of Vale do Paraíba, Brazil, gives representation to those towns that rose and fell with the boom. Jotuomba is a town that has fallen off the map, entering into a state of sleep where its small community is destined to live in a perpetual state of oblivion. Madalena, the main character, demonstrates the circular movement in which the town is trapped, through her daily routine that she performs along with the rest of the community day in and day out. This routine is broken upon the arrival of young photographer Rita. Rita's photography of Jotuomba and its members is crucial in highlighting the decay of the community and the town itself, bringing to the fore the exploitative economy of agricultural booms that yield human ruin as their long-term outcome. Her photography at the same time is crucial in finding and photographing the beauty within the decay and the oblivion, as seen when she photographs Madalena who finds liberation in this moment before her death.

In both films, photography comes to the fore as a narrative tool with the dual function of illuminating both violence and beauty. While it highlights the oppressive and marginalizing structures of the agricultural state and the violence that its structure visited

upon the civil populace, it is also the medium through which the female bodies of Madalena and Gertrudis find a source of liberation. Photography is the source that gives them the power to assert their individuality and to rebel against the oppressive agricultural system.

Chapter Two, "Photographing Political Consciousness in Walter Salles's *Diarios de motocicleta* (*Motorcycle Diaries*; 2004) and Julio Cortázar's 'Apocalipsis de Solentiname' ('Apocalypse at Solentiname'; 1976)," moves into the historical twentieth century, mapping the rise and fall of the leftist ideologies in Latin America. Salles's film and Cortázar's short story focus on the political consciousness of two historical Latin American figures, Ernesto "Che" Guevara and Julio Cortázar, as they negotiate the conflict between their bourgeois lifestyle and their emergent political ideology. *Diarios de Motocicleta* takes a step back in time to offer a more human portrait of the now mythical figure of "Che" Guevara. To do so, *Diarios* focuses on Guevara's travel through Latin America with his friend Alberto Granado on his broken-down motorcycle nicknamed "La Poderosa" (The Powerful One"). These two medical students set off to see the "real" Latin America, not the one they have read about in textbooks. As they travel through the region, from Argentina, to Chile, Peru, and finally Venezuela, Ernesto's experiences and interaction with people that share their stories of struggle and oppression, strip him of his bourgeois outlook on life characterized by traveling for leisure and using his status to acquire free goods. As the journey progresses Ernesto's political consciousness begins to emerge, evolve, and solidify. Photography is crucial in tracking this evolving political awareness. Through what I call filmic portraits, the filmic camera adopts a photographic aesthetic to create individual portraits of the people that

have shared stories with Ernesto and have contributed to establishing his political maturity.

"Apocalipsis de Solentiname" moves forward in time and addresses the intellectual discontent with the Cuban Revolution and the rise of right-wing U.S.-supported military dictatorships that established violent and oppressive regimes starting in the 1970s in Latin America. Cortázar, via the creation of an autobiographical literary avatar, navigates his personal struggles with the leftist movement as a prominent Latin American intellectual. "Apocalipsis" narrates the historical trip of Cortázar to Solentiname, Nicaragua, where priest and poet Ernesto Cardenal had founded a community on liberation theology principles. Upon Cortázar's avatar's arrival in Solentiname, the beauty of landscape paintings made by artists from the community takes him aback. Cardenal eagerly photographs them in order to take them back to his home in Paris, where he can continue to experience their beauty. Upon his return to Paris, eager to relive the beauty of the images, he sets up his screen and starts to look at the slides projected in front of him. Expecting to see the idyllic landscapes of the paintings, he is confronted with gruesome images of violence that play out in front of him as a filmic sequence. This filmic sequence plays before Cortázar images of torture, rape, and terror, linked to sites where oppressive and violent right-wing military regimes overtook the political scene, including Nicaragua, Guatemala, Argentina, and Brazil. Despite Cortázar's avatar's desire to deny his awareness of the political environment in Latin America, manifested through his eagerness to photograph the idyllic landscapes, the photograph holds the truth of his political consciousness, and commitment to the left.

Photography, as a result, emerges in both films as the holder of political truths, as the medium that captures and reveals to the diegetic spectator—in these instances, Guevara and Cortázar—the truth of their political consciousness. Ultimately, in both *Diarios de motocicleta* and "Apocalipsis de Solentiname," photography, within this Latin American context, will always hold the truth, revealing the inner structures of political violence.

Chapter Three, "Photographing Citizenship: Daniel Burman's *Esperando al mesías* (*Waiting for the Messiah*; 2000) and Lucy Walker's *Lixo Extraordinário* (*Waste Land*; 2010)," marks the historical transition from dictatorships to the implementation of neoliberal policies. By the 1990s Argentina and Brazil had fully adopted free-market friendly neoliberal policies. The effects of neoliberalism on the citizenry became evident as individual freedoms become attached to a free market that works to increase the wealth of an elite sector, relying on the labor and skills of citizens. Given that labor is viewed as a commodity, the position of the worker becomes attached to the success and failure and the cycles of supply and demand of the market. In *Esperando al mesías*, the notion of citizenry is shaken upon the sudden economic downturn experienced in the film. Main characters Ariel and Santamaría are affected by the failing economy; Ariel's family has to confront a financial loss and the sudden death of Ariel's mother Sara, and Santamaría, a banker, is fired from his job and on the same day is kicked out of his house and marriage by his wife because he can no longer fulfill his role as provider. Santamaría quickly finds his footing, despite no longer having a roof over his head or an income, and creates an informal business of recuperating stolen wallets that he finds in dumpsters. His role in recuperating and returning identification cards and credit cards, forms of state and

financial identification, he establishes a link between the precarity of citizenship within the neoliberal state. While underscoring the volatility of the market and its violent effects on the country, the film ends by offering a possibility of formulating identities not based on the neoliberal state but through the foundation of a family unit.

*Lixo Extraordinário* is a documentary that follows the Brazilian artist Vik Muniz as he sets off on his new art project in Brazil. The documentary follows Muniz's journey to the landfill Jardim Gramacho, located in the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro and the main site of garbage and recyclable collection for the area. Muniz's art project consists of focusing on people and the materials with which they work. With this in mind, Muniz starts to work with *catadores de materiais reciváveis*, collectors of recyclable materials. The artwork consists of Muniz's creating photographic portraits of the *catadores* that are composed of recyclable materials. Through these portraits, Muniz creates beauty out of the chaos he initially observes in the landfill, composing portraits that intend to highlight the human factor of a site that remains marginalized. In Muniz's process of shedding light on marginalized figures through his artwork he is circulating through international art exhibits portraits that render well-known Western works of art, including Pablo Picasso's *Woman Ironing* (1904), Jacques-Louis David's *The Death of Marat* (1793), Jean-François Millet's *The Sower* (1850), and a portrait that evokes the Madonna with children. By framing each *catador* as Western works of art, Muniz is both making the *catadores* visible to a new public sphere that would not otherwise "see" the *catadores* and their function within the economy, though at the same time arguably reinscribing to some extent the very violence from which the portraits intend to free the *catadores* by yoking their individual identities to masterpieces of Western art. *Esperando al mesías*

and *Lixo Extraordinário* address the socio-economic effects of neoliberalism in the formulation of citizenship, where photography functions within the films as the medium through which alternative identities, separate from a neoliberal formulation of citizenship, are possible.

Through individual readings of films where photography is at the core of the film's overarching meaning and message, I identify a consistent representational thread of photography as a narrative tool in twenty-first century Argentine and Brazilian films. Appearing either as a photograph, a photographer or the film's adoption of a photographic aesthetic, the photographic medium come to the fore in each film as a narrative tool that articulates and examines socio-economic concerns and the violence that these problems have inflicted on the civil population. Each chapter maps the key historical periods as articulated by the films analyzed, spanning the late nineteenth-century to the twenty-first century, from the liberal policies that promoted expansion and agricultural boom to the rise and fall of leftist ideologies and the rise of right-wing military regimes, to the implementation of neoliberal policies. This historical mapping demonstrates the overlapping and parallel socio-economic histories of Argentina and Brazil, and the heightened importance of film in these regions in articulating and denouncing violence. Within this historical trajectory, each chapter becomes a portrait of the violent effects of socio-economic and political policies upon the civil population and how photography is used as a narrative tool to expose such violence. While violence as exposed by the photographic medium is a guiding thread that connects each film and each chapter, this exposition of violence is also accompanied by the possibility of beauty, in the form of liberation from oppressive socio-economic and political systems through the

formulation of agency. Thus, photography within this cinematic corpus concerned with the socio-economic and political histories of Brazil, Argentina, and Latin America as a whole comes to the fore as fundamental in representing a history of violence and the possibility of liberation.

The play between violence and beauty that I identify through photography within each film points towards a theoretical understanding of the photographic medium as one that can sustain and articulate within its frame both an aesthetic and political value. Susan Sontag and Roland Barthes theorize photography as an aesthetic medium that can reveal the truth while also hiding it, meaning that the aesthetic value of a photograph has the possibility of obscuring political truth. Far from suggesting that the photograph does not depict truth, what they are proposing is that the aesthetic of a photograph is limiting and highly coded, thus incapacitating the spectator in accessing the violent political structures that are at play within the aesthetic image. As each chapter demonstrates, photography emerges in each film as a medium that can propose the articulation of both violence and beauty. By approaching photography as an articulation of beauty and violence, the films use photography as a tool to denounce state violence while offering the possibility of liberation. My intention is not to counter Sontag's and Barthes's like-minded assertions that the aesthetically beautiful has a seductive value which limits access to a political value, but rather that the films in this dissertation propose an inverted function in photography: in these cases, aesthetic value in fact reveals the politically violent structure imbedded within the image; aesthetic value yields political insight.

With this dissertation I seek to make a contribution to the growing scholarship that identifies photography in Latin America as a medium that has important value within

cultural narratives. The objective is to contribute to this scholarly corpus a study of the recurrent tendency in cinematic and literary texts to use the photographic medium as a vehicle for denouncing socio-economic and political violence in Latin America, and for illuminating a path toward liberational agency. The liberational agency that the characters attain at the conclusion of each film refers to the breaking away from state structures that limit them. In the process of denouncing the political and economic structures that deny the characters access to their basic freedoms, each filmic narrative offers an alternate approach in regard to the relationship between citizen and state. The narrative proposes at its conclusion the formulation of new affective communities. These affective communities, formed through friendships (as seen in *Histórias que Só Existem Quando Lembradas*, *Diarios de motocicleta*, "Apocalipsis de Solentiname," and *Lixo Extraordinário*) or love (as seen in *Cámara oscura* and *Esperando al mesías*), offer the possibility of developing identities that express their discontent with state structures and grant them visibility within those affective community structures, all the while that these community structures are posited as important pieces of larger state structures. As a result, I identify within each film a play between a politics of recognition and antistatism; the films reject the state and the socio-eocnomic policies it supports but at the same time these films also reconfigure the ways in which the state recognizes the characters by demanding that they be granted visibility on the strength of their individual identities, not as cogs in the wheel of a larger economic structure that inflicts repressive violence. Ultimately, each within its unique narrative and historical circumstances, these films propose that the individuals at the core of their narratives can reformulate their position vis-à-vis the state through affective communities.

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