New Constructions of House and Home in Contemporary Argentine and Chilean Cinema (2005-2015)

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This thesis explores the potential of domestic space to act as the ground for new forms of community and sociability in Argentine and Chilean films from the early twenty-first century. It thus tracks a shift in the political treatment of the home in Southern Cone cinema, away from allegorical affirmations of the family, and towards a reflection on film's ability to both delineate and disrupt lived spaces. In the works examined, the displacement of attention from human subjects to the material environment defamiliarises the domestic sphere and complicates its relation to the nation. The house thus does not act as 'a body of images that give mankind proofs or illusions of stability' (Bachelard), but rather as a medium through which identities are challenged and reformed.

This anxiety about domestic space demands, I argue, a renewal of the deconstructive frameworks often deployed in studies of Latin American culture (Moreiras, Williams). The thesis turns to new materialist theories, among others, as a supplement to deconstructive thinking, and argues that theorisations of cinema's political agency must be informed by social, economic and urban histories. The prominence of suburban settings moreover encourages a nuancing of the ontological links often invoked between cinema, the house, and the city.

The first section of the thesis rethinks two concepts closely linked to the home: memory and modernity. Analysing documentary and essay films, Chapter 1 suggests some political limitations to the figure of the fragment which dominates scholarly discussion of memory in Latin America. Chapter 2 studies films which explore the inclusions and exclusions created by modernist domestic architecture. The second section focuses on two human figures found on the threshold of the home: the domestic worker and the guest. Chapter 3 analyses unorthodox representations of domestic work, and explores how new materialist approaches can enhance readings of the political potential of 'art cinema'. Finally, in Chapter 4 I examine films depicting household visitors that upset

urban class divisions, and question the possibility of 'domestic cosmopolitanism' (Nava 2006) in contemporary Latin America.

My comparative analysis of these films explores a rupture between physical dwelling and imagined home that points towards new political practices in a neoliberal, post-dictatorship context.

Preface

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. I further state that no substantial part of my dissertation has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

It does not exceed the prescribed word limit for the relevant Degree Committee.

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I would like lastly to thank my family, who have helped me retain a sense of perspective even at the most difficult moments. As ever, their love and support deserve more gratitude than I can express.

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Introduction

In the first month of this millennium, a transparent house appeared on a central street of Santiago de Chile. The work of the architects Arturo Torres and Jorge Christie, and partly financed by the Fondo Nacional de Desarrollo de las Artes (Fondart), the house was occupied for two weeks by Daniella Tobar, a 21-year-old theatre student from the Universidad de Chile. Tobar carried out her normal daily routine within the single-storey, glass-walled construction, cooking meals, washing, and sleeping. This intervention, sitting somewhere between the fields of architecture, theatre and performance art, caused a considerable stir in Chilean media and public discourse. Conservative commentators accused the work of upsetting normal standards of public decency, and it rapidly became clear that a key objective of the largely male crowds that gathered outside was catching a glimpse of Tobar's naked body in the shower (Béraud 2013).

Press coverage of the Proyecto de Investigación Artística Nautilus, as the house was formally titled, centred on these questions of voyeurism and morality, but also on money. Some questioned the wisdom or utility of devoting public funds to such a project (Béraud 2013). After her truncated stay in the house, Tobar went on to have a career as an actress in a number of television series and films. In spite of its apparent unsettling of sociocultural norms, the glass house at Moneda 1055 was in this way at least partially reabsorbed into mainstream Chilean culture. This thesis takes Nautilus as a condensation and a foreshadowing marker of concerns that characterise a significant body of filmmaking in early twenty-first century Chile and Argentina. In an era when intimacy is frequently transformed into spectacle by the increasingly pervasive presence of media (Sibilia 2008), the at once familiar and strange nature of the domestic sphere is accentuated. Moreover, at a time when established public forms of sociability appear exhausted or broken (Lechner 2006: 367), domestic routine and the material components of the household offer themselves as a potential site of commonality. This thesis explores the contradictions of domestic communities in contemporary filmmaking in Argentina and Chile, asking how questions of identity are reshaped by cinema's uneasy movement between private and public, between inside and outside.

Film has, of course, long taken an interest in the domestic environment: indeed, John David Rhodes has argued that there is an ontological link (or, in his architectural terms, *communication*) between the cinema and real estate property (2017). Rhodes posits the cabinet of curiosities and the country house visit as forerunners of cinema in their conversion of the deepest recesses of private property into (paid-for) spectacle. Houses, Rhodes claims, often serve as both 'figure and ground' of cinematic representation, but he cautions against over-identifying the 'two rooms' of cinema and architecture (pointing here towards the roots of the film camera in the *camera obscura*). A rush to make that analogy, he claims, risks obscuring the hierarchies, alienation and (gendered) repression inscribed in real estate property. By contrast, Rhodes writes, 'a serious reckoning with the cinematic spectacle of property will necessarily dislodge us from the cozy familiarity we have with houses and with cinema'. Rhodes' emphasis on the inequalities of the relation between film and the domestic interior, and his theorisation of visual pleasure as 'inherently bound up in questions of possession and dispossession', are especially pertinent when thinking of contemporary Argentine and Chilean film. These two Southern Cone countries present housing inequities far starker than those visible in most of the global North.

Property thus forms one axis of my argument, in that it allows an analysis of domestic space in film that does not simplistically conflate two of the key terms I discuss here: 'house' and 'home'. The films I analyse resist, in varying ways, a bourgeois conception of home as a private domestic sphere invested with symbolic meaning, an understanding given universal validity by the work of thinkers such as Gaston Bachelard. Human identity is, Bachelard suggests, always *housed*: his concept of 'topoanalysis' seeks to explore the interrelation of the psyche with distinct parts of the domestic interior (cellar, attic, etc.) (1969: 9). A more sceptical view is outlined by Walter Benjamin in his 'Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century'. In Benjamin's analysis, the middle-class home functions as a means of suppressing business and social concerns, by materialising the fantasy of psychological interiority:

> [f]rom [this suppression] sprang the phantasmagorias of the interior. This represented the universe for the private citizen. In it he assembled the distant in space and time. His drawing-room was a box in the world-theatre. (1968: 83)

Benjamin ultimately suggests that the fusion of subjectivity and material environment is impossible: he describes the bourgeois effort to strip things of their commodity value through possession as a Sisyphean task (84). The films with which I open my analysis in Chapter 1 place cinema in direct dialogue with this vision of home, both adopting and challenging the role of the 'world-theatre' that Benjamin describes.

These works, and many of the others that I will discuss, pose the question of how traditional models of domestic and life – nuclear family structures, for example – might respond or adapt to the experience of modernity and postmodernity in Argentina and Chile. This is an approach with a long history: cinema's interest in domestic space has often taken the form of an investigation into the consequences of modernity. Many films, of which Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window* (1954) is one of the best-known, have tackled the shifting boundary between inside and outside that results from the development and increasing density of the urban fabric, and the consequent challenges to subjectivity and identity. Indeed, in the first half of the twentieth century the 'glass house' became something of a motif of modern living for certain artists, architects and intellectuals. Sergei Eisenstein expended a considerable amount of time and effort in developing a film to be titled *The Glass House*, writing multiple versions of the script that changed from a 'comedy based around the moving camera's ability to perceive situations which remain invisible to the inhabitants of a glass high-rise building' to a 'psycho-social drama' (McQuire 2008: 169).[1] Benjamin, meanwhile, in his essay on surrealism, makes the claim that 'to live in a glass house is a revolutionary virtue par excellence. It is also an intoxication, a moral exhibitionism, that we badly need' (1978: 49). Benjamin here affirms his faith in the ability of modern architecture to abolish boundaries between public and private spheres. Yet his metaphor of intoxication suggests that this may not be a comfortable process. Some films from the mid-twentieth century onwards, perhaps most notably Jacques Tati's *Playtime* (1967), suggests modernist architecture and its sought-after transparency cause confusion and dislocation in modern urban life. The films I analyse in the second chapter of this thesis take up precisely this point, suggesting that the communication between film and the

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[1] The script was however never finished, and production never started. See McQuire for further details (2008: 169).

modern(ist) house is not quite as harmonious as Benjamin, Eisenstein and other intellectuals of their period might have thought.

This thesis thus responds to a longstanding set of questions about how film, as industry, technology and artistic medium, might expose or alter the conditions of everyday life. The media furore surrounding the Nautilus project, however, also points towards a specific anxiety, and a specific curiosity, about the boundaries of public and private spheres in an age of ever-increasing (if unevenly accessible) technological mediation. It is an anxiety about identity, too: a transparent house and its audience raise questions about the extent to which the practices associated with the domestic space might be considered kinds of performance rather than expressions of essential qualities.[2] Yet there is of course a longer tradition in play here: the house has functioned as a crucial figure of identity, and indeed of human imagination, in Western philosophy. Mark Wigley, in his book on the relation between architecture and deconstructive thought, makes a striking claim in this regard. Since the time of Plato, he writes, the house has always been the 'exemplar of presentation' for the philosophical tradition that Jacques Derrida termed the 'metaphysics of presence' (1993: 103). Wigley adds that

> [t]he governing concept of "Idea" as presence, and of the visible world as informed matter, *the material presentation of immaterial ideas*, is traditionally established with the metaphor of the house produced by an architect (103, my emphasis).

Under this schema, the house 'is not simply the paradigm of the operations of the idea. Rather, the idea is itself understood as a paradigm […] or architectural model' (103). All thought, in other words, is a domestic practice and a reassertion of the logic of property. This is a point that Derrida makes forcefully when reading Hegel: 'the general form of philosophy is properly familial and produces itself as *oikos*: home, habitation […] the guarding of the proper, of property, propriety, of one's own' (1986: 200, original emphasis).

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[2] I am drawing here on Erving Goffman's analysis of everyday life as a series of performances, and of the spaces as akin to theatrical stages (1956).

Derrida's language here is undoubtedly hyperbolic, but it would be hard to deny the foundations of his argument. In the twentieth century alone, one can look to a number of thinkers whose work takes up the house as a structuring image or figure. In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Sigmund Freud refers several times to the idea that the house is a privileged symbol for the human body in dreams, with its constituent parts corresponding to organs, notably genitalia (1991: 156–57, 320–21, 472, 482).[3] Carl Jung questioned the 'almost exclusive personalism' of Freudian psychology, suggesting that the house in fact provided an archetypal model for the structure of the human psyche (1963: 182–85). Bachelard develops Jung's idea within a peculiarly lyrical form of phenomenology in his *Poetics of Space*, asserting that the house provides the model for the human conception of the universe, 'the human being's first world' (1969: 7). As mentioned above, he argues that human identity is always *housed*: this fusion of subject and environment is what he, and many after him, understand as *home*. As Rhodes notes (2017), Bachelard takes a large, bourgeois house and gives it universal validity: the size and the 'verticality' of the dwelling are essential to its ability to function as 'a body of images that give mankind proofs or illusions of stability' (1969: 17). He dismisses modern urban developments in Paris as nothing more than the destruction of meaningful, rooted dwelling: 'In Paris there are no houses, and the inhabitants of the big city live in superimposed boxes' (26). '*Home*', he argues, 'has become mere horizontality' (27, original emphasis).[4] This perspective is a useful counterpoint to my own approach: the cinematic depiction of domestic space inevitably

[3] That body is most frequently a female body, and indeed in his essay on the uncanny Freud suggests that what men find uncanny about the female genitals 'is actually the entrance to man's old "home", the place where everyone once lived' (2003: 151). Marjorie Garber notes that 'it is almost impossible to use the metaphor of woman as house, or to extend the figure, without implying some law about her' (2000: 79–80). As will be discussed below, many recent Argentine and Chilean films challenge that metaphor and its implications.

[4] Henri Lefebvre contends that the abstraction of space in urban modernity empties out the meaning-making capacity of city lodgings, so that *residence* (a term whose meaning here is close to that of Heidegger's 'dwelling', outlined below) is replaced by *housing* ('the latter', he writes, 'being characterized by its functional abstraction' [1991: 314]). The bourgeois apartment, in his account, is simply a parody of aristocratic dwellings that have been materially invested with meaning over many years (thanks, of course, to material privilege). In the urban bourgeois residence, image and representation triumph over 'true' dwelling. It is for this reason that Lefebvre subtly criticises the nostalgic aura of Bachelard's work. When *residence* has been replaced by the 'urban fabric', 'the House' as universal figure 'has a merely historico-poetic reality rooted in folklore, or (to put the best face on it) in ethnology' (120). As Rhodes notes (2017), Lefebvre's charge that Bachelard's house is 'as much cosmic as it is human' suggests a neglect of material circumstances (1991: 121).

moves and destabilises a house's 'body of images', and my analysis will seek to think through understandings of home that are relevant for the varied urban fabrics of Buenos Aires and Santiago. Bachelard's conception of the house as a 'poetic space' will nonetheless find an echo in the chapters that follow, even though the cinematic poetics in question are rather more provisional and mobile than the sort he envisages.

Bachelard's concern with meaningful dwelling echoes the writing of Martin Heidegger. In his essay 'Building Dwelling Thinking', Heidegger argues that dwelling (characterised by a sense of unity with the space of the world) is distinct from mere housing as the architectural provision of shelter (2011: 254). Heidegger claims that 'the *proper plight of dwelling*', meant here as a fundamental sense of homelessness in the modern world, 'does not lie merely in a lack of houses' (254, original emphasis). On the one hand, in the 'Letter on Humanism', Heidegger argues that through language, man has the innate capacity to dwell ('Language is the house of Being' [147]). Yet later in the same essay, he states that '[h]omelessness is coming to be the destiny of the world' (165). Heidegger explicitly links this fundamental homelessness to Marx's concept of alienation, and indeed Anthony Vidler has suggested that both Heidegger's and Bachelard's ideas of dwelling are nostalgic constructs prompted by the wars and Depression of early twentieth-century Europe (1992: 7–8). It is certainly telling that the examples of building that leads to true dwelling given by Heidegger are fundamentally rural and seemingly ahistorical (a self-sufficient, ordered Black Forest farmhouse, for instance [253-54]). Heidegger's language is shot through with notions of the 'proper' and of identitarian essence, to the extent that it seems easy to agree with Susan Bernstein's charge that '[t]he figuring of language as the house of being thus installs a theologically grounded stability' (2008: 131). In other words, Heidegger's image of a house that permits true dwelling does not allow for much change or transformation.[5]

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[5] Ian James provides a helpful gloss on Heidegger's philosophy of space: 'the instances that Heidegger identifies as the site of an originary giving of being always articulate a closeness, nearness, or domesticity. While it is true that the unfamiliar, uncanny, or alienating aspect of being-in-the-world is always considered to be a fundamental existential, the emphasis placed on closeness and the familiarity of the everyday dominate Heidegger's phenomenological descriptions of experience' (2006: 87).

Freud, Bachelard and Heidegger, in their distinct ways, each posit a fundamental (albeit not exactly settled) link between personal identity and domestic space. Much work on domestic space in contemporary film studies is articulated in these terms.[6] For instance, many of the essays in recent edited volumes (Andrews and others 2016; Prime 2015) seek to 'read' the house on film as a sign, in order to uncover a set of meanings relating to human identity. In this respect I share Bernstein's scepticism of accounts that reduce houses to narrative ciphers of their occupiers or owners (2008: 14). The growing incorporation of the term 'home' into film scholarship suggests an awareness of the complex affective bonds between house and occupant, and indeed between house and spectator. As will be discussed in more detail below, 'home' can be understood as a set of relations to people, a set of memories, certain assumptions about gender roles, a place, a space, practices, affects or emotions (Mallett 2004).[7] The question of 'home' in film can therefore be a question about the conceptualisation of cinematic space, the work of cinematic affect, or the indexical qualities of cinema, among other considerations. [8] My analysis will touch on several of these ideas, though unlike some recent studies, I limit my focus to private residences.[9] This approach is in part prompted by the historical prominence of the household and family in Argentine and Chilean culture, which I will outline in the following section. I also have in mind an issue of translation: the idea of being 'at home' is most frequently rendered in Spanish by the phrase 'estar en casa', while an alternative translation, 'hogar', is more closely linked to the house and to the hearth than the English word.

The films I analyse in this thesis contest this elision of house and home, and in some cases suggest that the identification of a house as home is increasingly difficult in contemporary Argentina and Chile, due to profound social and economic shifts.

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[6] For a reading of contemporary film that draws on the Freudian uncanny, see David Sorfa on Michael Haneke (2006).

[7] Recent decades have seen a flourishing multidisciplinary interest in the home: for an overview of publications in the area, see the introduction to *The Domestic Space Reader* (Briganti and Mezei 2012: 9–10).

[8] My approach draws on the emphasis on materiality developed by theorists such as Laura U. Marks (2000), but does not remain within a purely affective or Deleuzian paradigm.

[9] Laura Rascaroli uses a more expansive geographical idea of home in her analysis of Marc Isaacs' *Lift* (2013).

Indeed, one of my central arguments will be that material political and economic conditions exercise a marked influence on the aesthetic characteristics of cinematic representations of domestic space.[10] I will therefore investigate how the legacies of military dictatorship, as well as events such as the 2001-02 economic crisis in Argentina, and the renewal of political protest in Chile from 2011, for instance, shape the films analysed here. In fact, the thesis will claim, following Bernhard Siegert, that 'There is no such thing as *the* house, or the house as such; there are only historically and culturally contingent techniques of shielding oneself and processing the division between inside and outside' (2015: 9, original emphasis). Both housing and film can be understood as examples of the 'cultural techniques' that Siegert studies, and an examination of how they interact can, I will suggest, illuminate the impact of urban transformations in contemporary Argentina and Chile.

It should be noted at this point that while my approach is materialist, it is not strictly Marxist. This thesis will suggest that the pessimism and melancholy often engendered by Marxist historical materialism – at least as it has interacted with Latin American studies – might be avoided through an engagement with the perspectives offered by thinkers such as Bruno Latour and Jane Bennett, often associated with new materialism. Like Bennett, I am keen to develop a less deterministic and 'more subtle awareness of the complicated web of dissonant connections between bodies', animate or inanimate (2010: 4). I also draw on Rosi Braidotti's affirmation that 'matter is not dialectically opposed to culture, nor to technological mediation, but continuous with them' (2013: 35). Film, I will argue, is particularly well placed as a medium to point out this continuity, and reading contemporary Argentine and Chilean cinema in this way can allow a fresh assessment of the political and social functions of the house in their cultures.

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[10] Michel de Certeau claims in the preface to the English translation of *The Practice of Everyday Life* that he aims for 'a science of the relationship that links everyday pursuits to particular circumstances' (1984: ix). I seek here, in part, to understand how cinema forms that relationship in Argentina and Chile.

'The House' and housing in Argentine and Chilean culture

This new assessment gathers urgency when the historically prominent position of the household in the Southern Cone, and the dramatic political, social and economic changes of recent decades, are taken into account. Jorge Francisco Liernur has outlined how social reformers in Argentina in the late 19th and early twentieth centuries, from Domingo Faustino Sarmiento onwards, took an interest in the order and 'health' of households, seeing in them an indicator of the health of the nation. In this view, '[l]a morada […] cumple una doble función reguladora: de los sentimientos y de los recursos' (2014a: 505). The work of maintaining traditional family structures and an idealised image of the home was entrusted to women as a duty, and encouraged by a swathe of manuals and magazines such as *El Hogar* (533). In Liernur's account, Catholic conservatives and socialists both considered the house and the family as 'las células básicas del tejido social' (538). These approaches to politics endow the house both with a biopolitical regulatory function, and a capacity to represent broader society. This is an idea that finds an echo in literature of the period, especially in Chile. Alberto Blest Gana's *Martín Rivas* ([1862] 1983), which is taken by Doris Sommer as one of Latin America's 'foundational fictions' (1991: 204–20), is a portrait of an upper-class Santiago family and makes significant use of domestic settings while addressing a range of issues in national politics. Some years later, Luis Orrego Luco's novel *Casa grande* ([1908] 1985) was read as a denunciation of the excesses of Santiago society, presented through the depiction of an aristocratic family. Yet these kinds of allegorical narratives did not persist long into the twentieth century, or at least not in unaltered form.

Indeed, it could be said that there is a double sense in which houses are separated from this figurative role and defamiliarised over the course of the twentieth century in Argentine and Chilean culture: on the one hand, by their progressive conversion into commodities, and on the other by a growing attentiveness to their political agency, frequently expressed as a sense that houses have their own existence, their own temporalities. To these might be added a diminishing faith in the ability of the domestic sphere to act as a refuge against the storms of urban modernity (Liernur 2014a: 504). The house has nonetheless remained an insistent presence in debates around belonging, identity and society in literature, film and other spheres of culture. My use of

the singular 'the house' here is perhaps misleading, though: as I will outline further below, the transformations of Santiago and Buenos Aires have led to significant changes in the character of housing stock, and in the visibility of lower-class dwellings, such that it is difficult to characterise the heterogeneous domestic situations of those cities under any one label.

Perhaps the best starting point for an exposition of the complexities of the relation between house and nation in the Southern Cone is a text typically regarded as a foundational work of Argentine literature. Sarmiento, in *Facundo*, describes the virtues of the 'colonia alemana o escocesa del sur de Buenos Aires': 'las casitas son pintadas; el frente de la casa, siempre aseado, adornado de flores y arbustillos graciosos; el amueblado, sencillo, pero completo'. Here, a domesticated nature ('arbustillos graciosos') is mirrored by the plenitude of the home's material contents. By contrast, the dwellings of the 'villa nacional', characterised by 'desaseo', are not even accorded the status of 'casa' or 'casita' (1990: 64)**.** This brief sketch reveals the ways in which the house functions as what Siegert terms a 'cultural technique', processing the distinctions between nature and culture, and between the civilised and the barbaric. It is telling, and unsurprising given the text's author, that the sphere of the cultured and the civilised is not obviously associated with national belonging. The postcolonial character of Argentine culture becomes evident here: what Sarmiento depicts as homely, civilised and welcoming is the culture of the coloniser (or, more strictly speaking, of the neocolonial migrant). The national is thus configured as a barbaric exterior to the domestic sphere.[11]

This example should act as a caveat against facile assumptions that domestic narratives in Argentina and Chile can be read straightforwardly as national allegories: there is, more often than not, a dense and multivalent web of associations at work. This is not to deny the continued existence of allegorical structures: in Chile, in particular, there is a rich vein of writing which explores the potential of the house to act as a conduit for

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[11] There have been a number of studies of domestic space in postcolonial literatures, especially in the Anglophone world: see, for instance, Antoinette Burton's *Dwelling in the Archive* (2003). In a Latin American context, see *House/Garden/Nation: Space, Gender, and Ethnicity in Post-Colonial Latin American Literatures by Women* (Rodríguez 1994).

ideas about the nation. In a study of this field, Pilar Álvarez-Rubio points to José Donoso, Diamela Eltit, Antonio Skármeta and Isabel Allende as key exponents of this trend (2007). Yet she is careful to note that the house functions as a literary *topos* not merely for the *construction* of Chilean and Latin American identity, but also for the *questioning* of it (2007: 15-16). Álvarez-Rubio's reading of Donoso's novel *Casa de campo* (1978) exemplifies her approach. She finds in Donoso's work a large, upper-class, rural house that functions as a microcosm of the nation, but also a literary style that shows up the limits and exclusions of that model (32-43). Alessandro Fornazzari has conducted an in-depth analysis of the workings of allegory in the novel: for him, the narrative allegorises the events of the Unidad Popular period and the subsequent military coup in 1973, but also depicts the triumph of 'commodity abstraction', which renders allegory obsolete. Fornazzari draws on Benjamin to propose that 'Allegorization and commodification are both processes of debasing the "thingliness" of things', with the latter being an intensified, globalised version of the former (2013: 32–35).

The disappearance of the Ventura family's gold reserves in *Casa de campo*, when understood as representing the new hegemony of (foreign) finance capital after 1973, thus appears to mark the end of a literary tradition that cast a critical eye on the nation through domestic narratives (Fornazzari 2013: 31). The novel, in Fornazzari's reading, thus anticipates the commoditisation of all spheres of life, including the domestic, enacted by the neoliberal transformation of Chile begun under Pinochet (7-9). In subsequent texts the construction of allegory, and with it literary form, is more severely disrupted. Indeed, the house itself, which is cast in Donoso's novel as the result of the appropriation of indigenous territory, is revealed to be as vulnerable to new economic arrangements as the Venturas' gold.[12]

In a much more recent novel, *Casa chilena* (2015), Roberto Brodsky adopts an unusual second-person narrative voice to recount the story of a Chilean writer who returns to Santiago from the United States to sell his family home. Though the title of *Casa chilena* suggests an allegorising of the nation, as does the the melancholic focus on small objects, the distancing effect of the narrative perspective and the prominence of

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[12] Eltit's writing (for instance her novel *Mano de obra* [2004]) is a clear example of this trend.

abstract financial concerns limit the scope of any such reading. Brodsky's brooding narrator muses that when it comes to real estate property, the market has triumphed over memory in contemporary Chile (200). The text from which the epigraph to this thesis is taken, Alejandro Zambra's *Facsímil* (2014a), takes the form of the university entrance exam in force in Chile from 1967 to 2002. In the epigraph, a parody of a multiple-choice question demonstrates how the subordination of the house to consumer credit does not negate its affective dimension ('Pero amas esta casa' [2014a: 26]), but confuses it: hence the multiple possible orderings of the five statements. The house remains a marker of identity, but its position as just another good in the market makes the process of allegorisation unworkable.[13]

It seems, then, that in Chilean culture at least, houses provoke an increasingly anti-essentialist, fluid and heterogeneous understanding of identity. To adopt this critical position is to endow houses themselves, as (represented) material environments, with a kind of social and political agency.[14] This much as is suggestively implied in a phrase of Donoso's that Álvarez-Rubio uses as the epigraph to her discussion of *Casa de campo*: 'Una casa puede ser un mundo de atmósferas. Uno las crea, las maneja, yuxtapone, las cambia, las reconstruye. *Las casas tienen infinitas vidas*' (2007: 19, my emphasis). The strongest echo in Chilean literature of this notion that houses might have lives of their own, which do not correspond to the temporalities of human residence, is found in works that deal with the legacies of dictatorship. In Germán Marín's *El palacio de la risa* ([1995] 2014), for instance, the narrator reflects on the changing uses of the Villa Grimaldi, an aristocratic estate in the Santiago suburb of Peñalolén that went from being a hub for artists and intellectuals in the early twentieth century to a torture centre under Pinochet's dictatorship ('Historia' [n.d.]).[15] The demolition of the site in order to

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[13] The Chilean sociologist Tomás Moulian notes that consumerism positively encourages the adoption of 'ciertos objetos emblemáticos', in particular houses, as status symbols (1998: 63). Yet this is necessarily identity figured as appearance, grounded in 'El predominio del tener sobre el ser' (65). There are echoes here of Jean Baudrillard's assertion in *The System of Objects* that the serialisation of household objects under capitalism removes any notions of signification, ideology or transcendence from the domestic sphere (1996: 16–18).
[14] This notion that human culture and society are influenced by, and indeed dependent on, nonhuman matter is central to the new materialist approaches I will explore below.
[15] The fact that tiny solitary confinement cells at the site were known as 'casas Chile' in an allusion to the reduced dimensions of social housing developments makes clear the extent to

make way for a new housing development makes clear the collective dimension of the anxiety over the loss of memory and history implied by such destruction, which when expressed by the protagonist of Brodsky's novel might seem irremediably solipsistic. In *Una casa vacía* (Cerda 1996), a couple buying a house in Santiago slowly become aware of the horrific abuses committed there during the dictatorship. The last line of the novel, *'¿Habrá un corazón abierto a las voces de la casa?*' casts this scenario in terms of the life of the house (324, original emphasis). The filmmakers whose work I discuss in Chapter 1 invoke similar ideas in their investigations of memory and history in the domestic sphere, ultimately provoking the question of whether memory can be considered (human) property.

This interest in the independent lives of houses, and in the ways in which they condition and/or transcend human agency, arguably finds even stronger expression in twentieth- and twenty-first century Argentine literature. Manuel Mujica Láinez's novel *La casa* ([1954] 2010), for example, has the unusual distinction of being narrated *by* the house of its title. Julio Cortázar's famed short story 'Casa tomada' ([1951] 2010: 107–11), meanwhile, locates its protagonists in a house increasingly filled by a mysterious, hostile presence. Marcelo Cohen's *Casa de Ottro* (2009) takes up a similar idea: the novel's protagonist views the house of the title as suffused with the consciousness of its late owner. Edward King writes that in this work, the metaphors of house as museum and house as artificial intelligence are merged, so that domestic space no longer offers a logical narrativisation of past events, an 'official house of memory' (2013: 132–38). King argues that the increasingly 'vitalistic' descriptions of objects and Cohen's disregard for the proprieties of language, evidenced by his abundant neologisms, serve as the basis for a reflection on the possibility of a '*vida en común*' that incorporates nonhuman objects and machines (144-49, original emphasis). This proposal provides a close analogy for my own project, which aims in part to explore how a reconfiguration of cinematic space might allow new conceptions of life in common.

Domestic spaces in Argentine and Chilean film first appeared in apparently innocuous form. In both countries, albeit with vastly differing degrees of success, a film studio

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which the house-nation allegorical relationship was distorted under military rule ('La Celda' [n.d.]).

system modelled on that of the United States privileged domestic narratives, most often family melodramas. In Argentina, a film like *Así es la vida* (Múgica 1939), with its insistent focus on a bourgeois domestic sphere, seems to do little to explore broader urban social life. The early productions of Chile Films, the unstable government-backed enterprise on the other side of the Andes, demonstrated a similar imitation of Hollywood models. Carlos Schlieper's *La casa está vacía* (1945), for instance, foregrounds its sombre, rural domestic setting as symbolic of the travails of the bourgeois family whose story it narrates. Yet even in a film like *Así es la vida* there exist possibilities for alternative political readings, via the short sequences that venture outside, placing the house in its urban context and showing contact, however fleeting, across class boundaries. Moreover, the diegetic length of the narrative, from the beginning of the twentieth century to 1930s, spans several generations: characters come and go, but the house remains.[16]

The possibility of heterodox political readings is much greater in the films of the Argentine director Leopoldo Torre Nilsson, where the ideological contradictions and the sexual frustration that characterise the domestic space in melodrama are rendered visible through increased formal experimentation (Amado 2005: 356). In Ana Amado's reading, the chiaroscuro, expressionist imagery and unusual spatial perspectives of a film like *La casa del ángel* (Torre Nilsson 1957) reveal the house as an 'escenario metafórico y teatral de identidades que terminan de constituirse en relacion con sus espacios, objetos y lugares' (361). This has particular force in the film's depiction of the troubled sexuality of its adolescent female protagonist: for Amado, the house becomes the point at which female desire is (not always successfully) made to coincide with 'el deseo del Otro' (361). Rather than a homogeneous, completed family identity, then, the film portrays 'una marcada atmósfera existencial de desencuentro, aislamiento o conflicto con el resto de los habitantes del claustro familiar' (362). Torre Nilsson's aesthetic and ideological deconstruction of domestic melodrama had significant influence on later work: it finds a powerful echo, for instance, in the black-and-white

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[16] In later audiovisual productions in both Argentina and Chile, the temporal span is further extended. The narrative of Patricio Kaulen's *La casa en que vivimos* (1970) is split between 1940, 1970 and 1980, and the thirteen episodes of Diego Lerman's television series *La casa* (2015) cover moments from 1929 to 2029.

chiaroscuro, claustrophobia and confused sexual desires of Silvio Caiozzi's *Julio comienza en Julio* (1979).[17]

Alongside Torre Nilsson's work, the 1950s and 60s saw the emergence of a current of political filmmaking that took housing inequality as a key point of contention. In Chile, Rafael Sánchez's documentary *Las callampas* [*The Shanty Towns*] (1958),[18] which I discuss briefly in Chapter 3, depicts the movement of people from informal settlements in Santiago to the *población* (legally established neighbourhood) of La Victoria.[19] In Argentina, Fernando Birri's *Tire dié* (1960) focuses on the inhabitants of a marginal neighbourhood of the city of Santa Fe. Both Birri's and Sánchez's films begin with aerial shots of city centres, with a voiceover expressing the stark contrasts between the wealth of these areas and the poverty of the neighbourhoods that will subsequently be shown. *Las callampas* and *Tire dié* stand as examples of filmmaking that sought, often through rather didactic cinematic techniques such as explanatory voiceover, to effect political change by encouraging the spectator to identify affectively with the circumstances of its subjects.

In the 1970s and 80s, the advent of military dictatorships in both Argentina and Chile radically altered the character of cultural depictions of domestic space. Both the Pinochet regime and the various military juntas in Argentina made use of what Amado and Nora Domínguez term a 'discurso familiarista' in order to justify both the confiscation of property and the torture and elimination of dissident bodies (2004: 27–28).[20] Such strategies built on a longer political usage of the family as a model of patriarchal, authoritarian organisation of society. Amado and Domínguez suggest that the designation of the nuclear family as a regulator of order in modern Argentina 'le

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[17] Caiozzi's film also owes much to Donoso's *Casa de campo* in its caustic presentation of the mores of the Chilean ruling class of the early twentieth century. For a detailed analysis of how its aesthetics respond to the military dictatorship under which it was made, see Corro Penjean (2012: 77–78).

[18] Translations are provided of colloquial Argentine and Chilean terms and phrases. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are mine.

[19] Guillermo Cahn's *Casa o mierda* (1969) depicts an inverse movement: the seizure of land to establish the *campamento* (extralegal settlement) 'Fidel Castro'.

[20] Judith Filc provides a thorough examination of how the Argentine juntas used the imagery of the 'gran familia argentina' to promote a conception of society characterised by filial obedience towards national authorities (1997: 33–60).

señaló un espacio (el del hogar) y un ordenamiento económico (dado por la idea de propiedad privada y su secuela, la unidad doméstica)' (27). Wolfgang Bongers notes that during the campaign for the 1970 presidential election in Chile, a leaflet distributed by a group called 'acción mujeres de Chile' depicted a solitary child with the caption '¿Dónde está el papá?', suggesting that the candidacy of socialist Salvador Allende would wreak havoc with the 'natural' familial order of the nation (2016: 19). This example makes clear the extent to which the family and the household became issues of contention during this period: the military regime in Argentina ran a propaganda campaign in 1976-77 across various media, including television, that posed the question '¿Sabe usted dónde está su hijo en este momento?' (Ministerio de Educación de la Nación [n.d.]). The *allanamientos* (raids on the houses of suspected political opponents) conducted in both Argentina and Chile, as well as the notorious kidnapping of the children of the disappeared in Argentina, further established the sense that the household and family were battlegrounds.[21]

The censorship established by military regimes forced many filmmakers into exile, while those who remained in Argentina and Chile found themselves obliged to work in highly restrictive conditions, in both intellectual and material terms. Hence the predominance of indirect allusion and, notwithstanding the changes outlined above, some allegorical frameworks. Caiozzi's *Julio comienza en Julio* in Chile and Adolfo Aristarain's *Tiempo de revancha* (1981) in Argentina are prominent examples of the latter. Directors experienced constraints in terms of budgets and freedom of movement through the city that, especially in Chile, led to the production of small-scale narratives that take place largely indoors.[22] Literature and film produced after the periods of dictatorship often also resorts to the family and the household as figures through which to represent the multiple traumas of those years. For instance, Amanda Holmes argues that the house in *Camila* (Bemberg 1984) acts as a figure for the nation (2017: 8), while Luis Puenzo's *La historia oficial* (1985), one of the earliest and most famous examples of post-dictatorship Argentine cinema, was filmed in the director's own house,

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[21] There have been several cinematic depictions of these, for instance in *Un muro de silencio* (Stantic 1993). Elizabeth Jelin notes the paradox that the family was central to the discourses of both the military regime and the human rights organisations that resisted it (2010: 181–82)
[22] The cinema of Cristián Sánchez (*El zapato chino* [1979], *Los deseos concebidos* [1982]) is the best-known example of this trend.

demonstrating the continued financial difficulties experienced by filmmakers (Kriger 2003: 183).

In Argentine culture, the legacy of military dictatorship in the domestic sphere emerges in a form distinct from the Chilean examples given above, with a greater emphasis on the family. Rather than a hidden past as site of torture co-opted by the regime, the family and the home are more often presented as a potential site of resistance, which is confronted with severe external threats.[23] Laura Alcoba's novel *La casa de los conejos* (2008), for instance, narrates, the remembered experiences of woman who spent part of her childhood in a house run by the Montoneros, the Peronist revolutionary organisation to which her parents belonged. In recent Argentine fiction films such as *Infancia clandestina* (Ávila 2011) and *El premio* (Markovitch 2011), meanwhile, the militant home is figured as point of resistance to dictatorship, and an example of an alternative political reality. This is without mentioning the extensive body of documentary filmmaking and other cultural production by the children of disappeared militants in Argentina, in which 'family' becomes an axis of political affiliation along which memory and postmemory can be articulated.[24] As I will explore in Chapter 1, some recent Chilean documentaries have explored the political contradictions that can arise when family and household, so often seen as commonplaces of conservative ideology, are taken as figures through which resistance to dictatorial rule might be enacted or commemorated.

Two broad conclusions might be drawn about the impact of dictatorial regimes on domestic life in the Southern Cone, at least insofar as cultural representations of the domestic are concerned. The first is that boundaries between public and private spheres are decisively weakened (this is a process that neoliberal economic transformations continue, as we will see). The second is that consequently 'family' becomes a more flexible and less predictable term, not restricted by biological relation.

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[23] This general characterisation inevitably neglects some differing examples. For instance, Pablo Trapero's film *El clan* (2015), discussed briefly in Chapter 4, shows how in the aftermath of Argentine military rule, the Puccio family converted the basement their home into a prison for their kidnapped victims. In Chile, meanwhile, Zambra's novel *Formas de volver a casa* tentatively proposes the parental home (at the time of Pinochet's rule) as 'una especie de fortaleza en miniatura' (2011: 30).

[24] For recent interventions in this field, see Geoffrey Maguire (2017) and Cecilia Sosa (2014).

Indeed, Josefina Ludmer proposes the 'forma-familia' in twenty-first century Argentina as 'un mecanismo que liga temporalidades y subjetividades en formas biológicas, afectivas, legales, económicas, políticas y simbólicas', and as 'el grado cero de la sociedad [...] el único sujeto político concebible en el 2000' (2010: 72, 68-69). The idea of the family as a mechanism regulating the boundary between private and public ascribes it a disciplinary function, but its classification as a 'forma' suggests the possibility of change, of *re*formation. Such optimism is not as obviously on display in Chile, where Magda Sepúlveda charges that

> las elites han creado una sociabilidad que define en la mesa dominguera de la casa privada los destinos públicos del país, rehusando así los derechos de ciudad de la calle. (2013: 14)

The opposition between family home and city will recur as an important concern throughout this thesis. In cinematic terms, it gained prominence in both Argentina and Chile in the 1990s, when the social consequences of neoliberal economic policy drew the attention of filmmakers, who turned their lenses towards those living on the margins of urban society. In the 1990s and early 2000s, the films of the *nuevo cine argentino* developed an insistent focus on marginalised people and spaces. Much of the action in their narratives occurs in the street, or in public spaces that offer little prospect of stable identification or a strong sense of belonging.[25] In his influential analysis of the cinema of this period, Gonzalo Aguilar proposes *nomadism* and *sedentarism* as two opposite but complementary currents in the 'nuevos tiempos' of Argentine cinema:

> mientras el nomadismo es la ausencia de hogar, la falta de lazos de pertenencia poderosos (restrictivos o normativos) y una movilidad permanente e impredecible; el sedentarismo muestra la descomposición de los hogares y las familias, la

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[25] On this point, see Joanna Page's analysis of the bar in *Bolivia* (Caetano 2001) as a liminal space (2009a: 125-28), and James Scorer's exposition of how, in *Pizza, birra, faso* (Caetano and Stagnaro 1998) the Obelisco in the centre of Buenos Aires is presented not as the symbolic centre of the nation, but rather as a hollow monument emptied of contemporary meaning and associated with homelessness and precarity (2016: 118-19).

ineficacia de los lazos de asociación tradicionales y modernos y la parálisis de
quienes insisten en perpetuar ese orden. (2006: 41)

Aguilar points to films like *Familia rodante* (Trapero 2004) and *Vida en Falcon* (Gaggero 2004b), whose characters' lives are centred on vehicles, rather than houses, to illustrate his argument that especially after the economic crisis of 2001-02, the home no longer functions as a point of return from journeying (2006: 41-43). Those films that do focus on traditional households, meanwhile, depict stagnation, decay and the absence of conventional family structures: Lucrecia Martel's *La ciénaga* (2001) is an obvious reference here. In these cases, Aguilar argues, 'los lugares están sobrecargados y encierran y aprisionan los cuerpos' (2006: 55). In recent years, Aguilar's critical framework has been supplemented and nuanced by scholars of Argentine cinema who have sought to develop less pessimistic readings of domestic spaces in the *nuevo cine argentino*. Joanna Page has suggested that the apparent retreat into bourgeois domestic spheres enacted by the work of Martel and others (including Celina Murga, whose work I will discuss in Chapter 4) can be read as a reflection on the collapse of distinctions between the private and the public (2009a: 181–82). Page argues that the films moreover point to how neoliberal economic policy, in particular 'the state's amorous affair with foreign creditors and its shirking of responsibilities at home' (193), disrupts the vision of national government as 'housekeeping' that had become hegemonic in many capitalist societies in the late twentieth century.[26]

Jens Andermann builds on Page's conclusion that Argentine fiction film in the early twenty-first century establishes a 'limited public sphere' (2009a: 197) by examining the methods some directors employ in their efforts to reconstruct community. Nuancing Aguilar's nomadism/sedentarism distinction, Andermann suggests that films depicting 'sedentary' environments do not exclude the possibility of the home's recomposition, and that 'nomadic' films in fact ask us as spectators 'to deposit our trust once more in the camera and let its gaze be ours: a politics of the image, then, which stakes its bets on the recomposition of a (middle-class) audience' (2012: 40). Andermann understands

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[26] Page notes the development of this idea in the work of thinkers including Michel Foucault, Giorgio Agamben and Hannah Arendt (2009a: 192). I will return to the importance of the household in Arendt's political philosophy below.

cinema as one of the 'prosthetic extensions' of home, a technology that 'enact[s] our belonging to place as well as contesting it' (39, xix). He does not, however, find all attempts at the reconstruction of community entirely convincing. In Andermann's account, the films of Daniel Burman and Juan José Campanella

> simultaneously invoke and disavow the crisis of the city and the nation, which they 'resolve' through their retreat into interior spaces sheltering a core of values that are found to have remained intact. (43)

The inverted commas around the 'resolution' that Andermann finds in these films points to a frustrated or unfinished project of collective identity-building. It is precisely this unresolved question that I intend to investigate, examining how the representation of interior spaces in a more recent corpus of films might provide more thoroughgoing responses to the crises of national and personal identity that Andermann, Page and others have acknowledged.

These crises also loom large in the Chilean cinema of the 1990s and early 2000s. Chilean productions from this period have not attracted as much critical attention as the *nuevo cine argentino*, and indeed Chile produced far fewer films than Argentina in these years (Cavallo and others 2007: 39–41). It is however possible to discern a turn towards the everyday lives of those on the margins of urban society, for instance in films such as *Caluga o menta* (Justiniano 1990) and *Johnny 100 pesos* (Graef Marino 1993). In broad terms, critics nonetheless ascribe greater continued importance to the family as an organising political figure in Chile than in Argentina. It is certainly the case that a high proportion of Chilean films released in this period take the family as a key lens through which to focus their narrative.[27] Ascanio Cavallo, Pablo Douzet and Cecilia Rodríguez claim that the latter part of the twentieth century in Chile is most easily viewed as a succession of symbolic father-son relationships: 'el padre benevolente (y caótico) de la Unidad Popular, el padre duro (y ordenado) del régimen militar y el padre reconciliatorio (y gradualista) de la restauración democrática' (Cavallo and others 2007: 43). In this reading, the figures of Salvador Allende, Augusto Pinochet and Patricio

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[27] See, for instance, *La luna en el espejo* (Caiozzi 1990) and *Reunión de familia* (Wood 1994).

Aylwin respectively act as anchor-signifiers for the interpretation of filmic narratives. As I have already suggested, my own approach is more concerned with the aspects of cinema that elude symbolic interpretation. Nonetheless, the disintegration of traditional family structures that Cavallo, Douzet and Rodríguez identify as a principal current in Chilean cinema in this period is an important antecedent to the tentative new forms of domestic sociability that the films in my corpus present. Moreover, the pessimism these critics display with respect to cinema's capacity to create effective communities at times of crisis chimes with Andermann's scepticism, and thus also provides a starting point for my analysis.

Cavallo, Douzet and Rodríguez assert that 'el cine es un oficio altamente endogámico, que construye con enorme facilidad comunidades cerradas, autorreferentes y elitizadas' (2007: 38). This thesis aims, in part, to question this subtle assertion that ontological properties of film dispose it to the construction of closed communities. As will become clear over the course of my argument, Chilean film scholarship in particular has demonstrated a tendency to view cinema as irredeemably bound to bourgeois private space, and many assessments of the country's film productions post-2005 begin from this assumption. The picture in Argentina is perhaps less clear-cut, though the filmmaker and critic Nicolás Prividera has provocatively claimed that the *nuevo cine argentino*, for all its purported engagement with the everyday and the marginalised, transmits 'una visión del mundo que traduce sin distancia crítica el encierro de los hijos de la burguesía' (2014: 47). Before analysing the most immediate historical and cultural contexts of my corpus, however, it is worth taking a longer view on the changing urban fabric of Buenos Aires and Santiago de Chile, the cities that in one way or another form the backdrop to each of the films I analyse. A discussion of the political and social agency of houses on film risks being meaningless unless it is articulated with reference to such contexts.

Anahi Ballent and Jorge Francisco Liernur, in their wide-ranging study of housing in modern Argentina *La casa y la multitud*, argue that the twentieth century saw a shift from 'el imperio de la casa' (the political dominance of the traditionally constituted household outlined above) to 'la primacía de la vivienda' (the incorporation of housing for all, irrespective of social status, into state agendas) (Ballent and Liernur 2014: 24).

Ballent and Liernur point to the creation of the Comisión Nacional de Casas Baratas in 1915 as a key moment in this transformation (25). In the first half of the twentieth century, housing was seen as a mechanism through which to achieve social reform, as noted above, and institutions such as the cooperative El Hogar Obrero, the Catholic Church and the Banco Hipotecario Nacional encouraged the construction of affordable housing for the lower classes.[28] The cityscape of Buenos Aires began to change radically, as discussions over what would constitute 'modern' housing led to a move from the traditional 'casa chorizo' (a small, low-rise dwelling organised around a courtyard) to large residential blocks of apartments. As I will explore in more detail in Chapter 2, the 'modernisation' of housing and the utopian visions of collective living outlined, for instance, by Le Corbusier in his plan for Buenos Aires, were never fully realised and have left somewhat surprising legacies in terms of the architectural constitution of private and public spheres. Nonetheless, the conversion of dwellings into reproducible units (particularly in the profusion of apartment building under Peronism[29]) means that it seems uncontroversial to agree with Liernur's assertion that 'Con la modernización, la estructura de ideas en la arquitectura sufrió una conmoción de la que aún no se ha recuperado' (Liernur 2014b: 43).

Ballent and Liernur go on to suggest that the latter years of the twentieth century and first of the twenty-first saw a clear retreat of the state from housing debates, so that the construction of new dwellings was left to respond only to market imperatives (Ballent and Liernur 2014: 36–37). This led, they argue, to a splintering of the urban fabric, most visible in the development of upper- and middle-class gated neighbourhoods on the outskirts of the city (I discuss films set in these environments in Chapter 4). In short, economic and class differentials in dwelling grew larger, not smaller, especially after the crisis of 2001-02, and the persistent presence of the *villas* (shanty towns) in Buenos Aires was supplemented by further modes of precarious dwelling:

> formas de la autoconstrucción popular en terrenos tomados, la adaptación a las condiciones existentes – ocupaciones de edificios urbanos – o la apropiación de espacios libres intersticiales mediante materiales precarios – microvillas. (37)

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[28] See Chapters 6, 7 and 8 of *La casa y la multitud* (Ballent and Liernur 2014: 215-317).
[29] See Chapter 15 of Ballent and Liernur's study (2014: 461-87).

The third chapter of this thesis discusses some of these novel and unstable forms of habitation, if not the *villas* themselves, alongside a consideration of the politics of domestic labour. James Scorer notes that as the state reduced public housing initiatives in the 1990s, and increased unemployment made it hard to build identities around work, a boom in 'localized informal construction networks' meant that 'the neighborhood, or *barrio*, became a privileged locale for expressing political discontent and constructing alternative urban identities' (2016: 97).

If we turn our gaze across the Andes to Santiago de Chile, the broad shape of developments across the twentieth century is similar. The 'Ley de Habitaciones Obreras' of 1906 is generally regarded as the point from which housing became an issue of mass politics, and was followed by multiple other government initiatives in the following decades, though this work 'muchas veces privilegió la cantidad por sobre la calidad de las soluciones entregadas', according to Rodrigo Hidalgo Dattwyler (2005: 19).[30] Indeed, Edward Murphy suggests that state housing policies in the early twentieth century often made ideal (e.g. hygienist or patriarchal) images of family and home harder to live up to (2015: 48). The result, as in Buenos Aires, is 'una ciudad muchas veces fragmentada y separada del resto de la urbe tradicional, bien equipada y servida' (19). It could be argued that this fragmentation is experienced more strongly in Santiago than in the Argentine capital: this is in part because informal settlements such as the *callampas* mentioned above were eradicated and their inhabitants forcibly moved to peripheral areas under Pinochet's rule.[31] The consequences of this initiative are discussed in chapter 3. The upper classes also contributed to this fragmentation: Gonzalo Cáceres points to a body of Chilean films from the 1960s and 70s that depict the movement of the intellectual elite, the wealthy and civil servants to the suburbs, and to 'viviendas aisladas provistas de ante-jardín, jardín y, en no pocas oportunidades, pileta de natación' (2016: 391).

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[30] See Hidalgo Dattwyler's book-length study (2005), and the second chapter of Edward Murphy's *For a Proper Home* (2015: 40–67) for a full overview of these initiatives.
[31] On this point, see Hidalgo Dattwyler and Sánchez (2007).

In short, the changes occasioned by modernity may radically alter the conditions of urban dwelling, but what emerges from each of these studies is a sense that housing persists as a nexus at which multiple social concerns meet. Murphy names these as 'the making of personhood, elements of citizenship, political economic relations, and the formation of the state' (2015: 269), while also drawing attention to how the political prominence of housing has allowed Chilean women to overcome traditionally restrictive gender roles and step, as housewives, into the public sphere (36). Ballent and Liernur, meanwhile, suggest that modern experiments in collective housing and urban planning have not resolved the tension between 'casa' and 'multitud', between 'la construcción del sujeto libre y autónomo, y el despliegue de nuevas formas para la articulación de una multiplicidad de seres ya no unidos por valores esenciales heredados' (2014: 38). In the metropolis, Liernur writes, 'la casa constituye la sede de dos momentos clave del sistema global: la reproducción de la fuerza de trabajo y la realización por el consumo del ciclo de producción' (2014b: 46). This understanding of the cultural importance of housing helps frame my approach to the films in my corpus. As I will explore throughout the thesis, both housing and film can be understood as able to *construct* personal and collective identities, while simultaneously being themselves *products* of a given social and economic order.

Commodification and construction

In the period immediately preceding my corpus, a number of films insist on the damaging consequences of the commodification of housing on any stable link between domestic space and identity. In Argentina, Martín Rejtman's *Silvia Prieto* (1999) and especially his *Los guantes mágicos* (2003) show how the language of belonging and family is pressed into the service of business. In *Los guantes mágicos*, domestic spaces are commercialised whenever possible (including for film production), and there are several points at which domestic analogies for collective identity are revealed to be hopelessly inadequate in an era of liberalised international markets. For instance, an optician likens a 40-year-old body to a house with a rotten structure, but then notes that he was able to get rid of the house by selling it. Likewise, an assertion that Argentina's lack of industry is due to the country's familial character ('acá somos todos hermanos')

rings very hollow in a narrative in which family members are entirely dedicated to money-making.

In Chile, Alberto Fuguet's *Se arrienda* (2005) addresses similar concerns: the film's title, for instance, immediately points to a weakening of property ownership as a method of asserting personal identity. The film's protagonist, Gastón, returns to Chile after six years living in New York, and begins working as an estate agent for his father's company. As in *Los guantes mágicos*, scorn is poured on the notion that a house might function as an effective or truthful representation of human identity: a colleague tells Gastón, 'Cuando la gente piensa en una casa, en el fondo piensa en su futuro. Y allí empieza la psicopatía'. A sequence near the end of Fuguet's film further questions this idea: a client tells Gastón that he rents out his old family home rather than living there because of a history of family violence. This admission can be read as a suggestion that behind the free-market economics of contemporary Chile, there lies the spectre of (dictatorial) violence perpetrated at home. I will return to this idea in Chapter 1.

An understanding of housing as a commodity has meant that economic growth has been accompanied by a boom in construction, especially in Chile.[32] Several twenty-first century films, including those I analyse in the first chapter, investigate how this boom places a strain on existing forms of social interaction.[33] Moreover, the questions of the contiguity of urban residential property and the closeness of others that are raised there will recur throughout the thesis. It is partly in response to this development, as well as following a desire to move beyond deconstructive thinking, that I adopt the term *construction* to describe film's activity in relation to the home. I do so not simply to

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[32] Some data suggests that Chile has seen more housing construction per capita since 1990 than any other country (Salcedo 2010: 91, in Murphy 2015: 226).

[33] These issues figure more prominently in productions that, for reasons of space, do not occupy a prominent position in my argument. In Argentina, *Showroom* (Molnar 2014) sets up an opposition between the superficiality of the protagonist's work as a salesman of apartments in new tower blocks and the ultimate fulfilment of his family life in a run-down old house in the rural Tigre delta. *Aire libre* (Berneri 2014), meanwhile, exposes rifts in the relationship of a couple renovating a 'dream house' away from the bustle of the city centre. The Chilean *Metro cuadrado* (Ilic 2011) and the Argentine *El incendio* (Schnitman 2015) similarly explore undercurrents of discontent in young couples living in new apartment blocks. *El incendio* is of particular interest in this respect, as it is the purchase of a new property (in cash, as is frequent in Argentina) that paves the way to disagreement and violence.

describe its depiction of physical processes (e.g. the building of real estate), but also to think through the elaboration of cinematic space and the development of new social identities. Recent film scholarship from both Argentina and Chile lays the foundations for this approach. Chilean critic Carolina Urrutia Neno uses the term 'cine de construcción' to refer to a body of films made between 2005 and 2011 that use sensory techniques such as haptic imagery and acousmatic sound to disrupt the visual field (2013: 41). My own understanding of construction will expand on this, and on the concept of 'cine centrífugo', which Urrutia Neno defines as follows:

> un cine que parece no creer en nada y que se entrega al despliegue de unas imágenes (movimiento, paisaje, cuerpo, luz) vaciadas de contenido (en tanto discurso y alegoría), expresivamente ambiguas. Narraciones que se instalan en el marco de un espacio que se torna protagónico, donde lo que se fuga es la figura del pueblo, de la comunidad, de la masa (que sale del cuadro) y lo que se queda es el paisaje. (2013: 16)

As will become evident, I do not wholly agree that all figures of community are expelled from contemporary Chilean film, but the turn towards space (as landscape or architecture) is a central element of my argument. Bongers suggests an affinity between this Chilean 'cine centrífugo' and what Aguilar terms 'cine anómalo' in Argentina: 'un cine fuera de sí, un cine que crea nuevos circuitos a medida que se exhibe' (Aguilar 2010: 240; Bongers 2016: 183). The phrase 'fuera de sí' is a helpful shorthand for many of the operations undertaken by the films I analyse: in these works, the home is, paradoxically, a place where human subjectivity is decentred. Indeed, one of the directors Aguilar identifies as an exponent of this 'cine anómalo', Gustavo Fontán, features prominently in Chapter 1.

My approach also responds, at least in part, to Elizabeth Grosz's call for an understanding of philosophy *as* construction, and a recognition that 'building is not only a movement of sedimentation and stabilization but also a way of opening space and living' (2001: 7). I will suggest that the construction of spaces and identities that film undertakes in the domestic sphere can be understood as *poetic*. I do not mean here that the home is presented as a symbolic or allegorical text to be interpreted in order to

retrieve meanings related to human identity. I would rather think back to the Greek root *poiesis*, and its original meaning of making, or bringing something previously non-existent into being ('poiesis, n.' [n.d.]). This understanding of the poetic acts as a useful hinge around which to examine how cinematic form and the physical form of domestic space, brought together, might permit new perspectives on forms of sociability and community.

Material practices

The conception of the poetics of film outlined above brings two apparently distinct realms, the material and the social, closer together. Refusing a distinction often drawn between between the physical space of a house and 'home' as a set of practices or relations, I argue that we cannot gain access to the material world except via certain practices (of living, or looking, or other sensory engagement).[34] Film spectatorship is one such practice.[35] These films present the domestic sphere as a privileged site for the unsettling of identity roles. Their cinematic homes, I will argue, no longer offer refuge from political upheaval, or reinforce patriarchal structures of authority. Instead, domestic space functions as a stage on which human relations with family, neighbourhood and nation are performed, challenged, broken apart and reformed. This change is often visible as a renewed attention to the material environment, a seemingly paradoxical turning away from human figures towards their physical surroundings.

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[34] John Berger suggests that the practices of 'home' can persist in cases of poverty and uprooting, where they cease to have a material referent. For the uprooted, he writes, home is represented, not by a house, but by a practice or set of practices […] Home is no longer a dwelling but the untold story of a life being lived (2005: 64). Earlier in the same text, Berger describes a gap between the physical dwelling and 'whatever is kept in the heart and is sacred' (63). My readings of contemporary Argentine and Chilean film refuse this distinction between the material and the transcendent, arguing that human identity is always caught up in and shaped by physical surroundings.

[35] The terms in which Jean-Luc Nancy thinks of it are helpful here: for him, cinema is a mechanism that allows access to the world. It is 'the *motion* of what is real' rather than its representation, conveyor of a look that belongs as much to the world as to the spectator (2001: 26, original emphasis). Indeed, Nancy rejects the notion of the spectator as independent subject: for him, the movement of the cinematic gaze demonstrates that 'a subject is never but the acute and tenuous point of a forward movement (*avancée*) that precedes itself indefinitely' (2001: 66–68).

This shift reveals a gap between house as material environment and idealised notions of 'home' as subjective plenitude. Crucially, though, these works do not simply denounce that gap, but turn towards it as a space of possibility. This movement occurs in a manner which recalls, but is not reducible to, the effects of slow cinema, art cinema and the essay film. Indeed, I will argue that the films discussed resist easy classification into genres or even into the broader fields of fiction and documentary. My principal argument will be that the destabilising and defamiliarising angle taken by the works I analyse poses the question of the house's ability to provide models for political community beyond identitarian hierarchy. In the final chapter, this becomes a question of whether contemporary Argentine and Chilean cinema proposes a kind of 'domestic cosmopolitanism' (Nava 2006).

I do not intend to argue that these concerns are unique to Argentina and Chile, or to Latin America. The interpenetration of private lives and public cultural discourse that technology and media facilitate is, inevitably, not restricted by geographical borders. In the United Kingdom, it is striking to note that Manchester's recently built flagship centre for theatre, contemporary art and cinema is known as HOME, while the 2017 edition of the Manchester International Festival included a strand, 'Festival in My House', which offered residents 'the chance to present their very own micro-international festival in their own home' ('Festival in My House' [n.d.]). These anecdotal examples suggest a desire for culture to offer a sense of homeliness or belonging that everyday life no longer provides.[36] In a more sombre register, events such as the deadly fire at Grenfell Tower in London, which occurred against a backdrop of a broader crisis in the availability and quality of housing ('A Nation of Homebodies' 2017), have put home life at the top of the political agenda. They also point to an urgent need to develop new understandings of community in contemporary society.

That need is also evident in the films I analyse. Yet as we have seen, housing inequalities are even starker in the two countries in question, and so attention must be paid to local

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[36] Derrida argues that this desire responds to a 'radical expropriation, deterritorialization, delocalization, dissociation of the political and the local, of the national' in modern society (Derrida and Stiegler 2002: 79–80). This is a succinct diagnosis of some of the effects of modernity, though I will aim to avoid merely identifying moments of loss and difficulty in what follows.

circumstances. I moreover contend that an examination of the cinematic treatment of domestic space in Argentina and Chile can permit renewal of the critical frameworks typically deployed in studies of Latin American culture. My analyses of contemporary film productions start from deconstructive principles (hence the relatively frequent references to the work of Derrida in what follows), but then question the modes in which deconstruction has shaped Latin American cultural studies. Thus, to give two examples, in my discussion of memory in Chapter 1, I suggest some political limitations to the figure of the fragment which dominates scholarly discussion of memory and postmemory in Latin America, and in Chapter 4, I argue that a purely Derridean approach to the notion of hospitality risks occluding some of the specific economic and political factors at play in Argentine and Chilean film. I will suggest that post-deconstructive critical frameworks (such as the work of Jean-Luc Nancy, and new materialist thought) might offer more satisfying accounts of the shifts in the articulation of cinematic domestic space in Argentina and Chile.

The thesis both insists on local specificity and argues that a comparative approach can highlight otherwise veiled aspects of national culture, as well as revealing conditions and practices that are common across the region. My argument tracks, in short, two developments: the dissolution, or at least complication, of the relation between house and identity in Argentine and Chilean film, and a change in cinematic images of the city that might be described as a retreat into local spaces and neighbourhoods, or a loss of faith in film's capacity to represent urban space as a unity or whole. Housing emerges in these films as a key arena in which fraught relations between the individual and the collective are reworked. By revealing a disjuncture between physical house and imagined home, do the films offer domestic space as a valid new ground for political thought? To answer this question, it will be necessary to move beyond the Freudian and Heideggerian critical frameworks outlined above, towards an association between housing and identity that does not rely on fixed categories, but is able to convey the provisional nature of new forms of political being and belonging.

Deconstructing and reconstructing home

Much of the existing critical work that seeks to complicate the relation between house and identity adopts a deconstructive framework. Jacques Derrida, for instance, unsettles the terms of Freud and Heidegger's thought by examining the question of metaphor. At stake is the form and function of representation in language, which in Derrida's view rests on an implied domestic interior. In 'White Mythology' (1974) and 'The *Retrait* of Metaphor' (2007), he suggests that metaphor follows the 'law of the *oikos*' (2007: 62), and cites César Chesneau Du Marsais' metaphorical definition of metaphor as a 'borrowed home' (1974: 55; 2007: 61). Derrida calls this borrowed house 'quasi metaphoric' (2007: 66), a term which Bernstein elucidates as follows:

> [w]e could equally say it [the borrowed house] both is and is not metaphoric; it is both figurative and literal. Like 'das Unheimliche,' the uncanny, the borrowed house can be reappropriated as what is most familiar and can remain resistant as that which is strange, outside, exterior. The house is thus located on unstable ground. Yet is it possible to get outside the house without establishing another house, even by another name?
>
> This problem of the house is really the problem of deconstruction 'itself,' if there is such a thing, and its relationship to architecture, which is, after all, the art of housing. (2005: 81)

Bernstein here picks up on Derrida's observation that Heidegger's metaphor of the 'house of Being', unlike most metaphors, 'transports a familiar predicate [...] toward a less familiar, more remote, *unheimlich* subject' (Derrida 2007: 69). Yet in stating that the 'problem of the house is really the problem of deconstruction "itself"', she also points to a tension within deconstruction that may be irresolvable: as a philosophical approach it is dependent on the very (quasi) metaphorical images it seeks to take apart. Bernstein resumes this conundrum thus: 'one risks finding oneself in a borrowed dwelling as one deconstructs the house of being' (2005: 83).

This sentence leads me towards the reasons for which Derridean deconstruction, while important to my argument, cannot be the only theoretical reference for my approach. The complex negotiation of space, identity and representation that deconstruction undertakes can all too easily become an affirmative feedback loop. As Wigley puts it, 'secure housing is the greatest risk of deconstructive discourse' (1993: 100). Moreover, the emphasis placed on metaphor sits uneasily in relation to film, a medium whose 'language' does not operate via the division between signifier and signified essential to writing and speech. Bernstein herself points to these risks in a later work, *Housing Problems*, in which she asserts that 'the facticity of the house points to a limit of thinking, an undercurrent of the untheorized and excluded materiality that is a condition of possibility of architecture, or writing' (2008: 14). Filmmaking is, I suggest, an ideal tool for excavating this denied relation. In a way that literature cannot, it remits us to that which evades and circumscribes language. A film, unlike writing, cannot 'exclude' materiality.

This thesis, then, will seek to move beyond a deconstructive framework, while acknowledging its importance in recent studies of Latin American culture. The body of scholarship that is sometimes termed 'new Latin Americanism' adapts deconstructive thought to challenge the claim of any discipline to total knowledge about its object. For critics associated with this trend, Latin America is 'a limit-site of the world system that enables us to interrogate the very concepts of world and knowledge' (Jenckes 2004: 249). There is evidently value in this approach, but I will suggest that deconstruction's aversion to the constitution of any figures of place or location risks eliding the constant construction of places, homes and associated identities, even in the turmoil of contemporary urban Latin America. Kate Jenckes writes that Alberto Moreiras, one of the key exponents of 'new Latin Americanism', aims for a thought that 'would simply refer to Latin America (and sites within the endless heterogeneity of "Latin America") as sites of interruption to any totalizing idea of place, knowledge, or the proper' (2004: 267). This is a vision of academic practice as the circulation of 'irruptions or interruptions' that 'must not be reduced to meanings of places' (269). Yet the world is every day experienced as a series of meaningful places, and ignoring this fact risks turning Latin Americanism into a rarified pursuit, and an academic practice that insists on the melancholic and the negative. In the conclusion to the thesis, I explore how this

tension might be elucidated, if not fully resolved, through an appeal to Latin American thinkers such as Leonor Arfuch and Nelly Richard.

Thinking in broader geographical terms, the work of Doreen Massey stands as a crucial example of scholarship that both draws on and challenges deconstructive principles in its discussion of ideas of belonging and 'home'. Massey argues against the distinctions made between 'places' as 'bounded enclosed spaces defined through counterposition against the Other who is outside' and 'space' as precisely that *outside* (1994: 168). Massey memorably contests the notion that all local places (and ideas of home as bounded and secure) have recently been subsumed into a homogenised global space, pointing to the advent of new urban enclosures and the many different conditions of postmodernity across the globe. In much of the world, she argues, 'the security of the boundaries of the place one called home must have dissolved long ago', due, for instance, to movements of colonisation (164-65).[37] Massey's approach is useful for my argument in that it complicates the link between home and identity, by understanding every place as a node in a network of social relations. Home, Massey writes, has always been 'constructed out of movement, communication, social relations which always stretched beyond it' (171). As David Morley and others have argued, this is ever more the case when the presence of media in the domestic sphere uncannily brings the outside in (2000).

Massey's thought is important to my approach in one further way. Her conception of space as a 'simultaneity of stories-so-far', as 'always under construction' and inherently multiple (2005: 9), aids the expression of the limitations of a deconstructive critical approach that was outlined above. Massey recognises the usefulness of deconstruction's privileging of the interval and the gap over 'presumed horizontal integrities' in developing her open model of space (50). She however argues that it also presents several problematic aspects:

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[37] Writing in a postcolonial context, Dipesh Chakrabarty similarly states that to be 'at home in modernity is an ongoing and ceaseless process' (1999: 109).

[t]he focus is on rupture, dislocation, fragmentation and the co-constitution of identity/difference. Conceptualising things in this manner produces a relation to those who are other which is in fact endlessly the same. (51)

For Massey, it is precisely the 'process of invention' that is constrained by deconstruction's 'horizontality and negativity' (54). Her desire to think of space beyond representation and fixity, and instead as process (20), is an apt starting point for this discussion, though one might of course reasonably object that cinematic space is not restricted by this binary, being both representation and process. Moving beyond deconstruction, then, means not simply rejecting all figures of dwelling and domestic architecture as inevitably conservative or restrictive, but rather investigating what a new, more open understanding of these figures might permit (in political, social and cultural terms). Bernstein expresses a similar desire in her analysis of the relation between the house and photography, where she suggests that the quadrangle of the image's frame or the domestic interior, while appearing to offer a guarantee of unity or identity, in fact 'opens up onto an endless and undefined field, a field of rubble where no identity is stable. In the house or room we take refuge and deny the unravelling at our edges' (2008: 13). Bernstein therefore proposes a critical project that 'undertakes to mobilize the house into the gerund "housing" to open up this denial.'

The move from the noun 'house' to the gerund 'housing' remains within a textual paradigm, of course: my analysis will aim to trace a similar movement in specifically cinematic terms, attempting, like Bernstein, to discern a notion of housing that is decoupled from fixed identity. It is in part because of this attempt to move beyond the typical identitarian associations of the domestic sphere that gender occupies a less prominent place in my analysis than in much other work on the home in film. Moreover, in many of the films I analyse, gender is not foregrounded as a principal concern. Much has been written on the historical confinement of women to the home, and on the myriad ways in which domestic architecture shapes ideas about gender and sexuality:[38] I do not doubt the importance of this scholarship, and will draw on it at various points in the thesis. Nonetheless, the decentring of human subjects and the reflexive attitude

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[38] See, for instance, Walker (2002), the edited volume *Sexuality and Space* (Colomina 1992), and Grosz's *Architecture from the Outside* (2001).

towards the construction of cinematic space that characterise much of my corpus lead me to focus my attention on theories of cinema's interaction with the material environment. It is to these that I turn in the last section of the introduction.

Film theory: city, house and neighbourhood

For Siegfried Kracauer, cinema was a technology able to redeem the divisions of urban life, to knit together the disparate experiences of city-dwellers. Films, he claimed, 'help us not only to appreciate our given material environment but to extend it in all directions. They virtually make the world our home' (1997: 304). Writing in a less unambiguously affirmative tone, Benjamin considered that the 'shock effects' of film could encourage a 'distracted' mode of perception and an 'evaluating attitude' in its audience, so that like architecture, cinema could aid in the reconciliation of individual and collective experience (1999b: 232-34). Yet cinema also had, for Benjamin, alienating effects. The film actor, he stated, was 'in exile' in front of the camera (222-23). This assertion helps us begin to think about the strange balance between familiarity and unfamiliarity, the *heimlich* and the *unheimlich*, as Freud would have it, that cinematic representation of lived space inevitably implies. The work of Benjamin and Kracauer stands at the vanguard of a remarkable body of scholarship on cinema and the built environment, which is worth exploring here from two angles: that of the city, and that of the house.

First, the city: it has become a critical commonplace to claim an ontological relation between the cinema and the urban environment. Work in this vein, from David Clarke's *The Cinematic City* (1997) to Stephen Barber's *Projected Cities* (2002) and Giuliana Bruno's *Atlas of Emotion* (2002), has done much to inform critical understandings of the relation between space, place and subjectivity in film. Bruno's suggestion that through the movement of urban film, the spectator realises that '[h]ome itself is made up of layers of passages that are voyages of habitation' (2002: 103), for instance, chimes with the unsettling of binary distinctions between sedentary and mobile existence that I will analyse in Chapters 3 and 4. Nonetheless, I am conscious of Rhodes' call for attention to

the particularities of urban histories: I share his belief that 'each instance of interaction between a city and a cinematic practice is entirely specific and unique unto itself' (2007: xv). As noted above, urban homes in Buenos Aires and Santiago have their own unique histories, and indeed the reflexive documentaries discussed in Chapter 1 consider how cinema can engage with these.

Notwithstanding this commitment to cultural specificity, I would propose the work of Paul Virilio as an aid to understanding the relation between film and the urban histories outlined above. In the late twentieth century, Virilio was probably the most notable exponent of the view that technological and media innovation is indeed altering the urban fabric, though not in the benign way that Kracauer envisaged. For Virilio, cinematic, televisual and other images erode the traditional coordinates of space, converting them into temporal markers, so that 'constructed space occurs within an electronic topology' and 'spatial dimensions have become inseparable from their rate of transmission' (2012: 30–31). This phenomenon, Virilio argues, equates to the dissolution of the city as a whole: the 'unity of place of the old political theater of the City' is replaced with 'a unity of time, a chronopolitics of intensitivity and interactivity' (166), such that the urban (the city understood as spatial whole) becomes the suburban (the city as a series of spatially fragmented neighbourhoods).[39] The landscape Virilio outlines is familiar to scholars of contemporary Buenos Aires and Santiago. Indeed, Beatriz Sarlo's writing on the Argentine capital in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries demonstrates a similar concern for the dissolution of shared urban space into private, technological spaces (2009: 209-10). Yet Virilio's insistence that all spatial divisions are annihilated in 'the atopia of a singular interface' (2012: 35) is belied by certain realities: in Chapter 4, for instance, I examine cinematic representations of Buenos Aires' *country clubs*, gated neighbourhoods that are divided from the surrounding suburbs by high walls topped with security cameras. Moreover, the somewhat apocalyptic tone of Virilio's vision risks over-determining the nature of family and home. This is the critique put forward by Dwayne Avery, who suggests that Virilio, along with Marc Augé, relies on a nostalgic concept of home, 'wherein the capacity to inhabit one's "native soil" requires that the unhomely qualities of speed are

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[39] The peculiar relation of the suburbs to time will be discussed in Chapter 1.

vanquished' (2014: 20). Avery goes on to argue that the movement of cinema, the very quality that makes on-screen homes 'unhomely', can in fact lead the spectator to a new and more capacious understanding of 'home', one not dependent on a particular 'place of settlement' but rather on a 'set of practices, ideas and memories' (20). Avery divides place from practices far more clearly than I will, but I agree with his conclusion that cinema's unsettling of the domestic has an ethical value, in that it permits a more inclusive understanding of home (27).

Some recent scholarship on Argentine and Chilean film also reveals a cautious optimism about film's agency in the urban environment. Valeria de los Ríos, for instance, sees in Ignacio Agüero's documentary *Aquí se construye* (2000), which is discussed in Chapter 1, an attempt to provide a cognitive map of the Chilean capital (2010). As seen above, Andermann has identified a current in recent Argentine cinema that aims to reconstruct community in a fragmented neoliberal city, by relating to place 'as a sphere of belonging that must be defended against a hostile exterior, and around which a community can assemble with regained strength' (2012: 38). Part of my objective in this thesis is to interrogate the reach, and the limits, of such cinematic communities. James Scorer has intelligently nuanced this perspective in relation to Argentine cinema, suggesting that it is often a case of 'communities based on exclusionary commons' (2016: 113). Scorer in fact suggests that films made around the time of Argentina's economic crisis in 2001 only rarely depicted 'more open, outward, and forward-looking communities', while other cultural forms such as literature and graphic fiction were able to construct imaginaries of a 'city in common' (125). In the analysis that follows, I ask what specificities of the cinematic medium might create the limitations towards which Scorer points.

In order to understand why film may face particular challenges in constructing urban communities, it is important to think through cinema's relation to private space, and domestic space in particular. An obvious starting point here is the etymological root of the film camera in the *camera obscura*, literally a darkened room. As mentioned above, cinema and architecture can be seen to *communicate*, though it is important to point out that much early cinema depicts exterior urban spaces such as the street or, famously, the train station. Only with the development of the studio system, it might be argued,

did the home assume its subsequent prominence. It is therefore perhaps unsurprising that, insofar as twentieth-century film scholarship dealt with domestic space, it often did so through the lens of genre. I am thinking here of the paradigmatic work on melodrama done by Thomas Elsaesser (1992) and Laura Mulvey (1989), as well as, for instance, more recent studies of domestic space in genres such as science fiction (Fortin 2011). Rhodes asserts that 'it is difficult to think about genre without thinking about the way almost every genre embodies a mode of meditation on and use of the house and domestic space' (2006: 85). If we consider the frequency with which home comes to act as a point of narrative closure, this perspective seems all the more convincing. My analysis, however, will not take genre as an overarching frame, for the principal reason that the films I examine here frequently challenge typical classifications: between melodrama and black comedy (as in Chapter 2), or even between documentary and fiction (in Chapters 1 and 3).

It is only more recently that the apparently co-constitutive relationship between cinema (and the media more broadly) and architecture has received more detailed study. Emblematic of this trend is the work of Beatriz Colomina (1994) and Giuliana Bruno (2002) as well as the broader notion of 'cultural techniques' elaborated by Siegert (2015). This understanding of architecture *as* medium will be fundamental to my argument (especially in Chapter 2), though I contest certain critical narratives that risk over-identifying cinema and built environment, and thereby eliding potentially productive differences. As noted above, Rhodes warns against this over-identification, in part by highlighting the economics of the film-spectator relation: when we go to watch a film, he suggests, we 'must pay to occupy a space in order to look at a space [we] cannot occupy' (2017). Spectatorship is thus a peculiarly unfulfilling sort of consumption, as well as a form of affective labour (as we will see in Chapter 3). Rhodes' argument, advanced in relation to North American cinema, needs nuancing in this context. The limited commercial distribution circuits for nationally-produced films in Argentina and Chile mean that the works I analyse are not all that often watched by paying spectators gathered in a darkened theatre in Buenos Aires or Santiago. The room with which their cinematic houses communicate might just as well be at a European film festival, or indeed the private home of a spectator watching online via legal or

illegal means. In the latter case, film can increasingly appear, if only in an illusory sense, as common property.

The economic conditions of film production and spectatorship thus differentiate my corpus from that of similar studies that focus on the global North. This thesis also differs from much recent work in this field in that the transnational migrant and the exile are not prominent figures in the films analysed.[40] The European focus of much scholarship dealing with ideas of home and belonging in film leads to an emphasis on a transnational, postcolonial encounter that, I will argue, is not entirely transferable to the Argentine and Chilean contexts.[41] This will become most evident in Chapter 4, where I discuss the applicability of European notions of cosmopolitanism to contemporary Latin America. There are, of course, films from Argentina and Chile that deal with the difficult incorporation of transnational migrants into the domestic sphere (such as *Un cuento chino* [Borensztein 2011]). Both Chile and Argentina, moreover, have strong traditions of filmmaking by political exiles that deal with questions of national belonging from a diasporic perspective.[42] However, what is striking about the corpus of films analysed in this thesis is that such issues – difficult encounters with an 'other', fraught attempts at sociability across class boundaries – are addressed within a national framework. The question of home in these cases remains, then, tightly bound up with what John Beverley (adapting the thought of Ranajit Guha) has called the 'historical failure of the nation to come to its own' in Latin America (1999: 6). As seen above, the figure of the house has had a privileged relation to national culture in the Southern Cone. In recent cinema, the nature of that relation is placed under close examination, and the exclusions it generates highlighted.

As noted above, cinema's close relation to domestic space might seem to limit its potential for constructing communities beyond the private house, or modelling new forms of sociability. This thesis will indeed claim that there is a distinctly local quality to many films dealing with Buenos Aires and Santiago in this period, an apparent lack of

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[40] Cf. the work of Hamid Naficy (2001), whose theorisation of an 'accented cinema' focuses on experiences of exile and diaspora.
[41] E.g. Rascaroli (2013) and McNeill (2011).
[42] I am thinking here of the work of filmmakers such as Fernando Solanas, Raúl Ruiz, and Marilú Mallet.

faith in cinema's capacity to represent the city as a unified phenomenological space. As Scorer notes, David Harvey writes that dwellers turn to a 'localized neighbourhood aesthetic' as a response to urban transformations (2008: 28, in Scorer 2016: 127). Yet this need not preclude attempts at the tracing of links between residents and visitors, or between 'insiders' and 'outsiders'. In order to advance this argument, ideas of housing, dwelling or indeed of 'home' that rely on fixed 'existential spaces' (Conley 2012: 8) must be left behind, and understandings of the city as a series of networks and exchanges embraced. Scott McQuire suggests that this new 'relational space' can be 'made into a space of belonging – a "home"'. Being at home in modernity, McQuire argues, implies both 'the loss of stable coordinates, *and* the invention of new continuities and new processes of cultural affiliation across interlinked domains' (2008: 24, original emphasis).

At first glance it might still seem difficult to understand how the house, so often invoked as a symbol of hierarchical authority and of rigid identities, might remain relevant in this context. However, in phrasing that uncannily foreshadows a new materialist critique of how matter is 'frozen' into categories in order to constitute the empirical world (Coole and Frost 2010: 12), Hannah Arendt proposes that the house, as classically conceived, is '*something like a frozen thought which thinking must unfreeze*' (1971: 431, original emphasis). Only then, she claims, can a better understanding of dwelling be achieved. The films analysed here encourage this task through an aesthetics that defamiliarises the home, asking spectators to revisit or reconstruct their images of it. The films moreover tentatively suggest that that operation might have broader social consequences, though they do not assure positive effects. As Arendt writes, a rethinking of the house 'by no means guarantees that you will be able to come up with an acceptable solution for your housing problems' (434).

The corpus

The principal films I analyse here appeared between 2005 and 2015. 2005 was a crucial
year for Chilean cinema: it saw the release of four films regarded as foundational works
of what has become known as the *novísimo cine chileno* (Cavallo and Maza 2010): the
aforementioned *Se arrienda*, Alicia Scherson's *Play*, Matías Bize's *En la cama*, and *La
Sagrada Familia*, directed by Sebastián Lelio, which I discuss in Chapter 2. Several of the
characteristics commonly attributed to the *novísimo cine chileno*, such as a focus on
intimate spaces, a looseness of plot and the apparent absence of politics as a mass
activity (Urrutia Neno 2013: 16), will form an important part of my analysis. Yet I am
wary of setting too much store by the names given to apparent cinematic tendencies.
Indeed, while 2005 did not provide a defining event for Argentine cinema, the argument
might be made that it marks a point after which the integrity of the *nuevo cine
argentino*, the body of (initially) independent, low-budget filmmaking that has received
extensive critical attention, becomes difficult to sustain. As Urrutia Neno notes, the
nuevo cine argentino of the 1990s exhibited some of the characteristics listed above, in a
sense therefore foreshadowing recent Chilean work (2013: 57). Argentine film after
2005, meanwhile, appears rather more heterogeneous and difficult to categorise, as the
works analysed here demonstrate. In their frequent resistance to easy categorisation
according to genre, the films in my corpus point towards the unsettling of forms
(whether aesthetic or political) that, I argue, cinematic representations of domestic
space in this period undertake.

I cannot, of course, claim to consider all films that deal with housing and domestic space
in my chosen period. As Rhodes states, when we watch films 'we are forever looking at
and into people's houses' (2017). Lucrecia Martel and Albertina Carri, who are perhaps
the Southern Cone's most famous cineastes to have dealt significantly with domestic
space, are not dealt with at length here, in part because of the very significant critical
attention they have already received.[43] I have focused my efforts on a corpus of films
made after their best-known critical successes, in order to suggest that their concern
with the home is not merely a factor of their auteurist style, or indeed their status as

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[43] See, for instance, *The Cinema of Lucrecia Martel* (Martin 2016), analysis of Carri's work by
Gabriela Nouzeilles (2005), and Page's discussion of both filmmakers (2009a).

women directors. I would instead argue that many of the key concerns in their features, such as the subversion of family structures at home in Carri's *Géminis* (2005), or the mysterious sensory environments of Martel's *La ciénaga* (2001), respond to political, social and aesthetic trends that find an echo in later works. Like Martel's work, but in a more marked fashion, the films I discuss concern themselves with the material fabric of the home: the house is often accorded as much attention, and on occasion agency, as the human actors or participants. Where Martel and Carri frequently concern themselves with dysfunctional, isolated bourgeois households, however, the films I analyse think more explicitly about the place of households from a variety of social backgrounds in the urban environment.

The thesis is divided into two parts. The first rethinks two concepts closely linked to the home: memory and modernity. The first chapter, which discusses documentaries by Chilean filmmaker Ignacio Agüero and the Argentine Gustavo Fontán, questions the political implications of figuring domestic space as an archive of personal memory or national history, and suggests some limits to the figure of the fragment that dominates scholarly discussion of memory in Latin America. Somewhat counterintuitively, given my argument's concern with construction, *El otro día* (Agüero 2012) and Fontán's *Ciclo de la casa* (2006-12) depict loss and demolition. They thus suggest, as will the other films I discuss, that any new domestic constructions of identity are highly contingent and provisional. If the first chapter ultimately proposes that an apparently nostalgic turn in these reflexive documentaries and essays films can, in a limited way, enable a more open conception of home, then the second conversely shows how in *El hombre de al lado* (Cohn and Duprat 2009) and *La Sagrada Familia*, modernist dwellings that are superficially characterised by material transparency and openness are shown to be violently unsettled by the appearance of outsiders.

The second part of the thesis turns to focus more directly on the human figures that might typically be considered outsiders, but nonetheless form an increasingly visible part of cinematic domestic space in Argentina and Chile. The third chapter considers how *Mitómana* (Sepúlveda and Adriazola 2011) and *Réimon* (Moreno 2014) depart from established cinematic representations of domestic work in Argentine and Chilean film. In doing so, my analysis questions how much political potential resides in a turn

towards experimental or auteurist film aesthetics. The final chapter directly addresses a question that is latent in the preceding three: to what extent crossings of the home's threshold in film can model new forms of coexistence in urban societies characterised by the erection of barriers and the dissolution of public spaces. It analyses two films – *Una semana solos* (Murga 2007) and *Las cosas como son* (Lavanderos 2014) – that complicate distinctions between guests and intruders, and questions how far European theoretical frameworks such as Derrida's conception of hospitality and theorisations of 'domestic cosmopolitanism' (Nava 2007) might aid in the assessment of this dynamic.

My argument eventually leads me to propose that if houses in contemporary Argentine and Chilean film can be understood as sites of community and belonging, it can only be in a provisional sense, without any secure foundation in identity. With this apparently paradoxical formulation, I hope to indicate how as cinema reflects the household's uneasy relation to the urban outside, it also reflects on its own unstable identity as a medium, on how it is never entirely free from mediation by other forms. In so doing, I hope to challenge traditional distinctions drawn between the home as the sphere of affect, intimacy and privacy, and the city as *polis*, location of public affairs, protest and debate. Scorer argues that the neoliberal transformations of Buenos Aires make the use of 'traditional markers of identity construction and belonging' problematic (2016: 114). Without wishing to elide national differences, I will argue that this difficulty is found in Chile as well as in Argentina. However, I will suggest that contemporary filmmaking from both countries allows a rethinking of identity construction as a poetic process. Francine Masiello's description of the 'poetic house' in the writing of Argentine poet Tamara Kamenszain is equally valid for many of the films I will now discuss: 'this house is not a space for reflection on sentiment, but for realignment of those spatial parameters basic to our vision. The home is a medium for the art of seeing' (2001: 233).

Chapter 1. Reassembling the domestic archive: Ignacio Agüero and Gustavo Fontán

One of the first shots of Patricio Guzmán's feted film *Nostalgia de la luz* (2010) is of a sunlit, old-fashioned domestic interior, preserved like a museum. The camera lingers on the shadows cast by leaves on the floor, and presents a side-plate and an old radio in close-up. Guzmán, in voice-over, notes: 'estos objetos, que podrían haber sido los mismos que había en mi casa, me recuerdan ese momento lejano cuando uno cree que deja de ser niño'. The evocative power of these objects leads Guzmán into a meditation on the apparent loss of an innocent, provincial Chile, where Santiago seemed isolated from the rest of the world. The Chile Guzmán describes is characterised by José Bengoa as a lost community, a mythical rural past where the nation is imagined as an island surrounded by unnavigable seas (1996: 32–33). By staging the house's connection to national myth-making, *Nostalgia de la luz* highlights issues that appear in other recent Latin American documentary and essay films focusing on the domestic interior: the tension between lived experience and its recording and preservation in an archive (physical or virtual), and the possibility of community, whether within the home or beyond it.

Albeit with a different emphasis, Carmen Castillo's documentary *Calle Santa Fe* (2007) explores similar concerns. Castillo, a former militant with the Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria (MIR), revisits the house in Santiago where she was abducted by the military in 1974 and her partner, Miguel Enríquez, was killed. Castillo's desire to convert the house into a museum and memorial to Enríquez is met with resistance by younger members of the MIR, who question the politics of centring this endeavour around the private space of a home. Meanwhile, Macarena Aguiló's film *El edificio de los chilenos* (2010) documents the profound emotional consequences of the MIR's attempt to break with bourgeois notions of home and family when caring for the exiled children whose parents left to fight the Pinochet regime in the late 1970s.

In Argentina, many of the documentaries made by the children of militants who disappeared under the military dictatorship of 1976-83 adopt the family and domestic space as a mechanism through which the memory (and postmemory) of political

violence might be articulated.[44] Carri's *Los rubios* (2003) is the most famous example of this body of work, and is intriguing for its suggestion that the home is ultimately an unreliable conduit for such a project. This is particularly visible in a sequence when the actress playing Carri returns to the house in which the director grew up with her parents, and is met with evasiveness when she asks neighbours about the family's history in the area.[45]

These examples are intended to serve as indicators of how prominent the home has been in recent documentary filmmaking from Argentina and Chile, and how closely tied to questions of memory. The films I analyse in this chapter inscribe themselves within this trend, but also challenge certain assumptions: for instance around the political value of the much-discussed 'archival turn' (Hirsch 2012: 227) in culture as a critical framework for the discussion of memory and history in the Southern Cone. I focus on the work of two directors: the Argentine Gustavo Fontán and the Chilean Ignacio Agüero. Agüero's documentary practice is deeply imbricated with domestic space, to the extent that houses, in his view, already undertake the operations associated with the film camera. Agüero has likened his childhood home to a film school, and writes that it contained 'muchas ventanas productoras de imágenes', so that '[e]l mundo entero no era más que el espacio off de los encuadres de todas las ventanas' (de los Ríos and Donoso 2015: 17–18). This analogy leads Agüero to posit the domestic interior as an escape from history: '[a]sí, desde mi casa, entraba y salía de la Historia, como desde un refugio atemporal lleno de rincones, habitaciones y secretos' (19).

In Fontán's work, domestic space is not so much a 'refugio atemporal' as a vehicle for a genealogical view of time. Fontán has stated that the idea for his *Ciclo de la casa* (2006-12) arose from the realisation that the permanence that his detached, suburban home presupposed was being eroded by new modes of urban living:

> [e]sas casas estaban construidas para que la familia siempre se quedase. Eran casas familiares, que si uno quisiera hacer una sucesión, tendría que remontarse a 1890 y

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[44] *M* (Prividera 2007) and *Papá Iván* (Roqué 2004) are among the best-known examples of such work.

[45] See Scorer for an analysis of how *Los rubios* constructs a performative 'alternative family' that excludes 'any semblance of an inclusive urban commons' (2016: 115-16).

ver de quién era. Pero se da un momento particular en el que mi madre entiende que ninguno de nosotros se iba a quedar a vivir allí. (Girardi and Pinto Veas 2015)

In what follows, I will suggest that neither in the three films of Fontán's *Ciclo – El árbol* (2006), *Elegía de abril* (2010) and *La casa* (2012) – nor in Agüero's *El otro día* (2012) and *Aquí se construye* (2000), is the home truly a 'refugio atemporal'. The house is instead proposed as an uneasy counter-archive, where personal memory and collective history meet. I take the term 'counter-archive' to mean one grounded in private experience, and characterised by gaps, disconnection and the arbitrary, following Marianne Hirsch (2012: 227). I also build on Valeria de los Ríos and Catalina Donoso's argument that Agüero's *El otro día*, by adopting a multi-layered approach, including photographs, voice-over narration and fragments of other audiovisual material, presents a radical challenge to state conceptions of the archive as a regulatory, ordered mechanism (2015: 64).

Much scholarship on domestic documentary film adopts an optimistic, affirmative tone, analysing the evocative power of domestic images and the kinds of reflexivity and intersubjectivity that can emerge at home (Renov 1999; Russell 1999; Sobchack 1999). In what follows here, I will suggest that such readings do not fully account for the local and national political histories that are embedded in the domestic space (and are particularly evident in Agüero's films). Before going any further, it is worth establishing precisely what a 'counter-archive' might mean in contemporary Argentina and Chile. The legacy of dictatorship looms large here. The official archives of that period have proved fertile ground for artists: one might think of the sort of archive reworked in Voluspa Jarpa's 2000 exhibition 'La No-Historia', which displayed declassified CIA archives relating to the Chilean coup of 1973, with their redactions, in the Museo de Solidaridad Salvador Allende in Santiago de Chile. Fernando A. Blanco proposes that that building itself 'constituye un archivo por derecho propio. Un palimpsesto archivatorio', thanks to its long association with left-wing intellectual activity (2013: 228). So two sorts of archive, the official record and the accumulation of memories and associations, are put into dialogue in Jarpa's exhibition. One way of articulating my aims in this piece is as an attempt to explore how a building, on film, might function as a

'palimpsesto archivatorio', and how this accumulation of records differs from, say, a CIA archive.

Another way of framing the discussion would be as an attempt to find an alternative to the sense of the term evoked by Derrida, who in 'Archive Fever', examines the relationship between the 'psychic archive' of Freudian psychoanalysis and its exteriorisation via writing, ultimately suggesting that while Freud exposed 'the archontic principle of the [institutional] archive', he ultimately 'repeated [its] patriarchal logic' by declaring 'that patriarchal right (*Vaterrecht*) marked the civilizing progress of reason' (1995: 58–60). Derrida's thesis, which I will discuss in more detail below, thus rests on a complication of the division between inside and outside which is present through much of his work. Of particular relevance here is Derrida's argument that 'the meaning of "archive", its only meaning, comes to it from the Greek *arkheion*: initially a house, a domicile, an address, the residence of the superior magistrates, the *archons*, those who commanded' (9). The concept of archive, is thus, in Derrida's view, intimately linked to a dominant subject-position:

> [o]n account of [the *archons*'] publicly recognized authority, it is at their home, in
> that *place* which is their house (private house, family house, or employee's house),
> that official documents are filed…It is thus, in this *domiciliation*, in this house
> arrest, that archives take place. The dwelling, this place where they dwell
> permanently, marks this institutional passage from the private to the public, which
> does not always mean from the secret to the nonsecret. (10, original emphasis)

In this model, the archive occupies 'the intersection of the topological and the nomological, of the place and the law', and that it is 'at once *institutive* and *conservative*', in that it both makes the law (*nomos*) and conserves the law of the house (*oikos*) 'as place, domicile, family, lineage, or institution' (10-11, original emphasis). It is thus *economic* in a strict sense. Derrida posits the transformation of Freud's house into a museum as a paradigmatic example of 'these powers of economy' (11).

Here, Derrida's position immediately presents something of a stumbling block to my argument, in that it associates the (middle-class) home with the force of institutions and

the law (and it is the middle-class home that Agüero and Fontán deal with). How, then, might a building, *that sort of* building, avoid authoritarian associations? The question takes on particular force given that as we have seen, the family home, in contemporary Chilean and Argentine culture, is often seen to have a dominant position in public discourse. Indeed, Derrida's thought is a valuable tool for analysing Agüero's and Fontán's work precisely because the constitutive violence the French philosopher locates in the figure of the household – for instance in the essays in *Dissemination* (1981) – has specific historical correlates in Argentina and Chile, especially in the dictatorship's co-option of private space for acts of state violence. [46]

Agüero's and Fontán's films at least partially refuse conceptions of house and family as closed, rigid units, and thus begin to offer a vision of the archive as a dynamic, discontinuous set of practices, rather than as the expression of an authoritarian desire to order and classify knowledge. Yet if I state that this process only begins to take place in *these works*, it is because the middle-class domestic interior, as these directors film it, retains inevitable traces of Derrida's *arkheion*. In analysing this tension, I will focus my reading around four interrelated ideas. The first of these is (1) nostalgia and its relation to media and community. I will then discuss (2) notions of the uncanny/unhomely and the spectral in their relation to archival technologies. I will argue that the spectres in these films are frequently spectres of hierarchy, recalling unsettling remnants of the connections between middle-class home and abusive institutional authority. This will lead to (3) a consideration of the archive's relation to the figures of the ruin and the fragment, and indeed to processes of destruction. Finally (4), I will examine how Agüero's and Fontán's films construct particularly reflexive archives. It was noted in the introduction that Cohen's novel *Casa de Ottro* (2009) depicts the collapse of an official 'house of memory' into a domestic space in which agency is shared between human subject and material environment, and thus provokes a consideration of a '*vida en común*' (King 2013: 144, original emphasis). The films analysed here undertake a

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[46] See Roberto Bolaño's novel *Nocturno de Chile* (2000), which contains a character based on the writer Mariana Callejas, who allegedly held literary soirées at her home while state-sanctioned torture occurred in the basement (Lazzara 2016). For a detailed analysis of the house as a locus of state violence in Chilean fiction, see Bieke Willem's study of narrative space in Chilean literature (2016: 111–192).

similar operation, though the domestic sphere is shown to limit, as well as enable, the possibilities for a new life in common.

Across the areas outlined above, two further concerns emerge as important in my analysis. One is the relation between subjectivity, the archive and the process of filmmaking, and another is the figure of the home as threshold. Writing of the turbulent literary connections between domestic and national narratives, Homi K. Bhabha suggests that 'the intimate recesses of the domestic space becomes sites for history's most intricate invasions', and that as a consequence, '[t]he unhomely is the shock of recognition of the world-in-the-home, the home-in-the-world' (1992: 141). This is just one way of articulating the events of contact and division which take place in the domestic interior, but it provides a useful model for thinking about how a counter-archive might operate in that space: by drawing on the powers of the unhomely and the spectral.

Ultimately, I will contend that Agüero's and Fontán's films posit the act of filmmaking as a method of transforming the home's collections of objects into a counter-archive in least partly by placing them within narratives: by foregrounding the temporal, as much as the spatial aspects of the household. Yet these are not the sorts of wholesome stories which Spieker, drawing on Jean-François Lyotard, associates with the home in order to distinguish between 'the *domus* as a home (a collection) of memories and the archive' (2008: 4, original emphasis). In these films, and *because of how they are filmed*, the home cannot easily be defined as the imagined fusion of place and subject towards which Spieker and Lyotard gesture. The latter claims that, in the *domus*, an idealised representation of a bourgeois country house, '[t]he story makes beginning and end rhyme, scars over the interruptions' (1991: 192). The films discussed here might be seen as poetic, but their narratives do not shy from interruption. The house is thus more of an *assemblage*, forever in the process of construction or demolition, than a fixed locus of identity (what Verena Andermatt Conley calls an 'existential space' [2012: 8]).

A nostalgic medium

Is it possible for nostalgia to be productive? This question has proved persistent in certain branches of Western thought since Novalis' famed observation that 'Philosophy is properly Home-sickness; the wish to be everywhere at home' (Carlyle 1829: 128). Svetlana Boym offers a gloss on this statement:

> [m]odern nostalgia is a mourning for the impossibility of mythical return, for the loss of an enchanted world with clear borders and values; it could be a secular expression of a spiritual longing, a nostalgia for an absolute, a home that is both physical and spiritual, the edenic unity of time and space before entry into history. (2001: 8)

Nostalgia is, then, closely related to stable temporal and spatial figures, though not necessarily to a specific geographical location. This longing for a totality of perception and experience is expressed by György Lukács as 'transcendental homelessness' (1974: 41). For Boym, this sentiment is provoked by the emergence of 'objective' time which accompanied modern technological development, and which led figures such as Benjamin to be what she terms 'nostalgic for the present', for a seemingly ever-diminishing temporal space of personal experience (2001: 23).[47] Benjamin's specific articulation of nostalgia in relation to the fragment and the remnant has been of such influence in recent work in Latin American cultural studies that it will merit a fuller discussion below. For now, it is on Boym's analysis of the relation between nostalgia and technology that I wish to focus. Information technology might appear to be the opposite of nostalgia, given that it 'promises speed, ease and oblivion of everything except the technological products themselves' (346), and that since 'nostalgia depends on the materiality of place, sensual perceptions, smells and sounds…the object of nostalgia is precisely the nonvirtual, low-tech world' (258). However, Boym points out that this opposition in fact places the two in close relation, as both technology and

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[47] An alternative perspective on 'nostalgia for the present' is offered by an astronomer in *Nostalgia de la luz*: since all light takes a length of time, however small, to reach our eyes, everything we see is in the past. Nostalgia, a longing for a temporal unity of self and world, would thus be an inevitable condition of being. This is particularly true if one thinks of the fact that neural impulses are not instantaneous, so in the astronomer's words, 'el presente no existe', even in the interior of the subject.

nostalgia are about the mediation of experience (which the former seeks to maximise and the latter to annul). Susan Stewart links this dialectic with a bourgeois, suburban form of living:

> [t]he suburbs present us with a negation of the present; a landscape consumed by its past and its future. Hence the two foci of the suburbs: the nostalgic and the technological. (1992: 1)

I will suggest that in Agüero's and Fontán's films, these two poles of surburban life are put into contact: for instance, in *Aquí se construye* (2000), a film that deals with the demolition of middle-class, suburban-style houses in Santiago de Chile, Agüero's principal interviewee, Guillermo Mann, recounts at length the history of his family in the house which is to be demolished. Yet Agüero's film is structured in such a way that the sequence of events surrounding that demolition is practically impossible to determine accurately, and a date is only provided at the end. Much as Mann may wish to link the time of his family to that of the nation, the film denies him that possibility.

In an essay on the affective and reflexive qualities of contemporary Latin American documentaries, Ana M. López cites a phrase that appears on the front page of Guzmán's website: 'Un país sin cine documental es como una familia sin álbum de fotografías' (25). This sentence, which is probably a reworking of 'Un país sin cine es como una casa sin espejo', a phrase used by Jorge Coscia (2005), a president of the INCAA (Instuto Nacional de Cine y Artes Audiovisuales) in Argentina, gives documentary film a fundamental role in the construction of the nation as familial community. López suggests that contemporary documentaries establish links between the realms of the personal and the collective in rather more complex and unpredictable ways, arguing that the 'shift to the personal, local, and domestic in Latin American documentary film practice' in the 1990s and 2000s privileges the 'affective realm of the documentary that exceeds and reasserts the indexical status of nonfiction footage' (2014: 26). An insistence on the complication of the home-nation relationship is also visible in Vinicius Navarro and Juan Carlos Rodríguez's nuancing of the significance of 'nation' and 'territory' in contemporary Latin American documentary film:

Today the nation is one among the many symbolic territories explored by filmmakers who use nonfiction to expand their capacity to speak from different places. Contemporary documentaries engage with a wide range of spatial configurations that go from intimate surfaces to global settings, evoking corporeal, local, or transnational itineraries. (2014: 16)

Documentary films reflecting this trend include João Moreira Salles' *Santiago* (2007) and the films of Eduardo Coutinho in Brazil, the work of Sandra Gómez in Cuba, and in Argentina, *Habitación disponible* (Burd and others 2004). Agüero's and Fontán's films insert themselves into this tradition, I argue, in part through a reflexive examination of the nostalgic potential of filming the home. To begin to illustrate this, it is worth examining the premise and opening sequence of Agüero's *El otro día*, a film shot in the director's house in the wealthy neighbourhood of Providencia in Santiago de Chile. The film begins as a series of shots of the house's interior, its contents, and the garden. The spectator sees light move slowly over a wardrobe before a cut to a sequence of shots of a garden, which is framed, significantly, by windows (fig. 1.1). The sense that the house doubles the operations of the camera is thus immediately established. This contemplative sequence is interrupted by the sound of the doorbell, and Agüero then films his interaction with a man from Huechuraba who wants to sell him some *alfajores* (fig. 1.2). In this first instance, Agüero asks the man for his name and where he lives, but with the subsequent visitors whom he films, he will ask not only this, but whether he can visit their house, since they have come to his.

[image redacted for copyright reasons]

Figure 1.1 *El otro día*

[image redacted for copyright reasons]

Figure 1.2 *El otro día*

The shots of Agüero's visitors, and those he films when he visits, or attempts to locate, their houses, intersect with more contemplative footage of his home and the objects and images it contains. Indeed, the doorbell announcing the film's third visitor stops a voiceover by Agüero mid-sentence. Agüero is describing how the chance falling of light through leaves onto a photo of his parents on honeymoon in 1945 (fig. 1.3) led him to the starting point of a story, which, as the spectator discovers, is about both the history of his family and the history of Chile. This intrusion of the present into a historical narrative highlights several tensions within documentary form: one of these is precisely between the narration of history or memory, and the force of the present as pictured. This disruption stages what Stella Bruzzi has identified as

> The false opposition set up by most theoretical discussions…between the 'raw' visual material (which, if it could be left unadulterated, would provide us with a 'truer' representation of the events being recorded) and the forces of subjectivity such as the voice-over that endlessly thwart its objective nobility. (2010: 71)

At various points in *El otro día*, Agüero's voice-over is interrupted by a close-up of his cat in a tree, or spoken in a whisper as if so as not to disturb a bird bathing in the garden. These moments could be seen to reinforce the sense that the 'artificial' voice-over is imposed upon a 'natural', objective image. However, the interruption of the voice-over suggests a simultaneity of filming and editing which spectator knows, or at least suspects, to be staged. The break might thus be seen as a reflexive acknowledgement of documentary's status as, in Bruzzi's terms, '[a] performative [act] whose truth comes into being only at the moment of filming' (10). In this case, however, any sense of immediacy is at one further remove, as it is the moment of editing, rather than that of filming, that is constitutive of documentary 'truth'.

[image redacted for copyright reasons]

Figure 1.3 *El otro día*

The term 'documentary' may itself be a simplification here. Agüero's evocative voice-overs, which are (in general) provoked by the domestic interior and interrupted by its

outside, also blur the boundaries between documentary and what Vivian Sobchack calls the '*film-souvenir*', the home movie. Sobchack suggests that the images of the latter have an 'evocative', rather than representational function, as they remind the spectator of broader memories (1999: 247, original emphasis). As Sobchack writes,

> the image fragments of the backyard of the house I once lived in do not provoke
> intense scrutiny, but rather evoke a coherent, eventful, and lived space I wish to
> recall in excess of what is given to me on the screen. (248)

Agüero's voice-overs, like Guzmán's at the beginning of *Nostalgia de la luz*, stage precisely this sort of imaginative work, revealing the remembered and imagined spaces linked to family photographs and souvenirs. Chief among these is the island of Quiriquina, the place where the photograph of Agüero's parents was taken, and which becomes a prison camp under Pinochet. Moreover, as the film progresses, Agüero's narration of his father's life in the navy and the torture of his twin brother after the 1973 coup is periodically illustrated with archive footage of the prow of a ship, of an ocean and of icebergs (fig. 1.4): the domestic interior's power to evoke exterior landscapes is visually rendered. These dreamlike sequences are themselves interrupted by the sound of the doorbell, or by shots of the garden: there is ample support here for Navarro and Rodríguez's suggestion that recent Latin American documentaries 'remind us of how the contingencies of the present affect our understanding of the past' (2014: 3).

[image redacted for copyright reasons]

Figure 1.4 *El otro día*

In other words, the domestic interior's capacity for generating nostalgic reflection is both performed and questioned in *El otro día*. The photograph of Agüero's parents to some extent performs the function of the souvenir as described by Susan Stewart, which is to 'create a continuous and personal narrative of the past', to privatise or domesticate history (1992: 140). Yet this narrative is broken, in Agüero's film, by the shots of the garden and the ringing of the doorbell: by a return to/of the exterior. The photograph's

capacity to create the illusion of a fixed temporal and spatial whole (indicated by the long static shot which opens the film) is thus shown to be limited. In any case, Agüero's narration reveals that that 'whole' (the island of Quiriquina) was in fact just a small element of violent historical processes. In that sense, Agüero might be said to pre-emptively undermine any nostalgic construction of 'the distance between the present and an imagined, prelapsarian experience, experience as it might be "directly lived"' (Stewart 1992: 139). Indeed, it is notable in this respect that where in Stewart's model it is the souvenir itself which acts as the generator of personal narrative, Agüero seemingly makes a point of attributing that agency to a chance combination of circumstances in his voiceover:

> La coincidencia del otro día, de la posición de la fotografía en el armario, la luz del sol que la iluminó, con las hojas que le hicieron sombra, con el hecho que yo estaba justo en ese momento ahí filmando, coincidencia que se da muy pocas veces, quizás una sola vez, hace que sea aquí donde comienza la historia. Por ejemplo, puedo decir que los de la fotografía… [the voiceover is interrupted by the doorbell]

Here, it is the contingency of the present which both generates and disrupts narrative. Of course, if we think of film itself as an archival technology (and both Agüero and Fontán provide ample reasons for doing so), we arrive at the paradox skilfully explored by Mary Ann Doane: that of film's apparent ability to archive experience. Doane specifies that 'What is archived…would be the experience of a presence. But it is the disjunctiveness of a present relived, of a present haunted by historicity' (2002: 23).

The precise nature of this haunting will be explored in the next section, but for a clear example of how *El otro día* explicitly reflects on that haunting presence of history, it is worth returning briefly to the icebergs which appear in the dreamlike sequences mentioned above (fig. 1.4). The icebergs, as blank, faceless objects, recall Derrida's definition of the spectre and his concept of the visor effect: 'we do not see who looks at us' (2006: 6). The spectre, in other words, is always part of an unequal relation, always a spectre of hierarchy. Derrida's notions of spectrality and haunting, which as we will see he closely links to the archive, are tied to a disruption of temporal progression and the intrusion of the past into the present: the spectre 'de-synchronises, it recalls us to

anachrony' (6). Agüero's film thus constructs a temporality that recalls what Spieker terms the modern (public) archive's 'precarious oscillation between narrative and contingency' (2008: 7).[48] What is striking about *El otro día* is that this oscillation occurs in the domestic space, one more frequently associated with 'nonarchival collections' and, for Spieker, the Lacanian Imaginary (6). Haunting, as an instance of the uncanny or unhomely results, then, from the collapse of divisions both between interior and exterior and between past and present. Home, often associated with narrative closure in film (Avery 2014: 25), becomes temporally and spatially open.

Page has suggested that the collapse of distinctions between private and public spaces in contemporary Chilean films – such as *Play* (Scherson 2005) and *Zoológico* (Marín 2011) – is more easily read as part of neoliberalism's 'thorough reorganization of social and subjective experience' in the country than as a strategy of resistance to political hegemony (2017). My reading of *El otro día* will similarly argue that there is nothing innately resistant about the film's opening of the domestic archive. Consequently, affirmations of the community constructed by Agüero's film,[49] and of its 'estética de la habitabilidad' (Depetris Chauvin 2015: 186), seem somewhat utopian. What marks Agüero's film out from the aforementioned productions, though, is its engagement with history, and its recognition of the persistence of more hierarchical forms of authority beneath the neoliberal reorganisation of urban space.

As well as evoking Agüero's father's naval career, *El otro día*'s icebergs might also be seen to refer to the whitewashing of Chilean history which, according to Tomás Moulian, was undertaken by the country's submission to Expo 1992 in Seville: an iceberg, intended as a gleaming symbol of the country's rebirth in the transition to democracy (2002: 34–36) . It is notable in this respect that one of the sequences showing icebergs immediately follows the revelation that Quiriquina, to which Agüero's father promised to take his children but never did, later housed Pinochet's political prisoners. Agüero's public documenting of his home, his conflation of documentary with *film-souvenir*, thus

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[48] Spieker argues that film 'embodies the modern archive's claim to the [Lacanian] Real' (2008: 9).
[49] De los Ríos and Donoso write that in *El otro día*, Agüero's personal archive 'reorganiza su propia trama en virtud de [un] encuentro en un espacio que es común. Con esto, se señala una historia compartida y una idea de comunidad' (2015: 67).

reveals a conflation of family history with national history, but not in the comfortable, nostalgic sense which would be envisaged by conservative accounts. As Michael Chanan argues, the entry of the documentary into the domestic sphere has the ability to transform 'the public image of the family as a social institution' (2007: 230). There is no comforting image of the nation as family here. Instead, Agüero's interrupted meditations on material objects point at the experiences of those on the urban margins.

This is particularly clear in a sequence which cuts from the faces of children playing in the neighbourhood of Huechuraba to a poster image of an indigenous family (figs 1.5 and 1.6), and pans from there to a book entitled *Darwin en Chile*, and then to old family photographs. Here again, the movement of cinema unsettles the rigid spatial and temporal divisions associated with an official archive. Yet the cut also establishes an analogy between camera and house as mechanisms of representation and 'mechanisms that define space', and which can therefore be haunted (Wigley 1993: 163). The cut moreover outlines a troubling link between Agüero's project of documenting Santiago's margins and older, quasi-colonial scientific missions. Roger Koza's admiring characterisation of Agüero as explorer of an urban archipelago maintains this implicit link, and positions the director as a figure of authority (2013). Depetris Chauvin aims to resolve the political problem posed by figuring the city as natural wilderness by highlighting the unexpected connections Agüero makes between himself and others: 'El 'aire marino' de su familia deviene en una configuración visual de una red afectiva insospechada entre él y los otros' (2015: 190).

[image redacted for copyright reasons]

Figure 1.5 *El otro día*

[image redacted for copyright reasons]

Figure 1.6 *El otro día*

The appeal to affect rather than physical space neatly sidesteps the fact that while Agüero does trace his movements around Santiago on a map on the wall, shots of the map in *El otro día* are infrequent and not altogether easy to decipher.[50] Yet Depetris Chauvin is arguably being too generous with Koza's reading here. The implication of the latter is that the middle-class home is the only stable location of culture in the film. Koza's affirmation that *El otro día* posits the house as an '*axis mundi*', a point around which all events turn (2013, original emphasis), is reminiscent of Derrida's *arkheion*, the house as locus of official history and source of authority.

Agüero does not appear oblivious to this fact. In a later passage of narration, the voiceover comments on a photograph of his son Raimundo, aged 4, dressed as national hero Arturo Prat, and then notes how his father entered the navy aged 14, the same age as Jemmy Button, the indigenous Yaghan youth taken to England from Tierra del Fuego on the Beagle by Robert FitzRoy. By the time Jemmy Button returned to Tierra del Fuego, his father had died. This narrative of displacement and the neocolonial conversion of a human other into an object of curiosity for the citizens of Great Britain is accompanied by images of Agüero's garden, with its model ship and life ring. Again inserting the evocative into the documentary, Agüero suggests that any image of the (middle-class) home also contains a trace of the violent dislocation of marginalised communities. This can be seen as a rather less comfortable version of what Boym suggests regarding domestic interiors in the Russian diaspora: '[e]ach apartment collection presents at once a fragmentary biography of the inhabitant and a display of collective memory' (2001: 249). The film's montage and narration allow the contents of Agüero's house to act not simply as the bourgeois collection does in Stewart's model, by replacing 'the narrative of history with the narrative of the individual subject – that is, the collector himself' (1992: 156). There is no simple fusion of self and (clearly delimited, private) environment. Instead, the spectator is offered a reminder of social hierarchies and injustices.

Agüero has nonetheless described filmmaking as 'como estar químicamente fundido con lo que se está filmando' (Mouesca 2005: 107). Moreover, in *¿Qué historia es ésta y cuál es*

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[50] De los Ríos makes a similar observation, noting that Agüero's map is 'desbordado, excedido por el azar y la interrupción' (2017: 119).

su final? (2013), a documentary made by José Luis Torres Leiva about Agüero and shot in his house in Providencia, Agüero draws frequent comparisons between the construction of a documentary and that of a house, and talks of the making of a film as a spatial practice, a movement between a centre and satellite area: filmmaking, then, as the collection and arrangement of images. Insofar as the figure of Agüero as filmmaker in *El otro día* is analogous to that of Stewart's collector, one might say that his film constructs, even if in an interrupted fashion, a mode of subjectivity which is rooted in Benjamin's 'phantasmagorias of the interior'. It would however be simplistic to portray Agüero as blind to the broader political implications of his method of filmmaking. Indeed, in a striking moment from *Cien niños esperando un tren* (1988), a documentary about a cinema workshop in one of Santiago's *poblaciones* (peripheral working-class neighbourhoods), Agüero interviews some children in their house, and asks if they have been filmed before. They answer that they have, by some men who asked them questions about their parents, and whom the spectator understands to be agents of Pinochet's intelligence agency, the *Central Nacional de Informaciones*. In other words, film's ability to reinforce positions of power, and to inscribe experience in a hegemonic, official archive, is recognised.

However, it is still the case in *El otro día* that the threshold of Agüero's house acts as a kind of barrier, and that almost none of his visitors are admitted into his house, while he enters many of theirs. Agüero implicitly recognises this imbalance when he states in interview that '[m]i lugar en todo esto no es tanto mi casa, sino el lugar del mirón' (Marín 2013). The film certainly appears to lament a loss of contact. For instance, Agüero goes to visit the house of his postman, René, who tells him that the upward growth of the city, the 'ley de los condominios', has made direct interaction between him and his customers ever rarer. A more formally striking illustration of impossible contact comes in the sequence filmed in Huechuraba, mentioned above. While Agüero is filming children playing in the street, they approach the camera and ask what he is doing. He explains, but as one of them gets closer, Agüero admonishes him, saying 'No, no lo toques'. There seems then to be an irreducible distance between the filmmaker and the people or objects he records, despite the crossing of boundaries between domestic interior and urban exterior.

The explicit denial of touch in this sequence might lead us to consider Nancy's work on the subject. Touch is a central figure in Nancy's work, and is always presented as a promise never fulfilled: 'touching – immanence not attained but close, as though promised (no longer speech, nor gaze) – is the limit' (1991: 38).[51] It is closely linked to Nancy's conception of community as necessarily incomplete and unworked. 'Community', Nancy writes, 'is made of the interruption of singularities, or of the suspension that singular beings *are*' (31, original emphasis). The interruption of the move to touch here, along with the interruptions in Agüero's voiceover narrative, suggests that any community that film might be able to create cannot be predicated on an immanent common space, one constructed around a singular subjectivity (i.e., in this case, that of the filmmaker).[52] In more specifically cinematic terms, the interruption suggests that despite the prevalence of images that might be described as 'haptic' for their closeness and material qualities in the work of both Agüero and Fontán, theories of haptic cinema that emphasise presence and proximity fall short.[53] There is more reason here to follow Laura McMahon's suggestion that cinema '*enacts the withdrawal of touch*' (2012: 28, original emphasis).

As we will see in later chapters, Nancy's engagement with, if not full endorsement of, the language of being and presence makes his work a useful step beyond deconstruction towards new understandings of home as a space of commonality. The insistence on exteriority and exposure in his work on community does however limit the application of his thought in my analysis, which investigates how houses, as specific material forms, participate in the reconfiguration of inter-subjective relations.[54] It is for this reason that I will turn at the end of this chapter to the work of Latour, whose concept of the assemblage accords nonhuman objects a clearer role in the formation of collectives.

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[51] For a fuller exposition of Nancy's thought on touch, see his *Noli Me Tangere* (2008).

[52] For Nancy, there can be no singular 'Being' as subject, but only 'being-with-one-another' (2000: 64).

[53] I am thinking primarily here of Laura U. Marks' influential *The Skin of the Film* (2000).

[54] McMahon further notes that '[t]o represent a model of community – inoperative or not – would [...] appear to run counter to Nancy's notion of the non-representational evidence of cinema, and that there is 'a necessary dislocation between thought and film here, an inevitable *unworkability* – a resistance of film to thought and of thought to film' (2012: 84, original emphasis).

It is clear, in short, that Agüero demonstrates only a hesitant and equivocal faith in the film camera's ability to break down divisions between self and other, or to transform a domestic collection of objects and images into a 'counter-archive', or the basis for life in common. In *¿Qué historia es ésta y cuál es su final?*, Agüero sifts through family photos and pairs the films he has made with the houses he has lived in, describing *El otro día* in particular as a 'película de la casa'. There is a sense, then, in which film is presented as much as a technology of nostalgia as the facilitator of open social relations. The reflexive focus on the technologies through which nostalgia operates might nonetheless assist the production of what Boym terms 'reflective nostalgia', a longing aware of its own impossibility (2001: 49-50), and thus help create new conditions of sociability.

This possibility is broached explicitly in *El árbol* (2006), the first film in Gustavo Fontán's *Ciclo de la casa*. Fontán films his parents' house in the Buenos Aires suburb of Banfield, recording their discussions over what to do with a dead tree in their front garden, but also small details of their daily lives, with no voiceover or comment. In fact, the repetition of close-up shots of domestic gestures (such as sweeping leaves on the patio, or cooking) might lead one to think of the terms of narrative in the *domus* proposed by Lyotard: 'narratives are like gestures, related to gestures, places, proper names… there are stories: the generations, the locality, the seasons' (1991: 193). The passage of the seasons and familial relations are both salient in the film. However, as I will suggest below, the structure of family is presented as rather uncanny or unhomely in this and the subsequent films in the cycle, and, as Page notes,

> [t]he nostalgia of the characters' reflections on the past is matched by an attempt to recapture some of the qualities associated with earlier photographic techniques. The film's aesthetic is constructed self-reflexively around the use of magnifying lenses and the projection of shadows onto a screen through backlighting, technologies that belong to an earlier era of photography and analogue filmmaking. (2009b: 201)

The reference to earlier technologies is accompanied by recurrent shots which demonstrate how the material fabric of the house can produce distortion and illusion: interior space is seen through gauze curtains, or through windows and their reflections. There is a sense, therefore, in which the house itself, by participating in the production

of blurred images recalling the past, functions as a technology of nostalgia. This apparent according of agency to the house, to be further discussed below, complicates any notion of the filmmaker's subjectivity: it is clearly not a question of the self expanding to fill an empty interior, as Stewart has it (1992: 156-57).

It also complicates any simple identification of the film as a documentary, as does the interaction which develops between Fontán and members of his family through the trilogy. Indeed, in its sophisticated treatment of subjectivity, Fontán's work could be classed as essay film. In *Elegía de abril*, the second film in the cycle, the spectator sees his son filming the house's interior and its contents on a handheld camcorder, and the resulting unsteady footage is then incorporated into the film. Insofar as this challenges the conventional distinction between filmmaking subject and filmed objects, it echoes Michael Renov's notion of 'domestic ethnography', which Renov proposes as a way of 'moving beyond the subject/object dichotomization installed in the post-Enlightenment West' (1999: 141). In this work, which entails a filmic interaction with one's own family, 'authorial subjectivity is explicitly in question or on display. There exists a reciprocity between subject and object, a play of mutual determination, a condition of consubstantiality' (143).

While *El árbol* is not as explicitly reflexive, moments such as a fade from a blurred image of a family photo on a projector screen to a shot of Fontán's parents' faces (also out of focus) suggest that the ways in which the film mobilises domestic collections such as photographs might, in Hirsch's terms, reveal 'the operation of the familial gaze' (1997: 11), or, in Ludmer's phrase, the workings of the 'forma-familia' (2010: 72). The photographs are made to *perform* in the sense proposed by Diana Taylor when describing the use of archival photographs by the HIJOS groups in Argentina: they 'serve as placeholders in a sense, a way of securing the place of the disappeared in the genealogical chain' (2003: 187). While the 'disappeared' in *El árbol* are not political victims, as in the case of the HIJOS, Taylor's notion of archival performance, merging the archive of documents with the 'repertoire' of gestures, is a useful figure to apply to *El árbol*. Taylor notes that '[p]erformances also replicate themselves through their own structures and codes. This means that the repertoire, like the archive, is mediated' (20-

21). The mediation of bodily performances that film undertakes takes a distinctly uncanny character at points throughout Agüero's and Fontán's works.

Spectral performances and spectres of hierarchy

Several of the critics who envisage the bourgeois home as an enclosed space of collection conjure an image of it that is associated with stasis and death. Andermann, for instance, claims that '[b]ourgeois house building is always at heart the construction of a mausoleum' (2007: 14).[55] If the force of this suggestion is admitted, it is perhaps unsurprising that films such as Agüero's and Fontán's, which challenge these ideas of stasis and mummified subjectivity through innovative visual strategies, should also incorporate elements which might be described as uncanny, unhomely, or, to use a term favoured by Derrida, spectral. In this section I will argue that it is above all the performative or reflexive aspects of these films which are presented as 'unhomely', and that the 'spectral' appearances are also closely related to the impossibility of complete self-presence in cinematic representation that was discussed above.

In Freud's famous essay, the *unheimlich* is 'nothing new or strange, but something that was long familiar to the psyche and was estranged from it only through being repressed', and thus intimately related to the *heimlich*, which is not only the homely but also that which is secret or hidden (2003: 148). Avery agrees that 'the uncanny home rests on repetition', but suggests that 'Freud's focus on the uncanny interior represented an exception rather than the rule' (2014: 12-14). Echoing Nicholas Royle, Avery posits an understanding of the unhomely as liminal (15), a figure which can be usefully related to the films discussed here.

In *Elegía de abril,* the second film in Fontán's cycle which deals loosely with the legacy of the director's maternal grandfather, a poet, familial relations might be said to occupy a liminal space between reality and fiction. In the opening moments of the film, Fontán's

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[55] Andermann here echoes Theodor Adorno's pessimistic declaration that 'the house is past' (1978: 39).

mother, María Merlino, begins to reminisce about her father and his death, stating that he 'pasó de un sueño a otro.' However, she then declares: 'Yo no actúo más'. A voice from out of shot, which the spectator presumes to be Fontán's, asks why, to which she replies: 'Me cansé.' Fontán's entry into the diegesis – he later appears in shot, along with his son, and then filmed by him – and his mother's description of her participation as acting both challenge any conventional subject/object division. Later in the film, Fontán's son uses a handheld camcorder to film the domestic interior and to conduct interviews with family members: authorial subjectivity thus becomes split or shared (fig. 1.7).[56] Moreover, after a suggestion by Fontán's son, Merlino is partially replaced in the film with a professional actress, who on greeting Fontán's mother says 'La conozco porque la he visto en el cine' (in *El árbol*). Sequences in the film cut between the two women, and at one point Merlino tells a story about her father defending her from a dog in voiceover, while the camera films the actress through a door's frosted glass. The boundaries between 'private' domestic life and 'public' performance or display are here very unclear.

[image redacted for copyright reasons]

Figure 1.7 *Elegía de abril*

At one point in *Elegía de abril*, Fontán's son films his uncle doing an impression of 'tía Ernestina', a dead relative who would always sip tea in an exaggeratedly refined manner. After this performance, periodic sequences of yellowy, grainy footage shot at night appear to suggest the ghostly presence of Ernestina, culminating in blurry images of her face and her hand holding a teacup just before the film's end. This suggestion that acting is linked to the spectral or unhomely builds on sequences in *El árbol* when Fontán's mother is seen or heard reciting the names of relatives, whom the spectator understands to be dead. In that the 'ghost' of *tía Ernestina* appears within the diegesis, it can also be seen as a development of the disembodied whispering which accompanies

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[56] While in *El otro día* Agüero also appears in shot, and mentions something of his relationship with his son, the film's narration consistently identifies the camera's gaze with the director's subjective position.

shots of family photographs in *El árbol* (and again in *La casa*, the final film of the trilogy).

We might read these moments as an indication that the filming of domestic life, its conversion into images, enacts a kind of repetition which can be seen as unhomely. In this sense, the use of actors and impersonation is a reflexive comment on processes already at work in 'documentary' film (this is the point of Renov's 'domestic ethnography'). One might think here of Benjamin's use of Luigi Pirandello's idea that the film actor 'feels as if in exile – exiled not only from the stage but also from himself' (Benjamin 1999b: 222-23), or indeed of Derrida's assertion that audiovisual technologies articulate a 'spectral logic' in their blurring of divisions between the present and the absent, the living and the dead (Derrida and Stiegler 2002: 117). In the final film of Fontán's trilogy, *La casa*, this deconstructive logic, which Derrida conceives in abstract terms, finds a material equivalent in the demolition of the house itself. For Laura Martins, there are two principal dimensions to the film: 'la *fantasmal*: ahí están en suave desenfoque las memorias espectrales yuxtapuestas de quienes la transitaron…Por el otro, la *procedimental* que exhibe el proceso de desmantelamiento y destrucción de la casa' (2014: 174, original emphasis). These two dimensions are, arguably, linked: for Derrida, for instance, the Freudian archive is not only fundamentally spectral (1995: 54), but also inhabited by the death drive, a movement towards destruction which is '*anarchivic*, one could say, or *archiviolithic*. It will always have been archive-destroying, by silent vocation' (14, original emphasis).

Spieker suggests that the most crucial aspect of Derrida's articulation of the death drive is his insistence that 'the death drive destroys not simply memory – archives are never simply institutions of memory – it destroys the exteriority of the archive to what it stores' (2008: 43). This merging of the archive's contents and its material substrate is visible in *La casa*: first, because inhabitants and their memories are not easily separable from the house itself (the murmuring voices have no obvious bodily source). It is also apparent in that the filmic apparatus is itself not clearly distinguishable from the material objects of the house (fig. 1.8), or their fragmentation: as Martins notes, much of the film is shot 'con un espejo fracturado puesto sobre la lente de la cámara' (2014:

174). The sustained attention which Fontán's camera pays to the debris of the house during and after its demolition will be dealt with more fully in the next section.

[image redacted for copyright reasons]

Figure 1.8 *La casa*

An alternate perspective on the spectral nature of domestic documentary-making is offered by Agüero in *El otro día*. Halfway through the film, Agüero's voice-over reflects on how little we ever really know of our parents, and then muses that 'a veces, uno conversa más con los muertos que con los vivos'. A few minutes later, as the camera films the garden through the house's windows, a disembodied voice shouts '¡Acción!'. The shot then immediately cuts to grainy footage of a fleeting figure, turned away from the camera (fig. 1.9), that recalls Derrida's description of the archive's spectres as traces of figures 'whose eyes can never be met' (1995: 54). The voice and the body remain unattributed until the film's closing credits, which reveal that they belong to Raúl Ruiz, the acclaimed director for whom Agüero acted in films such as *Días de campo* (2004) and the TV series *La recta provincia* (2007), and who died in 2011. Spectrality is thus here related to the archiving of previous forms of audiovisual technology.

[image redacted for copyright reasons]

Figure 1.9 *El otro día*

What is notable about this moment is that the spectral presence that emerges is one that reminds the viewer of the hierarchical nature of all filmmaking: someone is always calling the shots. Agüero's encounter with the children in Huechuraba demonstrates a keen awareness of this. So while in *El otro día* a notable erosion of boundaries occurs between individual and collective memories, it is important to note that the director's

position of authority is largely maintained. This is not to deny the political value of Agüero's interviews with those living on the margins of the city: as de los Ríos and Donoso argue, the moment of encounter thus becomes central to the director's politics, insofar as they can be discerned (2015: 140).[57] His insistent questions on daily routine suggest that the life of the nation should be viewed not just through the lens of a bourgeois subject, but also from the perspective of the marginalised.

De los Ríos and Donoso suggest that *El otro día* is therefore an 'archivo inacabado, a la vez subjetivo y colectivo, abierto al futuro y al devenir' (2015: 150). Such critical accounts implicitly argue for the resistant or revolutionary qualities of Agüero's apparently haphazard audiovisual collection of fragments. Yet as *El otro día*'s spectral images show, the authoritarian associations of the middle-class Chilean home cannot be entirely undone by this opening to the outside. Derrida makes the point that there is 'no archive without outside', and asks whether the exterior is itself a kind of archive (1995: 14-15). It could certainly be argued that from the point of view of Agüero's interview subjects, his audiovisual archive *is* the outside coming in, 'reading' their houses for clues about their lives. Agüero's filmmaking, like Derrida's thought, is alive to (and sceptical of) the infraction of private space by audiovisual media, and attentive to the hierarchies implicit in the giving and receiving of hospitality (Derrida and Stiegler 2002: 31-33; Derrida and Dufourmantelle 2000).[58] I will return to these ideas in more depth in Chapter 4.

The point of this observation is that *El otro día*'s portrayal of the home as porous –

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[57] It should not however be assumed that the encounter itself is a guarantee of equality. The Brazilian film *Santiago* (Moreira Salles 2007) makes this point painfully clear. In this film, the director reflects on the inevitable hierarchies in his relationship with his family's domestic servant Santiago, and how they surfaced in his attempt to create a filmic portrait of the man in 1992. There are two archives visible in this work: the old footage to which Moreira Salles returns, and Santiago's paper compilation of the genealogies of European nobility (another archive imbued with patriarchal authority). *Santiago* is emblematic of a concern with the 'ethics of encounter' in recent Latin American documentary (see the essays collated in the section given this title in Arenillas and Lazzara [2016]), and suggests that an aesthetics of encounter is not itself enough to erase inequalities.

[58] Indeed, as noted above, the presence of Agüero's camera in a private home in an earlier film, *Cien niños esperando un tren* (1988), triggers a memory of a visit from an agent of Pinochet's intelligence services.

and Agüero makes this image concrete, showing rainwater dripping in – is not in itself a guarantee of ethical practice or the expansion of community. While the term *arkheion* may be unsatisfactory to describe the liminal political position of Agüero's filmic house, this does not mean that its occupant is divested of authority. Agüero's encounters across social boundaries are largely predicated on the figure of the threshold, a border that is not always successfully crossed. Indeed, although Fontán's films do not venture outside the house, they arguably do more to deconstruct the authority of the filmmaking subject.

The ruined archive

Given that, as we have seen, notions of the uncanny and the spectral are nonetheless often seen to rest on the crossing of boundaries, it is perhaps unsurprising that Fontán's trilogy should ultimately show the demolition of the house it documents: the destruction of divisions between past and present prefigures the destruction of those between domestic interior and 'outside'. Indeed, as noted above, Fontán has described the *Ciclo de la casa* as stemming from the realisation that the sort of family home his parents inhabited was ultimately unsustainable, so that

> la casa termina estrictamente en los fantasmas, es decir, en lo que podemos
> entender como lo fantasmal: en esa casa ya vacía, preparada para la demolición, en
> la perduración de eso fantasmal, de eso que ya no está. (Girardi and Pinto Veas
> 2015)

The subtext here, that the house as total horizon and record of several generations of family history is incompatible with contemporary urban life, is explored far more explicitly in Agüero's *Aquí se construye* (2000), a film which documents the demolition of bourgeois, suburban family homes to make way for apartment blocks in Santiago at the turn of the twenty-first century (fig 1.10). The documentary is structured around a

series of interviews with Guillermo Mann, a descendant of European migrants who has lived in his house, now scheduled for demolition, for nearly fifty years. Towards the beginning of the film, Agüero asks him: '¿Cuál es la historia de esta casa? ¿La historia suya en esta casa?', prompting Mann to muse on the intertwining of personal identity and built environment. In fact, Mann explicitly links the destruction of his and similar detached houses to the loss of a kind of imagined subjective plenitude: he sees the demolitions as an assault on his 'cultura personal', and suggests that 'todos estamos decayendo junto con nuestro entorno'. The loss of the house is, for him, 'como la muerte de un familiar'.[59]

[image redacted for copyright reasons]

Figure 1.10 A house soon to give way to an apartment block in *Aquí se construye*.

These are fundamentally Bachelardian reflections: Mann would no doubt agree that 'the house image would appear to have become the topography of our intimate being' (Bachelard 1969: xxxii). These parallels between the violation of domestic space and that of personal or bodily space are further developed when the spectator learns that Mann, during the filming, has undergone open-heart surgery. Nonetheless, as will be explored below, Agüero does go some way towards challenging this identification of home and self.

For instance, the performative dimension to the linking of personal identity and domestic space is made apparent from the film's opening sequence, which shows the removal of objects from the house prior to its demolition. Many of these have the appearance of theatrical décor, giving the house the implied role of stage set. It is notable that as the camera then pans across the emptied interior, the only object which remains on the wall is a Chilean national crest: the relationship of familial to national history, more fully explored in *El otro día*, is hinted at here (fig. 1.11). The nature of the montage in this opening sequence leaves the spectator in no doubt as to the fate

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[59] As noted in the introduction, Brodsky's novel *Casa chilena* (2015) depicts a very similar (albeit fictional) situation.

awaiting the house: an exterior shot which shows the building and its street number cuts directly to a shot, from the same location, of its demolition. Crucially, the audio track switches before the image track does, as if to suggest the inevitability of the house's destruction. Shots of demolitions punctuate the film at regular intervals, although there are no clear temporal markers until the end of the documentary, when the spectator is informed that shooting took place between June 1997 and January 2000. In a manner not dissimilar to the interruptions of *El otro día*, then, the demolitions of *Aquí se construye* suggest that the modern city's profusion of temporalities and histories disrupt any attempt at continuity associated with family history and the bourgeois home. The fact that Agüero films not only Mann's house and garden, but also the homes and the daily commutes of construction workers who are building the apartment blocks replacing houses like his, further develops this impression.[60] *Aquí se construye* does not fully endorse Mann's perspective, then, but nor is it complicit in its total erasure. The manner in which the new apartments under construction are presented – as glistening, lifeless showrooms (fig. 1.12) – suggests a scepticism of the homely qualities of these new dwellings.

[image redacted for copyright reasons]

Figure 1.11 *Aquí se construye*

[image redacted for copyright reasons]

Figure 1.12 *Aquí se construye*

In insisting in the recording of what is lost in the housing boom, Agüero's film marks out a space for itself outside the urban flows of people and capital it depicts (I will return to this idea of cinema as an *outside* to the processes of modernity in the next chapter). *Aquí*

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[60] Where Mann emphasises the continiuity of self and physical environmnent, a construction worker whom Agüero interviews at his home in the suburb of Renca draws attention to the importance of good relations with neighbours, which for him provide an alternative family structure.

se construye records, *as present*, the remnants and traces, both physical and psychological, of what preceded the modern transformations of the city. This, it seems, is what Doane is pointing towards when she suggests that the filming of destruction and demolition can be seen as a 'meta-archival' process: the demolition reducing 'the corrupting, dismantling work of time to an instant that can be seized and circulated' (2002: 223). Drawing on Derrida, Doane notes that film, in its reproducibility, is in a sense always haunted by 'the anarchival – destructiveness, the death drive', in that it eliminates the uniqueness and singularity of what it records (222). The filmic archive is, in her terms, distinguished from official records by its preservation of a non-rational temporality:

> The archive is a protection against time and its inevitable entropy and corruption, but with the introduction of film as an archival process, the task becomes that of preserving time, of preserving an experience of temporality, one that was never necessarily "lived" but emerges as the counterdream of rationalization, its agonistic underside – full presence. (223)

What is notable about *La casa* and *Aquí se construye* in this context is that, by documenting demolitions, they *preserve* these processes of entropy and corruption, as well as what came before them: this is a crucial difference between their work and what Andermann calls the 'anarchiving destruction' of twentieth-century Argentine dictatorships (2007: 17), or 'the destruction of important archives detailing the whereabouts of the disappeared' which hindered efforts towards justice during Chile's transition to democracy (Lazzara 2006: 19). This may be the films' strongest claim to act as 'counter-archives', alternatives to official records.

It is worth dwelling here on a significant difference in the presentation of demolition in *La casa* and *Aquí se construye*. In Agüero's film, shots of collapsing buildings are most often accompanied by melancholic music (Arvo Pärt's 'Fratres'), and no intra-diegetic sound. It would thus be easy to construe these shots as nostalgic, preoccupied with the 'vanishing present' (Boym 2001: 351), even as they deny the spectator the full experience of that present. By contrast, in *La casa*, the demolition process takes up the latter half of the film (lasting around half an hour), and the camera documents in close-

up walls being knocked down, ceilings broken through, and rubble scraped away. The only sound is that of the machinery and men at work. Rather than an occasional interruption of another story, here demolition is presented as the culmination of the narratives constructed across the three films of the *Ciclo de la casa*. After the building has been demolished, Fontán's camera pans in close-up across the rubble, as if looking for meaningful remnants. Among the objects it briefly lingers on are a book, part of an electrical socket, and a crucifix, the latter being the most obvious evidence of attempts at meaning-making (fig. 1.13). I read these moments as explicit manifestations of a trend apparent in each of the films I have discussed here: the presentation of the home as the place of accumulation of fragments, or remnants, of experiences and memories.

[image redacted for copyright reasons]

Figure 1.13 *La casa*

The fragment or ruin has become something of a contested trope in recent work in Latin American cultural studies, particularly in discussions relating to memory. Idelber Avelar's *The Untimely Present* (1999) is perhaps the most paradigmatic example of this trend. Jean Franco has related this mode of thought to the city, arguing that since the contemporary megalopolis can no longer be visualised as a totality, 'community, identity, and subjectivity [must] be rethought or refashioned from fragments and ruins' (2002: 190). In Chile, Nelly Richard has pointed to the debt such formulations owe to the work of Benjamin, and suggests that much recent Chilean art responds to his privileging of the residual and the discarded in its efforts to build discourses of memory (2004: 14). In James Cisneros' account, the 'figure of memory' in Chilean cinema, an allegorical construction mediating between distinct temporalities and spaces, emerges from this tradition (2006: 60).

Agüero's and Fontán's films seem to suggest some limits to this way of thinking: the 'figure of memory' runs up against the house as an increasingly unstable figure for family identity and national politics. What their focus on the middle-class domestic

interior implies is that the ability to assemble fragments of experience is closely related to a position of relative privilege (as occupant of the house, or indeed as filmmaker). The fragments of *El otro día* (whether voice-over narration, photographs, or doorstep encounters) are articulated through this privileged environment, as we have seen, and neither *La casa* nor *Aquí se construye* offers a clear vision of what might be learnt from their ruins. Michael Lazzara's qualification of the Benjaminian model of memory is useful here:

> [t]his archaeological metaphor, a way of dealing with ruins, alludes to re-membering as a process of piecing together the fragments and shards of experience in ways that permit innovative and unforeseen narrative constellations [...] But how these ruins are assembled depends entirely upon the lenses through which they are projected. Identifying and collecting memory traces (either voluntarily or involuntarily) is one thing; deciding how to deploy them is yet another. (2006: 32)

In other words, to piece the shards together you need a house in which to gather them. The choice of the lens of property for the exploration of identity and memory cannot, therefore, be completely just or equitable. In the case of Agüero, the positing of a link between domestic space and identity (both personal and collective) may be productive for the home-owning filmmaker, but is less obvious for his interview subjects, several of whom struggle to pay the rent or are staying temporarily at the houses of friends. This is not necessarily a foundation for criticism: as Bongers notes, 'todo discurso sobre la memoria – textual o audiovisual – es injusto' (2016: 15).

The inevitable inequalities of Agüero's position are echoed in other Chilean documentaries dealing with the country's traumatic past via the domestic sphere, such as the aforementioned *Calle Santa Fe* and *El edificio de los chilenos*. What distinguishes *El otro día* is the appearance of spectral images that do not respond to an obvious narrative logic. It is this filmic evocation of the unhomely, rather than the images of openings and thresholds, that provides *El otro día*'s strongest claim to an ethical approach, to a movement beyond the logic of property. These spectres suggest that the transition to democracy in Chile has not erased or properly dealt with the injustices of the past. Indeed, the emergence of these images in the home might imply that the

privileging of private property, consumption and subjective experience in much of the politics of the transition to democracy maintains the patriarchal 'law of the *oikos*' (Derrida 1995: 54) imposed by the dictatorship. In this vein, Fornazzari argues for the recognition of neoliberalism's 'founding moment of authoritarian violence', and suggests that the transition's subjugation of cultural forms to the logic of the market renders the allegorical memory projects of many contemporary Chilean documentaries misjudged (2014: 7-8, 72-78).

El otro día does not ask to be read as coherent, allegorical discourse, and thereby sidesteps Fornazzari's critique. We can read Agüero's spectral images as expressions of specific, located anxieties: about the possibility of constructing a just archive of Chile's past, and about the ability of documentary cinema, envisaged as a kind of housing project, to bridge the gaps in the country's urban society and present a whole image of the city. Page argues that many contemporary Chilean films construct 'affective communities while, at the same time, often remaining complicit with neoliberalism's discourses of self-authorship and individualism' (2017). The irruption of anachronistic spectres in *El otro día* suggests that the simultaneity of those two activities is illusory and very difficult to maintain.

Reflexivity, nature, poetry

In attempting to resolve some of the tension between processes of construction and demolition in these films, it is helpful to turn to their poetic qualities (thinking, as in the introduction, of the poetic as a process of making or bringing into being). Ben Bollig and David Wood propose the 'poetic film' as

> one that is creative (in the sense of the Greek *poiesis*, 'making') in its attitude to plot,
> narrative and montage, but takes its notion of the poetic from the lyrical, the lyric
> being the individual expression of the poet or, in this case, the film-maker. (2014:
> 119)

The importance given here to 'individual expression' highlights the tension between individual authority and the attempts at the formation of collectives discussed above. Bollig and Wood further note that in his theorisation of the 'time-image', Gilles Deleuze drew on Pier Paolo Pasolini's notion of the 'cinema of poetry', conceived as 'rooted in the fundamentally oneiric and irrational nature of film language' (119). [61] On this particular point, one might think of the long, static shot which opens *El otro día*, showing the slow movement of sunlight and the shadow of leaves across a wardrobe. It is a similar movement of light that, shortly after, passes over the photograph of Agüero's parents and creates the 'coincidencia del otro día' described above. In fact, this image, along with comparable shots of leaf-shadows from *El árbol*, in a sense encapsulates what I intend by proposing these films as 'poetic archives': a method of recording and assembling experiences which calls into question standard divisions between inside and outside, in this case between 'natural' exterior and 'civilised' interior, between film and its objects. By suggesting an archive not organised according to a rational, homogeneous division of time, some of Agüero's and Fontán's strategies ultimately raise questions concerning the distribution of agency between the house and its occupants.

I would like to return briefly here to Masiello's understanding of poetry, in order to clarify my approach. Describing a vision of ruins, Masiello writes that

> [t]he *unheimlich* (uncanny) of the ghostly past weighs on us, producing an inarticulate stammer. This is where speech breaks down, but it is also the point at which speech is translated creatively into poetic rhythm. (2009: 30)

Masiello suggests, then, that poetry is what arises when the impossibility of collecting these fragments into a whole becomes apparent: 'Repetition, as a strategy that might have harbored the hope of bringing elusive fragments together, inevitably collapses upon itself, almost like a stammer' (32). However, she elsewhere expresses the belief that Argentine and Chilean women poets might move beyond the fragment to 'voice a

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[61] The Chilean director Tiziana Panizza's short domestic essay films *Dear Nonna: a film letter* (2005), *Remitente, una carta visual* (2008) and *Al final: la última carta* (2012) might also be thought of as poetic in this sense.

new approach *en route* to alternative social and cultural visions. Poetry thus maintains a tension between *permanence* and *disorder*' (2001: 228, original emphasis). It is within this mode of thinking that I place Agüero's and Fontán's films: following, also, Masiello's description of the 'poetic house' that was noted in the introduction. While it is not clear that this rhythmic articulation of fragments might *actually* lead to new collective action it can at least provoke reflection on the form and ethics of archival practices. Turning, then, to the films themselves, it is perhaps in *El árbol* that the link between nature and poetry is most clearly made. The film opens with an epigraph from the Argentine poet Juan L. Ortiz:

> ¿Hay entre los árboles una dicha pálida.
> final, apenas verde, que es un pensamiento
> ya, pensamiento fluido de los árboles,
> luz pensada por éstos en el anochecer?

The 'luz pensada' of the poem might function as a succinct description of how the profusion of reflections and unfocused images challenge any notion of a division between an objective gaze and its subject, or between outside and inside, in Fontán's work. Nature is always already caught up in the film's production of images, as the light projected through leaves indicates. The outside/inside division is rendered still less stable, and eventually (literally) demolished, in *La casa*. Its opening sequences, which show the same house in a state of semi-abandonment (fig. 1.14), include close-ups of twigs and branches and a live chicken on the kitchen floor, and a broom attempting to sweep spilt water towards the outside. The strangeness of these images, which is reinforced by their lack of focus and a low rumbling noise on the soundtrack, reveals the extent to which usual ideas of 'homeliness' rest upon notions of taming or domestication, as Avery suggests (2014: 12).

[image redacted for copyright reasons]

Figure 1.14 *La casa*

In the film's closing moments, as the rubble is being cleared away, the spectator sees that the traces that are left include both brick shards and parts of branches. However, given the fluidity of the relationship between nature and culture which has been outlined above, it is notable and perhaps surprising that in the film's final shot, the camera pans upwards from the rubble to show a row of trees moving in the wind. It remains focused on these, immobile, for well over a minute, before a cut to black and the end of the film. The length and stillness of this image suggest a vision of nature as a source of stability and security, after the noise and movement of the demolition. In this context, the dissolving of categories of inside and outside, and of subject and object, suggested by Ortiz's 'pensamiento fluido de los árboles' and by Fontán's images might be read as a desire to be 'at home in the world', to achieve a sense of closeness and intimacy after the destruction of the house. Martins describes this movement as a 'fuga hacia lo viviente', and points out the self-reflexivity inevitably involved in this gesture: 'en el último plano un árbol frondoso queda allí como testigo, un árbol cuyo contraplano es la cámara misma' (2014: 173). This shot cannot but provoke reflection on the role of nature in the articulation of the film.

This role might ultimately be said to be *performative* in Fontán's work: determining the rhythmic articulation of shots, and perhaps even the construction of narrative: Page notes that Fontán describes 'waiting for light to fall naturally on the patio in the way he wanted, rather than creating effects by artificial means' (2009b: 202). This according of filmic agency to nature is echoed in *El otro día*: as noted above, the interruptions to Agüero's voice-over occasionally coincide with close-up shots of the garden (for instance, of a bird bathing). Of course, it might be said that this is merely a simulation of natural agency: the decision to cut the film in this way is made in the editing process. Nonetheless, the extent to which Agüero simulates this effect is notable: in Torres Leiva's documentary *¿Qué historia es ésta y cuál es su final?*, the director of *El otro día* uses the intertwined roots of the tree in his garden as an analogy for the film's structure: 'es un poco como el guión de la película, que es una trenza, va juntando, asociando cosas, trenzando cosas'.

Agüero's privileging of nature in his own house might superficially seem similar to Guillermo Mann's nostalgic evocations of his garden in *Aquí se construye*. Mann tells

Agüero that his house was known as the 'zoológico del barrio' thanks to his collection of rare plants and animals, and laments the loss of greenery in the neighbourhood. Valeria de los Ríos notes that Agüero hints at the artificiality of this conception by, at the end of the film, showing one of Mann's children interfering with a turtle in an aquarium. The director thus

> matiza el relato nostálgico de Mann al poner de manifiesto que la naturaleza ha sido colonizada por el hombre en diferentes momentos de la historia y que esta colonización siempre guarda cierto grado de violencia. (2010: 8)

One might argue, in a similar vein, that the frequent prominence of window frames in shots of the garden in *El otro día* draws the spectator's attention to the 'construction' of nature in that film.[62] Indeed, I would maintain that Agüero's and Fontán's films demonstrate that nature is never in fact entirely separable from the cinematic apparatus. In doing so, they unsettle the apparently comfortable relationship between the middle-class domestic interior and the 'tamed' nature of the garden which, in the Argentine and Chilean context, bears unavoidable colonial and authoritarian associations. We might think back here to Sarmiento's praise for the 'arbustillos graciosos' of the 'colonia alemana o escocesa del sur de Buenos Aires' (1990: 64).

In the context of Chilean history, José Bengoa argues that the nostalgia for a mythical rural past (of the kind that Donoso appropriates and re-signifies in *Casa de campo*) led the middle class to reproduce, in the city, 'la casa grande, las empleadas y nanas, el jardinero, la visita a las tías y abuelas —si es que vivían aparte—, el respeto por el dueño de casa, patrón, hombre, que sale a trabajar y vuelve esperando que todas las cosas estén en orden' (1996: 36). Bengoa further contends that '[d]e una u otra forma, el autoritarismo de los últimos veinte años fue una extensión, impropia quizá, de esta fusión, en la que se ha debatido nuestra identidad nacional. Fue la variante autoritaria de la fusión rural-urbana' (37). There are strong echoes here of the accounts of the dissolution of Santiago's urban public space under neoliberalism mentioned in the introduction. Arguing that this attitude renders democratic culture merely

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[62] A key difference between Mann's house and Agüero's is that the latter is a *casa de fachada continua*, a terraced property that is integrated into the urban fabric, rather than being surrounded by a garden.

'mesocrática', at the service of the middle class, Bengoa declares that '[l]a comunidad no se va a reencontrar en las imágenes rurales trasplantadas' (37).

As if to confirm Bengoa's point, perhaps the most disturbing of *El otro día*'s spectral images follows a shot of Agüero's twilit garden. 'La violencia se veía venir', states the voiceover, commenting on the development of political tensions around the dinner table when he was a child. There is then a sharp cut cut to a close-up of bones belonging to victims of state violence under Pinochet, taken from Agüero's first feature, *No olvidar* (1982). This grainy, black-and-white image might well be described as spectral in Derrida's terms, as a kind of present absence tied not just to the archive but also to 'familial domesticity', 'places, a habitation, and always a haunted house' (1995: 54-55). Yet the stark materiality of the bones also marks a world beyond theory, and reminds the spectator that for all its elaboration of the violence underlying the domestic sphere, Derrida's theoretical model cannot fully account for specific national circumstances, such as the use of private dwellings as torture centres under Pinochet's rule. As María del Pilar Blanco argues with reference to spectres in the literature of the Americas, Derridean readings risk losing specificity 'in favor of larger allegorical diagnoses' (2012: 8).

These films, I argue, nonetheless offer a poetic alternative to the authoritarian 'fusión rural-urbana' which Bengoa associated with the well-kept middle-class garden. The self-conscious erosion of boundaries which is evident in this respect also appears as an interrogation of film's relation to its objects. There is a high degree of reflexivity here: in *El otro día*, for instance, the spectator notes a poster for Agüero's earlier film *Cien niños esperando un tren* on a wall, as well as a flyer for Guzmán's *Nostalgia de la luz* on the top of a wardrobe. These images, coupled with Agüero's use of home movies, and the footage of icebergs (discarded from his film *Sueños de hielo* [1993]), present film as an archive of itself, rather than a true archive of presence. In a similar instance in Fontán's *Elegía de abril*, a poster for *El árbol* at one point comes into view on a bookshelf while the reflection of Fontán himself is visible in a mirror (fig. 1.15). Moreover, as suggested above, the use of older visual technologies in *El árbol* is, in a sense, an archive of

methods of archiving experience.[63] This variety of media inevitably draws the spectator's attention to their varying material qualities, blurring the distinction between place and the process of its recording and representation. The presentation of the house as a media archive in this manner moreover reminds the spectator that while a critical understanding of media as a material component of place may be relatively recent,[64] it responds to a longstanding state of affairs.

[image redacted for copyright reasons]

Figure 1.15 *Elegía de abril*

What all this amounts to, I would suggest, is a radical redefinition of the boundaries of cinematic subjectivity, particularly in the case of Fontán's work. Fontán has stated in interview that

> [l]a palabra subjetividad desde el cine, y creo que desde la psicología, la entendemos como la construcción ligada estrictamente al carácter de un personaje, es decir, la entendemos como subjetividad del personaje. Y yo creo en una subjetividad mucho más amplia, mucho más compleja, que tiene que ver con la de un ámbito y una forma de vida particular. (Girardi and Pinto Veas 2015)

Subjectivity, in this conception, is shared between the self, its environment, and the practices of living. Martins is perhaps a little hyperbolic in suggesting that the house in *La casa* 'poéticamente cuenta su propia historia' (2014: 168), but it is clear that the divisions and continuities between filmmaker and object, or between domestic interior and natural exterior, does not fall in the expected places: indeed, Fontán describes the house as an ecosystem (Girardi and Pinto Veas 2015). This erosion of boundaries also occurs, although to a lesser extent, in Agüero's *El otro día*. Here it is most notable

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[63] See also *La sombra* (2015), in which Javier Olivera reflects on the demolition of his family home and on the career of his father, the renowned Argentine filmmaker Héctor Olivera, through a re-examination of Super 8 home movies.

[64] See Chapter 2 and the conclusion for further discussion of this perspective.

between individual and collective memories, though as we have seen, the director's position of authority is largely maintained. In both cases, there are grounds for thinking of the home as an assemblage, in the sense advanced by Latour: a provisional whole that consists of sometimes tenuous connections between human and nonhuman actors (2005: 205–08). Latour argues for the recognition of how any human interaction is framed and conditioned by the 'multiplication, enrollment, implication, and folding of non-human actors' (193), and moreover that places are continually traversed by connections with other sites, which themselves are assemblages of human and nonhuman actors. Latour gives the example of a university lecture hall, and, crucially for my argument, suggests that it is an *exploration of the archive* that permits the tracing of the 'silent mediation of drawings, specifications, wood, concrete, steel, varnish, and paint', and of the 'work of many workers and artisans who have now deserted the scene' (195). In other words, it is the archive that allows an understanding of place as a connecting site, without glossing over the significant restraints that, as has been shown, history and political circumstance place on the formation of connections between sites in the contemporary city.

The value of Agüero's and Fontán's films, then, is their explicit undertaking of that archival work, which reveals houses to be composite assemblages of media and technologies; mechanisms for articulating the production and dissemination of images and stories. That this production occurs in a non-linear fashion reinforces the sense that the archives of experience visible here are not constructed in an attempt to rationalise time or construct rigid identities, but rather deal with both time and identity in a poetic, playful manner. Moreover, the recurrence of spectral images of past gives the lie to the notion that the displacement or dislocation of 'home', imagined as a bourgeois enclosure, is a uniquely modern or indeed postmodern phenomenon. The advantage of incorporating Latour's perspective into the films' spatial articulations of memory is that it reveals subjectivity not as a false concept, but as a property of the 'gathering' of attachments and ties in the domestic sphere. Subjectivity, Latour writes, is the result of the circulation of 'subjectifiers', actors that create a sense of interiority. We might name the houses in these films as examples of such actors. Latour in fact notes that duration is crucial both to the formation of subjectivity in this way and to the task of tracking the movement of 'subjectifiers' (2005: 218). A turn towards the past, therefore, need not be

a turn inwards, a nostalgic retreat into an imagined secure sphere. Or, to return to Boym's framework, nostalgia itself can be rethought as a reflective practice that fosters a 'creative self' rather than a recreated 'lost home' (Boym 2001: 354).

Much of this chapter has engaged with Derridean deconstruction in complicating the metaphor of the 'house of memory' that dates back at least to Augustine (2016: 180–81). Agüero's and Fontán's works suggest that the house has a *mobile* relation to the past in the contemporary city, contesting Bachelard's assertion that memories are 'motionless', fixed in domestic space (1969: 9). A turn away from deconstructive principles, to a conception of the domestic archive as an assemblage, allows an appreciation of that more open engagement with the past. The next chapter develops this critical perspective in order to advance a complementary and inversely structured argument. Domestic spaces that are architecturally construed as modern can act in a far less 'open' or 'transparent' manner than one might expect.

Chapter 2. Modernism, modernity and their outsides: *El hombre de al lado* and *La Sagrada Familia*

My starting point for this chapter is a comparative examination of two films in which domestic architecture, either as concept, as material reality, or as both, plays a determining role in the constitution (or, perhaps more accurately, the disintegration) of familial relations. In *El hombre de al lado* (Cohn and Duprat 2009), the Le Corbusier-designed Casa Curutchet in La Plata is the mechanism and the scene of class conflict. In Sebastián Lelio's *La Sagrada Familia* (2005), both architecture as a hereditary family profession and the physical form of the modernist beach house in which the protagonists are staying are of comparable importance in the unveiling of layers of hypocrisy and resentment. The readings that I propose of these films rely on an understanding of 'architecture' which goes beyond material construction, and includes operations of spatial and audiovisual organisation which are undertaken both by buildings and by the cinematic apparatus. As such, I follow a line of enquiry traced by Grosz, who argues for an understanding of architecture 'no longer as a whole, a complex unity, but as a set of and site for becomings of all kinds' (2001: 71). Grosz's Deleuzian call to re-interpret the architectural interior as a fold or contortion of an *outside*, a surface or screen (65), seems particularly pertinent in the cinema, where in Deleuze's view, the screen permits access to thought without interiority (Deleuze 2013: 161–93). In the films I analyse here, the confusion of exterior and interior does not occur uniformly, but in patterns which reveal social tensions.

I will moreover argue that *El hombre de al lado* and *La Sagrada Familia* point towards a relationship between film and (modernist) architecture that is not exclusively constituted by their seemingly parallel operations. Many studies of the intersections between the two artistic forms begin with that assumption: Juhani Pallasmaa, for instance, breezily states that

> both cinema and architecture articulate lived space. These two art forms create
> and mediate comprehensive images of life […] Both forms of art define the

dimensions and essence of existential space; they both create experiential scenes of life situations. (2007: 13)

At a surface level these statements are hard to deny, and indeed much of the analysis that follows will draw on a mediatic understanding of architecture. I am however convinced of the importance of avoiding facile parallelisms. Joan Ockman provides a helpful qualification of the similarities between film and architecture established by Benjamin and Kracauer in the early twentieth century, noting that

Benjamin [was] writing at a moment when the cinema as a form of commercial entertainment has not yet lost contact with its origins in the variety theater, music hall, panoramas, arcade peep shows [...] In this context, the architectural setting enhanced the multisensory, multidimensional experience of the performance. (2000: 172)

Ockman contends that modernist architecture, after the Second World War, swiftly became 'the chosen image of a globalizing capitalism', a 'stripped object' that 'could only end up *anaesthetizing* the senses' (174-75, original emphasis). In her view,

[b]y privileging the visual over the other senses, by submitting experience to techniques of measurement, normalization, and control, rationalism became an aesthetic strategy for managing reality's threatening contents. (175)

Ockman's terms of reference are European and thus not entirely applicable to my argument here, but I nonetheless argue, as she does in relation to Jacques Tati's *Playtime* (1967), for a kinship between film and architecture that does not preclude the possibility of critique. Film is precisely what is able to show up these 'techniques of measurement, normalization, control' (175). Moreover, in the early twenty-first century, many of the parallels drawn between film and architecture are disrupted by the spread of digital technology.[65] McQuire sums this up neatly when he writes that 'the modernist glass house has been reconfigured by the emergence of the digital home' (2008: 181).

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[65] For instance, Ockman's suggestion that where in film, 'the medium of artifice is light projected through matter (celluloid) [...] In architecture, it is matter projected or "thrown" into light' (189).

For him, the functions of the window are displaced onto the digital screen, which acts as 'interface between the heterogeneous dimensions of "home" and "world"' (182). We will see that how the cinema screen relates to that 'digital screen', and indeed whether it is possible to isolate a 'cinema screen' as a separate space, are complex questions.

I also return here to Siegert's insistence on the cultural contingency of the techniques of housing, and his rejection of 'the house' as a universal symbolic form. Siegert insists on the intertwining of the material and the symbolic, taking doors as an example: 'A door, then, is both material object and symbolic thing, a first-order as well as a second-order technique [...] The door is a machine by which humans are subjected to the law of the signifier' (2015: 10). As we will see below, in a filmed house this operation of division becomes still more complicated, as the spaces that architectural devices such as doors and windows articulate are reconfigured and disturbed. Yet Siegert's perspective is valuable: in both *El hombre de al lado* and *La Sagrada Familia*, architecture as 'empirical historical object' (Siegert 2015: 9), whether physically present in the diegesis or not, comes to embody and shape familial relations, and indeed social relations beyond the family unit. In *El hombre de al lado* in particular, the historical context of the house acquires particular force. In both cases, moreover, the apparently rational, ordered nature of the domestic architecture in question paradoxically ends up revealing, or pointing towards, aspects of life which exceed normative organisation, such as notions of the sacred and the performative.

In an argument running parallel to that advanced in the last chapter, I will argue that a degree of distance between the film camera and the mediatic operations of modernist architecture (and, in the case of *El hombre de al lado*, of digital media within the home) allows a perspective on how modernist houses act as 'subjectifiers' in the sense proposed by Latour. Moreover, the techniques employed by Cohn and Duprat and by Lelio implicitly ally cinema with an 'outside' to the domestic sphere that is not easily reducible either to urban society or to nature (here I am again following Latour [2005, 215]). Where, for Latour, the 'Modern Constitution' disavows the existence of hybrid forms that cross over the nature-culture divide (themselves the product of modernity) (1993: 34), these films refuse that dividing operation, particularly through recourse to ideas of performance. If in the previous chapter apparently nostalgic evocations of the

domestic were revealed to have greater potential for encouraging ideas of life in common than might be expected, here 'modern' ideas about domestic life are exposed as surprisingly parochial. Modernist architecture does not preclude the emergence of new forms of sociability within the home, these films suggest. Yet these forms result from the intrusion of 'outside' figures. This intrusion occurs in a violent manner that undermines traditional social forms (especially, here, privacy and patriarchal family structures) which are paradoxically reinforced by certain traits of the architecture.

In focusing on modernist constructions designed as private family houses, *El hombre de al lado* and *La Sagrada Familia* occupy an unusual position within a body of Argentine and Chilean filmmaking that examines the social consequences of modernist construction projects. The protagonists of the Chilean film *Mami te amo* (Eliash 2008), which I briefly analyse in the next chapter, live in the Unidad Vecinal Portales, an iconic modernist social housing block which has seemingly failed to fulfil its promise of communal cohesion. In Argentina, Martín Oesterheld's *La multitud* (2012) documents what remains of two large-scale projects, the unfinished 'Ciudad Deportiva' belonging to Boca Juniors football club, and the Parque de la Ciudad, a disused theme park in the Villa Soldati neighbourhood of Buenos Aires. The title of Oesterheld's film ironically reflects on the failed creation of public spaces, the remnants of which now form part of the urban margins.[66] The conflictive relationship between modernism and the public sphere will form a key part of my analysis below. The question of authoritarianism also rears its head here, as the Parque de la Ciudad was a project of the 1976-83 military dictatorship. Néstor Frenkel's *Construcción de una ciudad* (2006) takes up this theme, recounting the demolition and reconstruction (in a new location) of the town of Federación in the province of Entre Ríos. The new settlement, designed to be a 'model town' with planned zones and identical houses, was inaugurated by Jorge Rafael Videla in 1979. In Frenkel's film, residents recount the lack of public spaces, painting a picture of families staying at home watching state television (one resident puts this down to the

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[66] One reviewer describes these areas as 'Espacios urbanos en los que la torre futurista convive con el pajonal', neatly demonstrating the collapse of modernist visions of historical progress (Bernades 2013).

lack of a cinema).[67] The intertwining of the constitution of home life with questions of democracy that emerges here will be further explored in the conclusion.

El hombre de al lado: media against the masses?

The work and thought of Le Corbusier have been the subject of extensive critical discussion. The importance of Latin America in the Franco-Swiss architect's thinking has however been less frequently assessed. Jorge Francisco Liernur and Pablo Pschepiurca's *La red austral* (2008) represents the most thorough assessment of Le Corbusier's engagement with the region, and is notable in its refusal to view this relationship merely as the transmission of European ideas to a new environment, where they were adapted or bowdlerised.[68] Liernur and Pschepiurca highlight the unusual nature of the sketched plans Le Corbusier made for Buenos Aires on his visit to the city in 1929, suggesting that they contributed to the form of later, better-known plans, particularly those for the *Ville Radieuse* (98). They note, moreover, that the Buenos Aires sketch represented the first time the architect had formulated 'una propuesta concreta para la totalidad de una ciudad concreta' (100).[69] Liernur and Pschepiurca identify a tension in the Buenos Aires sketches between 'un esquema urbano general ideal previo y un mecanismo operatorio concreto, pero [...] también entre una concepción social liberal y una corporativa' (103-04). The authors of *La red austral* suggest that Le Corbusier's praise for the form of the 'damero colonial' of the city in the lectures he gave while visiting in October 1929 points to an authoritarian conservatism at odds with the more progressive aspects of his urbanism,[70] such as his proposal to fully incorporate Buenos Aires' industrial developments into the city, shifting the centre

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[67] As Andermann notes, both the houses in the new Federación and Frenkel's film become domestic archives not unlike those discussed in the previous chapter ([n.d.]).

[68] Felipe Hernández criticises William J.R. Curtis's account of modern architecture for advancing precisely this view (Hernández 2010: 55)

[69] Valerie Fraser asserts that 'Latin America had considerable impact on Europe during this period', noting that Le Corbusier's visit to Brazil coincided with the appearance of the curve in his architectural vocabulary (2000: 10). Her *Building the New World* (2000) provides a thorough introduction to modernist architecture in Latin America.

[70] Le Corbusier praises, for instance, the ease with which colonial squares '*could be policed*' (1991: 210, my emphasis)

southwards towards La Boca and Avellaneda (100-04). As we will see below, *El hombre de al lado* makes much of this implicit contradiction.

What, though, is the direct relevance of these broad considerations of modernist urban planning for a film which is shot almost exclusively within one particular house? There are several reasons why a connection might be made. Liernur and Pschepiurca state that the Casa Curutchet, built in La Plata for Dr Pedro Curutchet between 1948 and 1954, was intended by Le Corbusier to have a 'carácter ejemplar en relación con su paralela gestión en relación con el Plan de Buenos Aires' (2008: 392). Le Corbusier's plan for the city was never realised, and the Casa Curutchet can, they argue, be viewed as a condensed material remnant of those designs. The house's large windows certainly stand in contrast to what Le Corbusier saw as the 'monolithic', 'compact' and even 'inhuman' nature of the Argentine capital (1991: 23, 2). Similarly, the building's setting a few metres back from the kerb might reflect the architect's desire for constructions to 'no longer be lips pinching on the edges of the streets' (170). Indeed, for Liernur and Pschepiurca, 'la casa representa las actividades postuladas por la Carta de Atenas: habitación, circulación, recreación' (2008: 392). The reference to the principles of the 1943 Charter of Athens in the context of a private dwelling might be seen to hint at a renunciation of any ambition to transform public space through progressive, rational design (as we will see, *El hombre de al lado* invites consideration of this view). It is interesting in this context to think of Teresa Caldeira's work on 'fortified enclaves' in late-twentieth-century São Paulo, which she places in a paradoxical relationship with the modernist project of Brasília, claimed by Valerie Fraser to be 'probably the closest to a grand-scale realization of [Le Corbusier's] theories and ideas to be built anywhere in the world' (2000: 1). Caldeira contends that in Brasília,

> Brazil's most segregated city, […] the instruments of modernist planning, with little adaptation, become perfect instruments to produce inequality, not to erase difference. Streets only for vehicular traffic, the absence of sidewalks, enclosure and internalization of shopping areas, and spatial voids isolating sculptural buildings and rich residential areas are great instruments for generating and maintaining social separations. (1996: 317)

In Caldeira's account, the fortified enclaves of São Paulo in the 1990s represent an unintended outcome of a project which in the early decades of the twentieth century had proposed an urban utopia: 'the erasure of social difference and creation of equality in the rational city of the future mastered by the avant-garde architect' (317). In its own way, through its form and narrative structure, *El hombre de al lado* suggests that the (European) architectural modernist project fails in its attempt to eliminate distinctions between public and private spaces, to erase the street, or to articulate the kind of critique of capitalist society that plans such as Le Corbusier's *Ville Radieuse* appear to represent. In the analysis that follows, I will argue that film is employed as a method of critique of that project, ultimately suggesting that 'rational' modernist architectural design fails both to effect social change, and to avoid sacralisation as the preserve of the wealthy classes. In other words, there is a suggestion both in *El hombre de al lado* and, as I will argue, *La Sagrada Familia*, that in spite of the intentions behind such projects, they create not only physical but also aesthetic, social and political *outsides*.

A useful approach towards understanding how this failure is articulated in Cohn and Duprat's film is offered by Beatriz Colomina's analysis of Le Corbusier's architecture as fundamentally *mediatic*. Colomina has suggested that living inside a house designed by Le Corbusier is akin to inhabiting a film camera, given that '[t]he house is no more than a series of views choreographed by the visitor, the way a filmmaker effects the montage of a film' (1994: 312). For Colomina, '[i]t is this domestication of the view that makes the house a house, rather than the provision of a domestic space, a place in the traditional sense' (315). A further consequence of this understanding of the function of domestic architecture is a flattening of the outside into a series of images, a replacement of 'public space' with a collage projected into the interior (319). In the lectures he gave on his unrealised plans for Buenos Aires, Le Corbusier did indeed express a desire for buildings to be 'isolated prisms far from each other' (1991: 170).

This relationship between domestic space and spectacle is the subject matter of *El hombre de al lado*. In the film, the Casa Curutchet is home to Leonardo, a wealthy designer, and his family. Leonardo is outraged to discover one morning that his lower-class neighbour, Víctor, has begun to knock through a wall overlooking his property in order to create a window. Víctor thus challenges the notion that a Le Corbusier house, as

essentially mediatic, dedicated to the production of images, is also *immaterial*: as Colomina puts it, 'in the air' with 'no front, no back, side' (2007: 262). It is important to point out that the Casa Curutchet, the house in La Plata depicted in the film, departs from this model in a significant way. It is unusual among Le Corbusier's few domestic constructions in that it adjoins existing buildings (Lapunzina 1997: 44): it is therefore not as detachable, as 'immaterial' as, for instance, the Villa Savoye in Poissy, near Paris.

In fact, one might think of the Casa Curutchet as appended to a previous model of modernity: the city of La Plata was built between 1882 and 1884 as the capital of Buenos Aires province, and is laid out according to a strictly geometric plan. As was noted above, the admiration which Le Corbusier expressed for the colonial grid system in his Buenos Aires lectures can be viewed as expressing an authoritarian streak in his thinking: Siegert suggests that the grid design of Latin American cities enacts an overlap of 'the place in register and the place of residence', so that symbolic and real places are indistinguishable (2015: 109). In this reading, they are a tool for the reinforcement, rather than the dissolution, of social divisions. The grid form of La Plata is not, of course, a colonial design, but certainly draws on much older antecedents. It is interesting to note that Ezequiel Martínez Estrada, in a section of *Radiografía de la pampa* entitled 'Hollywood', views La Plata as a city which lacks 'la existencia orgánica de una ciudad', a film set that without 'ciertos elementos artificiales que la sostienen' would swiftly see the countryside encroaching on its borders. It is, moreover, in his view a 'ciudad milagro' which 'va contra las leyes naturales y tiene su realidad en la fe' (1991: 224). This vision of the city as a cinematic spectacle requiring an investment of faith on the part of its viewers anticipates some of the central concerns of Cohn and Duprat's film.

It might be said, then, that the Casa Curutchet, architecturally similar to houses like the Villa Savoye that sit surrounded by garden on all sides, sits uneasily within La Plata's grid form. This tension is compounded, Liernur and Pschepiurca suggest, by the contrasting forms of the neighbouring houses, a 'casa clasicista' and a 'casa modernista', which come to exemplify 'los dos tipos opuestos – ciudad verde, ciudad compacta – que Le Corbusier buscaba armonizar en el Plan para Buenos Aires' (2008: 392). In attempting to mediate between these two styles, they argue, 'el edificio es "casa" y "cosa" simultáneamente, articulando en una extraordinaria tensión dos modelos opuestos de

habitación, de ciudad y de mundo' (393). I will return to the question of the house as material or commodity below. For now, it is perhaps sufficient to hypothesise that the social conflicts of *El hombre de al lado* are in large part due to the awkward conjunction of different historical conceptions of urban life. We might also return to the opposition that Ballent and Liernur identify between 'casa' and 'multitud' in their study: the tension between a 'sujeto libre y autónomo' and 'una multiplicidad de seres ya no unidos por valores esenciales heredados' (2014: 38). In *El hombre de al lado*, Leonardo's image of himself as a free, autonomous subject is challenged by the appearance (and architectural contiguity) of Víctor, a man with whom Leonardo seems to share few, if any, 'valores esenciales heredados'.

The contiguity of the Casa Curutchet with the city means that Víctor is able to disrupt its 'collection' of the outside, its illusion of immateriality, by opening his own viewpoint onto Leonardo's home. Leonardo frames this development as a personal attack: he tells Víctor 'está vulnerando mi intimidad, la de mi familia', in reply to which Víctor asks, 'pero si te miran desde todas esas ventanas, ¿qué te jode una más?' ['but if they're watching you from all of those windows, why should another piss you off?']. Leonardo claims that it is an issue of proximity, that he cannot allow someone to have 'una vidriera adentro de mi casa'. I will suggest below that in fact class is at least as great a factor in the conflict generated here: Víctor's comment reveals the extent to which the apparent commitment to transparency which the form of the house implies is conditioned by social considerations. Leonardo's wilful confusion of inside and outside (the window is not strictly *inside* the Casa Curutchet) moreover reveals the extent to which his attitude to the world follows the terms outlined by Colomina: Víctor is challenging the conception of the house as 'a camera pointed at nature. Detached from nature, [...] mobile' (1994: 312).

It might be said that *El hombre de al lado*, in filming the Casa Curutchet, repeats the house's cinematic operations. Indeed, in the film's opening sequence, as Leonardo searches for the source of the banging which has woken him, the camera takes the spectator on an 'architectural promenade' around the house, showcasing its spaces and features (such as the central ramp). The positioning of Cohn and Duprat's camera, which rarely leaves the house, and indeed rarely leaves Leonardo's side, acts to

reinforce the perception that the film is simply guiding the spectator's eye through domestic space in the same manner as Le Corbusier's architecture. A quarter of an hour into the film, for instance, a montage of static shots again presents the house's salient features, such as how the *brise-soleil* on the upper balcony controls the entry of sunlight (fig. 2.1), and the open-plan form of the central living area. Both areas are empty of people, as if they were film sets awaiting actors. Yet this demonstration of physical openness is accompanied, as in the opening sequence, by the sound of construction work from Víctor's house: an 'openness' to the sounds of the city and its inhabitants which is not traditionally associated with Le Corbusier's houses. Moreover, as Marina Moguillansky has noted, a shot of Leonardo in the kitchen where a cabinet obscures his face and makes him appear as headless as the turkey he is preparing for cooking throws into question the house's claim to be a perfectly designed 'machine for living' (2014: 161). The ironic distance which Moguillansky sees the camera as taking with respect to its objects (both the house and its inhabitants) posits a relationship between cinema and architecture which is not a mirrored visual articulation of interior spaces: film is instead able to present the patterns and contradictions of life within these spaces.

[image redacted for copyright reasons]

Figure 2.1 *El hombre de al lado*

Most of Leonardo's confrontations with Víctor are shot over the designer's right shoulder, so that this face and the prominent frame of his glasses act as the left-hand border of the image. One might argue, therefore, that it is not just the house which aims to 'domesticate' the exterior, to give it 'una escala más humana' (to use one of Leonardo's phrases), but the film itself. The irony here is that this 'human scale' seems not to apply to Víctor, at least as far as Leonardo is concerned.[71] It is notable in this respect that in the one shot in the film where the camera takes a position aligned with

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[71] The racialised and classist language that Leonardo and his wife use to refer to Víctor ('ese oscuro', 'un grasa convencido') makes this clear, while also implicitly opposing Víctor to the light, hygiene and transparency that supposedly characterize the Le Corbusier house. On this point, see Moguillansky (2014: 157-59).

the neighbour, as he talks to Leonardo and his wife at a party in their house, it is placed directly behind his head, so that it obstructs the spectator's view. This is not to suggest that the film takes an uncritical view of Leonardo's obsessions: the spectator witnesses how, for all his anger at Víctor's architectural modifications, the resident of the Casa Curutchet is happy to use the offending window as a means of spying on his neighbour's private life, watching his intimate interactions with a young woman (fig. 2.2). The internal frame provided by the window bears an uncomfortable similarity to a cinema or TV screen, and the spectator might therefore wonder to what extent their act of viewing is less invasive, or more ethically justified, than Leonardo's. As we will see, *El hombre de al lado* provides no clear response to this question.

[image redacted for copyright reasons]

Figure 2.2 *El hombre de al lado*

It is clear, then, that Leonardo does not take issue with the production of spectacle by architecture, but rather with the *control* of that production, and with the *type* of spectacle produced. Marina Moguillansky notes that the collision of Leonardo and Víctor, two men from markedly different social classes, can be read as indicative of a change in the social preoccupations of Argentine cinema: rather than the poverty caused by the socio-economic crisis of 2001-2002, it is now social inequality which comes into focus, in the context of economic recovery (2014: 163). The specific interest of *El hombre de al lado* arises, I suggest, from the incorporation of European modernist architecture into that dynamic. In Cohn and Duprat's film, a historical project of modernity takes on solid, obstructive form in the shape of the Casa Curutchet. This is rendered clear by a comment Leonardo makes to a man asking about the best place to install a panic button: Leonardo replies, jokingly, that they'd have to consult Le Corbusier. The past is present and concrete here, and as we will see, the conjunction of the modernist ideals of transparency and order with Leonardo's obsession with ownership and privacy prevents any solidarity with his neighbour.

Víctor's unwanted gaze disrupts the workings of the 'machine for living' which Leonardo and his family appear to inhabit, or perhaps simply reveals the inoperativity of a mechanism designed to produce idealised images of domesticity. The role of Leonardo's daughter Lola in the film provides a good example of this. Leonardo's attempts at communication with Lola meet with almost no response. Indeed, she only speaks twice in the film's entire running length. One of these moments comes in the film's closing sequence, after Víctor has entered Leonardo's house to chase away a pair of thieves, and has been shot by one of them. As their neighbour lies slumped on the floor, Lola asks her father, '¿Se va a morir?' Leonardo tells her and his mother to go upstairs, and takes a phone, presumably with the idea of calling an ambulance. However, he then changes his mind, and simply watches Víctor die. The concern that Lola shows for Víctor stems from a series of sequences where he converts his new window into a makeshift finger-puppet theatre, using a cut-out cardboard box filled with foodstuffs (slices of ham, an orange, a banana) as a stage (fig. 2.3). The contrast between this improvised spectacle, accompanied by cheesy pop music, and the impeccably maintained Casa Curutchet could hardly be greater. Yet it is during one of these shows that Lola speaks for the only other time in the film: she simply exclaims '¡Buenísimo!'

[image redacted for copyright reasons]

Figure 2.3 *El hombre de al lado*

Víctor's puppet show would no doubt be considered in poor taste, or unrefined, by Leonardo, but it elicits the kind of affective response from his daughter that is absent when he attempts to talk to her in her bedroom, surrounded by the manifestations of the family's material wealth (a pink guitar, dolls, a pink pop-art image of Che Guevara). In fact, during one of these encounters, Lola uses her headphones to construct a kind of sonic border between herself and her father. A helpful approach to these considerations of affect, sound and materiality is offered by Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the refrain. The authors of *A Thousand Plateaus* suggest that repetitive phrases or sounds can sketch out a territory, construct a sense of place, so that '[t]he forces of chaos are

kept outside […] This involves an activity of selection, elimination and extraction […], a wall of sound' (2013: 362). However, as noted by Bennett, '[although the home formed via the refrain has a certain stability to it, that stability is, like that of the sounds – and the cosmos – "vibratory"' (2001: 167).

My argument here is that it is particularly through manipulation of and play with sound that Cohn and Duprat's film begins to question the ability of the Casa Curutchet to execute the rationalisation or harmonisation of social relations which its material forms suggest. *El hombre de al lado* recognises the instability of sonic borders through, among other techniques, an equivocal rendering of the divisions between intra- and extra-diegetic sound and music. In the case of Víctor's finger-puppet show, for instance, the music's status is unclear, oscillating at the borders of the diegesis. In this respect, the techniques used by Cohn and Duprat are not entirely dissimilar to the sonic deconstruction of the realist conventions of melodrama that is undertaken by Torre Nilsson's *La casa del ángel* (see Aguilar [2009: 121-42]). In both cases, the house ceases to be a guarantor of either cinematic realism or traditional family structures.

A different perspective on sonic confusions of inside and outside is offered in a sequence in which Leonardo and a friend who has come over for dinner are listening to avant-garde music in the living room, and making rather pretentious, vapid comments about it. Leonardo's guest notes an out-of-time banging, which he takes to be coming from the sub-woofer, but which his host eventually realises is the sound of the works going on in his neighbour's house. His anger at this intrusion makes it clear that his apparent open-mindedness, at least partially linked to the apparent openness and transparency of the house, in fact rests upon a powerful sense of hierarchy. The sounds of Víctor's refurbishment thus operate in a way similar to that envisioned by Sarlo in her account of the audiovisual experiences of contemporary Buenos Aires. Sarlo proposes an artistic intervention consisting in taking music seen as characteristic of one neighbourhood and playing it in another, in order to move beyond 'iconic' representations of the city. This would, in her view, create a

> *[d]écalage* entre música (convertida en 'sonidos naturales') y motivos
> arquitectónicos: ver mejor cuando se escucha lo que no debe escucharse, de

forma tal que el acontecimiento sonoro se vuelva un problema visual. Los
sonidos extranjeros rompen el 'estilo' atribuido a un lugar y lo desnudan, lo
hacen de nuevo. (2009: 164)

Something of this dynamic is in evidence in Cohn and Duprat's film: the sounds of
construction from the neighbouring house disrupt the 'style' (or indeed Deleuze and
Guattari's 'wall of sound'), the supposed values of 'transparency' and 'human scale'
which Leonardo would associate with his dwelling. Víctor thus represents a significant
aural challenge to the conversion of the exterior into neatly framed, non-threatening
audiovisual segments, an operation arguably presupposed, at least visually, by the form
of the Casa Curutchet. *El hombre de al lado* hints at the absurdity of this desire in a
sequence when Leonardo, disturbed at work by banging noises which he takes to
emanate from Víctor's house, discovers that in fact they are coming from his kitchen,
where the maid is tenderising a piece of raw meat.

Another way of reading these sonic disturbances is as a progressive defamiliarisation of
life within the Casa Curutchet: what Moguillansky calls a 'una toma de distancia irónica
con respecto al *habitus* de clase media-alta' (2014: 160, original emphasis). The extent
to which the daily routines of Leonardo and his wife Ana are already a series of
performances, or pretences, becomes increasingly apparent through the film. Ana
repeatedly asks Leonardo for a kiss, 'un piquito', as a proof of affection, and Leonardo
views this as a constant distraction from his work. He eventually complains of this to his
wife, and offers a pseudo-psychoanalytical reading of the act as 'un mecanismo […] vos
me querés trasladar a mí tu angustia, tu ansiedad mal canalizada'. This moment of
conflict follows shortly after a sequence in which Ana is recounting some of her
problems and frustrations to Leonardo, who is trying to work, and pretending to listen,
assenting at intervals either verbally or through gesture. Ana's voice is layered over
itself on the soundtrack, so that the content of her speech becomes unintelligible. This
technique blurs the boundaries between objective and subjective treatment of diegetic
sound, so that the naturalism of the sequence is called into question, as well as any easy
identification of categories of 'inside' and 'outside' (whether of self or diegesis). It may
also, it should be said, reinforce the spectator's sense of identification with Leonardo,

which would complicate a reading of the film as uniquely critical of his actions and attitudes.

Yet Leonardo's is not the only point of view which the film adopts: when Ana's parents come to visit, the spectator sees the point of view of a video camera which her father has recently bought and is trying out, scrolling confusedly through the different modes (fig. 2.4). The distortions of the images of the family, like the manipulation of diegetic sound, acts to defamiliarise life within the house, suggesting that the ambition of rationalising daily life which is implicit in the architecture of the Casa Curutchet is unlikely to be successful.

[image redacted for copyright reasons]

Figure 2.4 *El hombre de al lado*

We might think here of McQuire's comments on how the electronic screen has assumed the functions attributed to the glass window in the modernist house (2008: 182). McQuire notes that although

> electronic media offer to *screen* the world for the domestic observer – in the dual
> sense of projecting but also filtering – the screen home entails the subjection of
> domestic space to a new level of exposure. (182, original emphasis)

To that exposure, we could add distortion. Yet moments such as these are rare in the film (the only other comes when we see Leonardo through a TV camera as an interview is being recorded). *El hombre de al lado* does not, it must be said, engage nearly as fully or frequently with new media as another comparable Argentine film, Gustavo Taretto's *Medianeras* (2011). *Medianeras*, like Cohn and Duprat's film, explores the ways in which both the material fabric of the city and media (as material technologies) shape social relations between people.[72] Yet there are significant differences, of which

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[72] See Page (2016) for a thorough analysis of this film in light of new materialist notions of agency.

Medianeras' 'creative and ludic participation in an aesthetic of intermediality' (Page 2016: 86) is among the most prominent. Taretto's film celebrates the opening of *medianeras* (sidewall windows) as a new form of forging connections in contemporary Buenos Aires, whereas in *El hombre de al lado* the creation of a window (which is not, strictly, speaking, even a *medianera*) leads primarily to conflict and misunderstanding. Similarly, where *Medianeras* points to the ability of Internet chatrooms, YouTube videos and other forms of online culture to bring its two young protagonists together, Leonardo's daughter in *El hombre al lado* uses popular culture as a method for marking out her own space and refusing communication. Finally, the insistent focus on the house in Cohn and Duprat's film contrasts with the broader consideration of the 'unregulated mishmash of apartment blocks' of Buenos Aires in *Medianeras* (Page 2016: 81).

In *El hombre de al lado*, cinema remains in a sense 'outside' the networks of media that, in Page's reading, *Medianeras* maps. Reading this diffidence in a positive light, one might argue that it preserves a kind of cinematic specificity. Cinema might, as suggested above, be thought of as a critical outside to the transformations and contradictions of modern urban dwelling, a practice not commensurable with the more obvious private/public distinctions at issue in the conflict over Víctor's window. *El hombre de al lado*'s complex treatment of sound and music, I have suggested, offers a path towards this point of view, as do Víctor's performances and artistic creations.

Indeed, if we think of modernist architecture as working to deny, or actively to dissolve, public space, following the arguments put forward by Caldeira, Víctor is an unwelcome marker of that project's failure. He knows this, and regularly exploits the awkwardness of his position. In one sequence, for instance, he beckons Leonardo down onto the pavement in front of the house to show him two large, red metal sculptures he has made: one entitled 'Tecno-tango', and another called 'El origen', which, according to Víctor's straightforward description, is 'una concha, hecha con balas de nueve milímetros y alambre de púa' [a pussy, made of 9mm bullets and barbed wire]. Leonardo's evident distaste is compounded by Víctor's insistence that he take one of them home: 'Yo la hice para vos, que sos mi vecino'. This employment of the language of neighbourliness, combined with the grotesque nature of the art (at least from Leonardo's point of view), works against what Vidler calls '[t]he destruction of the

street, last trace of that "Balzacian mentality" so despised by Le Corbusier', itself a result of the 'polemical equation between art and health to be celebrated by modernism' (1992: 63). The fact that the conversation takes place on the pavement, a space between between house and city, reinforces the sense that Víctor is 'at home' in the interstices, in the realm of negotiation. He also demonstrates an ability to play different roles in his interaction with Leonardo, moving quickly from apparent fury over Leonardo's mistreatment of his uncle Carlos to excessive familiarity during a conversation on the doorstep at an earlier point in the film. Leonardo, on the other hand, seems awkward in almost all of his social interactions, whether they are with his wife, his daughter, or his students (one of whom rejects his sexual advances).

Víctor's 'crude' artistic or performative interventions, formed from leftovers and remnants (barbed wire, cardboard, food) suggest that the 'myth of transparency' and the 'ubiquitous flow of air, light, and physical movement' (Vidler 1992: 217) implicit in the Casa Curutchet in fact rest on a conception of exterior space as sterilised, and, crucially, commodified. Víctor's creations, which are transient or improvised, offer an 'outside' to this interior/exterior division. Víctor embraces modification over commodification, housing as process over housing as immutable property. Nonetheless, he demonstrates an awareness of Leonardo's transactional view of the world in one of his later discussions with Leonardo about the window, stating: 'Necesito un poquito del sol que vos no usás. Miralo desde ese lado' ['I need a bit of the sun that you're not using. Look at it that way']. Here, even sunlight is a good to be partitioned or jealously guarded. This vision of the outside world as reduced to a space of economic transaction is reinforced in a sequence when the doorbell rings as Leonardo and his family are eating dinner, and his first reaction is to ask his wife whether she ordered ice cream (in fact, it is Víctor at the door).

Adapting terms used by Arendt, we might class this view as a desired extension, beyond the material boundaries of the house, of the law of the *oikos*, economics or what Arendt disparagingly terms 'society' (as the form of community which 'excludes the possibility of action, which formerly was excluded from the household' [1958: 40]). Arendt views 'society' as founded on the assumption that 'men had become social beings and unanimously followed certain patterns of behaviour' (42); this assumption does not

seem very distant from those underlying Le Corbusier's urban planning or architectural designs. Here, as was noted in the introduction, Arendt's thought strangely foreshadows the perspectives adopted by new materialist thinkers. Latour, for instance, is determined to reveal the composite and fragile nature of what is generally regarded as society or 'the social', calling it 'but a moment in the long history of assemblages, suspended between the search for the body politic and the exploration of the collective' (2005: 247). Just as Arendt claims that society denies any possibility of action, so Latour writes that 'if there is a society, *then no politics is possible*' (250, original emphasis).

The question, then, is whether the cinematic techniques of *El hombre de al lado* are complicit with the representation of exterior space as a flat, inactive, and economic version of 'the social', or whether they offer a more optimistic vision of cinema's political agency. The film's closing credits, in which the principal characters appear as cartoon-like drawings on the walls of the house, suggest a degree of self-consciousness with respect to this dynamic: a recognition, perhaps, that film cannot avoid transforming human life into a spectacle of some description. It should be noted here that my use of the term 'spectacle' is not restricted to the sense given to it by Guy Debord. Where Debord suggests that 'the spectacle's function in society is the concrete manufacture of alienation' (1994: 23), Rhodes assigns it a more ambivalent role, at least in relation to private property:

> [t]he spectacle of property—the image, the moving image of the house—looked at askance or head on—reveals the secret of property's constitution by and on the grounds of alienated labor. At the same time, the image is the means through which we labor (however easefully) to forget this alienation. However, in rushing to exhibit itself—which is something that the private property of the house seems to do— property forever risks the revelation of the secret. (2017)

My attention here is more closely focused on the presentation of domestic interactions as spectacle, but this ambivalence remains of value, particularly as the directors of *El hombre al lado* went on to make a film that suggests that they see positive aspects in the conversion of domestic life into audiovisual media. *Living Stars* (Cohn and Duprat 2014) is simply a series of static shots of people dancing to pop music in domestic settings

(living rooms, kitchens, garages, etc.). The participants appear to be from a wide range of social classes, and there are a variety of everyday activities occurring in the background of the shots. Critical reaction to this film suggested that the conversion of daily life into performance and spectacle might in fact facilitate open, tolerant social interactions. One reviewer wrote: 'I've never seen anything that gave me more hope for equality and tolerance than a young man in his kitchen in full drag grinding it to "Toxic" in front of his entire family' (Nicholson 2014). It is interesting to note that this reaction is related, for the critic, to the non-cinematic nature of the work ('This is the only film at Sundance that you can duplicate by clicking around YouTube'). *El hombre de al lado* is more easily recognisable as a traditional feature film – though it was freely available to watch via YouTube at the time of writing – and the moments of equality engendered by performance in its narrative are, as we have seen, all too fleeting.

The film's opening credits sequence does however appeal to an art form outside the cinema. The film begins with the screen divided vertically into white and black halves, with the credits appearing across the division. It rapidly becomes clear that the two halves are shots of the same wall from opposite sides, as a sledgehammer begins to break through it (fig. 2.5). As Moguillansky notes (2014: 155–56), this sequence is a reworking of a video installation titled 'Boquete', by the artist Gaspar Libedinsky. The installation formed part of a series dealing with the 1984 riots at Caseros prison, during which inmates broke through parts of the building.[73] The opening sequence thus subtly suggests that film both restates and erodes ideas of architecture as disciplinary enclosure. It might also be read as simultaneously proposing and breaking down the fusion of wall and screen which is implicit in Le Corbusier's designs (Colomina picks up on Le Corbusier's phrase 'walls of light' to make this point [1994: 6]). Indeed, one way of approaching the perspective offered by *El hombre de al lado* is to view it as a restatement of the materiality, and historicity, of the Casa Curutchet; this historical perspective unsettles the ambivalence articulated above, and points to the ways in which the architectural form of the house might impede, rather than facilitate, life in common.

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[73] While initially a gallery exhibition, the work is now freely available online (Libedinsky 2011).

[image redacted for copyright reasons]

Figure 2.5 *El hombre de al lado*

This is particularly apparent in a sequence during which a woman at the house's front door asks Leonardo if she can visit the property. Leonardo bluntly rejects the request, suggesting (in a rather hyperbolic comparison) that it would be like his asking her to come into her house and look through her fridge. Unimpressed with this analogy, the woman asks: 'En la vereda se puede, ¿no? ¿O es tuya también?' ['I'm alright on the pavement, am I? Or is that yours too?']. The historical significance of the house, as the only domestic building designed by Le Corbusier in the Americas, here functions as an obstacle to social interaction. While it is important not to ascribe the plot details of a fiction film any sort of transparent sociological value, it is worth noting that, according to Liernur and Pschepiurca, the house's real-world first occupants, the Curutchet family, 'nunca dejaron de sentirse viviendo en una pieza de museo' (2008: 416).[74] The reference to the museum is apt in relation to Cohn and Duprat's film: perhaps the most appropriate metaphor to describe Leonardo's 'actitud autoritaria' (as an interviewer calls it) regarding the image of himself, his house and his family is that of curation. The figure of the museum furthermore allows us to conceive of how a house whose architecture conforms to rational design might come to be viewed as *sacred* (at least, in this case, by its fictional occupant). There is no one definition of the sacred, but an aspect common to many is the idea of something set apart, removed either physically or metaphorically from everyday life. This is the status a museum typically gives to its objects, and is evidently also the status that Leonardo desires for his home, but is unable to enforce.

It seems, then, that the apparently rational design of the Casa Curutchet is inextricably caught up in a pre-rational desire for ownership and differentiation. Víctor's architectural tinkering and playful reuse of leftover materials cause havoc in this environment (as does the heterodox creativity of Sofía in *La Sagrada Familia*, to be

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[74] The house is now leased by the Curutchet family to the Colegio de Arquitectos de la Provincia de Buenos Aires, and is open to the public.

discussed below). They interfere with a tendency towards abstraction from local specificity which William J. R. Curtis, among others, identifies in Le Corbusier's practice. Writing of the publicity material for the early houses, Curtis notes that 'Even the character of the immediate surroundings was often left out in photographs and drawings selected to present the abstract certainties of Modern Architecture' (1986: 71). There is a tension, therefore, between the idea of the modernist house as 'an allegory containing the dream of the new city in miniature', and an impulse towards specificity whose boundaries with privilege are unclear. Curtis, a critic in general positively disposed towards Le Corbusier's projects, admits that

> [w]hile Le Corbusier was preaching the virtues of mass-production dwellings and the vision of a transformed modern city, he was supporting himself with a practice based largely upon the construction of private houses, artists' studios and villas for the well-to-do. (71)

Curtis in fact goes as far as to suggest that 'the architect's universal values were more class-bound than he might have hoped' (71). Even more telling, perhaps, is the fact that one of Le Corbusier's main sources of inspiration for his urban plans and ideas on communal housing was a monastery, the Charterhouse at Galluzzo in the Ema valley in Italy (22). The model of communal life which a monastery might offer is one that is rational upon first inspection (following a clear set of rules), but which is ultimately founded on pre-rational intimations of transcendence. It is, moreover, a community which is explicitly withdrawn from the secular world and, in the Carthusian model, implies a significant degree of individual withdrawal from the other. It is perhaps unsurprising in this context that Le Corbusier's houses might struggle to avoid sacralisation.

In the case of the Casa Curutchet, Leonardo's reluctance to engage in public life on the street is also bound up in questions of national or international affiliation. After first engaging with the worker knocking through Víctor's wall, whose accent and complexion mark him as from the northern regions of Argentina, Bolivia or Paraguay, Leonardo complains: 'Qué país feo, la puta madre' ['What a fucking awful country']. The shot in which he does so frames his family against a window, with a view to the offending

opening, which might be taken to symbolise current or impending familial rupture. Shortly after this sequence, the spectator witnesses Leonardo on the phone to a business associate, talking in English and German and making travel arrangements (demanding business class air travel, for instance). The telephone on which he does this is recognisably made by Bang & Olufsen, the high-end Norwegian company. There is therefore a clear sense in which Leonardo takes a cue from its material surroundings in his striving to maintain a (pseudo-)European cosmopolitan lifestyle. As we will see, the contested relation between private household and national identity is still more strongly expressed in *La Sagrada Familia*.

Yet if Le Corbusier's houses work at denying local specificity, what *El hombre de al lado* shows is that, paradoxically, the Casa Curutchet cannot avoid attention due to the historical significance of its design. Shots which show tourists observing the building, framed by the house as well as by the camera (fig. 2.6), give a further indication of the extent to which the Casa Curutchet is defined by its form and history. It is ironic in this context that in the yoga classes she runs, Ana should ask her clients to focus on a mobile phone and attempt to forget everything they know about it, considering it simply as a conjunction of shapes. This attitude is arguably the one that neither the tourists nor Leonardo are able to adopt with regard to the Casa Curutchet. Leonardo persists in viewing the house as a material and symbolic extension of himself as representative of aesthetic modernity, and of his family as well-to-do people. In Liernur and Pschepiurca's terms, he cannot resolve the tension between 'casa' and 'cosa', house as dwelling and house as prized commodity.

[image redacted for copyright reasons]

Figure 2.6 *El hombre de al lado*

Cohn and Duprat's film itself struggles with this tension. On this basis it could be described as postmodern, not simply because of some of its formal characteristics – such as the non-realist treatment of sound – but also because it reflects critically on the social implications of a particular project of architectural modernity, and shows at least

some awareness of its potential complicity with that project (one reviewer claimed that it ends up 'dándoles la razón a quienes no confían en sus vecinos' [Cinelli 2010]). Yet the persistence of modernist architecture and its social effects suggests that the prefix *post* is not entirely accurate. As I will argue in relation to Lelio's *La Sagrada Familia* in the following section, an understanding of cinema as *non*modern, or as a hybrid form that rejects the divisions of the 'modern constitution', as Latour has it, might be more helpful in this context. The point of the modern constitution, Latour argues, 'is that it renders the work of mediation that assembles hybrids invisible, unthinkable, unrepresentable' (1993: 34). In the films I analyse here, that work of mediation (and of mediatisation) is very much visible.

La Sagrada Familia: the enchanting outside

The title of Sebastián Lelio's first feature film hints at a multiplicity of concerns, referring the spectator not only to the Holy Family as theological concept, but also to the multitude of artistic representations or interpretations of that figure, of which perhaps the most famous (and certainly the most relevant for the film) is Antoní Gaudí's as yet unfinished Barcelona church. In this section, I will argue that *La Sagrada Familia* not only contests the subjectifying operations of the modernist house in which it is set, but also challenges what Latour names as one of the 'guarantees' of the modern constitution: the 'crossed-out God' (1993: 32). Latour suggests that in modernity, God's role in the 'dual social and natural construction' was cancelled, and that 'no one is truly modern who does not agree to keep God from interfering with Natural Law as well as with the laws of the Republic' (32-33). In *La Sagrada Familia*, conversely, questions of religion and unorthodox spirituality are precisely what bridge the society/nature and inside/outside divides. The traditional understandings of the sacred as reserved or separate space to which I alluded above are thus challenged, along with the supposed certainties of the modern constitution.

The film takes place over the course of an Easter weekend, and intertitles ('viernes santo', 'domingo de resurrección') accord the Christian calendar a key role in the organisation of the film. The narrative centres on a well-to-do family on holiday at their

beach house in the bay of Tunquén, near Valparaíso. Father and son are both architects, and both are called Marco. The arrival of the son's girlfriend, Sofía, a theatre student whose heterodox beliefs and career choice unsettle his bourgeois Catholic family, lays bare latent conflict and provokes a drastic reconfiguration of familial bonds.

The house in which this drama unfolds is not accorded as prominent a role as the Casa Curutchet in *El hombre de al lado*, although, as will be shown, some of its features, such as the extensive windows looking out to sea, are important (fig. 2.7). This apparent commitment to transparency, as a facet of the building's modernist design, is allied in the discourse of the father to a sense of moral rectitude, an attitude which in the film's dénouement is revealed to be hollow, as the elder Marco engages in sexual relations with his son's partner. The location of the family's house is strikingly dissimilar from that of the Casa Curutchet: where the latter is appended to a pre-existing urban grid, the former is placed in a sparsely populated rural area, where many houses designed for the wealthy, like the one in the film, present themselves as little more than immaterial viewpoints. The house in the film is surrounded by an ample garden, and a drive with a gate. Thus while *La Sagrada Familia* is the only film in my corpus that is set outside of a city, one might argue that Tunquén is to all practical effects a wealthy suburb of Santiago: the occupants of the house in the film clearly spend most of their time in the capital, and they engage with 'local' residents in a limited way (though the film's ending provides an important twist in this respect).

[image redacted for copyright reasons]

Figure 2.7 *La Sagrada Familia*

In both *El hombre de al lado* and *La Sagrada Familia*, the intrusion of the outside in a manner unforeseen by the form of modernist domestic architecture generates both fascination and upheaval. This dynamic might be conceptualised as a series of instances of enchantment, or of visual redefinitions of the sacred. It is important to state that while Arendt's model of the relations between *oikos* and *polis* is in many ways crucial to the arguments I develop in this thesis, my use of 'enchantment' differs significantly from

her employment of the term. Arendt sees enchantment as pertaining to 'small things', the material contents of the domestic interior, particularly in twentieth-century French culture. She argues that the 'enlargement of the private, the enchantment, as it were, of a whole people' does not articulate a public realm, but rather marks its retreat, as 'greatness has given way to charm everywhere; for while the public realm may be great, it cannot be charming precisely because it is unable to harbor the irrelevant' (1958: 52). I will conversely suggest that, in these films, the 'public', the messy, and the lower-class reappears in the domestic realm in strange and potentially enchanting form.[75] My argument draws in part on the ideas of material assemblages already discussed, noting in particular that Bennett's concept of 'vital materialism' proceeds from her earlier work on ideas of enchantment. Bennett speculates, for instance, that 'reinvigorating a medieval Christian model of enchantment' might help the exploration of the distribution of agency between humans and nonhumans (2001: 165). She moreover proposes an affinity between Guattari's *The Three Ecologies* (2014) and the Holy Trinity, in that just as Guattari asks his readers to think of the realms of the environmental, the social and the mental as forming a single whole, so Christians are taught to hold the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit as one God. Bennett, following Latour, claims that 'modern' society only superficially rejects this mode of thought when it affirms the separation of human and nonhuman. In fact, she argues, modernity increasingly entangles the human with the nonhuman environment (2010: 114-15).

Bennett's reworking of the Trinity as an ecological paradigm can aid an analysis of the radical disruption and opening of the figure of the Holy Family in Lelio's film. So too can Nancy's redefinition of the sacred, in that it refuses the drawing of rigid boundaries. In his essay 'The Image – the Distinct', Nancy claims that 'the image is always sacred', and contrasts this category ('the separate, what is set aside, removed, cut off') with religion, which for him is 'the observance of a rite that forms and maintains a bond' (2005: 1). Yet Nancy also argues that the image 'is given in an opening that indissociably forms its presence and it separation' (3).[76] It is, paradoxically, 'the distinct' that opens onto 'an

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[75] In a sense, this is hardly a provocative argument: Benjamin sees Le Corbusier's architecture as heralding the demise of the house as 'mythological configuration' (1982: 513, in Vidler 1992: 147).

[76] Rhodes reads this as an indication that 'the image has property boundaries; indeed, its property is to keep (and transgress) boundaries', and notes that Nancy's first example in this

indefinite totality of meaning' (5). This bringing together of presence and separation echoes the simultaneity of touch and its withdrawal discussed in the previous chapter, and finds another correlate in Nancy's *The Evidence of Film*, where he describes the movement and techniques of cinema as both opening and withdrawal of the world (2001: 18, 34).

Nancy's holding together of the distinct and indefinite in his discussion of the sacred image is echoed in the disputes between father and son in Lelio's film. As mentioned above, both are architects, and in the opening minutes, they engage in an argument over the merits of building plans drafted by the son. The younger Marco expresses a desire to avoid 'cosas tan definidas como por donde se entra, por donde se sale', while his father suggests that his drawings have aesthetic merits, but are not practical. According to the older man, the 'entradas de luz por todas partes' would make the proposed structure too hot in the afternoons (this is somewhat ironic given the large array of floor-to-ceiling windows in the house in which he is standing as he says this). A key point of divergence between the two is the issue of functionality: when the father questions this, the son states that he doesn't want to be 'cuadrado, tradicional, funcional'. A conflict thus arises between a vision of architecture as fluid, similar to the kinds of exterior folds proposed by Grosz, and a more conventional point of view.

The older Marco's more normative view of architecture finds an echo in his lament for the loss of Catholic rituals in daily life: when his son declares that he would enjoy eating meat on Good Friday, rather than the traditional fish, the father hyperbolically replies 'ya…nada existe'. This split on both religious and architectural matters appears again later in the film, on the Saturday, as the father tries to pacify an argument between his son and Sofía through a reference to the religious structuring of the weekend: he notes that they should be in silence, waiting, between the crucifixion and the resurrection. The younger Marco mocks this attitude, stating:

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essay is of a girl exiting a house (2017). Nancy in fact seems to refuse the language of property in insisting that the image neither legitimises nor transgresses, but 'crosses the distance of the withdrawal even while maintaining it through its mark as an image' (2005: 3).

A la única persona que yo le creo de verdad todo el cuento con la fe, es a Gaudí.

O sea, yo no creo en Dios, pero si Dios existe, *si Dios existe*, estaría en uno de los

peldaños de una de las cúpulas de…

His father, interrupting before he can name the Sagrada Familia, mocks this vision as one of religion as 'carnaval', questioning 'tanta necesidad de manifestar exteriormente'. The older Marco thus argues for a form of religion predicated on subjective interiority: when, earlier in the same sequence, his son mockingly suggests that he will be struck by lightning for blasphemy, Marco replies 'si no está afuera, está en ti mismo, entiéndelo de una vez por todas'. The contrast between this attitude and the house's apparent openness to the outside is subtly developed through the film: for instance, a shot of the older Marco's face reflected on the windows looking out to sea indicates a blurring of the boundaries between interior and exterior (fig. 2.7). Notably, this shot appears shortly after Marco has told Sofía 'estás en tu casa', extending an offer of hospitality (as we will see in Chapter 4, Derrida sees such an offer as a reassertion of ownership). Here, the camera works to reveal the house's unexpected mediatic effects. The style of filming apparent throughout *La Sagrada Familia*, with its extensive use of handheld shots and extreme close-ups, creates a sense of immediacy which paradoxically also shows, on occasion, the intervention of the house in the production of images. For instance, earlier in the film there is a shot of the son's friend Rita, similar to the image of Marco described above, which shows her looking out to sea, the image of her face flecked with dirt on the window and mixed with the reflection of the water. The following shot, which reverses the camera's gaze, shows her feet resting against the glass. This sequence demonstrates the window's ability both to confuse vision and to act as physical barrier, in spite of its transparency.

This presentation of the glass window runs counter to Benjamin's optimism about glass architecture's revolutionary qualities, and his designation of glass as a material without aura, 'the enemy of secrets' and 'the enemy of possession' (1999a: 733). In *La Sagrada Familia*, the role of glass is more ambivalent: as part of the material fabric of the house, it acts to influence human relations: indeed, later in the film, it is the house's abundant windows that allow the younger Marco to discern, from outside, the increasing closeness between his father and Sofía – so it may be the enemy of secrets, but hardly

the enemy of possession. The distorting effects outlined above also point to how, in the films I analyse, the material is often rendered *as process*, as part of the film's technology of vision. I will explore the political implications of this in more depth in the next chapter.

As a frequent background to the domestic setting in *La Sagrada Familia*, the sea becomes a part of these processes. The presence of water in this and other films by Lelio (such as *Navidad* [2009] and *El año del tigre* [2011]) is taken by Jorge Morales to be 'la simbolización del estado interior de desasosiego de los personajes' (2010: 42) (2010: 42). I would instead argue that it functions more broadly as the intimation of a more fluid form of life unencumbered by traditional domestic norms, but which remains inaccessible, on display behind the windows that, within the diegesis if not for the film spectator, reinforce the modern separation of nature and society. An early sequence in which the family are having breakfast, the younger Marco at his 'lugar de siempre' at the table after his father has made a plea for tradition, provides a succinct illustration of this opposition (fig. 2.8). The narrative of *La Sagrada Familia* does not provide many grounds for optimism about the possibility of alternative family structures within the domestic space. At the film's close, when the younger Marco discovers that his father and his girlfriend have engaged in sexual relations, he drugs them and leaves them dead or comatose (the spectator is unsure) before eloping with Rita.[77] He arranges the two in a tableau-like pose on the sofa that might be read as a distortion of traditional religious images of the Holy Family (fig. 2.10). The momentary stillness of this image that marks both togetherness and separation might lead us back to one of Nancy's formulations on the sacred nature of the image: '[a]t one extreme, immobility – immutability and impassability – at the other, distension and the passionate movement of separation' (2005: 10).

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[77] Lelio's later film *Navidad* (2009) is somewhat more optimistic in this regard, in that it depicts a more fulfilling and sexually liberating 'alternative family' among three adolescents within a house. That house has, however, been broken in to: it is perhaps the ownership of property that precludes, for Lelio, more open social relations.

[image redacted for copyright reasons]

Figure 2.8 *La Sagrada Familia*

[image redacted for copyright reasons]

Figure 2.9 *La Sagrada Familia*

[image redacted for copyright reasons]

Figure 2.10 *La Sagrada Familia*

The house, despite its modernist architecture, thus ends up providing twisted echoes of older aesthetic traditions. As in *El hombre de al lado*, the values of transparency and openness do not reach all that far. When, towards the end of the film, Marco sees his father and Sofía kissing, it is in a corner of the staircase landing: a small, dark space. A further marker of the unstable relationship between transparency and traditional notions of subjective (and architectural) interiority appears when Sofía enters the master bedroom with the older Marco, and notes the 'vista privilegiada'. The layout of the house thus reinforces traditional familial hierarchies. We might say, therefore, that the older Marco thus demonstrates an attitude not entirely dissimilar to that of Leonardo in *El hombre de al lado*, who is also concerned with the maintenance of a hierarchy of vision. What is intriguing in both this film and *El hombre de al lado* is the extent to which the space of the home, and in particular the control of what is seen from or within it, is associated with conflicted and vulnerable male subjectivity. In *El hombre de al lado*, Leonardo takes great pride in his house, yet he falsely scapegoats his wife when telling Víctor to close up the window, claiming that she had demanded it. For all that modernist architecture is seen to privilege 'rational', 'scientific' and indeed 'male' terminology and spatial practices, then (Walker 2002: 827), an echo persists here of Luce Irigaray's claim that women are denied a 'proper' place because they are forced to

be the passive ground for male belonging (1993: 9–11). As will become clear below, in *La Sagrada Familia* that passive association with domestic space is rather more forcefully contested.

I argued above that a certain distance from modernist architecture, and from other media, allowed cinema to perform a critical function in *El hombre de al lado*. In *La Sagrada Familia*, the reverse might be said to be true: the preponderance of hand-held, unstable close-ups means that the spectator is rarely given a complete image of the house (there is just one establishing shot near the beginning). In fact, it could be argued that Lelio's camera is less complicit that Cohn and Duprat's with the mediatic operations of modernist architecture.[78] The film's apparent immediacy and intimacy is complemented by the fact that shooting for the film did in fact take place over the three days of an Easter weekend. During this period Lelio shot over 80 hours of footage, in which much dialogue was improvised (Urrutia Neno 2013: 43). These techniques are read by Urrutia Neno as marks of affiliation to a current of Chilean cinema in which '[e]l paisaje y el espacio parecen volverse autónomos de la historia, narran ahí donde el personaje se torna pasivo, o simplemente contempla, mira a la vez que es mirado por este mismo paisaje' (16).

While I agree that there is a certain transfer of agency from character to external environment at work here, the composition and organisation of that external space is hardly liberated from historical structures in *La Sagrada Familia*: as will be discussed below, questions of the national framework of Chile are closely linked to family relationships in Lelio's film. That said, Urrutia Neno's invocation of the interval as a key aspect of this 'cine centrífugo', seemingly emptied of discursive or allegorical content (13-15), is a helpful tool in the analysis of *La Sagrada Familia*, where almost imperceptible cuts in sequences of dialogue show the stitching together of disparate footage, the cracks in the illusion of immediacy. The frequent use of close-up, handheld shots and the visible editing make it hard for the spectator to view the world of the film

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[78] Other electronic or digital media are comparatively absent from *La Sagrada Familia*. For an example of a film which strongly contrasts traditional (religious) family structures with the possibilities of sexual liberation afforded by the online world, see Marialy Rivas' *Joven y alocada* (2012). *Joven y alocada* is similar to *Medianeras* in its thorough engagement with the aesthetics of digital culture.

as that of the nation in miniature, or at least suggest that if the nation is in some way represented, then it is as a fragmented, unstable community.

In Lelio's film, that fragmentation owes much to the appearance of Sofía, a theatre student with unorthodox spiritual beliefs, who does much to destabilise the traditional family structure under discussion above. Early in the film, Sofía lets herself into the house unannounced, testing from her first entrance into the diegesis the typical operation of hospitality.[79] Not long after meeting Sofía, the older Marco reveals the extent to which he views Catholic identity as a fundamental part of the Chilean nation, stating that 'En Chile, somos todos católicos'. He then asks Sofía is she is Catholic, which given his previous statement is analogous to asking her if she legitimately belongs to Chile. Sofía's reply offers an unusual interpretation of Christianity: she does not agree with much Catholic doctrine, and says that 'mistificaron todo', but views Jesus as a person with 'una conciencia expandidísima', with 'los chakras abiertos todos'. The application of this pseudo-Hindu or Buddhist terminology to a description of Christ provides the first indication that the family's guest will do much to unsettle the symbolic forms which the parents attempt to maintain (and on which, somewhat equivocally, the film itself relies).

Sofía puts this attitude into practice on the night of Good Friday, when she hands out drugs to the younger Marco, his friends Rita and Aldo, and Aldo's new boyfriend Pedro. The group of young people embrace each other, stretch out on the floor of the house, and then go outside, where the nailing of Christ to the cross is re-enacted using fluorescent glow-sticks (fig. 2.11). This sequence is composed of handheld shots, with a predominance of facial close-ups and a lack of depth of field, so that the form of the house recedes into the background. The re-enactment of the crucifixion, in which the younger Marco assumes the role of Christ, is unsteadily filmed in a barely-lit exterior, and might be read as a destabilising or mocking performative appropriation of the terms of the sacred.[80] In Nancy's terms, however, this imitation of the central sacrificial

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[79] See Chapter 4 for a full exploration of ideas of hospitality in my corpus of films. Sofía's unannounced entry is an example of what Derrida calls the 'hospitality of visitation', which he associates with ideas of the messianic (2000: 13-14).
[80] The use of a cannabis grinder printed with a photographic image of Pope John Paul II has, arguably, a similar function.

act of Christianity is entirely proper to the sacred nature of images: he writes that 'the distinction of the image – while it greatly resembles sacrifice – is not properly sacrificial' (2005: 3). This is the case because where sacrifice lifts the profane into the sacred, the image 'is given in an opening that indissociably forms its presence and its separation'. The unsteady framing of this sequence thus does not affect its sacred character, given that for Nancy the distinct 'is always the heterogeneous, the unbound' (3).

 This sequence is also the first occasion on which the spectator sees Sofía perform part of a theatrical monologue in which she plays the role of a distressed woman named Ophelia (who is not directly identifiable as the Shakespearean character). The camera follows Sofía as she walks through the woods reciting lines from the monologue, in a sequence whose naturalism is called into question both by the apparently extra-diegetic nature of her speech (at least initially), and by the lighting: she is lit by a light source seeming to emanate from behind the camera. In other words, the only justification for the lighting is the act of filming itself. We might take the implication of these moments to be that performative acts such as these unsettle the typical framing devices of a naturalist fiction film.

[image redacted for copyright reasons]

Figure 2.11 *La Sagrada Familia*

When Sofía performs her complete Ophelia monologue to her boyfriend and his father, this time within in the house, there are more drastic consequences. Before she begins, she demonstrates a keen awareness of the pervasiveness of performance in all social interaction, declaring that the two men are different around her from how they would be otherwise, because 'hay roles que cumplir'. The older Marco attempts to naturalise these roles, stating 'yo soy el papá, él es el hijo y…', but Sofía interrupts to add 'el Espíritu Santo, amén', once again appropriating and twisting the terms of Christian discourse. Her performance, when it starts, is a violent expression of despair, whose verbal element notably includes the destruction of an interior:

arranco de cuajo las puertas, para que entre el viento y el grito del mundo.
Destrozo las ventanas con las manos sangrientas. Rompo las fotografías de los
hombres que amé, y que me utilizaron.

Sofía's character moreover explicitly figures the domestic interior as prison: 'prendo
fuego a mi cárcel'. This moment is thus a rare instance in my corpus of films when the
historical confinement of women within the domestic sphere and their subjection to a
patriarchal order are directly addressed. Here, the female body is not figured as
analogous to the house, but is instead precisely what begins to disrupt the domestic
order. The camera remains close to Sofía's body throughout the performance, apart
from reaction shots which show father and son to be equally fascinated. At one point, as
she tips her head back, the camera follows in close-up, showing the hillside and
coastline through the window behind her (fig. 2.12). Both verbally and visually,
therefore, Sofía's performance presents itself as a movement towards a natural outside.
The older Marco, despite his earlier criticism of 'tanta necesidad de manifestar
exteriormente', is clearly enthralled: the last shot in this sequence is filmed over his
shoulder, as he intently watches Sofía's face. Like Víctor's artistic interventions in *El
hombre de al lado*, Sofía's performance disrupts the existing state of familial relations.
Its enchanting effect moreover contests critical characterisations of the focus on
intimacy in contemporary Chilean film as responding only to the media's conversion of
subjectivity into globalised spectacle, and 'las vidas desencantadas de la modernización
neoliberal' (Saavedra Cerda 2013: 18, 103). Carlos Saavedra Cerda's contention that
politics in recent Chilean cinema is thus reduced to a '*performatividad despolitizadora*'
(28, original emphasis) is difficult to sustain in this context: in both *La Sagrada Familia*
and *El hombre de al lado*, performance has at least micropolitical effects, even if it is not
explicitly allied to broader movements.

One might think here of the Argentine dramatist and theorist Jorge Dubatti's claims that
at the root of any theatrical experience there lies an idea of *convivio*:

una práctica de socialización de cuerpos presentes, de afectación comunitaria, y
significa una actitud negativa ante la desterritorialización sociocomunicacional
propiciada por las intermediaciones técnicas. (2004)

Dubatti associates *convivio* with Benjamin's concept of aura, and therefore opposes it to any reproducible art form such as photography or film. Both Sofia's performance and those of Víctor in *El hombre de al lado* might be seen as a temporary suspension of this opposition, with film assuming a role Dubatti accords to theatre: 'una herramienta de formación de subjetividades alternativas' in the face of neoliberalism and the globalised market (2004). Indeed, Víctor's reuse of seemingly worthless scraps of food in his performances contests the dominance of commodity value. I will interrogate film's ability to enact a practice-based *convivio* and move beyond a logic of property in more depth in Chapter 4.

[image redacted for copyright reasons]

Figure 2.12 *La Sagrada Familia*

One point of contrast between Lelio's film and *El hombre de al lado* can be found in the explicitness with which questions of familial belonging or sexual attachment are tied to national belonging in *La Sagrada Familia*. Aldo and Pedro, the gay couple, are in Tunquén to help Pedro revise the Civil Code for his upcoming law exam, and when the spectator first encounters them Aldo asks Pedro about article 74 (concerning birth and existence) and about emancipation (achieved through the death of the father or the attainment of 21 years of age). Much later in the film, after a disastrous sexual encounter between the two, Aldo attempts to re-establish contact by asking Pedro the same questions, addressing him as 'abogado', but receives no response. There is, it seems, a mismatch between legal articulations of life and actual lived experience: Leonardo's ill-fated appeal to legal frameworks in order to resolve the 'problem' of Víctor's window in *El hombre de al lado* articulates the same idea. This conflict between tradition and actuality in the construction of collective life runs through Lelio's film, emerging for example in the statement made by the older Marco that was mentioned above: 'en Chile, todos somos católicos.' Church and state are legally separate in Chile, but Marco's phrase implies that civil and religious identity are inseparable, and because

he pronounces it before a guest in his house, that a right to residence is linked to religious affiliation.

It is helpful in this context to think of the origins of the Greek for law, *nomos*, in the verb *nemein*, to dwell (Arendt 1958: 63). *La Sagrada Familia* militates against legalistic or pseudo-legalistic conceptions of family and dwelling, and thus rejects the political theology towards which the father's conflation of Chilean and Catholic identities points. Within the tradition of political theology, Carl Schmitt theorised *nomos* as 'an original, constitutive act of spatial ordering' (2003: 78), and his work has been very influential for a number of political theorists, including Giorgio Agamben, to whom I will return below. However, Gareth Williams argues that Schmitt's conception of *nomos* and anomie is ill-equipped to account for the political realities of contemporary Latin America. For Williams, the 'historical desuturing of the conceptual and institutional relation between territory, theology, and the political' is now so far advanced as to render Schmitt's approach of little value (2015: 159). In this view,

> [w]e are now experiencing the collapse of restraint; the decontainment of many (though not necessarily all) historical and spatial forms of mediation between territory, authority, culture, and economy, and perhaps even the disintegration of the nomos-anomie relation itself that is central to the organized sovereign monopoly on violence. (162)

One way of thinking about the unsteady aesthetics of Lelio's film, and its transferral of sacred imagery to a poorly framed 'outside', is as an act of 'decontainment'. In the terms used by Agamben, the metaphor of the 'house of God' that has historically been used to describe Christian communities and, by extension, Western governments, is thus left behind (2011: 25).[81] The idea of the nation as the 'house of God' does not, of course, officially persist in Chilean law, though the statement in the Chilean Constitution's first article that 'La familia es el núcleo fundamental de la sociedad' bears the marks of

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[81] Agamben suggests that 'the implications for the history of Western politics of the fact that the messianic community is represented from the beginning in terms of an *oikonomia* – not in terms of a politics – have yet to be appreciated' (2011: 25, original emphasis). The implication is thus that Arendt neglects a much longer history when she places the 'rise of the "household" (*oikia*) or of economic activities to the public realm' in the modern era (1958: 33).

Catholic social teaching (Minsterio Secretaría General de la Presidencia 2005). *La Sagrada Familia* is not the only contemporary Chilean film to suggest that Catholicism maintains a kind of legal force, nor to adopt the household as a figure for exploring this. Pablo Larraín's *El club* (2015) depicts a house of Catholic priests who have committed crimes ranging from the sexual abuse of children to the misappropriation of funds, and who are being kept out of the reach of the state by the Church.[82] The household, in Larraín's film, is much more clearly figured as a 'state of exception' (Agamben 2005) to the democratic order of modern Chile. As in *La Sagrada Familia*, though, the appearance of unexpected visitors begins to pull apart the domestic order (in this case a quasi-monastic community), and the house itself is located on the coast, facing the 'outside' to the ordered division of territory that the sea represents. Both of these examples reveal that the 'crossed-out God' of Latour's 'modern constitution' is in fact a key actor in the formation and contestation of private and public spaces.[83] It is in this sense, as well as in its questioning of the apparent transparency of modernist architecture, that Lelio's film can be seen to associate itself with a *non*modern outside.

La Sagrada Familia ends on Easter morning, with the younger Marco abandoning the modernist house, which has become a site of disorder rather than the locus of *nomos*,[84] to depart with his friend (and now lover) Rita. Two moments in the closing sequences of *La Sagrada Familia* are particularly important to my argument about the failure of the modernist house to regulate the nature/society divide, and about new formulations of the sacred and the enchanting. The first is the appearance of a rabbit in the house, just after Marco has drugged his father and Sofía. The film opens with Marco's mother recounting a dream in which the house is invaded by rabbits, and later, before she departs for Santiago, she worries about keeping the gate closed in order to keep the rabbits out (though there is no evidence that there are any). When a rabbit does appear, therefore, just before the intertitle that marks the beginning of Easter Sunday, it

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[82] On the impunity of priests guilty of sexual offences, see also *El Bosque de Karadima* (Lira 2015).

[83] I am reminded here of Simon Critchley's claim that '[r]ather than seeing modernity in terms of a process of secularisation, [...] the history of political forms can best be viewed as a series of *metamorphoses of sacralisation*' (2012: 10, original emphasis).

[84] Agamben writes that 'anomic feasts' such as Carnival show the controlled presence of anarchy within the Western legal order (2005: 71–73). Marco's actions arguably turn Easter into an 'anomic feast'.

functions as a surreal manifestation of the mother's fears about encroaching nature. It also undercuts an orthodox understanding of Easter: new life appears, but rather than in the image of Christ, it is in the image of an animal associated with the pagan and commercial aspects of the celebration. Rather than 'la puesta en obra de un mundo desencantado' (Urrutia Neno 2013: 75), therefore, the shots of the rabbit and the ethereal extra-diegetic music that accompanies them present a world re-enchanted in a minor and incomprehensible manner.

The second significant moment in the film's closing minutes is its final shot. Marco goes to find Rita, embraces her, and the two drive off in her car, as the camera rests on a shot of her modest house, framed by vegetation and the sea. Insofar as a satisfactory emotional and sexual relationship appears to be possible within the running time of *La Sagrada Familia*, it is in the context of a small wooden construction, built in a rustic style (fig. 2.13). Is this a final retreat into nostalgia for Heideggerian authentic dwelling by Lelio? The fact that Marco and Rita do not stay challenges that interpretation, but what is in any case clear is that his camera is more at ease, steadier, in this environment than within the modernist home.

[image redacted for copyright reasons]

Figure 2.13 *La Sagrada Familia*

Conclusion

The two films analysed here are united by a deep scepticism of modernism's ability to foster meaningful life in common. The Casa Curutchet, as we have seen, can be read as a scaled-down version of Le Corbusier's plans for the rational city of the future, and yet in Cohn and Duprat's film it comes to act as the materialisation of a past European project of modernity that functions as an obstacle to social relations. The design of the house in *La Sagrada Familia*, meanwhile, clearly draws on the work of Le Corbusier and others associated with the modernist movement, but the house is withdrawn from urban life

and is shown to be only superficially transparent. Domestic space in Lelio's film is imbued with traditional, hierarchical ideas of civic and religious belonging, and of the sacred, which the film deconstructs through its unsettled framing and turn towards the outside. If, in *El hombre de al lado*, the framing of the shot often doubles the framing undertaken by the house (albeit sometimes in an ironic fashion), in *La Sagrada Familia* the camera more often refuses the distinctions that the domestic architecture encourages.

It is striking that, compared with the films discussed in the previous chapter, which concerned themselves explicitly with the past, these works that interrogate modern experiments in housing design offer fewer grounds on which to view the house as an open, provisional assemblage, what Latour would term a common world in '*progressive composition*' (2005: 254, original emphasis). The move from the 'house of God' to the house as machine for living is not, as we have seen, any guarantee of more equal, tolerant or fulfilling social relations. Similarly, Siegert's claim that modernist architectural innovations move from a 'nomological' logic to a 'cybernetic' one, in which inside/outside divisions are complicated, rings somewhat hollow in this context (2015: 201-202). Indeed, where Siegert points to sliding doors in Le Corbusier's Maisons Loucheur to support his argument (202), in *El hombre de al lado*, the Casa Curutchet possesses a traditional door and doorframe, which are uncannily freestanding, surrounded only by a wire fence (fig. 2.14). The bourgeois private sphere is here not so much a haunting presence as a concrete form.

[image redacted for copyright reasons]

Figure 2.14 *El hombre de al lado*

Unlike *Medianeras* or Marialy Rivas' *Joven y alocada* (2012), these films do not demonstrate much faith in the ability of new media to generate new social connections. Instead, in both *El hombre de al lado* and *La Sagrada Familia*, it is low-tech, non-modern forms of creativity and performance, centred on the body, that appear to have the most powerful affective qualities. These performances of intimacy differ from those

described by theorists such as McQuire, in that they do not explicitly respond to the pervasive presence of media technology in the home, and the subsequent commodification of images of private life. Referring to the performance of the self in the reality television format *Big Brother*, McQuire suggests that the modern project of 'openness' has failed because 'the self is widely experienced as a media commodity', one that is expendable and 'routinely discarded or expelled in favour of a better-performing other' (2008: 200).[85] In these films, by contrast, performance is at least sometimes available as a method of escape from such processes of control.

In short, these films contest globalising theories about the effects of modernity on the domestic sphere, suggesting that local 'outsides' (whether the contiguity of urban dwellings in La Plata, or the heterodox spirituality of Sofía) can exercise a high degree of agency. They moreover claim a role for cinema that stands at a critical distance from the transformations of modern society in Argentina and Chile. In doing this, they might be said to disavow their own participation in certain media networks: YouTube, for instance, or in the case of *La Sagrada Familia*, the free online Chilean cinema platform Cinépata. Yet they are far from the only contemporary works that propose the aesthetic specificity of cinema as a way of challenging dominant understandings of modern domestic life. The films I analyse in the next chapter offer a vision of domestic labour that contests its characterisation as purely performative or immaterial, proposing it instead as one of the material practices that make up the home. It is a recourse to the aesthetics of activist, auteurist and art cinema that facilitates that move.

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[85] Cf. Leonor Arfuch' s discussion of how reality television programmes such as *Big Brother* render the spheres of home and work performative, part of 'la conversación social' (2002: 83).

Chapter 3. Labour unhoused: *Mitómana* and *Réimon*

The first decade of the twenty-first century saw the emergence, in Argentina and Chile but also in other South American countries (notably Brazil), of films which take as their focus the playing out of labour relations within the middle-class home.[86] In the Southern Cone, the most prominent examples of this trend are Jorge Gaggero's *Cama adentro* (2004a) and Sebastián Silva's *La nana* (2009). There are striking similarities between these two productions: both make use of a realist aesthetic, and a tragicomic tone, in order to effect an exploration of class differences and their consequences for personal identity. In other words, the films posit the exploration of a domestic interior both as the investigation of a psychological interior, and also as a spatial elucidation of social tensions in uncertain economic contexts (the events of *Cama adentro* take place in the immediate aftermath of the 2001-2002 crisis in Argentina).

Both films were successful on the international festival circuit, but not immune to criticism at home. The Argentine film director and critic, Nicolás Prividera, known for his uncompromising attitude regarding the (absence of) political content in the *nuevo cine argentino*, accuses Gaggero's film, with its 'cándido humanismo', of failing to tackle the fundamental problematic of the *ama-sirvienta* relation (i.e. its continued acceptance in society), and of giving that the impression that the only problem in the plot is the inability of the *señora bien* to continue paying her maid a wage in the aftermath of the crisis (2014: 82). In Prividera's view, this deficiency is rooted in the film's aesthetic criteria:

> *Cama adentro* pretende ser solo una película de cámara: lo importante, nos dice, son los detalles (ligados, por supuesto, a la esfera de lo doméstico). Lo central, insiste, son los personajes; su relación fraternal, frente a un afuera igualmente hostil para ambos. Pero ese afán microscopio no la salva del trazo grueso y el lugar común, que es finalmente lo que se esconde tras las apariencias: su simple superficialidad. (83)

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[86] In Brazil, see for instance *Que horas ela volta?* (Muylaert 2015) and *Doméstica* (Mascaro 2012).

I would hesitate to repeat such a sweeping condemnation, and would argue that *Cama adentro* in fact demonstrates more sensitivity than Prividera gives it credit for: the 'relación fraternal' between the two protagonists, while undeniably present, remains verbally unarticulated throughout the film. Indeed, the 'afán microscópico' which Prividera disdains reveals the displacement of affections between the two women onto material objects (a photo album, a set of earrings, a birthday cake), and this operation contains an intimation of the objectification of social relations which, it seems, is Prividera's target. The 'trazo grueso' of which Prividera complains is perhaps more clearly visible in *Cama adentro*'s narrative structure. The film's ending, in which the newly impoverished Señora Beba arrives to stay the night at her former maid Dora's house, in the urban periphery, creates a circularity which might be taken to signify a kind of redemption, both for Beba and, I would venture, for the (middle-class, *bien pensant*) spectator him- or herself.

It is, in short, the narrative closure accompanying the film's spatial enclosures that underlies any impression that the film's political engagement lacks substance or true engagement with broader socioeconomic issues. One might thus argue, *pace* Prividera's judgement that Gaggero's film 'constituye un compendio de las promesas no cumplidas del (ya no tan) nuevo cine argentino' (2014: 84), that it is *Cama adentro*'s insistence on apparent fulfilment that lessens its effectiveness as a social document. A similar view of Sebastián Silva's *La nana* is taken by Andrés Pereira, for whom the film fails to provide an exception to what he identifies as the normal conditions of cinematic production in early twenty-first century Chile, that is, a cinema that is made and enunciated 'desde el lugar del patrón o asociados' (Pereira 2009). *La nana* cannot fully give account of 'la relación peón-patrón de latifundio colonial, seen here as a 'matriz sociológica fundante para comprender lo *latinoamericano*', because it remains loyal to the codes of a realism particularly concerned with the bourgeois home, cutting off the possible 'puntos de fuga' that threaten its narrative economy (2009, original emphasis). The fact that Silva shot the film in his parents' house might seem to add some weight to Pereira's argument (Diestro-Dópido 2010), and to those of critics who see contemporary Chilean film as uncritically replicating bourgeois family structures and the neoliberal conversion of intimacy into spectacle (e.g. Saavedra Cerda 2013: 54, 104).

One might conceivably challenge Pereira's assertion that '[n]o hay nana, al menos en el país que conocemos, que pueda materialmente hacer una película sobre su experiencia' (2009), and indeed the work of José Luis Sepúlveda and Carolina Adriazola, to be examined below, attempts to provide a foil for this view. Yet it does seem that there is an absence of political context in *La nana* which is not universally replicated in the many other recent Chilean films that focus on middle- or upper-class households. An intimation of a different approach can be found in Rodrigo Marín's *Zoológico* (Marín 2011), where a sequence at the breakfast table includes, in the background, a radio broadcast relaying the news of the (real-life) credit scandal at the department store La Polar. Marín's film, like Silva's, offers a claustrophobic vision of upper-middle-class life, but here there are at least traces of an outside (both to the home and to the diegesis). A questioning of the assumption that fictional filmic narratives of domestic labour enable the critique of existing political structures, either within the home or outside it, will form the basis of my argument in this chapter. In sketching out an alternative understanding of labour in films dealing with domestic work and the urban periphery, I will draw on Paolo Virno's ambivalent theorisation of the multitude, and the radical rethinking of work that accompanies it, as well as new materialist scholarship that argues for increased recognition of the agency and vitality of seemingly inert environments.

My selection of these approaches has its roots in the unstable, rhizomatic nature of the films of which I offer a reading here. José Luis Sepúlveda and Carolina Adriazola's *Mitómana* (2009) vigorously rejects traditional narrative structures and conventional aesthetic strategies, situating itself firmly outside the mainstream of recent Chilean cinema. In Argentina, Rodrigo Moreno's *Réimon* (2014) undermines the typical parameters of fictional filmmaking in different ways, through an attempt to make visible the economic and labour conditions of the filmmaking process, as well as via a focus on the materials with which the protagonist undertakes her domestic work.

Perhaps the central concept at issue in *Mitómana* and *Réimon* is that of truth, understood both in a strictly epistemological sense (and here is where codes of social documentary are challenged and reworked), but also as a kind of political or social

essence. These films present, I argue, a riposte to any thinking of the popular that figures the mass or the people as a transcendental ground for political action. More specifically, they work against the assumption that images of marginal housing conditions can automatically communicate truths about the society in which such conditions occur. In so doing, they might be seen to destabilise the foundations of the social documentary tradition in both Argentina and Chile. In the Chilean context, Rafael Sánchez's *Las callampas* (1958) can be said to have had a significant impact, providing a vision of the urban marked by apparently 'objective' documentation, but also by didactic narration and the privileging of the role of Catholic social movements such as the Hogar de Cristo. In Argentina, Fernando Birri's *Tire dié* (1960), another foundational film, employed some of the same aesthetic strategies. Fifty years on, the two films under discussion here display far less confidence in cinema's ability to extract a coherent narrative or ideological lesson from what it records. That diffidence, however, may itself form the basis for a more capacious understanding of film's relation to political action.

Mitómana

Sepúlveda and Adriazola's *Mitómana*, as its title suggests, is fundamentally concerned with the difficulty of distinguishing truth from falsehood. Providing a summary of the film's events is far from straightforward: it appears to be a documentary tracking the shooting of a fiction film in Santiago's southern periphery, but around twenty minutes into the running time, the lead actress (Yanny Escobar) is ejected from the production, apparently because she refuses to shave her head. Her replacement (Paola Lattus) confusingly assumes the name 'Yanny', and proceeds to impersonate a care worker in the working-class Santiago suburb of Puente Alto (or La Pintana – the exact location is unclear), entering people's houses and engaging in confrontations with the municipal authorities.

This précis may in fact give an impression of greater coherence than the spectator's experience yields. The indeterminate and seemingly non-sequential nature of the film's events follows a vision of the world outlined in a voiceover by Escobar in the opening

minutes, in which she suggests that there is no clear distinction between truth and lying in acting, and that it is a form of belonging and not belonging at the same time (I will return to this point below, in relation to Virno's concept of 'pure belonging' or 'belonging as such'). Escobar rejects a singular reality, stating that 'son muchas las realidades por las que hemos pasado', and claims that anyone can end up becoming a mythomaniac, including actresses. This voiceover can be interpreted as a parodic re-writing of the 'voice of God' narration that accompanies films like *Las callampas* (Bruzzi 2010: 47), acting as a guarantor of the truth of the images presented. In what follows, I will attempt to trace, in stages, a triangular relationship between labour, housing and filmmaking, with the intention of demonstrating how Sepúlveda and Adriazola's work unsettles each of the terms in that equation. This outline will allow me, in the final part of my argument, to offer a rethinking of the concept of 'marginality' in this film.

Labour and filmmaking

Taking in the first instance the interrelation of labour and the practice of making films, *Mitómana*'s foregrounding of the *performance* of work (and, in particular, of service provision) means that there are no easy 'lessons' to be drawn from it (in contrast to the at least intermittently moralising approach of *Cama adentro* and *La nana*). The observation that film frequently offers itself as a disguised product of occluded or 'immaterial' labour functions as a useful starting point for this discussion. It is not, it must be said, a particularly original thought: in her introduction to the cinema journal *Framework*'s dossier on the subject, Elena Gorfinkel asserts that 'all of cinema is in some sense the spectacularized product of a labor that remains consistently off-scene' (2012: 43). Gorfinkel also cites Jonathan Beller's influential book *The Cinematic Mode of Production* (2006), which argues that cinema models a 'capitalist "attention economy", in which the spectator labors to produce cinema's value' (43). The haunting presence of Adorno and Horkheimer's thinking on the culture industry is hard to avoid in this formulation.

The approach I propose here is somewhat different, drawing principally on Virno's theorisation of post-Fordist labour and the multitude, as well as on the rethinking of work and the social in a Latin American context offered by Martín Hopenhayn. Hopenhayn in fact takes specific issue, as we will see, with the Frankfurt School model of the culture industry, suggesting that it is inadequate for describing recent transformations in culture and knowledge (1994: 105). Virno, for his part, centres his analysis on an opposition of the multitude to the people, suggesting that the former is irreducibly plural, while the latter, historically the prevailing term, denotes a converging movement towards a 'One' (2004: 21). In his account, the multitude demonstrates the obsolescence of the boundaries between public and private spheres which classical political thought has rigorously developed. Virno offers a definition in the following terms:

> [t]he contemporary multitude is composed neither of 'citizens' nor of 'producers'; it occupies a middle region between 'individual' and 'collective'; for the multitude, then, the distinction between 'public' and 'private' is in no way validated. (25)

This refusal of binary constructions resonates with *Mitómana*'s vertiginous transitions between interiors and exteriors, and the merging of the categories of 'citizen' and 'producer' echoes the equivocations which Paola and Yanny voice about their role as actresses, to be discussed below. On the latter point, Virno is drawing on a series of ideas developed in his essay 'The Ambivalence of Disenchantment', which claims that in post-Fordist capitalism, the sphere of life traditionally seen as not related to work, that of socialisation and the emotions, becomes subsumed into processes of production. In his words, the production of commodities 'subsumes and valorizes the emotional situation typical of nonwork', such that contingency, alienation and possibility are themselves professionalised, and work can no longer provide 'an objective ethical framework' (1996: 26–27).This diagnosis, which as we will see is in some ways even more obviously applicable to early twenty-first century Chile's neoliberal system than to capitalism in general, might seem fundamentally pessimistic. Yet Virno insists on the opportunities offered by this situation, even if his account of the multitude lacks the fundamental, messianic sense of *telos* present in that of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (as Sylvère Lotringer argues [Virno 2004: 15–16]). The dissolution of ties to place and communal

identity once offered by work affords a somewhat ambivalent 'abandonment to finitude and a *belonging to uprooting*, by resignation, servitude and eager acquiescence' (Virno 1996: 33, original emphasis). This state of pure belonging can, in this view, 'become an omnilateral and simultaneous adhesion to every present order, to all rules, to all "games"' (32).

Virno later develops this concept to articulate the state of 'not feeling at home' which characterises the contemporary multitude and is, in his view, 'at the center of [its] own social and political praxis' (2004: 35), whilst simultaneously locating it in a threatening 'publicness without a public sphere' (40). I will return to the specific, spatial force of 'not feeling at home' in *Mitomána* below. For now, I will focus on the way in which Paola/Yanny clings to the fiction of her employment, in an attempt to escape from what Carolina Urrutia (Urrutia Neno 2013: 63) discerns as 'un irremediable estado de extravío' in the facial expressions of almost all of the film's participants. One of the most unusual characteristics of the film, aside from the near-total lack of narrative cohesion, is the fact that at least part of the work involved in filmmaking, the emotional labour of the actors, is foregrounded. Work, therefore, appears in two registers, both of which, importantly, pertain to the realm of fiction: that of film acting, and that of impersonating a nurse, an employee of the state.

Both of these activities belong to the realm of what Virno terms 'virtuosic' labour, work without a defined end product, which requires the presence of others for its completion (2004: 52). Virno's thesis is that the post-Fordist era sees the subsumption of this sort of labour into the systems of production (themselves now diffuse, and incorporating traits usually ascribed to political action, he suggests [55-58]). Virno turns to a concern articulated by Marx in order to suggest that there is a

> strong resemblance between the activity of the performing artist and the
> *servile* duties which, thankless and frustrating as they are, do not produce
> surplus value, and thus return to the realm of non-productive labor. (54)

This is so, in Marx's terms, when the 'product is not separable from the act of producing' (1990: 1048). This point provides the crux of an analogy which *Mitómana*, in fits and

starts, develops between the work of film acting and that of domestic service. Yanny, the first actress in the film, attempts to assert her importance to the production early in the in the narrative, when she films her own naked body with a handheld camera, in close-up and explicit detail. This sequence, filmed in a much tighter aspect ratio than the rest of the film, then cuts to a wider shot of Yanny having her make-up applied, in which a digital camera, itself being positioned to film her, appears. Yanny's voice then provides a sonic bridge to a shot in which, fully made up, she proclaims 'Yo estoy en la película. Yo *soy* la película, po' [I'm in the film. I mean, I *am* the film]. The actress here asserts her identity with the product of her labour. Yet the changes in aspect ratio and perspective that precede this moment, not to mention the generalised lack of a discernible 'style' in *Mitómana*'s erratic camerawork, leave the spectator far from certain that the film he or she is watching is the putative product to which Yanny refers. *Mitómana* presents itself as process, rather than finished product : the reflexive intrusion of the digital camera mentioned above neatly exemplifies this tendency.[87] This emphasis on process is somewhat reminiscent of Julio García Espinosa's plea for a 'cine imperfecto', '[que] lo mismo se puede hacer con una Mitchell que con una cámara 8mm', and which is interested in 'mostrar el proceso de los problemas' rather than in 'celebrar los resultados' (2016). What is conspicuously absent from *Mitómana* is any trace of the optimism which García Espinosa's manifesto, written in 1969 Cuba, displays in the revolutionary potential of this gesture.

We might think here of Virno's formulation of 'labor-power' as the true grounds for bio-politics: the articulation of the post-Fordist system as one in which '[t]he potential for working, bought and sold just like another commodity, is labor not yet objectified, "labor as subjectivity"' (2004: 83). The bodily excess of Yanny's self-imaging can be read as an attempt to fuse her subjectivity with the open-ended product of her work. Yet this gesture ultimately fails, as Yanny is only accorded a subjective presence in the film for as long as her services as actress are required; the 'labour as subjectivity' relation is not within the subject's control. This dynamic is echoed later in the film in more explicit association with domestic service, as Paola attempts to use her (fictional) employment as a nurse as a justification for her presence in the homes of others. This ploy also

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[87] Iván Pinto Veas (2012) claims, along similar lines, that the film's key formal procedure is 'evidenciar procesos'.

invariably fails, as she is frequently, and at points forcibly, ejected (fig. 3.1). In the last of these sequences, not long before the film's end, the man whose house Paola has entered rejects her claims to be an institutional representative, and to want to help those in need, responding: 'vendría a ponerse en el lugar de los demás. Que todos dicen lo mismo…'. The implication seems to be that Paola's (imagined) affiliation cannot provide a stable identity (because, Virno might argue, all labour is now servile or virtuosic). This point of view is arguably also apparent in the film's structure, so that it might be said that virtuosic labour, whether as nurse or as actor, cannot counteract the prevailing fungibility of roles in contemporary life (Paola does, after all, quite literally take the place of another actor). There are significant political implications to this observation, especially when thinking about *Mitómana*'s lack of adhesion to certain institutional codes of social documentary filmmaking, which I will discuss in detail below.

[image redacted for copyright reasons]

Figure 3.1 *Mitómana*

A hint of these political consequences is provided in an early sequence from the film, where Yanny is standing outside a metro station in Santiago, complaining of the fact that the privileged, white elite represent 'las masas' in Chilean cinema, and telling the crowds of urban commuters that they look nothing like the nation's film stars (she names Tamara Acosta and Benjamín Vicuña). She states her own position as 'una persona más', searching for personal fulfilment, but condemned to 'mentir tanto como cada uno de ustedes'. A woman approaches her to ask if this is a protest to do with the state of the city's transport network, but Yanny violently rejects this proposal, instead claiming that is about her failure as an actress, since she is only given roles in 'películas de mierda raras que nadie se interesa en ver' ['weird shitty films that no one is interested in seeing']. The suggestion of a specific political project is here denied in lieu of a personal protest at the (racialised) structures of dominance and inequality Yanny sees in the Chilean film industry. She in fact goes as far as to blame the passers-by for this state of affairs, noting that spectators each pay 3,000 pesos a ticket 'para ver cómo su ídolo se burla de usted' ['to see how your idol laughs at you']. The picture of an

unthinking, dishonest and servile multitude that Yanny paints has several important points of contact with Virno's thinking, as will be seen below.

It also provides an interesting point at which to return briefly to consider films like *La nana* and *Cama adentro*. These two examples, unlike *Mitómana*, present themselves as finished artefacts, offering few or no traces of the labour of production. Whether they are guilty of the charge of offering the distorted representation of 'common' people that Yanny decries is less clear. In *La nana*, the role of the protagonist Raquel is taken by Catalina Saavedra, who at the time of the film's release in 2009 was already an experienced television and film actress, though Silva's film provided her breakout role. Thus, although it might be claimed that Saavedra bears more physical resemblance to the 'average Chilean' (itself a problematic concept) than, say, Tamara Acosta, her role in *La nana* may still be construed as an instance of a member of an elite assuming the place of a worker. At first sight, the case of *Cama adentro* appears to be substantially different, as the role of the maid Dora is played by Norma Argentina, who had never acted in a film, and who had in fact previously worked as a maid. Prividera maintains that this casting choice 'le entrega al film esa autoridad vicaria que no puede sostener por sí mismo' (2014: 83), yet how exactly that authority is constructed within the film, rather than simply in the surrounding critical discourse, is far from clear. Argentina is listed in the credits in the same manner as all other cast members; a stronger version of Prividera's argument might suggest that this denial of difference, the conflation of domestic labour and the performance of it, is in fact what limits *Cama adentro*'s potential for rigorous social critique.

To add a further angle to these considerations, we might pose the question as follows: do the neatly scripted, closely filmed narratives of personal redemption offered by Gaggero's and Silva's films merely serve to distract the spectator from his or her own position in the barely-navigable networks of early twenty-first century labour relations that Virno and Hopenhayn describe? Following the arguments advanced by Jesús Martín Barbero in *De los medios a las mediaciones* (2010), one could argue that the controlled aesthetics of *Cama adentro* and *La nana* enact a complex mediation of identity, inviting spectators to imaginarily position themselves in comfortable middle-class contexts even as they depict the decline or reconfiguration of such environments. Put more succinctly,

there is room for the suspicion that the films have a 'domesticating' function not only in terms of their spatial references, but also metaphorically, offering models for what Michael Goddard and Benjamin Halligan term 'biopolitical training': that is, providing naturalising representations of precarious or immaterial modes of labour without offering much in the way of critical reflection (2012: 180).

The treatment of space is fundamental to this dynamic: *Mitómana* presents a striking counterexample in a moment when Paola, standing in the rain in a poorly lit street at night, in a peripheral area of Santiago (perhaps Puente Alto or La Pintana), complains to the camera of her lack of success as an actress, and muses that it may be because she overacts, and because the film camera in any case tends to exaggerate gesture and emotion. The immaterial labour of film acting is denaturalised here, both by the content and delivery of Paola's monologue and, crucially, by the non-representational treatment of filmic space (Paola is at points barely visible against the background of the night sky and grey buildings). In the latter part of this sequence, Paola states that 'esto no es un set, esto es el patio de una casa donde me estoy quedando a dormir.' There is an apparent attempt here to divide the real from the world of fiction, though it is striking that this 'real' house is seemingly barely representable. Paola asserts her need to 'manejar yo el espacio, y no dejar que el espacio me maneje a mí': in other words, not to be 'domesticated' by the space of the film.

Labour and housing

This statement of intent provides a good point at which to turn to another side of the conceptual triangle outlined above, namely the relation between labour and housing in *Mitómana*. This might be conceived of as the ways in which work practices designate and demarcate interior spaces in the film, or, inversely, as the role played by domestic space in the production of social identities (labour-related or otherwise). It is clear from

the start of Sepúlveda and Adriazola's film that classical divisions between work, the public sphere and politics on the one hand and leisure, privacy and domesticity on the other no longer hold: we might think here of Virno's association of the exhaustion of the public/private division with the advent of the multitude and the 'general intellect', a term I will return to below (2004: 23-24). No one in the houses and streets the directors film appears to have stable employment, and Paola's performance of work frequently leads her across thresholds between inside and outside. It is notable that she is never seen, however, in her own house: as noted above, Virno's multitude is characterised by a state of 'not feeling at home' (35). As we will see, Paola's lack of determined spatial belonging acts as a correlate for the lack of clear social identification provided by her work.

Houses nonetheless occupy a key position in *Mitómana*'s strange sequence of events, offering brief points of stability in the film's frenetic shuttling between interiors and exteriors. At the moment of transition between the two lead actresses, the sequence opens with the camera, handheld, following Paola down a nondescript residential street, and then doubling back on herself, apparently unable to find the house she is looking for. She goes through a gate, knocks on a front door, and asks the lady who answers for Nora (this, it seems, is another name for Yanny). The lady points her to a house across the street, where she finds Nora/Yanny. After a confrontation at the threshold (fig. 3.2), the two return to the first house. After giving her a bag of clothes, Yanny then throws Paola out, and as she does so a third woman, unknown to the spectator, appears in the doorway, shouting '¡Váyase de mi casa!'. The domestic interior here, however briefly glimpsed, is figured as the holding-pen of the putative film project's fictional protagonist, and Paola's unwanted intrusion (she reaches inside to unlock the door) allows her to occupy that position from this point onwards. The inside of the house could be seen to function as a kind of reserve for (performed) personal identity, but without a stable frame, merely as a short temporal fragment of the sequence's long, unsteady handheld takes. Bachelard's claim that '[a] house constitutes a body of images that give mankind proofs or illusions of stability' (1969: 17) is here deeply unsettled, and there is no easy analogy between the occupation of a dramatic role and the occupation of a particular physical space.

[image redacted for copyright reasons]

Figure 3.2 *Mitómana*

This unsteadiness recurs later in the film, as Paola (now calling herself Yanny) takes on the role of a nurse, and visits elderly residents in their houses.[88] The first time she does so, the old woman (Carmen) whose house she enters claims that she doesn't need looking after, and asserts her right to make Paola/Yanny leave, her status as 'dueña de la casa'. She moreover claims that clinics don't really send nurses to care for people at their homes: 'esta no es la realidad'.

The crossing of boundaries which Paola and the camera undertake are thus presented as an illusory aesthetic alternative to services which the state fails to provide. Here, as elsewhere in the film, it is not entirely clear whether the people Paola interacts with are 'acting', or are unsuspectingly drawn into *Mitomána*'s web of inventions. The film's deeply ambivalent representation of the neoliberal state's unwillingness, or inability, to intervene directly in people's lives will be discussed further below. It is notable, in this case, that Paola claims that she has a duty to be in the house because of her job, and gives her name as Yanny Escobar as if this were a piece of supporting evidence. Her claim to belong in this place is articulated through reference to a fictional identity, itself tied to fictional labour. Towards the end of this sequence, the spectator is presented with another confrontation across a threshold (in this case a window), but here expected positions are reversed: Paola is on the inside, and Carmen outside (fig. 3.3). This might be read as a further suggestion that houses can offer no reliable indication of who belongs, and who does not, in a particular location or social context; or, in other words, that the interior/exterior division in cinematic space is easily reversible, that the analogy between domestic interior and personal identity hinted at above is ultimately useless.

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[88] Care work is cited by Hardt and Negri as a paradigmatic example of immaterial labour, involving 'affective, cognitive and linguistic tasks' (2006: 109).

[image redacted for copyright reasons]

Figure 3.3 *Mitómana*

Another notable aspect of this moment is Paola's choice of dress: her decision to wear a
nurse's white overall demonstrates her desire for immediate personal identification
with institutional employment. It is notable that shortly after this sequence, she is
confronted by a woman at the clinic who demands that she stop wearing this overall:
'estás usufructuando un cargo que no lo tienes'. The fact that this identification is never
entirely successful suggests, I would argue, that work cannot produce or map the spatial
distinctions between inside and outside, between home and city, which it might
traditionally have facilitated. These distinctions, such as they exist in the film, instead
depend on a constantly shifting network of acting and role-playing: for instance, at one
point in the film Carmen tells her lazy son Alejandro that if he is continue living in her
house, then he must *act as a son*. This emphasis on performance offers a radically
different perspective on the agency and creativity possible in the urban periphery from
other films that adopt a more 'straightforward' focus on the issue of housing at the
margins. Emblematic of the recent productions addressing this issue is Tiziana Panizza
and Paola Castillo's *74m²* (2011), a largely conventional documentary which follows the
construction and development of a social housing neighbourhood in Valparaíso
designed by Pritzker Prize-winning architect Alejandro Aravena (fig. 3.4). Aravena's
houses, situated on a site close to a middle-class neighbourhood of the city, are only
partially completed, the exterior shell concealing an interior which gives space for the
inhabitants to adapt it to their particular needs. Panizza and Castillo's film makes use of
a conventional documentary aesthetic to present a largely affirmative view of this
material creativity.

[image redacted for copyright reasons]

Figure 3.4 *74m²*

What remains implicit in *74m²* is the fact that this is a model of social housing that responds in large part to market-driven imperatives: the houses are not finished in part because the level of government subsidies available would not permit the construction of completed dwellings in the site chosen. Justin McGuirk, writing of a similar project (Quinta Monroy) undertaken by Aravena in the city of Iquique, notes that the ideas behind the construction are similar to those articulated by the British architect John Turner in relation to the *barriadas* (shanty towns) of Lima in the 1960s and 70s, namely the proposal that creativity in the urban margins should be encouraged in opposition to standardised government housing (1963: 393). Turner argued that in order to take account of what material environments '*do* in people's lives', housing was best conceived of 'as a verb' (1972: 151–152, original emphasis). I will return to this linguistic strategy below. McGuirk also notes, however, that while Turner ultimately viewed the creativity of the *barriadas* as a symptom of underdevelopment, now it is optimistically construed as 'participation'. McGuirk poses the provocative question, 'is this notion taking over from consumption in defining our state of being?' and suggests that this development represents the triumph of entrepreneurialism and the cult of private power over what where once supposed to be the responsibilities of the state (2014: 87–88).

The notion that marginal creativity simultaneously results from and occludes the derelictions of the state finds an echo in Hopenhayn's work on modernity and postmodernity in Chile. Hopenhayn argues that the cultural internalisation of privatisation in late-twentieth century Chile has markedly different effects across social sectors, and that

> [e]l desdibujamento del Estado asistencial y de algunos mecanismos consagrados de movilidad social, fuesen efectivos o simbólicos, genera tendencias contradictorias en la órbita de los excluidos. (1994: 43)

These contradictory tendencies, he suggests, are creativity and fear: '[l]a incertidumbre respecto del futuro tiene más que ver con el temor que con la creatividad, pero obliga a la creatividad para conjurar el temor' (43). The intertwining of these two emotions is somewhat glossed over by the affirmative aesthetics of Panizza and Castillo's

production, although the film does show, in detail, the tensions generated by the housing project within the community of *pobladores* (residents of Santiago's peripheral neighbourhoods) who move into it. In *Mitómana*, by contrast, creativity (as performance, or simply as lying) and uncertainty (if not always exactly fear) go hand in hand, for the spectator as well as for the film's participants, many of whom, it is worth restating, are not actors, or do not appear to be. The creativity on display in Sepúlveda and Adriazola's film is not material in the architectural sense, but is rather located in the realm of performance and of film form. Questions therefore arise about the relationship of the filmmakers to the subjects and environments which they film. Are Sepúlveda and Adriazola criticising the state's retreat from public life, or its attempt to intrude into people's homes in the first place? If, moreover, their interest lies more in challenging the typical boundaries of the documentary film form, rather than in understanding the realities of lived experience in the locations they film, then what is the ethical position of their own intrusion into private houses with a film camera? The directors might reasonably be accused of a certain bad faith in their enterprise, or at least of a palpable cynicism in filming the offering, and rejection, of a non-existent service.

In assessing the validity of this accusation, it is helpful to turn once more to the vision of the post-Fordist multitude offered by Virno. In his account, cynicism appears as a result of 'the chronic instability of forms of life and linguistic games' which arises after the dissolution of traditional labour ties (2004: 87). One might conceivably add film to Virno's list of unstable forms, particularly if we accept Hopenhayn's assertion that the production of home videos is one of the 'efectos especiales' offered by capitalism to daily life (1994: 43). Images of houses, following this argument, can offer no social truth outside the forces of production. This is precisely Virno's point when he argues that the 'general intellect', a term he takes from the 'Fragment on Machines' in Marx's *Grundrisse*, becomes the principal driver of production. The 'general intellect', in Virno's terms, denotes the exteriorization of social knowledge and its conversion into an economic force (2004: 38). There are striking parallels between this diagnosis and those offered in the Chilean post-dictatorial context both by Hopenhayn, who writes of the conversion of knowledge and information into 'el principal insumo de producción' (1994: 108), and by Norbert Lechner, who discerns a 'des-subjetivación de la reflexión' in the political culture of the post-dictatorial period (2006: 484–5). These points of

contact with Virno's thought are important, as they point to the relevance of a theoretical model developed with reference to late-twentieth century Italy for the Chilean situation.[89] This is not to deny any difference between the two countries, and the extent and nature of urban marginality, where *Mitómana* situates itself, provides one such point of contrast. The film nonetheless provides fertile ground for an interrogation of the spatial aspects of the 'general intellect' thesis, which for Virno is nominally 'public' but without a 'public sphere' or political community (2004: 40-41): homeless, in other words, or pertaining to the unstable realm stitched together from public and private spaces that *Mitómana* explores, and that is conjured up by the title of Lechner's book *Los patios interiores de la democracia* (2006).

This context does something to provide an explanation for *Mitómana*'s cynicism, if not a justification. The strongest answer to a charge of bad faith, however, is provided by the film's final third, which appears to undermine the residual structure of the rest of the narrative (that of the film in production), and leads many critics to appeal to notions of the limitless and the unfinished: Marcelo Morales calls the film 'una película sin límites' (Morales C. [n.d.]), while Iván Pinto Veas labels its third part 'un puente sin barandas' (2012). In this last section, a third character, a girl named Rocío, comes to occupy a crucial (if unsettling) role, acting as a kind of guide to her neighbourhood for Paola. Not long before the film's end, the two discuss the morality of lying, and Paola claims that the residents of the neighbourhood lied in order to obtain their houses, by claiming that there were people signed up to a government welfare plan ('gente que estaba asignada') when this was not the case. Rocío rejects the suggestion that her community has manipulated the government plan, stating 'a la gente pobre no se le puede mentir', and Paola counters this suggestion by noting that 'los pobres sí pueden mentir'. The extension of the capacity for invention and fictionalization to those at society's margins is in fact hinted at by Rocío just before this sequence, when she declares to Paola: 'Yo actúo mejor que ti', before stating that the 'professional' actress is essentially different to the local residents because she is from Providencia, a wealthy, central neighbourhood. It is not at all clear that Paola is in fact from Providencia, but Rocío's

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[89] Jon Beasley-Murray, too, notes the relevance of Virno's thought for postdictatorial Chile, though he couches it in the Foucauldian terms of a shift from disciplinary power to biopower (2010: 210–211).

assertion serves to remind the spectator of the partiality of Paola's (and hence the film's) perspective. By providing an answer and a challenge to Paola's narrative and actions (Rocío is, inexplicably, later seen pointing a gun at Paola's head), the film goes some way towards refuting an accusation of bad faith, although does not in doing so necessarily establish coherent political grounds for its approach. I will explore this political indeterminacy in more depth below.

Before doing so, it is important to return briefly to Paola's assertion that the houses in Rocío's neighbourhood were gained through false statements. This statement endows verbal creativity or duplicity in the margins with the power to gain housing for a community, although the benefits or nature of that housing are thrown into doubt by Paola and Rocío's conversation. As if to reinforce this point, during that sequence, which takes place in Rocío's house, the camera reveals to the spectator nothing but the dimly lit corners and surfaces of a room, the edge of a window, and a partial view of next door's kitchen. Once again, access to the 'truth' or reality of marginal conditions is conspicuously refused, and housing is presented as an opaque, almost illusory good.

Paola's oblique mention of a government initiative is striking, given the lack of services and of a sense of community to which *Mitómana* alludes. Paola Jirón has argued that the major weakness of the social housing initiatives undertaken by democratic governments in Chile after 1990 was a failure to understand the importance of 'the relation between inhabitants and their habitat' and of social interaction, and the woefully inadequate provision of communal facilities and services, especially in areas such as La Pintana and Puente Alto, which were among the largest recipients of those relocated after Pinochet's eradication of Santiago's *campamentos* (informal settlements) (2010: 81–84).[90] Jirón moreover suggests that the predominance of informal employment led many living in such projects to feel worse off than they had been in informal settlements (85). Murphy suggests that the lack of services has made it difficult for Santiago's *pobladores* 'to articulate a further critique of the conditions they occupy', and that they therefore live in a 'domesticated periphery [...] As they are domesticated in the home, so they are politically' (2015: 38). While *Mitomána* articulates some of

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[90] The population of La Pintana grew by 90% between 1982 and 1984 (Jirón 2010: 77).

these concerns at the lack of service provision, and the politics it articulates are anything but 'domesticated': in fact, they fail to respond to any stable spatial figure of collective action, as we will see below.

Film and housing

Mitómana's apparent unwillingness to disclose the spaces and dimensions of Rocío's house leads me to a discussion of the final link in the triangular relationship I have thus far been tracing, that between the act of filmmaking and housing itself. I would like here to return to Turner's observation that 'housing is a verb', which he uses to argue for individual agency and creativity in dwelling, even in circumstances of severe material poverty. his rhetorical move is echoed in Bernstein's stated desire to mobilise the noun 'house' into the gerund 'housing' (2008: 13). As noted in the introduction, Bernstein claims that in great swathes of Western philosophy, from Descartes onwards, '[t]he facticity of the house points to a limit of thinking, an undercurrent of the untheorized and excluded materiality that is a condition of possibility of architecture, or writing' (14). Can the same be said of houses in cinema? This is an impossibly broad question, but Sepúlveda and Adriazola's film certainly affords an opportunity to think about potential answers from the urban periphery in Chile. It also, as we have seen, suggests that labour, like the house, might function as a disavowed condition for filmmaking. *Mitómana*'s refusal to construct a stable or clear relationship between personal identity and dwelling-place certainly chimes with Bernstein's assertion that '[t]he idea that the house stands in for a self and tells us its secret story, holding on to its owner as origin and spirit, is a myth' (14). In this section, I want to explore whether film can offer alternative understandings of housing, as process, practice or performance.

Before doing so, it is worth addressing a linguistic point: it might reasonably be objected that, although in English 'house' transforms naturally into 'housing', in Spanish there is no equivalent gerund form for 'casa'. In response, I propose adopting 'vivienda' as a near-correlate, given that it originates in the vulgar Latin gerundive 'vivenda', which is defined by the *Diccionario de la lengua española* as denoting 'cosas con que o en que se

ha de vivir'. 'Vivienda', moreover, in addition to describing a physical shelter, was in past also used to denote 'género de vida o modo de vivir' ('vivienda' [n.d.]). The question, then, would be whether film can recuperate this former sense of the word, and illuminate the presence (or absence) of the social and relational aspects of housing that, in Jirón's account, successive government initiatives have neglected.

My analysis of *Mitómana* has thus far suggested that the film reveals some of the labour usually denied by cinematic production, and that it questions the ability of work to map or 'produce' defined spaces, whether domestic or public. It does so via an emphasis on incomplete or failed pretences or performances (those of its actresses, and arguably those of the filmic narrative itself, which is disrupted by the appearance of Rocío). This privileging of process and (dis)continuity seems to offer itself as a way out of the pervasive logics of production which, in Virno's and Hopenhayn's accounts, now exert control over all spheres of life. The question which then arises is whether *Mitómana*'s unfinished and unsteady processes manage to extract its images from this production, and, consequently, whether the film can provide a figure or trace of the multitude (as opposed to a unified or stagnant 'popular') endowed with political valency.

Sepúlveda and Adriazola's refusal to construct neatly framed domestic interiors certainly leads the critic towards an understanding of housing which is fluid rather than fixed: the frequent disjunction between the audio and image tracks in fact question any stable notion of 'narrative space'.[91] Yet the spectator or critic may still reasonably pose the question of the *point* of this deliberate incoherence, or indeed of Paola's staged intrusions into others' homes. What might Sepúlveda and Adriazola hope to demonstrate via these equivocal actions? One potential answer has to do with the efficacy and the ethics of filming other people's houses. In one such sequence, Paola visits the home of a man named Don Sixto, again posing as a nurse. She asks him how he has been, and receives no answer. The camera records a silence of more than twenty seconds, revealing little other than the faces of the two and a jumble of objects on a sideboard, barely visible in the dimly-lit interior. Paola then asks Sixto '¿desde cuándo

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[91] I use this last term in the sense proposed by Stephen Heath in his seminal essay, itself titled 'Narrative Space'. Heath writes that: '[n]arrativization, with its continuity, closes, and is that movement of closure that shifts the spectator as subject in its terms' (1981: 54).

está en esta casa?', a question which would not be out of place in Agüero's *El otro día*. Yet Paola's incursions, unlike Agüero's, tell the spectator little or nothing about the lives of the houses' occupants. After she has posed the question about how long Sixto has lived there, the spectator hears a barely comprehensible mumbling from an old woman in the corner, whom, until that moment, the camera has ignored. Sixto then explains that they have moved around between several houses, stating that 'nos trasladaron' without it being clear who the 'they' in that formulation are.

The contrast with Agüero's interviews with the residents of houses across Santiago in *El otro día* could hardly be clearer: for him, as we have seen, filmed conversations with residents *in situ* function as a kind of replacement for, or reconnection of, the social bonds that otherwise might seem to be eroded in twenty-first century Santiago, and as a tool to aid in the excavation of often-occluded histories. Moreover, Agüero's camera frequently 'reads', in close-up, the surfaces of the interior as if scouring them for clues about the inhabitant's biographies (this is precisely the kind of operation Bernstein denounces when she claims that the house's 'secret story' is a myth [2008: 14]). In *Mitómana*, conversely, dialogues with residents reveal precious little; they might even be seen as a direct parody of Agüero's approach. In the conversation with Don Sixto, Paola quickly turns to discuss her own problems, specifically her diagnosis with herpes (it is possible that she is imparting this information to Sixto because he is a former sexual partner of hers). The spectator has witnessed this diagnosis minutes earlier during a sequence which shows, in unsparing detail, Paola undergoing a gynaecological examination. The juxtaposition of these two sequences brings to mind Benjamin's likening of the film cameraman to a surgeon. Yet while Benjamin argues that film offers, 'precisely because of the thoroughgoing permeation of reality with mechanical equipment, an aspect of reality which is free of all equipment' (1999b: 227), here Paola's mention of her herpes, and specification of the location of the infection in her genitals, refers the spectator back to the apparatus of the medical examination, clouding the prospect of a reality 'free of all equipment'. The epistemological value of this kind of cinematic intrusion is, thus, thrown into serious doubt: the house, as material environment, eludes conversion into signifying filmic images.

It is tempting, given the sequence discussed above, to discern in the film a gendered binary in which the camera is figured as male and invasive, and the internal space of the house as female and submissive. To do so, however, would be to ignore the fact that for most of the film's duration, Paola is herself presented as an intruder in the homes of others, and that the camera sometimes adopts the perspective of the residents whose property has been violated.[92] Moreover, in the opening minutes of the film, before Paola has 'taken over' from Yanny, the latter shoots footage of her own naked body, including a close-up shot of her genitalia, thus blurring any possible distinction between 'male' camera and 'female' represented subject.

Another view of the driving force behind *Mitomána*'s constant and apparently frivolous transgression of boundaries might identify a desire to unsettle the assumption that images of the margins constitute a ground for political action. In order to understand why this might be the case, it is helpful to contrast Sepúlveda and Adriazola's film with others, notably documentary productions from the middle of the twentieth century, which aim to use the presentation of housing crises on the urban periphery in Chile as an explicit call to political action. One example of this trend is Rafael Sánchez's *Las callampas* (1958), briefly mentioned above. Sánchez's film deals with the emergence of informal settlements (the 'callampas' of the title) on the edges of Santiago as a result of mass migration from rural areas, and adopts a social-realist, and somewhat didactic, aesthetic in doing so. In contrasting Sánchez's approach with that of the directors of *Mitómana*, it is helpful to turn to the analysis of the earlier film provided by Pablo Corro Penjean. For him, *Las callampas* 'desata en el cine chileno las relaciones entre el afuera y el adentro de la representación de lo social', and as a result evidences important ideological and aesthetic contradictions, mixing the perspective of the reporter with the 'exposición didáctica del educador' (Corro Penjean 2012: 27). This didactic streak is

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[92] The association between house and female body is in fact more clearly visible in an earlier film by Adriazola, *Vasnia* (2007). The house in question here is a self-built, precarious dwelling in Valparaíso, which the female protagonist wants to leave behind, but nonetheless violently defends against male intruders. For a detailed reading of how *Vasnia* re-signifies 'home-making' as a resistant practice, see Luongo (2009). Luongo notes both that 'la genealogía de mujeres peleando por la casa en este país es densa', and that the house has also been 'la máxima expresión del sistema explotador de las mujeres.' Luongo argues that *Vasnia*'s presentation of a house 'hecha astillas, desarticulada, desmembrada' allows it to formulate a feminine subjectivity that is 'en desvarío íntimo, intimidante'.

most evident in the film's periodic use of a child's toy house to introduce and model the demolition of the informal settlement and the move to more permanent dwellings in La Victoria ('una vida estable y definitiva', as the voice-of-God narration has it). The emphasis placed on a reliable physical shelter or enclosure is coupled with a form of narrative closure: even as the narrator states 'esta es una historia verídica, inconclusa', the spectator's gaze is returned to the model house and a boy standing next to it (fig. 3.5).

[image redacted for copyright reasons]

Figure 3.5 *Las callampas*

This narrative strategy, in addition to the bird's-eye view of La Victoria with which the film closes, and the emphasis it places on the importance of the assistance provided by the Catholic Church (via the charity Hogar de Cristo), and on the promotion of traditional family life, means that Sánchez's film arguably fails fully to escape the institutional or enclosed realist aesthetic which Corro Penjean identifies as dominating the history of cinema. His vision of the inherent tensions in this approach is worth quoting at length:

> La imagen cierra. Como apropiación discursiva de lo circundante próximo y lejano, constituye un micro mundo, una cifra doméstica [...] El entusiasmo ante la posibilidad de multiplicar los hábitat [*sic*] apareja el deber de la normalización constructiva que asegure la estabilidad de cada sitio y su visibilidad. (2012: 19)

Many of the shots in *Las callampas* could be said to participate in the 'normalización constructiva' identified here. It would be wrong to assume that the inclusion of images of the *pobladores* and their lives automatically signify an aesthetic or political rupture: Corro Penjean notes that the *pobladores* have no voice in the film,[93] and considers that '[l]a intención de romper la esfera de la intimidad controlada de la figuración cinematográfica chilena de la pobreza abriendo múltiples fisuras hacia el afuera',

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[93] Birri's *Tire dié* (1960) contains sequences in which the inhabitants of the *villas* of Santa Fe do speak, but they are, crucially, dubbed over by the narrator.

apparent in the camera's unsparing gaze, is ultimately undermined by a sense of didactic inertia (exemplified by the toy house) (29).

This appeal to an idealised, wholly visible figure of a house suggests that while *Las callampas* may at points work against the kinds of aesthetic enclosure Corro Penjean refers to, it nonetheless takes them as a starting point, as a residual ground. Insofar as *Mitómana* refuses even to engage with this domestication of the cinematic image (to return to an idea expressed above), it marks itself as appreciably different not just to Sánchez's work, but also to more recent productions set in the periphery of Santiago. One such film is Elisa Eliash's *Mami te amo* (2008), a fiction production which is in some respects similar to *Mitómana*, as it demonstrates a comparable interest in formal experimentation, and in the difficulty of distinguishing between truth and fiction (for one section of the film, the young female protagonist is played by a different actress, with no obvious explanation for this change). A crucial difference can be discerned between the two films, however, when it comes to housing and construction. The girl, called Raquel, and her mother (played by Catalina Saavedra) live in the Unidad Vecinal Portales, a modernist housing block built between 1954 and 1966 (around the time of the 'callampas' pictured in Sánchez's film). This location functions as a reference point for the film's narrative – Raquel's mother is going blind, and often loses her daughter, who then has to make her own way back home. The housing block frequently appears in the background of shots taken from a walkway above a motorway, where Raquel meets an older girl who seems to have a nomadic existence on Santiago's streets (fig. 3.6).

[image redacted for copyright reasons]

Figure 3.6 *Mami te amo*

The recurrent presence of a housing block which can be taken to signify the remnants of a community-centred project ('ruinas de una utopía colectiva', in the words of Pinto Veas [2008]) means that while *Mami te amo* questions the 'transparency' or objectivity of the cinematic gaze as explicitly, or even more so, than *Mitómana*, there is nonetheless a fixed point of return, a kind of material grounding for the narrative which is,

moreover, a reminder of a desired common space. For Pinto Veas, the film 'devuelve, retorna Santiago', as a city 'en la que en algún momento existió un espacio en común' (2008). Here again is the tension between 'la posibilidad de multiplicar los hábitat' and 'el deber de normalización constructiva' that Corro Penjean identifies in all cinema (2012: 19). It is surely not coincidental that a construction site and its workers are another recurrent presence in Eliash's film, as is the case in many other Chilean films of this period, from *Play* (Scherson 2005) and *Metro cuadrado* (Ilic 2011) to *Lucía* (Atallah 2010). It is for this reason that I cannot fully agree with critical accounts which emphasise the nomadic qualities of the film (Urrutia Neno, for instance, writes of Raquel's constant transiting across the walkway between 'territorios inestables' [2013: 70]). The protagonists' home may be chaotic, but it is nonetheless a space that Raquel, and the spectator, consistently return to; it occupies a key position in the film's narrative construction.

The image of the walkway mentioned above is in fact used by Catalina Donoso Pinto to draw a comparison between *Mami te amo* and *Mitómana*, suggesting that both complicate distinctions between permanence and movement, as in both cases spaces of transit, 'pasarelas', are occupied at length by the films' protagonists (2015: 141). In a sequence in the final third of *Mitómana*, women from Puente Alto are seen affixing banners to a bridge which spans an empty canal (fig. 3.7). The spectator is unable fully to read the slogans on the banners, and the only hint provided about their nature or their intended addressee comes from Rocío, who says that a doll hanging from the bridge with the banners represents 'la Bachelet' (Michelle Bachelet, President of Chile from 2006-2010 and again from 2014 to the present).

[image redacted for copyright reasons]

Figure 3.7 *Mitómana*

The film's doubtful attitude towards collective political action is also articulated with reference to work, in a voiceover where Yanny, in the film's opening minutes, before the switch of actresses, complains that a trade unionist rally she attended offered 'un

discurso ochentero, añejo', unchanged since the days of President Patricio Aylwin (the first President of Chile after Pinochet, from 1990 to 1994). Here, as in Virno's account, work is unable to provide any sort of grounding, and so both the protagonist and the film itself refuse to adhere to any particular set of rules, flitting between roles, perspectives and ideas, modelling the kind of opportunism which Virno sees as a defining characteristic of contemporary modes of production. The 'discurso ochentero, añejo' of which Yanny complains includes, significantly, the lament that '¡hoy en día nadie está trabajando!'. In the world of *Mitómana*, this is a given, not a polemical statement or a call to action.

The dissolution of labour that the film suggests is also a dissolution of any coherent vision of the social. Sepúlveda has stated that *Mitómana* is 'una metáfora del cine chileno actual, donde hay una cierta reivindicación de lo social, pero desde una perspectiva del consumo, de no tocar en profundidad el tema' (Morales C. 2013). *Mitómana* is certainly not packaged for easy consumption, but nor does it purport to offer an in-depth perspective on social problems; quite the opposite, in fact, as we have seen. So while Sepúlveda sets the film's objectives as 'tocar temas como el arribismo social, el asistencialismo' (Morales C. 2013), it does so only in an elliptical, almost off-hand manner. *Mitómana*'s directors are, perhaps, trying to avoid any association with the exercise of institutional (bio)power which might be seen to accompany a more conventionally explanatory discussion of these issues, or a clearer image of a definable sector of society. An aversion to institutions and hierarchies is certainly apparent in the description given of the film school Sepúlveda and Adriazola run, the 'Escuela Popular de Cine', as 'la primera escuela de carácter popular, horizontal y gratuita desarrollada en Chile' (Escuela Popular de Cine [n.d.]). This scepticism is also latent in the title of the film festival founded by Sepúlveda and Adriazola: the *Festival de Cine Social y Antisocial*. One might think here of Hopenhayn's assertion that coherent social imaginaries have found themselves progressively replaced with 'una telaraña de sensibilidades, lenguajes, especialidades y estrategias de vida' which only ever achieve a 'visibilidad segmentada' via the media (1994: 54). This complexity disrupts any straightforward spatial metaphors for the social, and leads Hopenhayn to describe present experience itself as a 'periferia' (67).

If the periphery is everything, then any distinction between margin and centre is difficult to uphold. *Mitómana*, as we have seen, refuses to construct stable, framed spaces for the viewer, and in fact seems to refuse an understanding of the work of cinema as *constructive* at all: it does not map or produce space, and cannot in any straightforward sense 'reveal' the conditions of housing. Work, in the film, is either non-existent or servile, 'virtuosic' in the sense in which Virno uses the term (contrast this with the proliferation of construction sites described above). This refusal to construct might be read as an attempt to avoid co-option into conservative political discourses: as noted above in relation to *Las callampas*, the appeal to a figure of enclosure, even in an attempt to denounce inequality and injustice, can be seen as the (re)instatement of hierarchies and institutions, or of a new set of exclusions. Readings of Sepúlveda and Adriazola's film which appeal to the interstice (Urrutia Neno 2013: 64) or the margin (Barraza 2013) as the characteristic space of *Mitómana* risk falling into this trap, and overlook the emphasis it places on process and labour.

It is difficult, then, to envisage an appropriate spatial metaphor for the vision of life in the urban periphery that *Mitómana* offers. Perhaps Virno's conceptualisation of the multitude as amphibian comes close to an answer: 'on one hand it speaks to us of social production based on knowledge and language; on the other hand, it speaks of the crisis of the form-of-State' (2004: 44). *Mitómana* certainly speaks of both of these. Virno, interestingly, explicitly denies an 'interstitial' or 'marginal' character for the multitude, and suggests that it will naturally seek the 'collapse of political representation' (43): of politics, that is, which is understandable as a visible figure or form. This is the status which *Mitómana* denies the peripheral urban dwelling (and which is accorded to it, however elliptically, by a film like *Mami te amo*). In this context, it is somewhat puzzling that critics such as Pinto Veas and Urrutia Neno appeal to a *material* basis for politics in the film (even if Pinto Veas does so while explicitly referencing the camera's 'dificultad para "dar cuenta de"', its lack of access to social reality [2012]). In order to move towards a solution to this puzzle, it is necessary to reconsider what is understood by 'material' in this context, and to find a definition of the term that encompasses not simply the nonhuman environment, but also the processes by which humans interact with and approach it. In the following section, I explore how the Argentine director

Rodrigo Moreno's 2014 film *Réimon* offers a useful template for developing a new materialist understanding of domestic labour.

Réimon

The title of Moreno's film leaves the spectator initially puzzled: for much of the running time, it is a signifier without an obvious signified, and it is only halfway through the film that its meaning becomes evident. 'Réimon' is a quasi-Anglicised (and, importantly, masculinised) rendering of the protagonist Ramona's name, used by a resident of one of the two apartments she cleans in the centre of Buenos Aires. Moreno's film depicts not only Ramona's working hours, but also her travel to and from her home in one of the Argentine capital's peripheral neighbourhoods.

This brief summary suggests a number of shared concerns with *Mitómana*: most obviously, the representation of work in the home, but also that of marginal housing, and, subtly, the gender implications of domestic work. The two films, as we will see, also share a preoccupation with rendering visible the immaterial labour of filmmaking itself. Yet there are several important differences which mark *Réimon* as worthy of separate, detailed attention. Most notable among these is the contrasting cinematographic style which Moreno adopts in rendering the domestic spaces through which Ramona moves. Whereas Sepúlveda and Adriazola's frenetically mobile camera refuses to provide a stable frame for such spaces, Moreno's film consists in large part of long static takes, which frequently make use of walls, doors and windows as internal framing devices. I will argue that Moreno's insistent focus on the objects and materials with which Ramona works offers the grounds for a rethinking of filmic representations of domestic work: not as easily digestible spectacle, as is the case in *Cama adentro* or *La nana*, but rather as a peculiarly artistic form of visual excess (there is a debt to the work of Chantal Akerman here, to be explored below).

Réimon's explicit staging of the insufficiencies of Marxist materialist thought, through the reading out loud of *Capital* by Ramona's employers, might therefore lead us to consider the utility of other understandings of materialism in an analysis of the film's aesthetic choices. Moreover, the film's questioning of traditional historical materialism ultimately renders the division between Fordist and post-Fordist labour upheld by Virno and others rather less obvious, as we will see. Clarifying the relationship between three key ideas in Moreno's film, namely marginality, materialism, and art, will assist in providing a view of how the aesthetics of art cinema can function as a provisional ground for reclaiming the material value of work undertaken in other people's homes.

Marginal aesthetics

Réimon presents itself as an instance of 'marginal' filmmaking in a number of ways, not all of which are entirely consonant with each other. Attention is drawn both to marginal modes of cinematic production and to objects typically considered 'marginal' to the narrative development of a film. At the same time, however, *Réimon*'s depiction of suburban areas often described as marginal contests the trends apparent in much Argentine cinematic production. The film's multiple and competing notions of marginality thus lay the foundations for a reworking of materialist thought in relation to film aesthetics.

Réimon begins with a series of statements, in white text on a black background, about the financial aspects of the film: the budget, the sources of funding, the duration of the production and editing, and the labour hours required, including the average number of hours worked per day. One striking aspect of this enumeration of tasks is its 'top-down' approach: it begins with funding sources, proceeds to mention the participation of production and post-production companies, and then moves to elaborate on the nature of the directing and editing work. The spectator is told that '[e]l director aportó el total de su trabajo a la producción de la película' (fig. 3.8), in a somewhat ostentatious move

to position *Réimon* not simply as an instance of alienated labour, subject to the typical pressures of commercial distribution networks. This move is seemingly strengthened by the assertion that, along with the director, the head of production and the director of photography 'participan de las eventuales ganancias que la película pudiera llegar a generar.' Upon reflection, however, the (in all likelihood) very small profits generated by a resolutely arthouse film like *Réimon* might be seen to render this gesture hollow. Moreover, the hierarchy implicit in the film's opening statements makes it difficult to argue that Moreno's film fully distances itself from conventional modes of production: the 'horizontality' explicitly claimed by the directors of *Mitómana* is less in evidence here. Indeed, the labour of the actors is not even mentioned in the breakdown which precedes the title of Moreno's film.[94] Though the production company behind *Réimon* is called Compañía Amateur, there is in fact nothing very amateurish about the film's aesthetics, as will be discussed below. Moreno's camera appeals to theatrical modes of representation in order to construct the house, or more specifically the apartment, as a stage on which the realities of domestic labour relations in contemporary Argentina are acted out. The domestic interior thus becomes, as it does for Gabriel Giorgi in the writings of Clarice Lispector, 'un lugar de saber biopolítico' (2014, location 1013). More than that, though, it is framed as an object worthy of aesthetic consideration.

[image redacted for copyright reasons]

Figure 3.8 *Réimon*

The film does not begin in this enclosed, middle-class environment, however. The opening shot is of Ramona's face as she sits in a bar, apparently at closing time. This is a very long take, and the first of many in the film: the slow rhythm with which Moreno imbues his film suggests an understanding of filmmaking not simply as observational, but as a practice which is inextricably bound up with the material environment. Shortly after the opening shot in the bar, the camera pans in close-up over the branches and buds of a tree, as a dog barks in the background. The short focus and the use of high-

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[94] In this sense, *Réimon* only partially contradicts Gorfinkel's assertion that film is the 'spectacularized product of a labor that remains consistently off-scene' (2012: 43).

definition digital technology make the textures of these formations visible in detail: a procession of ants can be seen moving along one of the thicker stems. The camera's slow, spiralling movement entangles the spectator's gaze in the twigs, providing time for reflection and challenging any expectations of linear narrative which might be brought to the film (fig. 3.9). Moreno's interest in the play of light and shadow on surfaces, and his eschewal of straightforward narrative progression, indicate something of a shared sensibility with the work of Fontán. What distinguishes Moreno's film is the manner in which these aesthetic strategies are quite explicitly linked to political concerns: this intriguing linkage will be explored more fully below.

[image redacted for copyright reasons]

Figure 3.9 *Réimon*

At the end of its movement through the branches, the camera comes to rest on the figure of an old woman, sat on a stool under some washing lines, with a cloth and tub visible in the background. This is the first of several instances in which Moreno's camera presents and, importantly, makes *sensible*, the apparently useless, unproductive stretches of time generated by domestic labour and its associated practices (such as the long commutes Ramona must undertake in order to get from her home to the apartments that she cleans in the city centre). What follows this first long shot amounts to a presentation of Buenos Aires' urban margins that differs radically from the images typically associated with such areas. A series of shots shows dogs asleep on a patio, dappled with the light coming through tree branches. The spectator is then introduced to the street where Ramona lives, as she tends an *asado* on the pavement outside her modest dwelling (fig. 3.10). The southern suburbs of Buenos Aires appear here as a quiet, tranquil space, in contrast to a powerful filmic tradition which depicts them as crime-ridden and unsettled.[95]

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[95] I am thinking here of works such as Pablo Trapero's *Elefante blanco* (2012) and Ezio Massa's *Villa* (2008), as well as older productions like *Pizza, birra, faso* (Caetano and Stagnaro 1998). More recently, critics have turned to the films of José Celestino Campusano as examples of cinema that makes the periphery of Buenos Aires visible without depicting it as the scene of spectacular violence (Aguilar 2015: 209).

[image redacted for copyright reasons]

Figure 3.10 *Réimon*

The framing of this sequence is particularly significant: the front of the house is aligned parallel to the camera lens, so that the street space in front of it is foreshortened. This effect is echoed later, as Ramona walks through the streets near her house, the camera following her in a parallel travelling shot, and in long takes from the window of the train which she catches to get to work. One might think here of Aguilar's analysis of Rejtman's films, which construct on-screen space in a similar way, flattening foreground and background together. Aguilar adopts Deleuzian terminology to suggest that Rejtman's cinema creates smooth spaces, as opposed to the striated space offered by the films of Lucrecia Martel, which make extensive use of resources such as acousmatic sound in order to give their images a kind of sensory depth (2006: 106). For Deleuze and Guattari, smooth space is the realm of the nomad, undifferentiated by territorial divisions, while striated space is carved up into enclosed units (2013: 552-53). This distinction lies behind Aguilar's identification of nomadic and sedentary tendencies in Argentine cinema, which, as discussed in the introduction, is much less evidently applicable to more recent productions. Still, the political implications of a Deleuzian 'smooth space' are interesting to consider in relation to *Réimon*. Deleuze and Guattari, in *A Thousand Plateaus*, suggest that while the city is a striated space *par excellence*, it also 'reimparts smooth space', for instance in 'shifting shantytowns of nomads and cave dwellers, scrap metal and fabric, patchwork, to which the striations of money, work or housing are no longer even relevant' (2013: 559-60). Moreno's presentation of the urban periphery as just such a smooth space might seem in this light to be an anti-political gesture, a denial of the 'striations of money, work or housing'. This operation of smoothing moreover appears to erode any clear distinction between the oft-invoked categories of urban 'centre' and 'periphery'.

I would however suggest that *Réimon* does not rigidly follow Deleuze and Guattari's model, in which '[t]he physicosocial model of Work pertains to the State apparatus', and

'labor performs a generalized operation of striation of space-time, a subjection of free action, a nullification of smooth spaces' (570). The film's editing does not simply compress the times of Ramona's working day into the divisible 'abstract labor-time' which Deleuze and Guattari associate with (state) capitalism (570). There are certainly moments of ellipsis, but these are often compensated with long takes which serve no apparent narrative purpose. An example of this strategy can be found in a long, static take of Ramona at the apartment of 'señor Eduardo'. In this shot, Ramona, viewed from behind, opens a window, looks out towards the port and does nothing *productive*. *Réimon* thus offers the spectator not Deleuze and Guattari's abstract, divisible labour-time, but something more akin to Deleuze's notion of the cinematic time-image, which in his account provides the viewer with a direct experience of time, and is linked to the collapse of the 'sensory-motor schema' joining perception to action in film, after the Second World War (2013: 40–43). Deleuze explicitly relates the advent of the time-image to cinema's confrontation of '*its most internal presupposition, money*' (81, original emphasis), and goes as far as to liken the passing of time to Marx's formulation of capitalist exchange:

> time is by nature the conspiracy of unequal change or the impossibility of an equivalence. It is in this sense that it is money: in Marx's two formulations, C-M-C is that of equivalence, but M-C-M is that of impossible equivalence or tricked, dissymmetrical exchange. (81)

At first glance, *Réimon* provides straightforward evidence for Deleuze's claims, both explicitly confronting its relationship with money (in its opening statements), and making extensive use of the time-image. Yet what Moreno's time-images reveal are the apparently unproductive elements of the world: a vacant gaze, a leaf, the action of drinking a glass of water. These are moments not obviously accounted for by Marx's formulations. *Réimon*'s non-rational treatment of time might therefore be seen to highlight the passage to post-Fordist working practices. Where, in post-war Europe, 'an ideology that presented progress as inevitable and universal [...] stressed smooth minimalist efficiency and the abstraction of space' (Boscagli 2014: 128), here time particularises space: long static shots invite close attention to small physical details. The irony, of course, is that the kind of domestic work undertaken by Ramona (as opposed

to that on view in *Mitómana*) is undoubtedly *pre*-Fordist, originating in an era before mass industrial production. We begin to see here how *Réimon* disrupts the chronology of European or Eurocentric theoretical models, whether Deleuze and Guattari's smooth space or Virno's general intellect.

The points of contact between these two approaches are in fact thrown into relief in this context. Deleuze and Guattari note, somewhat more elliptically than Virno, Marx's prediction that 'machines would themselves become productive of surplus value', so that while 'it remains true that all labor involves surplus labor, [...] surplus labor no longer requires labor' (571). In other words, surplus-value can be generated without any work being done: Deleuze and Guattari give examples of 'children, the retired, the unemployed, television viewers', to which we might add film spectators. This kind of deterritorialized '*smooth capital*' operates, they argue, across 'every semiotic system' (572, original emphasis). Virno's theses on the general intellect and the exteriorisation of thought spring to mind here. Yet both he and Deleuze and Guattari seem to adopt a sequential and at points teleological approach to this analysis: Virno argues that post-Fordist labour follows the Fordist sort, and the authors of *A Thousand Plateaus* hold that striated capital gives rises to smooth capital. *Réimon* suggests that virtuosic or affective labour occurs in conditions not unique to the 'modern' era: here, as in the films discussed in the previous chapter, the significance of modernity is brought into question. As we will see in the following section, defining exactly what Ramona is employed to *do* is not altogether straightforward, and her job at points appears to have as much to do with presence and performance as with productive activity.

Moreno's film, then, claims a marginal position for itself even as it undermines the assumptions that often lie behind centre/margin oppositions (or indeed oppositions between the modern and the pre-modern). This refusal to engage in the delineation of clear binaries is also apparent in *Réimon*'s explicit staging of the difficulties inherent in a contemporary approach to Marx's thought (as we have seen, both Deleuze and Guattari and Virno demonstrate a similar ambivalence, drawing on Marx and simultaneously aiming to move beyond him). The rethinking of materialism that might emerge from this attitude points to a significant shift in the terms in which political engagement and solidarity are thought.

Conflicting materialisms: theory against practice?

A new definition of the material or materialism can be approached via *Réimon*'s unpredictable treatment of time, which has an important effect on the meanings that a spectator might attach to the spaces and surfaces of the dwellings in which Ramona works. Moreno's camera often lingers in place after Ramona has disappeared from view behind a doorframe or wall (this occurs frequently during the sequence in Eduardo's apartment discussed above). The domestic spaces in *Réimon* are not 'produced' or differentiated by labour: though we see Ramona undertaking various tasks, her employers' homes are characterised as much by inaction and by performative acts (reading and playing music) as by her work. Like *Mitómana*, *Réimon* also challenges an understanding of space in terms of a relation between work and product, though unlike *Mitómana* it does so not through a refusal to present film form as a finished product (i.e. as a temporally coherent diegetic world), but instead through an insistent focus on particular objects and materials, on textures and surfaces. *Réimon* presents this questioning most acutely in sequences which take place in an apartment which is home to a young couple who spend their time reading out aloud passages from Marx's *Capital* on working hours, urban design, and the exploitation of the labour force. The film highlights the couple's hypocrisy by contrasting their ostentatious theoretical engagement with the silent tedium of Ramona's work. Filmic images are thus opposed to the spoken word.

This becomes apparent if we consider the first sequence in which the staged readings from Marx take place. The couple read to each other a passage which argues that the rich are distinguished from the poor not by the possession of land or wealth, but by their control of labour. The man demonstrates his hearty agreement with this idea, exclaiming '¡ahí está!', before going to listen to music from a vinyl record player. As he does so, he waves at Ramona, who is partially visible through a window. The following shots produce a juxtaposition that makes the couple's hypocrisy still more evident: as the man sings along in English to a record (not audible for the spectator, as he is wearing headphones), Ramona goes to start her work. What is revealed here is not just the absence of any connection between Marx's theory and everyday practices, but also, I argue, a vision of those practices as unpredictable and not easily assimilable into a structuralist intellectual or theoretical framework. One way in which this vision is articulated is via the film's emphasis on the performative aspect of Ramona's work: so frequent are the shots of her inaction that one might wonder if she is paid in part simply to *be* in the apartment, as a reminder of her employers' social status. Following the sequence described above, as the man listens to his record in the background and Ramona sweeps the floor in the foreground, he unplugs the headphones and invites her to dance, calling her 'Réimon'. Ramona's awkward dance with her employer reminds the viewer that the domestic interior's capacity to facilitate performance does not have a predetermined ethical status: this dance is a performance of hierarchy and authority. The nickname 'Réimon', a phonetic rendering of the English name Raymond, can moreover be interpreted as the exercise of control over Ramona's gender identity, or a disavowal of the fact that this supposedly Marxist couple is using the labour of a female, racially distinct other as the background to their domestic life. It would thus be difficult to view this performative shift in identity as a liberating one for Ramona.[96]

The second way in which *Réimon* designates the sphere of the everyday or domestic as not incorporable into larger intellectual narratives is through its attention to objects and to nonhuman forms of life. The film may thus be said to stage an encounter between Marxian materialism and theories which have been termed new materialisms. It would

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[96] The fact that Moreno's film adopts this nickname as its title is therefore somewhat unsettling: a generous reading would be that it points to its own potential complicity in 'othering' its protagonist.

be impossible to provide a single satisfactory definition of how these new currents of thought diverge from traditional historical materialism, but their difference can in part be explained through their emphasis on the vitality and aleatory nature of matter and the agentic capacity of nonhuman elements. Maurizia Boscagli provides this summary:

> [t]he older materialism insists that under the system of capital every object is always already commodified; the new materialism insists on the fungibility of matter and on the plasticity possible at the moment of subject-object interaction. (2014: 4)

The film camera itself is an important mechanism through which this plasticity might operate: I will return to this notion, and what Boscagli terms 'technoaesthetics', below. Diana Coole and Samantha Frost note that the new materialisms evince not only a 'posthumanist ontological orientation', but also a concern with biopolitical issues, and, crucially, 'a critical and nondogmatic reengagement with political economy' (2010: 7). It is this last aspect which is perhaps of greatest interest in the context of Moreno's film. A new materialist perspective on *Réimon* can allow the tracing of substantive links between the practices of everyday life and broader (bio)political concerns, but in a manner which avoids crystallisation into an overly constructivist theoretical form that disregards its material circumstances. Such is the judgement seemingly passed on Marx's *Capital* by Moreno's film: the staged readings of his text arguably render it *immaterial*, part of a virtuosic performance. The incorporation of new materialist viewpoints may also permit a recuperation of the material aspects of 'immaterial' or affective labour undertaken by Ramona.

In every shot of Ramona at work, some part of the domestic environment intrudes into the frame, acting as an internal border and obscuring the spectator's vision. Before the dance sequence described above, the lefthand third of a shot of Ramona making a bed shows nothing but a wall and the doorframe. It is striking that the couple's copy of *Capital* is visible on the bedside table in the room as Ramona works: Marx's theory is quite literally circumscribed by the material environment (fig. 3.11). Moreover, as noted above, Moreno's camera rests for surprising lengths of time on objects which cannot

easily be taken as evidence for the relevance of Marx's analysis of the working day: the dogs at Ramona's house, and plants in a garden in the surrounding area, for instance.

[image redacted for copyright reasons]

Figure 3.11 *Réimon*

This heightened attention to the natural world is reminiscent of an earlier Argentine film, *Bonanza* (Rosell 2001), a documentary about a man living in a makeshift house at the edge of Buenos Aires, who makes his living from a variety of unorthodox activities, such as the trapping and selling of wild birds. The protagonist's house is home to an array of captive animals and a heap of disused cars, and the film's erratic narrative structure and handheld camerawork make any clear distinction between 'natural' exterior and 'civilised' interior impossible. Rosell's film presents the urban margins as the location of unpredictable, creative working practices, and offers no obvious moral or ideological lesson. [97] *Réimon* is far more formally restrained than *Bonanza*, but Moreno shares with Rosell, with whom he who collaborated on *El descanso* (Moreno and others 2002), a desire to avoid clichéd representation and the subjugation of daily life to political theory.

Within *Réimon*'s diegesis, it is apparent that the passages read from Marx's *Capital* lose their explanatory power not only due to the hypocrisy of the readers, but also because the labour the film showcases is not of the productive, 'physicosocial' sort, to adopt the term used by Deleuze and Guattari (2013: 570). So the affirmation, for instance, that 'el trabajo de los pobres es la mina de los ricos' rings hollow in the context of Ramona's sporadic tidying and cleaning. Deleuze and Guattari's inclusion of the media and entertainment industries in their analysis of the development of 'smooth capital' is particularly pertinent here, as it leads us towards a reflection on the kind of labour undertaken by the film viewer. *Réimon* demands considerable attention and patience from its spectators, and does not offer a conventional conclusion (or, to use a suitably

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[97] The more recent *La mujer de los perros* (Citarella and Llinás 2015) is similar in a number of ways: it depicts the periphery of Buenos Aires as a mysterious environment, and the protagonist inhabits a self-built, ramshackle dwelling that she shares with a large group of dogs.

economic phrase, 'pay-off') in return. Just as the value produced by Ramona's work is unclear, so the structure of the film can be seen to subvert the normal functioning of cinema's 'attention economy', alluded to earlier in this chapter.

Art histories

One issue which remains unresolved from this discussion is that of the attitude the film adopts towards the labour of its performers. As noted above, they are excluded from the breakdown of hours and costs at the film's beginning, and while Moreno has stated in interview that Marcela Dias, who plays Ramona, is a non-professional actor (García Calvo [n.d.]), there is no way of discerning, within the diegesis, a difference between her and the film's professional participants. This could be seen as a democratising gesture, but one might also ask what, therefore, is achieved by this casting decision. Is Moreno simply searching for a degree of authenticity, or 'autoridad vicaria', as Prividera states is the case in *Cama adentro* (2014: 83)? The director of *Réimon* claims that '[c]uando la película toma elementos reales de la protagonista es porque entiende que son irrepresentables', and moreover asserts that '[a] esta altura de la historia del cine, "la vida pobre" ya no se puede representar bajo los parámetros del realismo' (García Calvo [n.d.]).

Yet Moreno's reasoning is not fully borne out by his film: while the unconventional treatment of time and the staged quality of the readings from Marx do work against a realist reading, other aspects of *Réimon* reinforce its quasi-documentary qualities. I am thinking here of the use of high-definition digital video, and the manner in which the camera lingers on innocuous, everyday things, whether they are plants or household clutter on a desk. These objects, like the 'refuse' and the 'familiar' objects that Kracauer describes in his *Theory of Film* (1997: 54-56), mark not a singular, comfortable realism – as does Flaubert's barometer for Barthes (1968) – but rather what Kracauer calls 'special modes of reality', things normally unseen (1997: 46). These objects are, as discussed above, a material excess which subtly challenges theoretical interpretation of

the lived experience on display. *Réimon* thus resets the 'parámetros del realismo' to which its director alludes. Not all of this work is visible, however: the idea that *Réimon* is in some sense *presenting*, rather than *re*presenting, a life lived between the urban margins and the centre, is not necessarily clear to the spectator. There is no indication within the diegesis that the actor playing Ramona really lives where she is shown to, or that her family members in the film are in fact relatives of Marcela Dias, although both of these statements are true (García Calvo [n.d.]). Moreno's theorising of his film thus finds only confused echoes in its formal characteristics. This gap between theory and practice might be seen as a reiteration of the operation Moreno's camera carries out with regards to Marx's text: the production of a perspective which does not lend itself to structural theorisations of the social.

Where *Mitómana* self-consciously plays with film form in order to lay bare its status as the (unfinished) product of labour, in *Réimon* this tactic is less apparent. This is not to say, however, that Moreno's film offers no reflection on its status as cultural artefact. At the end of the opening credits sequence, the film's title appears as 'REIMON una película dirigida y escrita por rodrigo moreno'. The component words in this phrase appear and then disappear in an unpredictable order, and 'una película' is the last part to remain on screen (fig. 3.12). The prominence of the label 'una película' might be read in this light as an anti-realist gesture, a foregrounding of the work which challenges the illusion of its being a window onto reality. A question then arises around what sort of relationship can be traced between the work of the film itself, and the domestic work it depicts. Here, I suggest, it is not simply one of contrast: the aestheticizing gestures of the camera in fact transform Ramona's work from mere sign of the wealth of others into a critique both of capitalist employment structures and of a superficial approach to Marx's *Capital*.

[image redacted for copyright reasons]

Figure 3.12 *Réimon*

[image redacted for copyright reasons]

Figure 3.13 *Réimon*

It is certainly possible to view Moreno's patient examination of colour and texture, such as in the long take devoted to Ramona's arrangement of pillows and a bedsheet (fig. 3.13), as a search for aesthetic beauty in the mundane tasks depicted. It is tempting to cast this aestheticizing impulse as a negation of the banality and tedium of Ramona's labour. However, if we conceive of the film camera as a technology that facilitates the blurring of subject-object boundaries, and, in parallel, of aesthetics as 'an important technology of matter, a *dispositif* through which materiality comes into being' (Boscagli 2014: 4, original emphasis), then the ethical status of this gesture becomes less clear. Moreno's camera, as an instrument of what Boscagli terms technoaesthetics, can in fact be seen to facilitate a vision of the matter it films – whether objects or built environments – not simply as 'a source of false consciousness' (5), as traditional historical materialism would have it, but rather as the possessor of an 'improper beauty' that allows the questioning of 'systems of power and signification' (10-11).[98] The frequent prominence of internal frames – provided, for instance, by the walls of the apartment – within the shot has, in this light, at least two key functions: it both emphasises the partiality of the vision the film offers of Ramona's work, and simultaneously designates her interactions with the material environment as worthy of aesthetic consideration. The camera's sustained attention to the everyday objects Ramona cleans and reorders not only marks film's indexical relation to the material world, then, but also denotes a style that both values Ramona's labour and demands a kind of labour of attention from the spectator.[99] It is thus the film's most powerful mechanism for showing up the hypocrisy of Ramona's 'Marxist' employers. It is for this

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[98] We might also think here of Iris Marion Young's contention that 'homemaking' can be an affirmative materialisation of identity for the women who undertake it (2005: 140) . In this view, Ramona's work would affirm her individual identity, against the deformation represented by the nickname 'Réimon'. The sticking point for this reading is that Young claims homemaking 'gives material support to the identity of *those whose home it is*' (140, my emphasis).
[99] On slow cinema and labour, see various essays in *Slow Cinema* (De Luca and Barradas Jorge 2015).

reason that Boscagli claims that aesthetics is what allows 'new materialism' to engage in social critique:[100] the development of an 'improper' aesthetics of domestic labour in *Réimon* reveals the potential for readings of Marx to become 'systems of power and signification' that bear little relation to their material surroundings.

In reductive terms, Moreno's decision to search for beauty in a crumpled bedsheet might nonetheless be viewed as a popularisation of the aesthetic, an operation which *Réimon* undertakes elsewhere rather less subtly. In the first sequence that shows Ramona at work in Eduardo's apartment, classical music (Debussy's *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*) is heard, but it is not clear whether it is extradiegetic or intradiegetic in nature. Close to the end of the film, Ramona is seen putting a CD into the stereo in the same apartment, and the same music begins to play. This revelation may be intended as a challenge to class-based preconceptions of Ramona's musical tastes. However, it appears to run somewhat counter to the more critical aesthetics outlined above: if the thought expressed here is 'working class people can appreciate high culture', then an innate positive value is implicitly attached to that (European) high culture. This apparent return of cultural hierarchy can be found, with a different inflection, in the techniques with which Moreno's camera approaches the everyday. An extended shot of Ramona peeling and cutting potatoes, for instance, is a clear homage to the work of Belgian director Chantal Akerman, whose film *Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1975) contains a similar (although even longer) shot.[101] The reference here is certainly apposite: Akerman's film is the paradigmatic exploration in twentieth-century European cinema of the time and materiality of a woman's work in the home (Margulies 2009). Moreno's recourse to images similar to those of a European model is not necessarily cause for critique, then, so much as a reminder that works of art always find themselves inscribed into historical traditions, consciously or otherwise. Indeed, it

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[100] Coole and Frost make a parallel argument in proposing that structural social theories risk overestimating human 'construction and authorship' (2010: 26). Intriguingly, they suggest autonomist Marxism, of the sort that influenced Negri and Virno, as one potential mechanism for avoiding this tendency (28). I will return to the points of contact between Virno's thought and new materialism in the conclusion to this chapter.

[101] The Chilean film *Naomi Campbel* (Donoso and Videla 2013), which deals with the life of a transgender woman in one of Santiago's *poblaciones*, includes a comparable homage to Akerman's film.

is possible to read the formal characteristics of 'art cinema',[102] on which *Réimon* draws, as allowing an independence of political perspective that echoes the medium's claim to specificity. Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover write that

> [s]ince art cinema authors often speak from outside of Europe or America or locate themselves outside the mainstream of representational practices, it could be argued that authorship takes on a pressing significance for thinking the potential of art cinema as a platform for political agency. (2010: 8)

In this view, Moreno's aesthetics and his deliberate avoidance of public funding via the INCAA can be seen as a statement of political independence: he has made clear that he wished to avoid state funding 'porque pensaba que era contradictorio y hasta canalla pedirle dinero al estado que oprime y explota al personaje principal' (Molas 2015).[103] As I will discuss in the conclusion, however, the very limited circulation that the adoption of such a stance implies is more easily construed as a limit to political agency. Indeed, if there are political projects in *Réimon* and *Mitómana*, they are very tentatively articulated. In both cases, forms of supposedly 'immaterial' work are presented as unavoidably material ('material' here referring, as noted, to a process of engagement between subject and world rather than to inert matter). The domestic interior as material environment is set up in opposition to theoretical frameworks or collective political activity, and the directors of both films make concerted efforts to undercut established cinematic depictions of the urban margins as fundamentally passive spaces of despair into which the filmmaker ventures in order to extract social truth. The films' sophisticated consideration of how the labour of filmmaking interacts with the work they depict creates the possibility of a solidarity between spectator and protagonist that is based on commonality of sensory experience rather than on class- or place-based identification (as we have seen, such strategies are ridiculed or rendered impossible in

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[102] Galt and Schoonover define these as 'overt engagement of the aesthetic, unrestrained formalism, and a mode of narration that is pleasurable but loosened from classical structures and distanced from its representations. By modern standards, the art film might be seen as too slow or excessive in its visual style, use of color, or characterization' (2010: 6).

[103] His film did however receive support from the Hubert Bals Fund, a branch of the International Film Festival Rotterdam that has become known as a major supporter of Latin American filmmaking, and has been accused by some of providing a 'paternalistic, one-way flow of aid' (Ross 2011: 263).

these cases). Yet the fact that the work of film can always ultimately be taken as *art*work means that *Mitómana* and *Réimon* inevitably find themselves in dialogue with other aesthetic and political traditions, such as García Espinosa's *cine imperfecto* and Akerman's feminist realism. As is often the case for avant-garde works, the rupture here is not as complete as the directors claim in comments outside the diegesis.

Conclusion

This chapter began with the observation that the small-scale tragicomic narratives of films like *Cama adentro* and *La nana* might be said to disavow the ways in which the persistence of domestic employment in Argentina and Chile reflects broader social inequality. Indeed, they arguably render domestic work immaterial and performative, and align the spectator's perspective with that of the resident employer. *Mitómana* and *Réimon*, as we have seen, have no such reassuring domesticating function. In differing ways, they present a vision of this work which is more challenging and altogether less homely. In *Mitómana*, there is a refusal to represent clearly or demarcate the boundaries of the domestic interior, which becomes a refusal to engage in a predictable form of cinematic realism (the type, founded on enclosure, which Corro Penjean identifies with an act of 'normalización constructiva' [2012: 19]). Moreno's *Réimon*, conversely, focuses so closely (and at such length) on the material attributes of the domestic space as to render them obstacles to Marxist theorisation: its aesthetics are truly *improper* in that they impede the designation of everyday objects as mere property, as signs within an ideological system that can easily be mapped out. Moreover, both films move beyond the walls of the house to the urban margins in order to show how domestic life is inextricably bound up with flows of labour and capital across the city (or, in Deleuze and Guattari's terms, how space is never entirely smooth or striated, but a mixture of the two [2013: 552]).

These two films are clearly critical works, then, in that they question hegemonic modes of cinematic representation. Yet they are also critical, I argue, of the possibility of constructive political filmmaking. As discussed above, *Mitómana* stages various forms of political action or protest, but suggests that all are ultimately unsatisfactory, while

Réimon is in large part predicated on the exhaustion of Marx's *Capital* as a political referent. We have seen that the figure of the multitude helps to articulate how Sepúlveda and Adriazola's film works against conventional political thought, but is less useful in describing a new political project. It might also seem at first glance that *Réimon* does nothing more than pull apart previously influential theoretical frameworks. These works stage competing political discourses, in other words, and find them all wanting.

This impasse finds visual form in the films' unconventional representation of housing: in *Mitómana*'s fragmentary and poorly-lit shots, and in *Réimon*'s unusual depiction of the urban periphery as a tranquil space. Both films make use of atypical formal strategies, often related to the manipulation of cinematic time, in order to accord the built environment an unpredictable protagonism and vitality: houses in these films are not defined in opposition to workspaces, but are a constitutive element of working practices (or, on occasion, of the manifest absence of work). We might think back here to Bernstein's assertion that a more dynamic understanding of housing allows the recognition that our dwelling-spaces in fact open onto 'a field of rubble where no identity is stable' (2008: 13). *Mitómana* and *Réimon*, considered in these terms, might then permit the development of a politics that does not rely on closed, domesticating figuration of the sort which Corro Penjean identifies, nor appeals to collective identities that the films present as exhausted, like a trade union or a class (in a Marxian sense).[104] What these films propose is an incipient affective solidarity with their protagonists: a sharing of experience that wilfully disregards boundaries of property or propriety. In this respect, they recall the 'affective proximity' identified by Domitilla Olivieri in recent European observational documentaries (2016: 147). Olivieri concerns herself with 'the temporal and spatial realities of transnational subjects' and the 'contours and identities of contemporary postcolonial Europe', but as we will see more clearly in the next chapter, theoretical ideas associated with transnational experience in Europe can be equally applied to divisions *within* the nation in Latin America.

The housing inequalities which *Mitómana* and *Réimon* make apparent become, in this view, less a cause for political lament than a potential source of new thought. New

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[104] There is a significant overlap here with Nancy's call for a politics concerned with 'spacing' rather than 'figuring', and with 'an incommensurability that is kept open' (2010: 50).

materialist philosophies offer themselves as a helpful tool, I suggest, for accessing that potential. Braidotti neatly summarises one aspect of this set of perspectives when she states that 'matter is not dialectically opposed to culture, nor to technological mediation, but continuous with them' (2013: 35). In this mode of thought, reminiscent of the notion of 'technoaesthetics' discussed above, material environments such as houses function not as a 'limit of thinking' (Bernstein 2008: 14), but as a crucial part of it. This approach may also help recuperate the material aspects of supposedly 'immaterial' labour (whether it is that of a domestic worker or that of a film actor) and clarify the triangular relation between film, housing and labour established earlier in the chapter. All three elements, in this view, are engaged in the resignification of matter as culture, and all resist co-option into ideological frameworks. A new materialist perspective, lastly, helps outline the limits of theoretical evocations of the multitude: it is intriguing to note that Braidotti criticises thinkers such as Hardt, Negri and Virno for failing to give enough consideration to technology and its effects (2013: 43). On the one hand, we might think here of Virno's insistence that a film director's 'detached' view of the world represents an opposing pole to the 'omnilateral and simultaneous adhesion to every present order' that characterises post-Fordist subjectivity (1996: 32). *Mitómana* and *Réimon* give the lie to such a narrow view of cinematic aesthetics. Conversely, though, cinema's indexical character renders some of the more utopian aspects of the multitude harder to sustain. Hardt and Negri's evocation of the 'flesh of the multitude' (2006: 212), for instance, as an 'open' successor to delimited bodies, residing 'in the communication and collaboration of social conduct' (200), cannot account for the particularity of the bodies and spaces seen in these films. Here again, the pretensions of political theory are subverted.

These observations are of course of limited value if they are not situated in relation to national and regional contexts. I would not advocate reading these films as simple signs of cultural and political realities in Argentina and Chile, but their very complexity can serve as an indicator of certain trends in these countries. The fundamental instability of *Mitómana*'s form, for example, might be seen as a reiteration of the continued spread of neoliberal modes of thought and government in twenty-first century Chile, whose consequence is that neither employment, nor public services, nor the home itself can offer a secure source of identity. *Mitómana*'s method of resistance is, paradoxically, a

repetition of this insecurity at the level of film form. It can, therefore, be identified as an example of what Fornazzari terms 'speculative fictions': works that take on 'the task of narrating emerging neoliberal forms' (2013: 116). Sepúlveda and Adriazola's film is in this respect similar to Diamela Eltit's *Mano de obra* (2004), a novel that, perhaps even more explicitly than *Mitómana*, articulates the extent to which precarious labour arrangements affect and destabilise the domestic sphere. Neither work proposes an obvious solution to this state of affairs, but it could at least be argued that the exposure they offer gives space for alternatives to be thought.

The context in which *Réimon* was produced is at first glance strikingly different. Moreno's film was released in 2014: by that date, eleven years of government by Néstor Kirchner and then Cristina Fernández de Kirchner had firmly reinstated notions of the public good and the welfare of the marginalised in national political discourse.[105] *Réimon* is very clearly concerned with the potential chasm between discourse and action, though, and whilst one should be wary of over-identifying the characteristics of a work with the opinions of its creator, it is surely not irrelevant that Moreno has been critical of the perceived hypocrisy of some Kirchnerist figures.[106] He proclaims his independence from state-associated funding sources as loudly as Sepúlveda and Adriazola, but his is a very different kind of 'independent' cinema from that of the directors of *Mitómana*: in place of their vaunted horizontality, *Réimon* stages a denunciation of thoughtless intellectualism in a style that paradoxically appeals to the traditions of auteurist filmmaking. The most striking quality of Moreno's film is its ability to turn these techniques to the service of a widening of cinematic horizons, to include locations as unremarkable and typically invisible, in filmic terms, as the Buenos Aires suburb of Florencio Varela. This peripheral area is, moreover, presented in a fashion that avoids the clichéd conception of 'marginality' visible in other films from the period. Indeed, both *Réimon* and *Mitómana* are, in their differing ways, notably sceptical of the category of 'marginality' itself. This strategy at least partially invalidates one of

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[105] A law establishing working hours and rights for domestic staff was passed in 2013, during the presidency of Cristina Fernández de Kirchner ('Promulgan La Ley Para Empleadas Domésticas' 2013).

[106] In 2015, Moreno posted a photo on Twitter of the Kirchnerist politician Martín Sabbatella and musician Fito Paez laughing and relaxing, while two maids look on from the kitchen. His caption suggested that *Réimon* would help its audience 'entender esta foto' (@doctormoren, 10 July 2015).

the charges Prividera raises against the *nuevo cine argentino*: while *Réimon* might be said to revel in 'la no oculta banalidad de algunos de sus devaneos', it is manifestly not 'una visión del mundo que traduce sin distancia crítica el encierro de los hijos de la burguesía' (2014: 47).

Of what, then, might it be a vision? What, if anything, is constructed by the poetics of these films? Certainly not any stable identities related to place or to work. Nor would it be easy to talk of the *interpellation* of the spectator, given the extent to which that term presupposes a specific ideological framework. How, then, might the spectator's engagement be described? What kind of agency is afforded him or her to develop new, more satisfactory forms of political organisation? No obvious answer is offered here to Beverley's call for Latin Americanism to forge

> a new kind of politics that interpellates 'the people' not as a unitary, homogenously modern subject, but rather, in the fashion of Bauer's 'communities of will', as internally fissured, heterogeneous, multiple. (2011: 41)

Indeed, *Mitómana* and *Réimon*, in giving visual form to such an idea, might be said to demonstrate just how challenging its realisation could be. Virno's characterisation of multitude subjectivity as 'pure potential' here seems accurate to the point of generating inertia (2004: 81). The fact that neither of these films is readily available either online or in physical form poses this problem still more sharply – and is somewhat ironic, given that the legal – and on occasion literal – invisibility of domestic workers remains a significant challenge to their attainment of full workers' rights.[107]

Perhaps the only way of preserving any sense for the concept of construction in these works is to see them as constructing provisional spaces of affective identification. These films pose the question of whether commonality of experience is possible without stable common spaces. Latour argues that tracking associations between human and

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[107] An article in the Argentine newspaper *La Nación* claimed in 2013 that only 16% of domestic workers would benefit from recently introduced labour rights, as the rest were not formally registered as employed (Mantero 2013). On the question of literal visibility, a controversy in a gated neighbourhood near Santiago in 2012 revealed that domestic workers were obliged to enter and leave the community in a van, rather than on foot (Univision 2012).

nonhuman actors can lead to 'a shared definition of a common world', if the right 'procedures to render it common' are in place (2005: 247). These films offer only qualified support for that approach, suggesting that those procedures may not be easily achievable. In the final chapter, I consider two names for such processes, hospitality and cosmopolitanism, and investigate how far they might account for the crossings and intrusions that characterise the Argentine and Chilean domestic sphere on screen.

Chapter 4. A hospitable medium? *Una semana solos* and *Las cosas como son*

In each of the preceding chapters, houses have played host to unexpected encounters across social boundaries, and also presented material obstacles to harmonious cohabitation. As we have seen, these moments open questions over the relation of the house to subjectivity, and over the potential of domestic space to act as the ground for more inclusive forms of community. The films I analyse in this final chapter – Celina Murga's *Una semana solos* (2007) and Fernando Lavanderos' *Las cosas como son* (2012) – invite more direct consideration of how fruitful such encounters might be. I read these films in light of the recent turn to hospitality as an ethical paradigm in European and North American critical theory, suggesting that they point to some limits of its application in contemporary Latin America. The films also suggest nuances for the revived scholarly interest in the related notion of cosmopolitanism, which is particularly pertinent for *Las cosas como son*, given its transnational elements. I will however argue that, like other films analysed in this thesis, it challenges the spectator to consider how cosmopolitanism might be thought *domestically*, both in relation to local dwellings and to the nation. The films thus offer, I suggest, new avenues for rethinking the home as a point of intersection or threshold between private and public in a context of constant urban transformation.

Much of the impetus behind the critical interest in hospitality since the turn of the millennium is to be found in the late writings of Jacques Derrida, who in works such as *Of Hospitality* (Derrida and Dufourmantelle 2000) and 'Hostipitality' (Derrida 2000) interrogates the concept's multiple political and ethical aporia. As will be discussed further below, Derrida identifies an irresolvable tension between what he terms the hospitality of *invitation*, in which the issuing of a welcome reaffirms ownership and a dominant subject-position, and that of *visitation*, which is the appearance of an unexpected arrival, and implies a decentring of the subject (2000: 13–14). Derrida's paradigm has undeniable value: the analysis of the relationship between the offer of a welcome and the exercise of power over property is, as we will see, particularly apposite for the films I discuss in this chapter. This frame of reference has yielded

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fruitful work from scholars such as Mireille Rosello, Pheng Cheah, and others, on whose contributions I will draw here.

Yet it also has clear limitations, among which is a question of form. Derrida explicitly poses the question of hospitality in linguistic terms: he discusses, for instance, the link between *Wirtbarkeit*, a word for hospitality used by Kant, and *Wirtschaft*, thus connecting hospitality to questions of economic and household law (via the Greek *oikonomia*) (2000: 3–4). He also plays on the ambiguity of the French term *hôte*, which can mean 'host' or 'guest' (6), and on the similarity of *acception* (denoting the accepted meaning of a word) and *acceptation* (a gesture or act of acceptance) (7). Language is clearly important in this context: at first sight, at least, oral or written language is a fundamental component of any public sphere in which concepts of hospitality might be discussed. However, here, as in previous chapters, I am interested in how film's attention to material environments renders them part of social interactions: for instance, how the form of a gated neighbourhood in Buenos Aires alters conceptions of *insiders* and *outsiders*. One might think here of Pasolini's distinction between literary languages and film language: where the former 'have an immediate legitimacy as instruments (pure and simple instruments), which do, in fact, serve to communicate', cinematic form lacks 'concrete instrumental precedents' and appears 'arbitrary and aberrant' (2005: 167). In this view, an understanding of a shot as a semiotic unit must necessarily draw on 'gestures and brute reality' (168), so that

> *[t]he linguistic instrument on which film is predicated is* [...] *of an irrational type*: and this explains the deeply oneiric quality of the cinema, and also its concreteness as, let us say, object, which is both absolute and impossible to overlook. (169, original emphasis)

A writer has a pre-existing, communicative language on which to draw, in other words, whereas a filmmaker each time invents his or her own language, since film's 'grammatical signs are the objects of a world which is chronologically exhausted each time it is depicted' (170). It appears difficult to argue, in this context, that cinema might constitute a public sphere, at least in the Habermasian sense of a common understanding achieved through rational debate (Habermas 1992). I will therefore

consider, towards end of the chapter, how far cinema can act as a vector for the kind of redemptive erasure of boundaries that Derrida and others envisage as the (always deferred) endpoint of a thought of hospitality.[108] As will become clear, the economic conditions of film production and distribution can be seen to restrict such a project.

Before turning to the films themselves, I will note one further qualification to a a Derridean model of hospitality, to do with geopolitics. The European focus of Derrida's work and subsequent scholarship has led to a privileging of issues relating to transnational migration and postcolonial legacies:[109] Derrida himself constantly plays on the multiple meanings of the French *étranger*, which can imply a stranger, a foreigner, or a foreign country (Derrida and Dufourmantelle 2000). In the Southern Cone, movements of people within nations have carried with them many of the cultural or 'racial' markers of difference associated by European critics with the crossing of national borders. The analysis I undertake here does not, therefore, just question the ability of one nation to be 'home' for a citizen of another, but also considers how material and social changes fragment the metaphorical construction of nation as home, rendering fellow citizens as *étrangers* in the dual sense described above. I will thus argue here for the importance of close attention to specific histories of urban development. Moreover, while it does not feature directly in my argument, the political charge conferred on domestic space by the violation of the home in state-sanctioned abductions in both Argentina and Chile remains a haunting reminder of the difficulty of viewing domestic space as a site of productive social encounters. Pablo Trapero's film *El clan* (2015), which dramatises the kidnappings undertaken by the Puccio family soon after the transition to democracy in the 1980s, powerfully shows how the practices of the military dictatorship came to have an uncanny afterlife in Argentine culture. The Puccios' conversion of their basement into a holding cell for their victims can be thought of as a perverse privatisation of state policy.

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[108] This question in a sense returns to and interrogates Kracauer's faith in film's capacity to redeem the fragmentation of everyday urban life by mapping its 'resilient texture' and rendering visible 'the elementary things which men in general have in common' (1997: 304, 310).

[109] See, for instance, Paula E. Geyh's discussion of postcolonial hospitality and cosmopolitanism in the cinema of Michael Haneke (2011).

In this context, I ask whether it is possible, in recent productions from Argentina and Chile, to see instances of hospitality as an 'interruptive practice' (Rosello 2013: 127), a mode of behaviour that disrupts identitarian norms. The films analysed so far certainly present encounters that challenge traditional conceptions of the family, and of domestic space as removed from the sphere of political debate. In *El otro día*, Agüero turns encounters at the threshold of his house into the structuring principle for his film, tracing unexpected lines of connection across Santiago. Yet there is less evidence to suggest the creation of durable new forms of interaction, or the dissolution of social hierarchies: while Agüero is received as a guest by many of the people he films, very rarely does he permit them access to his house. In *El hombre de al lado*, meanwhile, Leonardo jealously guards not only physical access to his home, but also the right to look at it.

In *Una semana solos* and *Las cosas como son*, the arrival of unexpected or unwanted guests is still more prominent. These are works in which, in Derrida's terms, what is at issue is the hospitality of visitation, not that of invitation. Differentiating between a guest, an intruder, and a captive is not, in these films, an easy task. The films also make clear the impact of specific material and political circumstances on the possibility of gestures of welcome. I analyse these in two broad movements: first, by thinking through the growth of gated neighbourhood*s* in late twentieth- and early twenty-first century Buenos Aires. *Una semana solos* is set in one such neighbourhood, and makes startling claims about the consequences of life in an enclosed environment on children's ability to discern the boundaries of property. Implicit in Murga's film is the suggestion that the act of filmmaking itself rests on a similar disregard for notions of property or propriety. Turning to consider *Las cosas como son*, I argue that Lavanderos demonstrates an uncommon awareness of how the 'hospitality' apparent in transnational modes of film production disrupts local identities in a manner that extends beyond the diegetic narrative. Jerónimo, the film's protagonist, rents out rooms in his house to foreigners, but the actions of one guest, the young Norwegian woman Sanna, put both his business model and his sense of his place in Santiago at risk. Lavanderos' narrative therefore provokes a consideration of how notions of cosmopolitanism may either act in concert with or disrupt movements of capital. The question ultimately posed by these films, I

suggest, is one of conviviality: whether the domestic sphere is presented as a space where social relations are forged and strengthened, or as one where they fall apart.

Una semana solos

It is probably uncontroversial to claim that the city of Buenos Aires has never been entirely at ease with its edges. Gorelik argues that from the 1960s onwards, cultural representations of *porteño* identity overwhelmingly focus on either the city centre or the *villa*, creating a dialectic of modern progress and misery. Meanwhile, the 'conurbano' continued to grow in population and become physically more integrated into the urban fabric, without achieving significant cultural visibility (2016). Indeed, as discussed in the previous chapter, the prevailing trend in recent Argentine cinematic productions has been the representation of the urban margins as spaces of violence, poverty and despair. The periphery of Buenos Aires is not uniformly composed of working-class neighbourhoods, however, and in recent years Argentine cinema has paid increasing attention to the middle- and upper-class enclaves found outside the Avenida General Paz, the ring road that divides the capital 'proper' from its suburbs in the Province of Buenos Aires. The development of gated communities known as *country clubs* (now most often simply called *countries*) and *barrios privados* in this area is one of the clearest spatial symptoms of the privatisation of public life in late twentieth-century Argentina (Svampa 2008: 42–43). Unlike the suburbs that arose around the time of the country's centenary celebrations, which achieved a 'dimensión metropolitana' thanks to their extensive political and cultural influence (Gorelik 1998: 18), these later developments remained stubbornly separate from the urban public sphere. *Los que ganaron*, Maristella Svampa's comprehensive account of life in the *countries* and *barrios privados* of late twentieth-century Buenos Aires, offers many testimonies and anecdotes from the residents of such neighbourhoods. Among these is one that presents a striking redefinition of the boundaries of home. María Luz, an architect living in the Bella Vista neighbourhood, states that any unease she had about moving to a gated area was

quickly dispelled, as 'una vez que te abren el portón [the gate of the neighbourhood] decís "ah… ya estoy en casa"' (Svampa 2008: 254).

This sense of relief, which reveals the heightened security concerns among the urban elite (Svampa 2008: 233, 278), masks a complex situation inside the gate. If home begins at the compound walls, how can the boundaries between different properties within the neighbourhood be negotiated? Svampa argues that the increased homogeneity of such environments aids the development of a form of sociability, what she calls the 'sociabilidad del "entre nos"' (126), which responds to the overarching logic of privatization in Argentine society in the period (41). The effects of this homogenisation are, in her view, deeply damaging, particularly for the young. Children are often granted a high degree of autonomy with the confines of the neighbourhood: Svampa documents cases of vandalism to houses which, she argues, result from a lack of familial control and clear boundaries between public and private spaces (104-107). If the entire *country* is configured as 'home', then the individual status of the houses within it is, it seems, put at risk.[110]

One further effect of the new model of sociability outlined by Svampa is, she suggests, a tendency to categorise everything and everyone from outside the compound as 'other'. Since most of the non-residents visible within *countries* and *barrios privados* are there to work (for instance as maids or security guards), social relations between them and resident adopt a 'carácter mercantil' (216). Moreover, these limited and dichotomised relations run along strongly hierarchical lines. Murga's film *Una semana solos*, which follows a group of children in a *country* during a week when the adult members of their family are on holiday, dramatizes many of the dynamics that Svampa identifies. There is, in fact, a direct link between *Los que ganaron* and *Una semana solos*: Murga has recognised in interview that Svampa's book was a key source of inspiration for her project (Halfon 2009). Moreover, in the afterword to the second edition of *Los que ganaron*, the author cites *Una semana solos* (then in production) alongside the novel (and now film) *Las viudas de los jueves* (Piñeiro [2005] 2014; Piñeyro 2009) and the film

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[110] Hence Scorer's succinct characterisation of such neighbourhoods as 'exclusionary commons' (2016: 96).

Cara de queso (Winograd 2006) as examples of the growing cultural interest in life in *countries* and *barrios privados* (Svampa 2008: 276).

It would be both reductive and neglectful of cinematic specificity, however, to see Murga's film as merely a visual rendering of Svampa's observations. My approach to *Una semana solos* will, correspondingly, seek to analyse not only Murga's diegetic illustration of certain behaviours described by Svampa, but also the extent to which the film's cinematography implicates the spectator as a guest, or intruder, in its houses. The opening sequence of *Una semana solos* makes clear the impossibility of separating these two concerns. The film's first shot is of a lake surrounded by grass, a *locus amoenus* seemingly far removed from city life (the sound of birdsong reinforces this impression). The camera, handheld, then tracks behind a girl running through trees, and continues to follow as she (María) and her cousin Fer enter a house. After examining some photos on a mantelpiece, both children comment that they don't recognise anyone. It thus quickly becomes apparent that they are there uninvited: a subsequent shot shows them rifling through a chest of drawers. The spectator is uninvited, too: this might seem a rather banal statement, but Murga's frequent use of handheld shots positioned at the characters' head-height encourages the spectator to assume the camera's gaze, to assume the camera as an avatar of his or her physical presence (fig. 4.1).

[image redacted for copyright reasons]

Figure 4.1 *Una semana solos*

What is perhaps most striking about the camera's gaze during the sequences in which the children enter the houses of others is its languid, relaxed movement. The editing is characterised by a slow tempo of cuts between shots that pan or track slowly to follow the children as they move through the interiors and explore their contents. The lack of suspense, even during the last of such sequences, when they are caught in the act by the *country*'s security officers, is notable. It is as if the spectator is being invited to feel *at*

home in these acts of transgression, and to take pleasure in the material wealth on display in the large, opulent houses on screen. This is not to say, however, that this sort of visual pleasure is presented as innocent, non-hierarchical or entirely different to the gendered kind that Laura Mulvey has famously analysed (1989). The second time the spectator sees the children enter an empty house, one of the boys turns on a television, flicks to a channel showing porn, and appears transfixed by it. The camera rests on his motionless features for several seconds. The implication of this moment, I suggest, is that a parallel is subtly drawn between the sexual transgression of the pornographic broadcast being viewed by a child, and the spatial transgression of his presence in the house. The transgression of property norms is here figured as a transgression of propriety (both of these terms can be expressed in Spanish as *propiedad*). Instances of child sexuality perhaps inevitably sit on the margins of what might be considered 'proper' in cinematic representation, and Murga's film, with its unwavering focus on interactions within a group of children, might be seen as fundamentally *improper* in such terms. At a later moment, María and Fer enter another house by themselves, and the mounting sexual tension between them culminates in a kiss in a bathtub (fig. 4.2). The act of film-viewing might be thought of as trespassing on intimacy, as not entirely dissimilar to the physical trespassing undertaken by Murga's protagonists.

[image redacted for copyright reasons]

Figure 4.2 *Una semana solos*

[image redacted for copyright reasons]

Figure 4.3 *Una semana solos*

Such questions of media are particularly pertinent in environments as rich in technologies of representation as the properties on display here. The houses the children visit are full of hi-tech goods: in the same sequence as the pornographic television channel mentioned above, the spectator sees the children turn on various devices, including a hi-fi and a large widescreen television, so that the shot becomes

host to a profusion of conflicting sounds and images (fig. 4.3). The viewer is thus reminded that these houses are in a sense designed to contain multiple spectacles: they are places where the boundaries between private and public spheres, the 'inside' and the 'outside', are not easily discernible. As was the case in films like *El hombre de al lado* and *El otro día* in previous chapters, here the home is presented as already mediatic, before its representation in film. One might think in this context of Morley's vision of the domestic sphere as 'a nodal point in a complex flow of people, goods and messages' (2000: 172). Perhaps most apposite, though, are Derrida's reflections on the topic: he argues that 'current technological developments are restructuring space in such a way that what constitutes a space of controlled and circumscribed property is just what opens it to intrusion' (Derrida and Dufourmantelle 2000: 61). Elsewhere, he constructs an argument that directly addresses the introduction of film or television cameras into the domestic sphere. In a filmed conversation with Bernard Stiegler, Derrida questions the possibility of authentic expression in an era characterised by the dominance of what he calls 'teletechnologies':

> I am *at home* [chez moi], but with all these machines and all these prostheses watching, surrounding, seducing us, the quote 'natural' conditions of expression, discussion, reflection, deliberation are to a large extent breached, falsified, warped. [...] What is more, the 'home' [*le 'chez-soi'*] to which I just alluded in passing (the *casa* hidden in the *etymon* of this little word '*chez*') is no doubt what is most violently affected by the intrusion, in truth by the breaking and entering [*l'effraction*] of the telepowers we're getting ready to talk about here [...]. (Derrida and Stiegler 2002: 32–33, original emphasis)

Derrida's characterisation of televisual representation as a form of 'breaking and entering' is striking, and he goes on to define the introduction of cameras into the home of another as an act of penetration. This problem becomes for him, crucially, one of ownership: there is much to ask, he suggests, 'about the right to know who owns, who is able to appropriate, who is able to select, who is able to show images, directly political or not' (34). Derrida argues that

> [a] new ethics and a new law or right, in truth, *a new concept of 'hospitality' are at stake* [my emphasis]. What the accelerated development of teletechnologies, of

cyberspace, of the new topology of 'the virtual' is producing is a practical

deconstruction of the traditional and dominant concepts of the state and citizen (and

thus of 'the political') as they are linked to the actuality of a territory. I say

'deconstruction' because, ultimately, what I name and try to think under this word

is, at bottom, nothing other than this very process, its 'taking-place' in such a way

that its happening affects the very experience of place [...]. (36)

There is much to unpick here, not least how the online storage and transmission of films affects the questions of ownership Derrida outlines (I will return to this below). However, the relationship that Derrida articulates here between film, hospitality and place is highly useful for an analysis of *Una semana solos*. Filmic technologies, in this view, disrupt or reconfigure the marking-out of places as *belonging* to certain people, and they do this by assuming a right of universal access, much as the children of Murga's film do. An ethical question then rears its head: does the making of this film, or indeed filmmaking in general, rest on an assumption of *unconditional* hospitality? Film may violate property and propriety, but whose property is that violation?

Before turning to discuss the ethics of the film itself, however, it is worth establishing what permits its protagonists to enter and deface the homes of others without much in the way of hesitation or remorse. This might be thought of as a problem of identification, in a number of inter-connected ways. The first of these has to do with the identification of those possessing equal rights. As noted above, the children are happy to roam through a house in which they don't recognise anyone in the family photos. However, when they do recognise the image of a friend, as occurs on one occasion, one of the group immediately expresses a desire to leave. This moment provides a succinct illustration of the contradictions of Svampa's 'sociabilidad del "entre nos"', a form of sociability in which notions of community and shared rights emerge from the 'cruce de círculos sociales homogéneos' (2008, 143). The question of 'homogeneidad económica' (139) is crucial here, as relative parity of material wealth might be seen to erode public/private dichotomies. Indeed, in practical terms the houses of others within the *country* are assumed by the children to be common property: it is only the appearance of a face known to them that forces a reflection on the norms of privacy that often pertain to the home. This failure of empathy reveals the lack of a conception of

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individual rights beyond proximate social circles. Any notion of citizenship thus seems distant. Indeed, Svampa argues that the social life of *countries* reveals a 'ciudadanía patrimonialista', a notion of belonging predicated on private ownership, whose ultimate consequence is the functioning of the *country* as an autonomous urban structure (Svampa 2008, 189). She cites the lack of cooperation between *countries* and municipal authorities in the district of Pilar as evidence of 'el alcance de la privatización como eje articulador de las relaciones sociales' (195).

This confusion disrupts another form of identification: that which might occur between house and self. The young girl Sofi, who is the quietest and most reflective member of the group of protagonists, is seen early in the film drawing a house on the palm of her hand: 'me encanta dibujarme casas', she tells her older cousin María. Much further into the film's running time, Sofi retreats to undertake the same activity in a bedroom after failing to gain a fair hearing from the boys in the group about shared use of the television. Sofi is the most reluctant of the children to enter the houses of others, and at the film's end, before the security guards catch the group red-handed, she makes her own way home. It is tempting, therefore, to view Sofi as the moral conscience of *Una semana solos*, and as a mediating figure between spectator and diegesis. She is, moreover, the only one of the children who speaks to all, indiscriminately, regardless of gender or class. A sequence near the end of the film, when she performs a song at a party in the *country*, acts as a rare and brief moment in which sociability across class and gender divisions seems possible: Murga's camera offers a wide shot encompassing a large group of young people.

We might think back here to Dubatti's notion of *convivio* as a practice of sociability that resists market forces, though the effect here is certainly not as strong as that of Víctor's improvised puppet theatre in *El hombre de al lado*, or Sofía's monologue in *La Sagrada Familia*. In any case, one might contest Dubatti's assertion that the *convivio* instantiated by theatrical performance necessarily counteracts market forces (2004): in the case of the films analysed in the previous chapter, performance and pretence arguably mimic or even disavow economic relations. In *Una semana solos*, the Italian lyrics that Sofi sings ('Io sono invisibile per te') point to the tenuous nature of any affective relation established in this way. What, then, are the implications of Sofi's drawings? One possible

reading is that the imaginary construction of the entire *country* as a kind of interior in which one feels 'en casa', as Svampa's informant puts it, is ultimately unsatisfactory. Sofi's drawings appear to state a desire for a simpler relation between house and self, one that can easily be rendered as a visual figure. Is this merely a nostalgic gesture, or one that reinforces the traditional identification of the female body with domestic space? I would rather argue that rendering this identification aesthetic demonstrates its constructed nature.

The third, and perhaps most crucial, form of identification which is disrupted by the *country* environment is that of the guest (that is to say, of either the self or the other as guest). While the adults are away, the family's maid, Esther, invites her younger brother, Juan Fernando, to stay in the house with the children. He struggles to build relationships with them, and ultimately becomes the scapegoat for their vandalism, as will be discussed below. One is reminde here of tension Derrida outlines between the hospitality of visitation and that of invitation. In the latter model, the gesture of hospitality carries with it a subtext:

> this is mine, I am at home, you are welcome in my home, without any implication of 'make yourself at home' but on condition that you observe the rules of hospitality by respecting the being-at-home of my home, the being-itself of what I am. (2000: 14)

There are clear points of contact here with Svampa's concept of 'ciudadanía patrimonialista', in which civic relations are subjected to the logic of property ownership. María employs this mode of thought when talking, late in the film, to a friend of Sofi's: when he asks what the matter is, she replies, 'pasa que es mi casa y no te soporto más' ['the matter is it's my house and I can't stand you any longer']. María is here aping the discourse of the host as Derrida views it: she is not, of course, the legal owner of the house, but nonetheless invokes a conception of its physical space as intimately linked to her subjective preferences.

The situation created by the arrival of Juan Fernando neatly illustrates how Derrida's two models of hospitality are inexorably linked. As far as the children are concerned, Juan Fernando is an uninvited visitor, an intruder. Indeed, one of the boys complains

about the new arrival on the telephone to his mother, stating that he wants him to leave. He provides no reason for this desire, stating simply that 'me molesta, nada más.' Yet Juan Fernando arrives because he has been invited by his sister, and indeed has his status rigorously checked at the entrance to the compound: because he has forgotten his identity card, his admission must be confirmed by the owner of the property, in another example of the dominance of the model of 'ciudadanía patrimonialista'. The fact that Juan Fernando appears simultaneously as intruder and as invited guest speaks to the strength of social hierarchies within the *country*: because he is the guest of a mere *mucama* (maid), he figures as an intruder in the eyes of the children.

Esther tries to help Juan Fernando integrate with the group, but when he goes with the other children to the swimming pool, he is upbraided by the lifeguard and by other members of the group for his failure to observe the 'reglamento' (for instance by not taking his trainers off at the poolside). The substance of this 'reglamento' is never made clear. When Juan Fernando asks what it is that he is not permitted to do, he receives the reply: 'lo que no se puede hacer'. Derrida's opposition of conditional laws of hospitality and *the* unconditional, singular law of hospitality is a useful reference here. Derrida argues that conditional, that is to say temporally and geographically situated rules 'would cease to be laws of hospitality if they were not guided, given inspiration, given aspiration, required, even, by the law of unconditional hospitality' (Derrida and Dufourmantelle 2000: 79). This hypothesis functions as an accurate description of the treatment Juan Fernando receives: in the *country*, the norms of class-based sociability prevail over any broader ethical imperative to provide a welcome. Thus the hierarchy that Derrida tentatively outlines, in which the unconditional law takes precedence over conditional laws (79), is reversed.

The hierarchies that predominate in *Una semana solos* are organised around class and work. In a relevant section of *Los que ganaron*, Svampa writes of the hegemony of commercial hierarchies in the constitution of social relations in such environments: 'en el entorno country el "otro" es siempre visto como empleado o como un subalterno, se trate de una guardia de seguridad o de un docente' (2008: 289). When in *Una semana solos* a group of boys take their parents' car out for a drive around the neighbourhood, they dismiss the authority of the security guards in just these terms: '¿qué van a hacer

los *copycops* [private security guards], si son unos empleados?'. The fact that this sequence then cuts to a shot of María sitting alone at the kitchen table reinforces the sense that these commercial hierarchies are accompanied by gender hierarchies: there is an implicit identification of the domestic space with the female body (even if, as is the case above with Sofi, Murga's film recognises the constructed nature of that identification). The subtlety with which Murga establishes this link, as well as the frequent recourse to the internal frames of the house, recalls the films of Martel. Diego Lerer, reviewing *Una semana solos* for the newspaper *Clarín*, suggested that it would provoke comparisons with *La ciénaga*, though in his view the intense drama of *La ciénaga* gives way here to a 'fluir del tiempo' (2009). Martel has in fact made a short film, *La ciudad que huye* (2006), which deals with Buenos Aires' gated communities, though here the aesthetics are markedly different, mixing handheld documentary footage with animation and satellite mapping imagery.

A significant part of Martel's short focuses on the 'vecinos de enfrente', and points to the lack of relations between them and the residents of the *barrios cerrados*. The designation of others as employees in Murga's film hints at how the links between the gated neighbourhoods and the surrounding suburbs, such as they are, tend to take the form of labour relations, in particular those of domestic work (Svampa 2008: 213). Murga's framing strategies subtly demonstrate the extent to which such relations are taken for granted, appearing to become part of the fabric of the *country* environment: her shots of domestic interiors make frequent use of depth of field in order to reveal the maid, Esther, at work in the background (fig. 4.4). It might be said, therefore, that in a less explicit way than Moreno's *Réimon*, *Una semana solos* reflects on how the domestic interior in film can perform what Goddard and Halligan call 'biopolitical training' (2012: 180), naturalising service labour as part of the home.[111]

[image redacted for copyright reasons]

Figure 4.4 *Una semana solos*

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[111] *Los dueños* (Radusky and Toscano 2013) disrupts this relation: in this film, the domestic employees of a wealthy family in the province of Tucumán occupy the house when the owners are not there, and imitate their lifestyle.

The child protagonists of Murga's film replicate these economic and class hierarchies in their co-option of Juan Fernando into their final escapade: he accompanies the group as they begin to vandalise the property, and then momentarily disappears. One boy says to another: 'seguro que está robando', demonstrating a willingness to identify Juan Fernando as a criminal intruder without recognising his sharing of that status. When Juan Fernando returns, he is carrying a flashlight, and thereby facilitating further acts of destruction. The shot in which he appears with the torches presents him as a distant figure, framed by a series of doorways, shining a light directly at the camera (fig. 4.5). This mise-en-scène hints at an equivalence between Juan Fernando's role in the house and that of a film projector in a darkened cinema. The spectator is thus invited to question the extent to which, as an accomplice to this act of uninvited entry, Juan Fernando is performing a role which is also undertaken by the film itself. To return to a formulation outlined above, one might think here that cinema appears to ally itself to an assumption of unconditional hospitality, a hospitality not bound by temporal laws or norms.

[image redacted for copyright reasons]

Figure 4.5 *Una semana solos*

What is the ethical status of this gesture? Is there, as suggested above, something ultimately *improper* about this form of cinematic representation? Derrida suggests that the problem of hospitality is

> coextensive with the ethical problem. It is always about answering for a dwelling
> place, for one's identity, one's space, one's limits, for the *ethos* as abode, habitation,
> house, hearth, family, home. (Derrida and Dufourmantelle 2000: 149-151)

Yet at the same time, he argues that the internal contradictions of hospitality present themselves as a challenge to the visual figuration of the house: 'there must be a door' for there to be hospitality, but 'as soon as there are a door and windows', someone has control, someone can impose conditions. There is, therefore, 'no hospitable house'

(Derrida 2000: 14). Derrida employs the figure of the threshold to crystallise this contradiction:

> hospitality always in some way does the opposite of what it pretends to do and immobilizes itself on the threshold of itself, on the threshold which re-marks and constitutes. (14)

The reflexivity and the internal frames of a shot like Figure 4.5 encourages the spectator to think of the cinematic image as this kind of threshold: caught between the conditional and the unconditional, or the subjective and the objective, as Pasolini has it. I would however argue that the precarious balance at which Derrida's theorisations of hospitality always seem to arrive cannot fully do justice to the social dynamics in operation in this case. At the end of Murga's film, Juan Fernando appears poised to receive all of the blame for the collective act of trespassing. Given his lower socioeconomic status, his darker skin, and his roots in the rural interior (the province of Entre Ríos), this is a sadly unsurprising development. Yet it demonstrates a fundamental imbalance between the 'conditions' of hospitality and its unconditional form, most obviously represented in this case by the film camera itself. In his reassessment of Derrida's theory, Pheng Cheah proposes that deconstructive hospitality should be understood as the opening of the subject's vulnerability to a nonhuman actor (this is the sense in which it is *improper*). The camera might be understood to be one such nonhuman actor, which for Cheah helps to bring about 'the nondeterminability of both host and other' (2013: 70).

The way in which Murga's camera seemingly trespasses on the intimacy of María and Fer as they kiss encourages this kind of reading. So too, in a less direct way, do the long static takes that draw the spectator's attention to the material fabric of the houses, in a manner similar to the films of Martel, and to Moreno's *Réimon*. The spectator is reminded that all the human actors are equal in their being framed by house and camera. The possibilities such shots create are however foreclosed by the film's ending. In the final shot, the children and Esther are sat around the kitchen table awaiting judgement by the security guards who have caught the intruders red-handed (fig. 4.6). The mise-en-scène here gives an appearance of equality, or even 'nondeterminability',

but it seems unlikely to last. In fact, the final line of dialogue in the film – Fer asks María to get him some juice ('¿Me servís?') – suggests the persistence of hierarchies, a reversion to propriety, and an economic understanding of social relations.

[image redacted for copyright reasons]

Figure 4.6 *Una semana solos*

This turn of phrase points us back towards Derrida's privileging of language in his theorisation of hospitality. Murga's film does provide some evidence to suggest that, within the boundaries of the *country*, language can be deployed to assert authority and ownership of property. When a security guard comes to the family house in order to report the boys for driving the car (in the sequence mentioned above), María meets him at the threshold and corrects his Spanish (she corrects his 'conducieron' to 'condujeron'). The 'proper' use of language is thus linked not only to class, but to physical property and, by extension, to a manifest disregard for the norms of life in common.

There is an echo here of Derrida's assertion that to speak to the other is always to reaffirm mastery and the boundaries of the self (2000: 14). While he claims that 'language *is* hospitality' (Derrida and Dufourmantelle 2000: 135, original emphasis), Derrida nonetheless immediately qualifies this statement:

> Nevertheless, we have come to wonder whether absolute, hyperbolical, unconditional hospitality doesn't consist in suspending language, *a particular determinate language*, and even the address to the other. (135, my emphasis)

Derrida's tentative recognition that a rigidly linguistic theory cannot account for all practices of opening or welcome points to the insufficiency of his thought for considering film's 'address to the other'. As we have seen, Murga's film employs a range of reflexive visual strategies in its mediation of the relations between guest and host, and between the protagonists and the spectator. The material world of *Una semana solos* intervenes in these relations in a manner that can only be thought of in linguistic

terms if one returns to Pasolini's conception of the language of film as 'arbitrary and aberrant' (2005: 167).

I would further suggest that Derrida's thinking of hospitality does not make adequate allowance for material political circumstances: in this case, the physical form of the *country* and its social consequences. The pseudo-universality underlying this aspect of Derrida's thought becomes clearer when we consider his essay on cosmopolitanism (a term which will be discussed in much greater depth in the following section). Derrida's text, a version of an address given to the International Parliament of Writers in Strasbourg in 1996, addresses the possibility of creating 'open cities' or 'cities of refuge' for refugees and immigrants. Derrida frames this question in terms of the 'destiny of cities' (2001: 7), and while he insists that he is not simply arguing for a return to a classical conception of 'the city' (8), his argument nonetheless rests on an assumption that 'the city of refuge', whose origins he acknowledges to be 'Western, European, or para-European' (17), can be conceived of as a singular subject, a whole.[112] This mode of thought or perception is precisely what is denied the residents of the *country*, and by extension the spectator of *Una semana solos*. The world outside the walls of the neighbourhood is glimpsed only briefly, through the windows of a school bus or through the grating of the elevated passageway through which Juan Fernando arrives at the gate (fig 4.7). In the only conversation that she holds with Juan Fernando, María tells him that getting to the centre of Buenos Aires from the *country* 'es un lío', an observation that chimes with Svampa's depiction of the fragmentation of the urban fabric caused by the growth of *countries* and *barrios privados* (2008: 199).

[image redacted for copyright reasons]

Figure 4.7 *Una semana solos*

In Svampa's account, this fracturing and the hegemonic conception of 'ciudadanía patrimonialista' mentioned above work in tandem such that the *countries* function as

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[112] Contrast this with Sarlo's declaration that 'Escribir la ciudad, dibujar la ciudad, pertenecen al círculo de la figuración, de la alegoría o de la representación. La ciudad real, en cambio, es construcción, decadencia, renovación y, sobre todo, demolición…' (2009: 145).

'microciudades' (189), and the metropolis itself becomes increasingly viewed as a source of insecurity, stress and pollution (233). The great irony identified by Svampa is that residents of gated neighbourhoods often view the city as a space of 'encierro', one in which their children would be unable to play outside (233). One resident links this experience to that of living in an apartment: 'me parece impensable haber vivido en un departamento', she declares (235). This declaration suggests that the house, as a typically more separate form of private property, is associated with freedom and a notion of the 'outside'. By contrast, the apartment, a form of property more readily associated with communal spaces and notions of the public, becomes in the imagination of the *country* resident a space of enclosure. Murga's film, which opens with an image of rural tranquillity and open space within the *country*, and depicts the world beyond its bounds via restrictive intra-diegetic frames, might be said to evince a degree of complicity with such a point of view. At the very least, it demonstrates the extent to which the spatial coordinates of 'inside' and 'outside' have become difficult to discern.

What is striking about *Una semana solos* is that where Svampa suggests that the city is increasingly reduced to 'las solas funciones económicas' (2008: 234), a phrase that recalls Leonardo's attitude towards urban space in *El hombre de al lado*, in Murga's film it is almost entirely absent. Indeed, one of the boys in the group of young protagonists declares 'yo nunca viviría en Capital', in a tone which suggests that he is repeating and practising an observed form of male sociability. If *Una semana solos* can be seen to hold a degree of social documentary value, then it is as a document of a form of suburbanisation (a particularly private form, as outlined at the beginning of this section). For that reason, Derrida's appeal to 'the city' and to its contested sovereignty in a text which also makes frequent reference to hospitality as a 'right' and a 'duty' might be seen to limit the cultural scope of his argument (2001: 5).

This suggestion can be reformulated in more generic terms, as the proposal that the *country* or the *barrio privado* holds a biopolitical function which challenges that previously exercised by the city or the nation. *Cara de queso* (Winograd 2006), another Argentine film that depicts life within the confines of a *country*, makes this point in a rather less subtle or tasteful manner. The *country* presented in this case is entirely Jewish, and the plot of Winograd's film revolves around the young protagonist's

struggle to achieve justice for a friend within the neighbourhood's internal justice system. At the midpoint of the narrative, the protagonist, Ariel, receives some advice from his grandfather, who refers to his experience in 'otros *countries*', where 'no te pedían el número de lote. Te lo tatuaban' ['they didn't ask for your plot number. They tattooed it on you']. The jarring frivolity with which *Cara de queso* compares the material and social structures of the *country* to those of the concentration camp – and it is certainly a grotesque comparison – masks a valid concern. If the normative structures of a community defined by social or quasi-racial homogeneity come to take precedence over those of a broader urban or national group, there is little possibility of the nation redeeming its 'historical failure [...] to come to its own' (Beverley 1999: 6).

It is certainly the case that there are few if any successful relationships across boundaries of class, gender or race in *Una semana solos*. Murga's near-exclusive use of child actors suggests a profound breakdown in traditional family structure. Here, as in other films discussed in this thesis, the only glimmers of hope for a more open sociability are provided through an appeal to performance. It might be argued that in *Una semana solos* not only the houses but the enclosed space of the *country* itself are mobilised as stages for and participants in the performance of social interaction (albeit rarely in the affirmative way envisaged by Dubatti). In Murga's film, as in the films analysed previously, there is an apparent desire for cinema to stand at a remove from the networks of spaces and media that constitute the contemporary city, in order to adopt a critical perspective on them. It might however also be said that Murga's camera finds itself in a provisional and uneasy alliance with the spaces of the houses and of the *country*, relying on their walls and boundaries to develop a quasi-theatrical aesthetic. The realism of this film is thus provisional, too. Albeit in a more subtle manner than the works discussed in the previous chapter, *Una semana solos* challenges the convention that the domestic sphere on film acts as a marker of the familiar, a vector for the satisfaction of what Corro Penjean calls 'el ansia burguesa de control e inventariado de lo real' (2012: 19). The film I now turn to discuss, *Las cosas como son* (Lavanderos 2014), also uses a house to probe that anxiety, which in this case is confronted by outsiders who differ not only in terms of class and gender, but also in those of national identity.

***Las cosas como son*: capturing cosmopolitan desire**

The figure of the *arrivant* to which Derrida frequently turns in his discussions of hospitality has a distinctly messianic quality, one which Derrida himself recognises and assumes, even if he is reluctant to extrapolate this epithet into a thought of *messianism* (which would of course be susceptible to deconstruction) (Derrida and Stiegler 2002: 12–21). Derrida construes the *arrivant* as a figure of 'infinite alterity', whose arrival is an 'absolute surprise', and 'who or which will not be asked to commit to the domestic contracts of any welcoming power (family, State, nation, territory, native soil or blood, language, cultural in general, even humanity)'. What is required, Derrida writes, is '*just* opening which renounces any right to property, any right in general' (2006: 81–82, original emphasis). Yet, as above, there is a tension between the undetermined and the determined: just after these claims, Derrida states that

> [o]ne might as well confess the economic calculation and declare all the checkpoints
> that ethics, hospitality, or the various messianisms would still install at the borders
> of the event in order to screen the *arrivant*. (82, original emphasis)

There is a residue of place, in other words, in Derrida's thought, that often appears in architectural terms: not only in the work on hospitality, but also in his discussion of the future '*to come*' in 'Archive Fever' (1995: 45, original emphasis). It is significant that Derrida names the points of opening to this messianic time as 'doors', and that in doing so he invokes Benjamin, who in the 'Theses on the Philosophy of History' 'designates the "narrow door" for the passage of the Messiah, "at each second"' (46). The implication here is that interior spaces can paradoxically provide the setting for a rupture in historical time, and an opening to a mode of thought that challenges the binaries with which enclosed spaces (whether nations or houses) appear to be constituted (open/closed, inside/outside, etc.). This idea is reminiscent of Bernstein's assertion that a bounded room always inevitably 'opens up onto an endless and undefined field, a field of rubble where no identity is stable' (2008: 13). As will be discussed in the conclusion, this uneasy relationship to location is echoed in deconstructionist Latin Americanist

scholarship. Some of this work also turns explicitly to the notion of the messianic: Moreiras claims that the politics of solidarity in the region 'needs to be conceived, in at least one of its faces, as a counterhegemonic response to globalization and empire, an opening to the trace of the messianic in an imperial world' (2001: 38). This 'trace of the messianic', Moreiras writes, is 'the compulsive need to find the possibility of an outside to the global system' (41). He makes this point even as he argues that cultural studies should be 'fundamentally committed to the deconstruction of the inside-outside relationship' (16).

In this section, I argue that Fernando Lavanderos' *Las cosas como son* (2014) demonstrates a profound scepticism about the degree to which a 'messianic' attitude might successfully tackle social problems or transcend cultural difference. Where Derrida infinitely defers the appearance of the *arrivant*, who is always 'to come' (2006: 81), Lavanderos' film insists on the material consequences of the enactment of absolute hospitality in the present, thereby resisting the logic of spectrality that underlies both Derrida's theorisation of hospitality and, as seen above, his understanding of the operation of media. *Las cosas como son* uses the domestic interior as a medium through which the idealism of the young Norwegian woman Sanna runs up against the preconceptions and material constraints of Chilean society. *Las cosas como son* leads the spectator, therefore, to consider the limits of what I will term 'cosmopolitan desire'.[113] Moreover, as was the case for *Una semana solos*, the economic circumstances of the film's production and its status as commodity place further conditions on its functioning as a marker of conviviality. Rosello takes this latter term from Paul Gilroy to name a 'hospitality based on togetherness rather than sameness or belonging', dependent on practices rather than on a logic of identity or property (2013: 130–32): it is therefore not entirely dissimilar to Dubatti's *convivio*.

My argument, then, is that political invocations of the messianic rely on a disavowed universalising cosmopolitanism that fails to account for divergent personal and

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[113] I adopt this concept from Mariano Siskind's discussion of the work of Latin American writers in the early twentieth century, which claims that critical and aesthetic cosmopolitan discourses of that era shared a '*deseo de mundo*', and 'invoked the world alternately as a signifier of abstract universality or a concrete and finite set of global trajectories traveled by writers and books' (2014: 3).

collective worlds. The house in Lavanderos' film does not provide an opening onto a messianic rupture with social norms so much as an arena in which conflicting visions of society encounter one another. My approach to this encounter is into three parts: a discussion of the image of the house itself, an analysis of Sanna's improper desires, and lastly a questioning of film's contested role in the making and unmaking of cosmopolitan identities.

Defining cosmopolitanism is a complex task, but at its simplest it might be thought of as an avowal of faith in the world as a single, common environment equally available to all: this is the implication, for instance, of the title of Timothy Brennan's book on the subject *At Home in the World* (1997). As we will see, the universalising qualities of some cosmopolitan projects have led to charges of complicity with the forces of commoditisation and capital: the 'openness' on which Derrida's thinking of hospitality and cosmopolitanism relies is also, in Cheah's words, 'a paramount value of bourgeois economic discourse' (2013: 77). In response to this perceived weakness, some scholars have recently sought to develop more localised models of cosmopolitan interaction, underwritten not by a logic of property but by affective bonds and shared practices. My aim here, in part, is to consider whether film's exploration of such ideas of hospitality and cosmopolitan openness in the domestic sphere critiques, or disavows, the role of capital in forming cinematic communities.

House

The house in *Las cosas como son* is, as well as an arena for conflict, a kind of allegorical fragment, a remnant of the Chilean literary and cultural tradition in which a domestic space could easily be read as a synecdoche of the nation. The film's protagonist, Jerónimo, does not own the large property, seemingly in the wealthy neighbourhood of Providencia, whose rooms he rents out to foreign visitors. A visit from his brother late in the film makes it clear that Jerónimo runs his business at his father's pleasure: the father retains ownership, and his brother informs him that the family plans to sell the

house, and invites him to present an objection if he has one. Jerónimo demurs, baldly answering 'si quieren vender, vendemos'. I begin my analysis of this film with this moment near the end of its running time because it marks a transition from one economic and cultural model to another: the predictable passing-on of land and property from one generation to the next is replaced by the rule of profit and the market. Here, as in previous chapters, it is instructive to think back to Fornazzari's *Speculative Fictions.* Yet my contention here is that the film reflects not just shifting economic forms, but also (and consequently) conflicting modes of subjectivity, an unsettled to-and-fro between the global and the local. As we will see below, attempts to read Jerónimo and his house as ciphers of the Chilean nation are explicitly staged in *Las cosas como son*, but also explicitly frustrated.

The sequences which most clearly invite the spectator to view the house as an extension or representation of Jerónimo's character (i.e. his inscrutable, guarded nature) are those in which he undertakes repairs or improvements to the physical fabric of the building. He is periodically seen chipping old paint from a wall, or halfway up a ladder, and these shots often frame him against part of the house itself, whether a bannister or a doorframe (fig. 4.8). Such moments might be read as expressive of Jerónimo's desire to maintain the house as a marker of familial identity in the face of a rapidly changing neighbourhood and city. We might think back here to Guillermo Mann in Agüero's *Aquí se construye*, particularly as the house in *Las cosas como son* is architecturally similar, a large detached property surrounded by a garden on at least three sides. The repairs might however also be taken to signify a will to maximise the house's effectiveness as a commodity. By refusing the spectator a clear avenue of interpretation, Lavanderos' film evinces a strange sort of diffidence regarding its protagonist: the irregular and unpredictable extradiegetic bursts of pizzicato strings which accompany many of the repair sequences further contribute to this sense of directorial detachment. This diffidence is arguably reflected in the film's title: as well as alluding to a desire for clarity of vision, *Las cosas como son* seems to designate a sense of stasis or stagnation.

[image redacted for copyright reasons]

Figure 4.8 *Las cosas como son*

Later in the film, Jerónimo begins to make alterations to the house which challenge this implied stagnation: he undertakes these with the help of Milton, a teenage boy from a deprived neighbourhood whom Sanna surreptitiously introduces into the house into order to shelter him from the (undefined) 'problems' he has got himself into. I will return to Milton's ambivalent status as intruder and guest in more detail below. For now, what is significant is that the work he undertakes with Jerónimo appears initially to be more productive than that which Jerónimo does by himself: the two apply a new coat of paint to a wall, for instance. The house thus becomes a significant actor in the formation of new social bonds, and the camera's close attention to the fabric of the building arguably also generates an 'affective proximity' with the characters similar to that discussed in the previous chapter. However, Jerónimo also enlists Milton's help to fix shards of broken glass to the top of the property's external wall (fig. 4.9): like many detached houses in Providencia, the house is set back from the street and sheltered behind a wall and gate (fig. 4.10). There is something rather perverse about Milton's participation in the reinforcement of a physical boundary that is also implicitly social: the spectator infers that Jerónimo is worried about an increased risk of break-ins as a result of Milton's presence in the house. If film aids a vision of the built environment as a social actor, then, it is not exclusively in a constructive sense.

[image redacted for copyright reasons]

Figure 4.9 *Las cosas como son*

[image redacted for copyright reasons]

Figure 4.10 *Las cosas como son*

Sanna

As we have seen, Milton is only in the house due to the actions of Sanna, who takes it upon herself to be a kind of guardian to him. Sanna's arrival as a paying guest in Jerónimo's house occurs shortly after the beginning of the film, and it is her relationship with her landlord that will structure the narrative of *Las cosas como son*: her disappearance after the catastrophic conclusion to Milton's stay in the house precedes the film's close by a very few minutes. If Jerónimo is apparently concerned with the maintenance of a certain form of property, then Sanna is a fundamentally *improper* figure. I use this term in a number of related senses, as was the case in my analysis of *Una semana solos*. Perhaps the most immediately striking of these has to do with Sanna's use of language, which shows no regard for norms of grammar or indeed for boundaries between languages: Sanna happily switches from Spanish to English in order more easily to express a particular thought or feeling. Jerónimo clearly understands these English phrases, but always replies in standard, relatively formal Spanish. Where in *Una semana solos* the (im)proper use of language designates social status and class affiliation, here it marks a boundary between a clearly localised form of living (Jerónimo's) and a transnational, decentred existence (Sanna's).

This is not to say that class differences are absent from *Las cosas como son*. Indeed, another key sense in which Sanna can be regarded as an *improper* figure is in her willingness to transgress social boundaries. She sees no reason not to help Milton, whom she meets while running an acting workshop in a school in Quilicura, a poor, peripheral neighbourhood of Santiago. Jerónimo takes the opposite view: he sees no reason why he *should* help the teenager, repeatedly asking Sanna '¿qué tengo que ver yo con eso?'. The spectator may be tempted here to draw a parallel between Jerónimo's house (detached and walled-off) and his approach to society (seemingly valuing individual concerns above any others). Yet the house rapidly becomes the stage for the working through of some of the social and cultural barriers between the film's two principal Chilean characters. *Las cosas como son* is not the only twenty-first century Chilean film to make use of a domestic environment as the backdrop and mediating element in the development of such an apparently socially transgressive relationship. *Volantín cortao* (Ayala and Jofré 2013), which narrates a burgeoning romantic

relationship between young social worker Paulina and the troubled teenager Manuel, sets its climactic sequence in a house which the two enter illicitly and begin to vandalise. It is notable that in this case, as in *Una semana solos*, the domestic environment becomes the medium both for the development of such relationships and for their unravelling.

A sequence in which Jerónimo, Sanna and Milton eat together around the dining table at first glance presents itself as a paradigmatic example of conviviality as Gilroy and Rosello define it: a togetherness defined by practices rather than identitarian traits (fig. 4.11). Indeed, Rosello notes that the word itself has roots in the Latin *convivium*, meaning feast or banquet (2013: 133). Yet the substance of the conversation between Jerónimo and Milton serves mostly to highlight social differences: Jerónimo arrogantly dismisses any possibility that Milton will know what badminton is, for instance, and reacts with snobbish surprise at the fact that Milton had a Spanish grandfather.[114] If the three protagonists do form a kind of alternative family, or provide a model for sociability across boundaries of class, gender and nationality, it is only in a tentative and provisional manner. Indeed, Jerónimo's encounters with Milton at home are largely characterised by mutual suspicion, and it is only during a trip to the seaside that the two begin to communicate on a basis of trust (both verbally and by playing football). The coastal setting for this development is not indifferent: the liminal space of the beach marks (somewhat unsubtly) the crossing of social boundaries. Yet Lavanderos' film, too, is ultimately marked with pessimism, as in its closing minutes Jerónimo and Sanna return to the house to find it broken into, and Milton bleeding, having been stabbed. Sanna's faith in her abilities to facilitate the healing of Chilean class divisions appears, as the film ends, tragically misplaced.

[image redacted for copyright reasons]

Figure 4.11 *Las cosas como son*

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[114] This moment neatly demonstrates how ideas of national belonging and familial belonging do not always coincide, and at times directly conflict.

One further way in which Sanna may said to act improperly is in her insistence in taking Jerónimo out of the house to show her around Santiago, thereby reversing stereotyped gender roles in which the woman might be expected to remain within the domestic sphere and the man to freely roam public urban space. Indeed, here as in *El hombre de al lado*, the house appears, at least superficially, as a figure for proud, autonomous masculine subjectivity.[115] The sites to which Jerónimo takes Sanna reveal something of his view of the city and perhaps of Chile: he shows her the 'Fuente Alemana', a gift to the nation from the German government of which only part ever arrived, and a group of enormous blocks of stone in a park that were meant to be hewn into statues of Chile's presidents, but which have been left untouched. The spectator is thus invited to infer that Jerónimo views the city as a failed project, worthy only of ironic commentary. To his surprise, Sanna takes pleasure in the unfinished state of the objects she is shown, and forces Jerónimo to pose for a photograph next to a piece of street art that he describes as the ugliest thing he has seen in his life. Shortly after this moment, the spectator see Jerónimo and Sanna looking over their photos from the day's excursion, and then kissing – their first moment of sexual intimacy.

Physical intimacy does not however erode the difference in worldview between the two protagonists. Perhaps the clearest way of articulating this difference is to note that Sanna demonstrates a resolute faith in the ability of subjective decisions (which she construes as friendship, but which slip into sexual desire) to overcome structural social difference and prejudice. This is partly why 'cosmopolitan desire' presents itself as an apposite phrase – as we will see, cosmopolitanism *can* appear to be predicated on the decisions, rights and preferences of the individual, rather than the acts of a collective. Before further elaborating this notion of 'cosmopolitan desire', it is worth making a brief excursion to investigate the varied meanings and values that have become attached to the concept of cosmopolitanism. If, as suggested above, there is a burgeoning field of study centred on the idea of hospitality, then this is arguably even truer for cosmopolitanism, at least in a European context (I will turn to its potential applications in Latin America below). It is a notion that has had an intellectual life in

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[115] Lavanderos' film does however include a very brief shot of a woman, presumably a domestic employee, washing the dishes: one is reminded here of Irigaray's claim that women are forced to be the passive ground for male belonging (1990: 9-11).

multiple fields, from political theory to ethics and cultural studies. If a common modern root can be identified for these disparate traditions, it is perhaps in the writings of Immanuel Kant, to whom Derrida refers at length in his essay 'On Cosmopolitanism'. In that work, Derrida questions Kant's limitation of hospitality to a '*right of visitation*' rather than a right of residence (2001: 21, original emphasis). Kant relies on a notion of the proper in his articulation of universal hospitality: he highlights

> our common right of possession on the surface of the earth on which, as it is a globe, we cannot be infinitely scattered, and must in the end reconcile ourselves to existence side by side [...]. (1903: 138, in Derrida 2001: 21-22)

The spatial limits that logically arise from this conception are what Derrida considers 'debatable' (22), and what create the tension at the heart of Kant's dictum that '[t]he law of cosmopolitanism must be restricted to the conditions of universal hospitality' (Kant 1903: 137). Those conditions, for Kant, are strictly legal and do not concern the realm of intimate human relations. He specifies that under his (imagined) legal framework, his 'cosmopolitan constitution', a stranger has no right 'to be *treated* as a guest', but simply to be treated 'without hostility' (137, my emphasis). In other words, Kant only mandates hospitality in the barest of senses, and separates cosmopolitan 'right' from the realm of affective practices. There is another tension in Kant's work, between his affirmation of a singular 'human community' and his subsequent division of the world into 'civilised nations' and those who are implicitly uncivilised: the Bedouins and other nomadic tribes, for instance (138-39).

As noted above, these tensions between the universal and the particular place limits on Derrida's own thinking of hospitality, particularly in relation to the concept of the city. The city imagined in abstract terms might appear to be 'the cosmopolitan space par excellence, not just as the privileged site of transnational and transregional encounters between strangers, but also because of its history as a site of hospitality' (Scorer 2016: 144). However, as Scorer notes, 'the city (or neighborhood) must be demarcated by a frontier for the act of hospitality towards the stranger to come into force' (144). This contradiction appears to become something of an aporia for Derrida, who defers any clear image of a city that might fulfil the cosmopolitan ideal:

> [b]eing on the threshold of these cities, of these new cities that would be something other than '*new* cities', a certain idea of cosmopolitanism, *an other*, has not yet arrived, *perhaps.*
>
> > – If it has (*indeed*) arrived…
>
> –…then, one has perhaps not yet recognised it. (2001: 23, original emphasis)

Derrida returns to the logic of the messianic here, as the spatial paradigm in which his thought operates appears to exhaust itself. The discussion of cosmopolitanism in Latin America might seem to be particularly fraught with difficulties, given the European model of 'civilisation' that underlies Kant's vision. Indeed, a number of intellectual debates in the twentieth century tackled the possibility of a Latin American cosmopolitanism. Among these, the exchange of views between José María Arguedas and Julio Cortázar is probably the most famous: Cortázar criticised the 'telurismo' of some Latin American literature, suggesting that it always led to the 'peores avances del nacionalismo negativo' and to a binary opposition of the country to the world, and of one race to other races (2014: 63–64). He moreover argued that the local or national aspects of his own writing were enriched by his move to Europe, because it permitted him a broader perspective on world events and on his own Latin American identity (66). In response, Arguedas attacked what he saw as Cortázar's arrogant positioning of himself above local frameworks, reminding him that '[t]odos somos provincianos […] Provinciano de las naciones y provincianos de lo supranacional que es, también, una esfera, un estrato bien cerrado' (1990: 21). This debate exposed a tension implicit in a body of writing that Aguilar identifies as a cosmopolitan tradition in Latin American literature. He describes how modernist and avant-garde writers sought strategically to adopt cosmopolitan discourses in order to challenge binary constructions of the centre and the periphery, and thus rework images of their nations. In Aguilar's words, writers such as Rubén Darío and Jorge Luis Borges investigated 'las distorsiones que con la modernidad se producen en la idea de *localidad*' (2009: 15, original emphasis). Aguilar's proposal of cosmopolitanism as not just a form of ethics, but as an *aesthetic* value that enacts a complex relation to the social (30), will be an important reference for my argument below.

If cosmopolitanism has emerged as a point of contention in scholarship on Latin American literature, it has not had as significant an impact on studies of urban society in the region. As we have seen throughout this thesis, the spatial fragmentation of Buenos Aires and Santiago makes it difficult to envision them as the loci of idealised cosmopolitan interactions. Studies of urban life by figures such as Hopenhayn and Sarlo tend to contrast the increasing atomisation of physical social existence with the formation of new virtual networks (Hopenhayn 1994; Sarlo 2001; 2009).[116] Is it possible or productive, then, to speak of cosmopolitanism in relation to films that present cities as fragmented, unfinished or inaccessible? These are three adjectives that might equally be applied to the concept of cosmopolitanism itself (which, of course, holds a close etymological relation to the *polis*). Indeed, an important volume of essays on the topic avoids any one definition, suggesting in its introduction that cosmopolitanism 'may instead be a project whose conceptual content and pragmatic character are not only as yet unspecified but also must always escape positive and definite specification' (Breckenridge and others 2002: 1). In this view, openness is a paramount value of the cosmopolitan, and the authors oppose it to nationalist 'static, reified, and bounded imaginations of place and home' (2). They nonetheless recognise that a 'search for home and authenticity' is not 'inauthentic or illegitimate in itself (2-3). Indeed, one of the authors' suggestions for a widened understanding of cosmopolitanism is a harnessing of feminist thought in order to develop domesticity as 'a vital interlocutor and not just an interloper in law, politics, and public ethics', such that domestic sphere might be 'subversive of thin claims to universalism' (9).

As we have seen, *Las cosas como son* suggests some limitations to an approach which privileges intimacy and desire as vehicles for overcoming of class divisions and individualism. However, the attempt to move away from a cosmopolitanism grounded in an ideal of the individual subject as 'abstract unit of cultural exchange' (5) or indeed 'citizen of the world' (8) is valuable for the intellectual possibilities it creates. Indeed, recent decades have seen a number of attempts to develop a cosmopolitanism that makes specific allowance for local histories, identities, or socio-political

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[116] Sarlo argues that the freedom of space-time limits that the virtual city promises in fact makes transgressive practices (such as, we might say, cosmopolitan hospitality) impossible, since 'esos límites definen zonas de la ciudad' (2009: 212).

circumstances.[117] Notable among these are the 'vernacular cosmopolitanism' advocated by Bhabha (2001), Kwame Anthony Appiah's theorisation of 'partial' or 'rooted' cosmopolitanism (2005; 2006) , and Mica Nava's 'domestic cosmopolitanism' (2006). Unsurprisingly, perhaps, it is the latter of these formulations that I will focus on here. I want to ask, in short, if it is possible to think of the home as a starting point for a cosmopolitan way of living, a form of cohabitation that looks beyond established identities? Can film, moreover, facilitate such a paradigm shift? The following section explores how film form and the material economic circumstances of cinematic production create both avenues and restrictions for such ways of thinking.

Filming multiple worlds

There is a recurrent turn in critical discourse around cosmopolitanism, and around cultural products which appear offer a kind of cosmopolitan function, to the figure of the world. Mariano Siskind identifies a 'deseo de mundo' among cosmopolitan intellectuals in the early twentieth century in Latin America (2014: 3), and Kant's cosmopolitan project relies on the sharing of one common world. In contrast to this singular world, the films examined here lend themselves more easily to critical accounts that emphasise an apparent multiplicity of subjective and discrete worlds: Antonella Estévez describes *Volantín cortao* as a scenario 'cuando los mundos se encuentran' ([n.d.]), and when in *Las cosas como son* Sanna describes Chile as quiet and 'lejos del mundo', Jerónimo quickly retorts 'lejos de *tu* mundo'.

In post-deconstructive critical frameworks, art is often endowed with the capacity of world-making, rather than mere representation: Nancy, for instance, writes that cinema creates 'an opening cut in the world onto this very world' (2001: 44-46), and elsewhere

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[117] We might think back here to Massey's refusal of the distinction between 'local place' and 'space out there' (2005: 6). In a review of studies of Chilean cinema by Urrutia Neno and Saavedra Cerda, Carolina Olmedo Carrasco identifies the tension between 'localidad' and 'cosmopolitismo' as the 'material constitutivo' of contemporary Chilean film (2014: 205).

claims that art is 'the birth of a *world*' rather than 'the construction of a system' (2000: 15, original emphasis). Just as Nancy resists any return to full presence in his theorisations of touch and community, though, so he describes the world of the image as 'necessarily plural, diffracted, discreet [*sic*]', and concludes that '[a] world is as many worlds as it takes to make a world' (15). Many of the formal features of *Las cosas como son* make explicit the tensions that Nancy describes in projects of world-making. I am thinking here of the repeated temporal cuts in sequences of dialogue (between Sanna and Jerónimo, or between Jerónimo and his brother), which are barely perceptible but which serve subtly to undercut the narrative continuity (and consequently the realism) of the film. There are, moreover, substantial narrative elisions in the film's editing: sexual intercourse between Jerónimo and Sanna is presented in a sequence of shots lasting only a few seconds, for instance. In the film's closing minutes, as mentioned above, the spectator's gaze is abruptly transferred from a shot of the two waiting at the hospital to which they have taken Milton to a sequence showing Jerónimo on his own in the house, with Sanna's belongings gone from her room. No narrative explanation is offered for this turn of events: the spectator does not have full participation in the film's diegetic world.

Given that a durable common world is here presented as impossible, one might turn to theories that identify a potential for commonality in more restricted spaces and times. Nava's domestic cosmopolitanism is one such project. Nava argues that the domestic sphere can be understood as the source of a 'visceral' cosmopolitanism, one that takes into account affective elements of life, and 'the emotional and libidinal economies of identification and desire' (2007: 14). This kind of cosmopolitan, 'visceral and vernacular but also domestic', 'historically has emerged from engagement with otherness and elsewhere in the local zones – the "micro publics" – of the modern global city: the street, the school, the gym, the shopping centre and the dance floor', she writes (12-13). Maud Ceuterick argues that this form of cosmopolitanism can be used to break down simplistic divisions between self and other, or the mobile and the sedentary, and uses it to read films that challenge the 'migrant/non-migrant dichotomy', including the Argentine production *Un cuento chino* (Borensztein 2011) (2014: 79). Ceuterick suggests that the films she analyses present a 'refashioning' (80) or 'reconfiguring' (84) of the domestic sphere as permanently 'in process', 'a domestic yet political process to

positively recognize the ones who move' (80). *Las cosas como son* certainly shows an attempt at this kind of refashioning, but offers only limited indications of success.

This occurs for a number of reasons: the fact that Jerónimo is not honest about his sexual and emotional desires – he goes through Sanna's belongings while she is out of the house, and says nothing of it – undermines Nava's optimistic view of the potential of the home's 'emotional and libidinal economies' (2007: 14). Moreover, the increasingly oppressive presence of the financial economy and the real estate market in the film reinforces notions of property and ownership: when Sanna reveals that she knows that he has been through her room, Jerónimo replies 'es mi casa y en mi casa hago lo que yo quiero'. The specificity of urban location is clearly important: the housing boom in Santiago imposes an economic logic on interactions that encourages an understanding of the domestic sphere as commodity rather than process. The fact that both Nava and Gilroy develop their theoretical models (domestic cosmopolitanism and conviviality respectively) specifically in relation to London also points to the importance of location: Gilroy, for instance, writes that 'every notion of culture as property is broken and dispersed by the swirling, vertiginous motion of the postcolonial world' in the British capital (2004: 70). This is manifestly not the case in the Santiago of *Las cosas como son*. The final substantial conversation between Jerónimo and Sanna, which occurs in the Parque del Bicentenario, with panoramic views across Santiago, represents an overt challenge to non-Eurocentric theories of cosmopolitanism. At this point in the film, just before the two protagonists return to the house to find Milton injured, they struggle to find any metaphorical common ground (making the setting of their conversation particularly ironic). Indeed, Sanna conducts most of this conversation in English, while Jerónimo replies in Spanish: this might be read as a challenge to Appiah's notion of 'cosmopolitan conversation', the idea that the simple sharing of dialogue, without any appeal to common principles, can 'secure shared practices' (2005: 256). Sanna claims that too many Chileans are like Jerónimo, in that they are afraid of everything, and, implicitly, concerned only with themselves and with what they might 'gain' from social interaction (Jerónimo has asked Sanna what she 'gains' from helping Milton, again demonstrating the far-reaching influence of market logic). To this accusation, Jerónimo offers the swift, sarcastic retort that what Chileans need is more 'niñas noruegas' to come and save them. This comment can be read in relation to Derrida's invocation of

the messianic: Jerónimo denies Sanna the right to break the social and physical structures in which he operates, and implicitly links the desire to do so to a neo-colonial attitude. In other words, Jerónimo insists on the separation of his world from Sanna's. Of course, his denial of her interference proves to be merely rhetorical, as the latter sequences of the film go on to show.

The ending of *Las cosas como son* is not entirely pessimistic, however. In the film's final moments (fig. 4.12), the spectator sees Jerónimo sat smoking on a street kerb as he watches the passing of a protest (one of the large-scale student protests that took place in 2011). In contrast to the rest of the film, this sequence seems tentatively to suggest that Jerónimo's unsettling experiences at home could lead to a renewed appreciation of the city as a common space for political action and the transcending of social boundaries. It might also be read as an intrusion of the documentary 'real' into Lavanderos' fictional narrative, a dissolution of the critical distance from the multiple and simultaneous encounters of urban life that the film's largely domestic perspective represents. As we will see in the conclusion to the thesis, this apparent inability to construct a durable, singular common world need not be read as a political failure.

[image redacted for copyright reasons]

Figure 4.12 *Las cosas como son*

Conclusion

The changing practices of film spectatorship, which appears to retreat ever further into the home, would in any case complicate a simplistic imagining of cinema as inherently productive of common spaces. Some recent films from the Southern Cone tackle this point directly: in Fuguet's second feature film, *Velódromo* (2010), the protagonist Ariel Roth is self-centred and immature, seemingly interested only in riding his bike and

streaming films online in his apartment. Such is his obsession with movie-watching that he frequently neglects or ignores guests in his own home, and his laptop is his most frequent companion throughout the apartment: he watches a French film on it while in the bath (fig. 4.13). *Velódromo* thus opposes the constant presence of media, and in particular of film, to the possibility of fruitful and lasting human interaction at home. Few Argentine or Chilean productions of the early twenty-first century make this point as overtly or as cynically as Fuguet's film, which is itself readily available to stream online. There are, however, many which point to similar conclusions: see the spoilt teenagers of Marín's *Zoológico* (2011), and, to an extent, the lonely protagonists of Taretto's *Medianeras* (2011).

[image redacted for copyright reasons]

Figure 4.13 *Velódromo*

There is a danger, then, in assuming that the increased online distribution of film creates a kind of virtual, cosmopolitan public sphere that compensates for the physical fragmentation of the city. It is true that the proliferation of online film platforms dedicated to the distribution of national cinema, such as Cinépata, OjOCORTO and Jirafa Play in Chile, and Cine.ArPlay and cinemargentino in Argentina, suggests an interesting retrenchment of collective identity even as film spectatorship becomes a more private activity. It should be noted, however, that the aesthetics of much contemporary Argentine and Chilean film, as we have seen throughout this thesis, are aimed at a discerning cinephile audience, often at festivals abroad, rather than at a broad public at home. Nor is all of the content on these platforms is free-to-view, and so economic inequalities persist. While I have argued that in many of the films analysed in this thesis, domestic logics of property are interrupted by an emphasis on practice and process, the status of the films themselves as private property cannot always be overlooked. The reflexivity of Fuguet's *Velódromo* might lead us to ask whether the depictions of domestic impropriety (physical trespassing, sexual transgression or otherwise) in the films I have analysed in fact serves to disavow the fact that some of them circulate as commodities in domestic and international markets.

The question is worth asking, given the shifting nature of film financing in Chile and Argentina. Several scholars have asserted that European funding models for cinema from the global South constitute a form of neo-colonial economic practice (e.g. Halle 2010).[118] However, in Argentina and Chile in the early years of the twenty-first century, the nation-state retains a prominent position in film funding. This might seem strange in the case of Chile, as this period was otherwise characterised by the continuation of neoliberal economic policy. This trend is not, however, necessarily as contradictory as it seems: Page draws on the work of Roberto Trejo Ojeda (2009: 119) to claim that in Chile '[i]nstead of being conceived as a form of public spending, with the aim of protecting a national industry, state funding for cinema is now increasingly understood as an *investment*' (Shaw and others 2017, original emphasis). It can thus encourage the inflow of foreign capital, particularly in the guise of foreign film producers making use of locations or specific expertise. We might think here of Cheah's assertion that hospitality's 'primal scene' is to capital rather than to people (2013: 79).

How does *Las cosas como son* appear when viewed through this lens? Its funders include BancoEstado (Banco del Estado de Chile), a state-owned bank, and Corfo (Corporación de Fomento de la Producción), a Chilean governmental organisation which is part of the Ministry of Economy, Development and Tourism. It might, therefore, be said to participate in the 'selling' of Chile as a national brand to foreign markets. The downbeat tone of the narrative might seem to counter such a view: however, as Page recognises, 'neoliberal marketing machines' have a remarkable facility to 'profit even from dissenting voices or apparently uncommercial activities' (Shaw and others 2017). This is not to say that Lavanderos is naïve in his presentation of an imagined depiction of Chilean life to international festivalgoers and consumers. As we have seen, he hardly presents an idealised image of Chilean identity. Moreover, his first film, *Y las vacas vuelan* (2004), directly tackles the complex affective and economic relations that filmmaking engenders, adopting a highly reflexive aesthetic as it depicts the relation between a Danish filmmaker and a Chilean actress. The role of performance in the

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[118] See also Jeffrey Middents' assessment of the impact of transnational funding on ideas of 'place' in contemporary Latin American film (2013).

development of intimate relationships and ties of belonging is treated more explicitly here than in the later film.

We might draw a contrast here with Murga's *Una semana solos*, which demonstrates a less obviously reflexive approach to the mediation of national and international identities that film production necessarily involves. Like almost all Argentine films of the early twenty-first century, *Una semana solos* received support from the INCAA as well as funding from the government of the city of Buenos Aires, but it also received financial aid from the Hubert Bals Fund (associated with the International Film Festival Rotterdam). Murga's international profile has benefitted from the support of Martin Scorsese, whose name is the first credited as the film opens. Scorsese's involvement resulted from his favourable reaction to an early screening of *Una semana solos*: we might therefore consider how Murga's auteurist, slow cinema style functions as a kind of cosmopolitan aesthetic, not just in that it appeals across national borders but that, in Aguilar's words, it has a 'relación creadora con los universales, las normas, el territorio y la actividad crítica' (2009: 30). Aguilar takes Torre Nilsson's *La casa del ángel* (1957) as one of his examples of an 'episodio cosmopolita' in Argentine culture, arguing that the film's deconstruction of the conventional aesthetics of bourgeois melodrama proposes the house as an 'espacio agujereado y, a la vez, ahuecado' in which private, affective concerns mingle with and reshape the world of national politics (130).

The aesthetics of Murga's and Lavanderos' films are less experimental than Torre Nilsson's, but Aguilar's understanding of cosmopolitanism as an artistic practice that subverts any rigid identity formation can be fruitfully applied to these later works. In each case, cosmopolitanism can be an enabling framework for rethinking social relations *within* the nation, a task that appears distinctly challenging. Aguilar qualifies the political claims of his aesthetic analysis in terms that are strikingly relevant for my project:

> [n]o se trata [...] de una apelación a la autonomía del arte sino a una mediación de la forma, que si se beneficia transitoriamente de una apelación a la autonomía que nunca se vuelve efectiva, lo que hace en realidad es cuestionar las funciones

asignadas y compartimentadas y dilatar los ámbitos de la imaginación y la
percepción y de lo que es considerado político. (32)

In the films discussed in this chapter, and throughout the thesis, there is an appeal to consider the home as a space in which the modes of social interaction that characterise the contemporary city in Argentina and Chile can be reworked. Yet this appeal is more often than not one that 'nunca se vuelve efectiva': it is a *desire* for the home to function as a 'micro public' in Nava's sense, rather than a fulfilment of that description. Even in its lack of effectivity, however, this appeal can provoke a reconsideration of 'las funciones asignadas y compartimentadas', and of 'lo que es considerado político': in *Una semana solos*, the *country* becomes a location characterised not by separation and privacy but by the transgression of boundaries, while in *Las cosas como son*, a large, detached house belonging to a wealthy family at least temporarily plays host to an 'alternative family' that crosses divides of class and nationality. Meanwhile, films such as *El otro día* and *Mitómana* mobilise domestic space as a starting point from which to contest critical narratives about the irretrievably fragmented nature of the contemporary city.

None of these alternative constructions appears to last, or to be immune to the persistence of certain identitarian hierarchies. Nor can the aesthetic characteristics of cinema entirely erase the logic of property underlying its creation and distribution. The works I have analysed at times invoke a critical distance and detachment from urban networks.[119] Yet their at times diffident interaction with other media and with architecture reveals the ultimate impossibility of this aspiration. Cinema, like the houses it depicts, has only a provisional and contestable autonomy (I will return to this notion in the conclusion). Both film and domestic space are forms that are mediated, though, importantly, not annulled, by their environments.

In his discussion of the merits and disadvantages of Derrida's insistence on an improper and absolute model of hospitality, Cheah notes both that it may be complicit with 'bourgeois economic discourse', but also that it has the advantage of not relying on an

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[119] Amanda Anderson (2001) identifies critical distance and detachment as essentially cosmopolitan qualities.

(impossible) overturning of capitalist alienation (2013: 75-77). He contrasts this approach with that of Marx and Arendt, who in his view 'redefine the proper in terms of the human capacity to make and to open a world that can receive humanity' (70). In Arendt's work, he writes, 'the proper is that which projects us into the world' (69). Ultimately, I will suggest in the conclusion, the reshaping of social relations that these films depict demonstrates qualities from both models: the opening towards nonhuman actors and the decentring of the human subject that Derrida implies, on the one hand, and a recognition of the enduring human capacity to maintain social divisions on the other. That being the case, the opposition of property to impropriety ceases to be of great critical use.

Conclusion

Home is that place which enables and promotes varied and ever changing perspectives, a place where one discovers new ways of seeing reality, frontiers of difference.

bell hooks (1990: 148)

Latour closes his book *Reassembling the Social* by claiming that '[i]n a time of so many crises in what it means to belong, the task of cohabitation should no longer be simplified too much' (2005: 262). The films I have analysed could certainly not be accused of oversimplification. They reveal houses, and the social relations that occur within and through them, as provisional assemblages. Of course, to claim to do this the films implicitly must adopt a position that stands *outside* such networks, and this claim, as we have seen, is itself contestable and highly provisional. In concluding, I will suggest that the films I have analysed undertake what Argentine theorist Leonor Arfuch refers to as a '"rescate" de lo propio, lo local' (2002: 84), both in terms of domestic space and in terms of cinema's specificity as a medium. Yet they do so in a manner that is considerably more fragile and ambivalent than Arfuch's proposal, and that ultimately leaves the distinction between the proper and the improper hard to discern.

Arfuch develops a theory of intimacy and community in early twenty-first century Latin America that draws on Arendt's positing of art's capacity to transpose individual experience (1958: 50). Arfuch's thesis is that transformations in media (the presence of television and the Internet in the domestic sphere, for instance) make classical divisions between private and public spheres impossible to maintain (2002: 27). Insisting on plurality, Arfuch looks for positive, community-building effects of the rise of 'microrrelatos' and life writing. She argues for a model of subjectivity that is co-constituted between the individual and the collective: 'es a partir del *nosotros* que se

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amplía la potencialidad del *yo*' (85, original emphasis). In this vein, she offers the
following speculation:

> quizá la escalada de lo íntimo/privado, que pone en juego una audiencia global,
> pueda leerse también como *respuesta* a los desencantos de la política, al desamparo
> de la escena pública, a los fracasos del ideal de igualdad, a la monotonía de las vidas
> 'reales' ofrecidas a la oportunidad. (78, original emphasis)

Arfuch's argument accords local political contexts surprisingly little room: she claims
that Argentina's specific circumstances in the post-dictatorship period do not
significantly differentiate it from the rest of the world 'en cuanto a la gestión pública de
la intimidad' (19). In other words, she makes no distinction between Argentina's
experience of postmodernity in the 1980s, 90s and beyond, and that of the rest of the
world. This position runs counter both to much work on changing modes of citizenship
in Latin America (García Canclini 1995), and, closer to home, to Beatriz Sarlo's studies of
Argentine urban life (1994; 2001; 2009). In concrete terms, Arfuch's argument appears
to neglect the extent to which new modes of subjectivity, national belonging or
citizenship are formed in response to neoliberal economic models developed in the
aftermath of dictatorship. The market, Sarlo claims, encourages citizen-consumers to
build their identities through the accumulation of objects, and shopping malls to that
end recreate 'la dulzura del hogar donde se borran las contratiempos de la diferencia y
del malentendido' (1994: 19–20).

A more localised version of Arfuch's proposal that cultural interest in intimacy and daily
life responds to a disenchantment with conventional political structures can be found in
Lechner's work on Chilean society after dictatorship. Lechner suggests that 'el
descontento con las formas habituales de hacer política' in post-dictatorship Chile leads
to an investigation into the political potential of daily life (2006: 366). Unlike Arfuch, he
makes no claim as to the value of this development, and instead insists on ideas of
community and the collective as an unresolved question: '¿cómo instituir *lo colectivo* en
sociedades que se caracterizan por una profunda heterogeneidad estructural?' (359,
original emphasis). As we have seen, a similar concern animates the films analysed in
this thesis. Despite the household's historic association with authoritarian modes of

government and with the imposition of a state of exception, discussed in Chapter 2, it would be an over-simplification to oppose the domestic sphere to that of democratic debate. Lechner offers a more nuanced relation: '[t]ambién la democracia, tan necesitada de la luz pública para su desarrollo, esconde patios traseros, algunos sórdidos, otros simplemente olvidados' (346). A film like Agüero's *El otro día* elegantly shows how engagement with the lives of others and a commitment to the equality of experience across class boundaries is conditioned, but not negated, by reminders of authoritarian abuse at home.

Lechner's comments provide a way of bridging the gap between Arfuch's optimism and more pessimistic scholarship on contemporary Latin American culture, which emphasises the fragmentation of the social brought about by the market dynamics outlined above. Perhaps unsurprisingly, such approaches have been particularly influential in Chile: where the neoliberal economic reforms undertaken by the Argentine military junta were generally perceived as a disaster, and mass privatisations did not occur until the presidency of Carlos Menem in the 1990s, in Chile the reforms brought in by Pinochet's regime were widely seen as the foundation for later economic success (Moulian 2002). The work of Nelly Richard posits notions of fragmentation and dismemberment as a consequence of dictatorial rule and neoliberal consensus (2004: 1), but also turns to 'interrupted sequences and inconclusive fragments' as forms with which the work of political memory can be undertaken (21). Ultimately, Richard suggests that critique should mobilise 'los conceptos-metáforas del pliegue y del intersticio' in order to find an '*entre-lugar*', a minimal point from which the de-differentiation that results from the globalised market can be resisted or at least creatively reformulated (2010: 24–25, original emphasis).

We see here that even an essentially deconstructive approach to Latin American culture demands a minimal notion of place. This paradox is also visible in the work of Moreiras, who in his influential *The Exhaustion of Difference,* argues that Latin American cultural studies should be

> fundamentally committed to the deconstruction of the inside-outside relationship
> on which any and all historicisms, including the historicisms of intranational or

diasporic locality, and therefore all cultural theories of modernity, have always been structurally established. (2001: 16)

Moreiras proposes that 'locational thinking', in which, for him, location is always inevitably commodified and converted into 'propriety and, finally, into property' (21), should be replaced with a critical approach he names 'dirty atopianism' (23). Moreiras intends with this phrase to give a singular name to a critical project that resists consolidation into a totalising model, a project that thinks of itself as anticonceptual and antirepresentational (33). This is proposed in opposition to a critical practice that 'capture[s] Latin American difference in order to release it into the global epistemic grid' (32). One of the ironies of Moreiras's outline is his suggestion that it is Latin America's peripheral *location* that makes it fruitful ground for deconstructive critical approaches. For example, he cites Hopenhayn's questioning of Adorno's pessimistic assumption that critical negativity is itself ultimately negated. For Hopenhayn, this pessimism reflects a particular (metropolitan) location, and on the global periphery interstitial spaces persist (Hopenhayn 1994: 155, in Moreiras 2001: 43).

What emerges here is a contradictory desire to (re)construct a form of commonality that avoids identity/difference binaries. Moreiras terms this 'postmodern epistemic constructivism' (2001: 44), and it is given fuller expression in the final pages of Williams' *The Other Side of the Popular*, a similarly prominent study of Latin American culture. Williams closes that book with a call for

> a notion of the social that is grounded no longer in constituted intimacy, in closure, in communion, or in the promise of a completed collective identity of all in one. Rather, it demands a notion of commonality that is grounded in intimacy's and communion's dispersed and scattered interruptions, fissures, fragments, and residues. (2002: 301)

Williams' use of the adjective 'grounded' points, like Richard's 'entre-lugar', to the persistence of an idea of place. His 'interruptions, fissures, fragments, and residues', meanwhile, are what Beverley somewhat dismissively terms the 'tropes' of 'second-wave' Latin Americanism (the kind Moreiras proposes). To these, Beverley adds 'post-

dictatorship, trauma, mourning and melancholy, "inoperative community", "savage hybridity" [another term from Moreiras]', the ruin and allegory (2011: 55). Beverley's critique of this approach is founded on a conviction that, by over-valuing intellectual endeavour, it reinstates a divide between the metropolis and the periphery, and ignores actual political practice. Moreover, he contends, deconstruction reveals itself as 'a form of melancholy' incapable of fostering change (55). Beverley was writing at a moment when the *marea rosada* of left-wing governments in Latin America appeared to promise radical political change, and in 2017 it seems hard to share his belief that the re-emergence of an actual political Left removes deconstruction's strategic importance (55), given the recent turn to the right under Mauricio Macri, in Argentina and the travails of Michelle Bachelet's second government in Chile.[120] Nonetheless, Beverley's characterisation of Moreiras's concepts of 'dirty atopianism' and 'savage hybridity' as bringing with them 'a sense of the Latin American as a form of the *sublime*' (2011: 53, original emphasis) carries some weight. The notion that cultural critique (especially that undertaken from the United States or Europe) must always be in some sense *improper* risks becoming an orientalising gesture towards its object, as Beverley suggests (53).

So while Arfuch's '"rescate" de lo propio, lo local' in a globalised world may be somewhat decontextualised, it acts as a useful counterweight to the potential excesses of deconstructive thought. Arfuch's reevaluation of intimacy has given rise to a substantial body of scholarship in Chile and Argentina, of which the essays in *Estéticas de la intimidad* (Amaro 2009) are notable examples. Tamara Kamenszain calls the writers she discusses in her study *Una intimidad inofensiva* 'los que escriben con lo que hay' (2016). The filmmakers whose work I have analysed here also take what is closest at hand, the intimate and the historically private, as the material with which to elaborate their narratives. I will suggest below that as well as indicating budgetary restraints, this strategy points to new conceptions of cinema's ability to model forms of cohabitation.

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[120] Bachelet's popularity and authority were severely damaged by the alleged involvement of her son, Sebastián Dávalos, in a corruption scandal known as the 'Caso Caval' (Faúndez and others 2017).

By pointing throughout this thesis to the ways in which the material components of housing interact shape human interactions, I have suggested that new materialist approaches to film can aid in the development of a more constructive understanding of the role of domestic space in contemporary Latin American cinema. Where Moreiras proposes a 'postmodern epistemic constructivism' (2001: 44), I follow Latour in arguing that in the films in my corpus 'persons, objects and worlds are taken to be "constructed" entities, that is, entities that could fail (and the notion of construction implies nothing else)' (2002: 41). In Latour's terms, this constructivism, applied not just to human practices but to all elements of the world, is not *post*modern but *non*modern, in that it rejects the culture-nature division he ascribes to the 'modern constitution' (1993: 13). 'Home', understood as an unsteady web of connections between people, objects, the built environment, and the film camera itself, can be viewed as a construction in these terms. The films however diverge from Latour's model at the point at which he envisions the tracing of connections between unexpected actors as leading to the '*progressive composition of one common world*' (2005: 254, original emphasis). As noted in the previous chapter, and less explicitly throughout the thesis, the reflexive aesthetics of these films unsettle the home's traditional role as the marker of a unifying, singular cinematic realism, and point instead to multiple, incommensurable realities.

Andermann has argued that in recent years the identification of cinema with the social mobilisation that occurred around the 2001 crisis in Argentina has given way to a politics that 'advances not toward commonality but toward singularity; not toward the transparency of collective political will but toward the opacity and contradictoriness of local and "originary worlds"' (2013: 159). It is certainly clear that, apart perhaps from in the final sequence of *Las cosas como son*, 'the people' does not appear as fundamental political subject in these films, as was the case in earlier moments of Latin American cinema. Yet Andermann's opposition of the collective and the local appears somewhat reductive, as does Urrutia Neno's claim that the disappearance of the 'pueblo' and the 'masa' from Chilean film entails the disappearance of any possibility of community (2013: 16).

Andermann, Urrutia Neno and other scholars of Argentine and Chilean film are united in suggesting that recent years have seen a shift away from documentary-style realism in

fiction filmmaking: Corro Penjean, for instance, writes of 'ensayos con el realismo' (2012: 15), while Andermann claims that 'cinema becomes a site not so much of social chronicle and testimony as of a reflexiveness of the image, *in the space between televisual spectacle and video-activist counterinformation*' (2013: 160, original emphasis). The division that this sentence articulates is perhaps overly stark. Might it not be said that the reflexivity of the works discussed enhances their effectiveness as 'social chronicle', precisely because in refusing monolithic constructions of 'the social' or 'society' they offer a more accurate image of the world as experienced by contemporary residents of Buenos Aires or Santiago? It is intriguing to note, nonetheless, the independent space which Andermann's judgement accords cinema. I have aimed to show in this thesis that just as film presents the urban house as continually traversed by the exterior, but not subsumed within it, so cinema is placed in contact with other media, but maintains an (uneasy) independent identity.

The term 'media ecology', developed to describe how media, as a complex system, can shape human interactions (Strate 2008), is particularly apposite here given ecology's root in the Greek *oikos*, and is moreover consonant with the new materialist emphasis on nonhuman agency. The varied aesthetic characteristics, economic conditions and distribution circuits of the films I have studied act as a reminder that an ecological understanding of the operation of media in the contemporary city need not imply a smoothing out of all differences, or a total erosion of local identities. As Conley puts it: '[t]he ever-multiplying media spaces do not all have to be confused with consumerist hyperspace' (2012: 149).

Film as provisional cohabitation

Some of the works analysed in this thesis circulate freely online and can easily be viewed at home, either on the national platforms described in the previous chapter or in illicit form on YouTube. Others, however, cannot easily be viewed without directly contacting the filmmakers themselves. So while it might seem straightforward to argue that these works indicate the heterogeneity of contemporary urban media ecologies, it is less obvious that they provide the grounds for a thinking of commonality. This is particularly the case in a context where traditional cinema-going is perceived to be in decline, and existing distribution networks are heavily weighted towards US commercial productions.[121] These developments are particularly marked in Chile, and Santiago does not benefit from the same range of independent or state-subsidised screening spaces as Buenos Aires.[122] It is certainly true, moreover, that in recent decades, film has been more frequently mobilised as a vehicle for collective political action in Argentina than in Chile.[123] Yet in each of the chapters of this thesis, the relations between the domestic sphere and the nation are more clearly visible in the Chilean examples than in their Argentine counterparts, and it is in the Chilean *Las cosas como son* that a domestic narrative explicitly, if briefly, opens towards political action in the street. This contrast, which interestingly inverts the difference Masiello identifies between 'the Argentine anxiety for a *grand récit* and the Chilean cultivation of minor yet violent detail' in an earlier study of Latin American culture (2001: 4, original emphasis), might be explained in a number of ways.

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[121] The early twenty-first century has moreover also seen the revitalisation and birth of national and regional film festivals, notably the BAFICI in Buenos Aires and the SANFIC in Santiago. The ticket prices for such events are generally low, but they might nonetheless be characterised in Scorer's terms as 'exclusionary commons' in class terms (2016: 113). The BAFICI has put on free screenings in neighbourhoods across the capital in recent years, in an effort to combat this perception: the festival's slogan in 2016 was 'la ciudad se viste de cine' ('BAFICI [18]' 2016).
[122] Statistics from Buenos Aires show remarkable resilience in audience numbers for Argentine productions in the period analysed here: 1.5 million in 2005, and 2.3 million in 2015. The total number of cinemagoers remained roughly constant, at 11.5 million (Dirección General de Estadística y Censos (Ministerio de Hacienda GCBA) 2005; 2015).
[123] Jessica Stites Mor's *Transition Cinema* (2012) provides a thorough analysis of left-wing political filmmaking in Argentina since 1968.

First, the continued potency of the Chilean cultural tradition that uses the house as a figure through which to interrogate the nation should not be underestimated, even if the relation that is posited is not, as we have seen, straightforwardly allegorical. One might also consider the increased intervention of the Chilean state in funding film productions, though as noted above this does not in any sense lead to uncritical attitudes towards the nation. In Argentina, meanwhile, the early years of the twenty-first century have seen some reaction against the predominance of state funding via the INCAA, most famously in Carri's *Los rubios* (2003), but also, as we have seen, in the case of filmmakers like Moreno. The formation of small production companies along lines of family or friendship, such as La Unión de los Ríos, which came to prominence with the critical success of the independently-funded *El estudiante* (Mitre 2011), represents a further shift in the cinematic landscape.

It might in fact be argued that it is easier to identify notions of commonality and cohabitation in the production of the films in my corpus than in their aesthetic characteristics. On the one hand, the formal qualities of the films studied here – close-ups, long takes – frequently encourage the spectator to identify affectively with the domestic spheres on display. On the other, the works just as frequently defamiliarise life at home, for instance by imposing a visual or acoustic distance between the events of the diegesis and the spectator. In the absence of many clearly defined aesthetic gestures towards commonality, then, one might turn to production as a more fruitful model of cohabitation. The small-scale nature of many of the works I have analysed encourages the formation of quasi-familial bonds among cast and crew members: Fontán has explicitly recognised this.[124] A Chilean film made shortly after the period that I have discussed, *Vida de familia* (Scherson and Jiménez 2016), neatly illustrates the apparent disconnect between the diegetic and extra-diegetic treatments of the possibility of community and cohabitation. The film, adapted from a short story by Zambra (2014b: 164–86), relates the experiences of Martín, a socially inept, single forty-something man who is paid to look after the house of a distant cousin and his family while they are on holiday. While he is in the house, Martín begins a relationship with a woman to whom

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[124] Conversation with the author, 21 September 2015. Lelio's *La Sagrada Familia* can be taken as another example: as noted in Chapter 2, the shooting took place over the same period of time as the diegetic narrative, and with a small crew that might be thought of as a quasi-familial unit.

he pretends that he owns the property, having recently separated from his wife. The film is largely concerned with the deconstruction of idealised images of family life, and there is no neat resolution at its end: when the house's owners return, Martín has disappeared, without explaining anything to the woman he has been seeing.

The circumstances of production of *Vida de familia* appear to offer a more optimistic version of domestic life: the film was shot in Scherson's own house in Santiago's Barrio Yungay, and in interview, Scherson has spoken of how the film arose in part out of a desire to achieve an intimacy and relaxed atmosphere on set that was not possible in larger productions (mediacinemachile 2017). The fact that the film was co-directed moreover suggests a harmonious sharing of agency that is hardly in evidence within the diegeses of the films I have analysed here. I would suggest, however, that the plot of *Vida de familia* and the process of its production are more alike than they might appear: in both cases, cohabitation and the establishment of a common understanding are both temporary and highly provisional, that is to say, limited to a (bourgeois) domestic sphere and contingent on the availability of money to fund the necessary labour.

The imperfect fiction of home

Vida de familia provides an apt final example for several further reasons. One is the prominence and subtle agency accorded to the material fabric of the house in Martín's performance of his new identity: Scherson has suggested that 'la casa lo va hechizando' (mediacinemachile 2017). Another is the limited spatial references of the film: the camera rarely ventures more than a few blocks from the house. In both of these cases, *Vida de familia* reflects traits visible in the corpus of films analysed here. Moreover, by presenting satisfactory, wholesome family life as a series of performances and as an ultimately unconvincing fiction, Scherson and Jiménez's film plays explicitly with the tension between the realms of reality and fiction that has been present throughout this thesis. Martín's indeterminate status, somewhere between invited guest, legitimate occupant and illicit intruder, mirrors that of several of the characters and participants in

the films discussed here. Martín constructs a temporary, fictional family life with Paz, the woman he sees, and her son, by performing an identity that is not properly his: that of a divorced family man.

Scherson and Jiménez's film does not pass any clear moral judgement on Martín's actions: on the contrary, in its final sequences it encourages the spectator to consider how the life of the 'real' family that returns to the house is underwritten by forms of roleplaying and fiction. Étienne Balibar's notion of 'fictional places' is a useful correlate for the domestic sphere both in this film and in the others I have analysed: Balibar defines fiction positively as 'the production of the real from experience [...] where insurrection opens on to the constitution (and the transformation of existing constitutions) (1998:15).[125] Balibar's thought is particularly valuable for my argument in that it recognises the continued existences of borders and identitarian divisions *within* nations (82–83), and moreover suggests that the solution to practices of exclusion is not the dissolution of all spatial identities into a globalised, virtual commons, but rather the acknowledgment of identity formation as a plural spatial practice that is never complete and that crosses established thresholds. It is not a question, he writes, of '*making identities disappear*, but of giving individuals and groups means of identifying and dis-identifying themselves, of *travelling in their identity* [*voyager dans l'identité*]' (130, original emphasis). Balilbar later develops this positive understanding of fictional identities into an idea of 'imperfect citizenship', a constructive process that avoids a dynamic of property between citizen and state, and the notion of a 'community of fate', a similarly unfinished collective that demands the constant reconstruction of intersubjective relations and thrives on the management of conflicts (2001: 206–15).

The films discussed here are resistant to wholesale co-option by any particular theoretical project, but there appears to be considerable scope for the further consideration of how Balibar's thought, which is developed in relation to Europe, might be of value in relation to contemporary Latin American culture. I will simply point here

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[125] The translation is Conley's (2012: 129). Conley glosses this definition as implying 'a critique of a collective condition *and* and performative enunciation taken as a form of action' (129, original emphasis).

to two ways in which Balibar's work addresses some key ideas from this thesis: first, his conception of the family as a network of affiliations that crosses boundaries between public and private spheres (1998: 82-83), notably similar to Ludmer's theorisation of the 'forma-familia' in contemporary Argentina (2010: 72-73), is echoed in the reworkings of affective and familial bonds that the films in my corpus present. Moreover, Balibar's assertion that the 'community of fate' can begin at the smallest level, 'a building, a street, a neighbourhood, in which we never live isolated with our "fellows" [semblables]' (2001: 210), provides a way of positively interpreting the domestic conflicts visible in recent Argentine and Chilean films. In that these works do not shy away from the constant struggles of home life, or the difficulty of defining 'home' itself, they might be seen to provide a starting point for an honest discussion of contemporary urban cohabitation.

Balibar's work explicitly appeals to art, and indeed to cinema, in proposing its vision of the continual process of imperfect cohabitation and citizenship. Balibar draws on Bertolt Brecht's theorisation of theatre's distancing effect, suggesting that it works 'not against identity but precisely alongside it', providing a mechanism for the regulation of identitarian conflicts 'on another stage [sur une autre scène]' (1998: 131-32). He then argues that filmmakers such as Eisenstein, Jean-Luc Godard and the directors of Italian neorealism 'reintroduced the distancing effect in the very interior of cinema'. Balibar thus opposes film to television, which he claims 'crushes all distancing and all play' (132). I have suggested that in recent Argentine and Chilean films, there is an appeal to theatrical notions of performance on a domestic stage,[126] and a degree of distancing, particularly through challenges to conventional realism and a blurring of the boundaries between documentary and fiction film. It is therefore possible, following Balibar, to think of the fictionality of ideas of 'home' in these films as enabling a constructive understanding of domestic relations.

It is striking to note, in this context, that Scherson has described the domestic setting of *Vida de familia* as advantageous precisely because it allowed the film to avoid being labelled as 'Latin American' (that is to say, as a production conforming to current global

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[126] This appeal is arguably even stronger in the films of the Argentine Matías Piñeiro, and in Rodrigo Marín's *Las niñas* (2007).

expectations of Latin American cinema), and thus facilitated its participation in international festivals such as Sundance (mediacinemachile 2017). The home is thus presented as a place which, both within the diegesis and outside it, allows experimentation with identity: what Balibar calls 'means of identifying and dis-identifying' (1998: 130). Thinking in the terms used by Moreiras, the home thus becomes a location that subverts the commodification of location. Here again, however, the question of economic restrictions rears its head. The house in *Vida de familia* permits such a subversion of conventional identity labels because its owners (both intra- and extra-diegetic) are wealthy: it is full of costly markers of cosmopolitan belonging, such as shelves full of books. Scherson and Jiménez are not blind to the privilege such an environment presents, nor its potentially alienating effects: towards the end of the film, Martín pulls the bookshelves apart and scatters their contents across the floor. In many other recent productions, as we have seen, the potential of residential property to materialise 'non-belonging', as well as belonging, in Rhodes' terms (2017), is made still more explicit.

Beyond negative communities

As suggested above, much recent work on Argentine and Chilean film has suggested that the turn towards the domestic sphere implies not only a kind of aesthetic enclosure, but also a political move towards singularity rather than commonality. The films analysed here certainly do not advance large-scale political projects; nor do they make claims about 'society' as a whole, or appeal to 'the people' as a coherent political subject, as did earlier traditions of Latin American filmmaking. In these works, common identities are only available temporarily, in restricted locations, and through a performative understanding of social relations.

I have, however, aimed to show that this development can be understood in positive, constructive terms, as a modest cinematic response to the increasing heterogeneity and fragmentation of urban environments. In the films I have analysed, houses function as

material vectors for the tensions between the individual and the collective, as they relate to memory, modernity, labour, and the practice of hospitality. These issues are articulated via reflexive aesthetics that draw on, but are not limited to, previous filmic traditions.[127] The works thus make a tentative claim to cinematic specificity, while recognising their co-existence with, and indeed dependence on, other media (a category that includes the houses themselves). Their reflexivity moreover makes clear the non-identity of 'house' and 'home'. The films leave little doubt that 'home' is a 'fictional space' in Balibar's terms, or a rather unsteady poetic construction if we follow the definition of 'poetic' advanced in the introduction to this thesis. Houses are not here reduced to mere symbolic *expressions* of an existing political order, as was the case in earlier cinema, but are revealed as technologies of representation and as agents in the construction and performance of humanity's fictional identities. The multiple ways in which the films analysed defamiliarise the domestic environment, or incorporate it into their strategies of framing, might thus be thought of as a cinematic equivalent to the shift that Bernstein proposes from the noun 'house' to the gerund 'housing'.

Yet this shift does not occur without conflict. The changing nature of the urban fabric and the increasing contiguity of dwellings are frequently seen to challenge a proprietorial attachment to a house as a symbol of individual identity, but the consequences of an understanding of housing as process are not always positive. In *El hombre de al lado*, Víctor creates a new window in order to let more light in, and establishes temporary affective bonds across class boundaries, but in *Las cosas como son* Jerónimo undertakes modifications to his house to enhance its security and its ability to earn him money. In short, the films analysed are not particularly optimistic about the possibilities of cohabitation in contemporary Buenos Aires or Santiago. Yet the fact that a space of possibility and encounter is revealed, at home, is itself a notable development, which allows an appreciation of the political value of spaces not easily recognisable as 'public'. Nancy writes that the place of politics is the open space between multiple, incommensurable spheres that are both private and public (2010: 50): there is perhaps scope for imagining 'home' as one of these spheres, and cinema as 'the place where it is a matter of keeping [...] incommensurability open' (50).

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[127] This technique is particularly evident in the Chilean film *Lucía* (Atallah 2010), which uses a reduced frame rate to create a stop-motion effect in sequences depicting domestic activities.

The films' refusal to provide overarching visions of 'the social', or of the city, need not therefore be read as a retreat into rigid identities. In fact, these films fulfil Williams' plea for the avoidance of 'historically constituted (colonial, national, imperial, or neoliberal) notions of a subsistent ground or of a common measure for being-in-common' (2002: 301), through their presentation of the vastly differing material conditions and social practices of contemporary urban dwelling. The alternative they present is not, however, purely 'spectral' or 'negative', as Williams suggests (19, 286), though parts of the films could be described in these terms. The heterogeneity and conflict in evidence their houses can be seen, following Balibar, as essential for the construction of any viable collective. Balibar views the project of community as the creation of

> a *hybrid political actor* (or 'power'), whose capacity virtually extends to the whole world (or is always already 'cosmopolitical'), but who is *located*, *situated*, in a certain place, where conflicts with global causes and dimensions are crystallizing and reflected in a singular manner. (2012: 448, original emphasis)

In the films I have analysed, people and the houses they live in go some way towards becoming such hybrid political actors, especially in their conversion into and circulation as cinematic images. The concept of domestic cosmopolitanism on film is perhaps best understood in these terms, as a constellation of 'micro publics' (Nava 2007: 12-13), or what Rosello terms spatial 'forms of constraint' (2013: 144), that represent a more achievable form of conviviality than a singular, utopian cinematic public sphere.

To give an example: the upheaval and the encounter with otherness that Jerónimo experiences at home in *Las cosas como son* makes way for an engagement, however slight, with political action in the street. In a sense, then, I am proposing a reworking of Bachelard's assertion that a house provides 'a body of images that give mankind proofs or illusions of stability' (1969: 17): houses provide a place from which we can be usefully unsettled. Houses might be thought of as the residual, plural and heterogenous grounds implicit in deconstructive readings of Latin American culture, the '*entre-lugar*' from which Richard imagines identities could be creatively reformulated (2010: 25). This might seem a rather modest and provisional claim, but the histories of violence that have accompanied rigid and exclusionary understandings of home in Argentina and Chile give cause for regarding such provisionality as a virtue.

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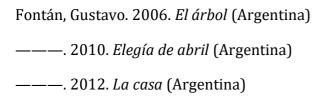Cavallo, Ascanio, and Gonzalo Maza (eds.). 2010. *El novísimo cine chileno* (Santiago de Chile: Uqbar)

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