

BLOOD RUNS: THE CIRCULATION OF ARGENTINE HORROR CINEMA IN  
ARGENTINA AND THE UNITED STATES

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A dissertation submitted to the faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of English and Comparative Literature.

Chapel Hill  
2012

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## **ABSTRACT**

**JONATHAN RISNER: Blood Runs: The Circulation of Argentine Horror Cinema in the United States and Argentina**

(Under the direction of María DeGuzmán and Joanne Hershfield)

The following dissertation focuses on six Argentine horror films available in the United States and Argentina and how the films' circulation in two national markets is reflected in multiple sociopolitical allegories concerning both countries. 9/11, the War in Iraq, legacies of Argentina's Dirty War (1976-83), the neoliberalization and 2001 economic collapse of Argentina, and the city/country divisions figure into the movies as scenes or fragments of scenes. The six films use well-known horror cinema motifs to not only help the films be recognized as horror by U.S. and Argentine consumers, but also to portray the aforementioned events in a different light. The films tender new modes of seeing national and global crises and contribute to cultural and political discourses on topics such as violence, memory, urban decay, citizenship, and the failure of government institutions.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation is the sum of many parts and help has come from many quarters. I must express gratitude to so many. First, my committee. Gregory Flaxman has been an astute mentor and originally suggested I focus on Argentine horror cinema. Tamara Falicov generously offered her expertise, encouragement, and advice. She provided crucial contacts in Buenos Aires that helped get the project off the ground. Long before I embarked on this project, Juan Carlos González-Espitia inspired me to look at “the dark side” of Latin American cultural production. His passion for intellectual exchange and teaching and uncanny ability to find time to help students constantly amazes me. Last but not least, my co-directors, María DeGuzmán and Joanne Hershfield have had no small hand in shaping this project. They have challenged me at all steps and have always been willing to offer advice when I was seemingly at a dead end. I dearly appreciate their help.

Of course, academic help has come from beyond the committee. Juana Suárez has been a brilliant mentor over the years and has influenced this project in so many ways. Richard Langston threw me a crucial lifeline when I was scouring the earth trying to define what consumption of a film entailed. The Geography Department at UNC introduced me to film geography and feminist geography. I can only hope I have acted responsibly. Thank you to Altha Cravey, Alvaro Reyes, Gabriela Valdivia, and Joseph Palis (now at N.C. State).

Argentina’s horror community has been a generous group. I am constantly humbled by their willingness to interact with a random student from the United States and/or to respond to an email. The passion they exude for cinema is nothing short of inspiring, and I can only hope to

have replicated a measure of that very passion here. I cannot thank them enough: Pablo Sapere, Paula Pollachi, Sebastián Tabany, Axel Kuchevatsky, Carina Rodríguez, Demián Rugna, Fabián Forte, Hernán Findling, Nicanor Loreti, Daniel de la Vega, Charles Newberry, Lisandro Berenguer Grassi, and Dário Lavia. Equally important, I must acknowledge the help from employees at Mondo macabro (R.I.P.) and Solo cine.

Friends, of course, also have been helpful to the realization of this dissertation. Pablo Maurette deserves special mention for retrieving films on visits to Buenos Aires or recommending a text to illuminate some facet of Argentine culture. I promise the next project will be about Vicki. Thanks to Brian Bedsworth for being a dear friend and for finding me a place to stay in Buenos Aires for a couple weeks. Thanks to Roger McDonough for hosting me. Thanks also goes to various friends for offering words of encouragement or just a laugh: Glynis Cowell; Emilo del Valle Escalante; Oswaldo Estrada; Sam and Amy Amago; Jocelyn Dawson and Rob Thompson; Joaquin Bueno, Amy Wentworth, and Santiago; Esther Poveda and Bill Norman; Hélène DeFays, Abel Muñoz, Otto and Paloma; Dennis, Kristine, and Leo Markatos-Soriano; Marco Oliveira; Raphael Ginsberg; Neal Morris; Gene Hughes; Carlos Abreu Mendoza; Heather and Alba Knorr; Marc Cohen; and Bobby Blankenship.

Crucial institutional support came in the form of grants from UNC's Institute for the Study of the Americas and UNC's Department of English and Comparative Literature. This dissertation would never have been completed without their help.

Finally, I owe so much to my families in helping me realize this project. Anytime family is mentioned in the same breath as horror cinema, I cannot help but to laugh. Thanks to John and Carol; Ray and Martha; Nathan and Vicky; Amelia, Scott, Lucy, and Will; Eric and Sierra. Thanks to my Mom and Dad. Thanks for encouraging and supporting me through the years.

Thanks also to my kids, Arno and Ila, who are such rays of hope. Finally, this dissertation is dedicated to my partner and love, Gretchen Moehlmann. It is so hard to put in words what you do for me day-in and day-out. You lift and move me. Let's keep moving.

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## INTRODUCTION

In June of 2008, I entered into Mondo macabro, a horror movie store in Buenos Aires and soon discovered a cinematic circuit, unknown to me, between Argentina and the United States. A handful of Argentine horror films lined the walls and, after inquiring about purchasing a DVD, the clerk asked where I was from. I answered, “Los Estados Unidos” (“the United States”) and the clerk replied that many of the movies before me were distributed not in Argentina, but rather in my country of origin. He explained I could give him a blank DVD and a few pesos to receive a copy of the film by the week’s end. Since I was leaving Buenos Aires the next day, I declined. That evening I found several Argentine horror movies on amazon.com from which I purchased them while still in Argentina. My first brush with Argentine horror cinema was a skein of flows and exchanges. Argentine horror films circulated legally in the United States and by other means in Argentina proper. Abetted by liquid capital (i.e., a credit card), I purchased the films while physically in Argentina, and the DVDs would soon arrive at my front door in North Carolina. Like a parasitic monster harnessing various modes of technology, commerce and distribution, Argentine horror cinema made its way through the Americas into my DVD player in the United States.

The anecdote above illustrates a myriad of issues related to Argentine horror films distributed in the United States that I will address. Films are only one facet of Argentine horror cinema. To map the present state of Argentine horror cinema is akin to drawing a shifting constellation whose elements – films, funding, themes, criticism, directors, and directors’ influences – are oriented both inward and outward from the country and move between

Argentina and other countries and particularly the United States in my dissertation. Select Argentine horror films achieve DVD distribution in the United States through companies both big and small and through online downloading.<sup>1</sup> Some films have also been screened as part of horror and/or fantasy film festivals in the United States or, in the case of Adrián García Bogliano's *Habitaciones para turistas/Rooms for Tourists* (2004), have enjoyed a theatrical run.<sup>2</sup> The circulation of Argentine horror cinema is by no means exclusive to the United States. Argentine horror cinema enjoys domestic distribution through various channels like the company Videofilms, the downloading of films on file sharing programs such as Taringa, select retail stores such as Mondo macabro, or even informal street markets. Argentine horror films are screened also at various Argentine film festivals, cultural centers, and even cinemas, a topic I will address in the first chapter. In my analysis, the infrastructure of Argentine horror cinema exists in Argentina and the United States on large and small scales.

Argentine and U.S. production and distribution companies, film festivals, retail and fan websites and deterritorialized file sharing programs coalesce to enable horror films to circulate and to create an Argentine horror film culture in two different countries. Although I will explore the idea of a film culture more in chapter 1, in his study of Italian cinema Pierre Sorlin articulates

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<sup>1</sup>Daniel de la Vega and Pablo Parés's film *La sombra de Jennifer/Chronicle of a Raven* (a.k.a. *Jennifer's Shadow*) (2004) is distributed by Lionsgate in the U.S., while De la Vega's *La muerte conoce tu nombre/Death Knows Your Name* (2007) is distributed by Maverick Entertainment Group, a company considerably smaller than Lionsgate. With regards to film titles of Argentine films, I list both the Spanish and English titles, when possible, in italics. When no English or Spanish title is available, I provide the translation within quotation marks. Subsequent references to films will be either only in Spanish or English, depending on the film's original title.

<sup>2</sup>*Death Knows Your Name*, for example, was shown at the Tabloid Witch Festival in Santa Monica, California in 2007. *Habitaciones para turistas* was screened at the Two Boots Pioneer Theater in New York City in 2005.

a criteria for what constitutes a national film culture. For Sorlin, a national film culture was “not a set of films which help to distinguish a nation from other nations, [but rather] the chain of relations and exchanges which develop in connection with films, in a territory delineated by its economic and juridical policy” (10). In the case of Argentine horror film culture, the distribution of films in the United States points to a “chain of relations” not only in Argentina proper, but in the United States as well. In short, the distribution of Argentine horror films in the United States and the various practices that emerge around those films in both countries point to an Argentine horror film culture both in Argentina and in the United States.

The circulation of Argentine horror films between Argentina and the United States is not a coincidence, and it extends to the level of aesthetics. First, the films’ adherence to horror cinema codes, or rather codes of particular horror subgenres, is recognizable to U.S. audiences and Argentine audiences alike.<sup>3</sup> Thus, a Gothic horror film such as *Jennifer’s Shadow* features a mansion, unexplained diseases, and familial conflicts. *Interferencial/Dead Line* (a.k.a. *Interference*; Sergio Esquenazi, 2007), an apartment horror film, projects the unraveling of its hermit-like protagonist, Martin, who imagines he is being pursued.<sup>4</sup> *Plaga zombie: Zona mutante* (Pablo Parés and Hernán Sáez, 2001), a film as its title suggests, features scores of the undead, a communicable disease, gore, government malfeasance, and a trio of ordinary heroes

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<sup>3</sup>I draw on the following texts to consider the characteristics of a horror subgenre: apartment horror (Carl Royer and Diana Royer’s *The Spectacle of Isolation in Horror Films*), Gothic (Lisa Hopkins’ *Screening the Gothic*), zombies (Gregory Waller’s *The Living and the Undead* and Peter Dendle’s essay “The Zombie as a Barometer of Cultural Anxiety”) and slashers (Carol Clover’s *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*, Vera Dika’s *Games of Terror*, and Richard Nowell’s *Blood Money*).

<sup>4</sup>Though I will discuss generic characteristics more in chapter 2, the apartment as a primary setting and a character’s psychological demise within the apartment are two fundamental elements of apartment horror.

brandishing makeshift weapons. In *Habitaciones para turistas* and *36 Pasos*, two slasher films, violence against women, sometimes committed by women, unfolds largely in rural locations.

The films' adherence to horror subgenre conventions, however, does not translate into an exclusive address to an Argentine or U.S. audience to the neglect of the other. Indeed, Argentine horror films and Argentine horror film culture can just as easily be studied in different national contexts in which a group of Argentine horror films are distributed and/or viewed through, say, retail stores and/or file sharing programs.<sup>5</sup> I focus on films distributed in the U.S. since the films that I analyze specifically privilege and imagine Argentine and U.S. audiences in different ways and to differing degrees.

Two films intended for the U.S. market – *Death Knows Your Name* and *Dead Line* – obscure their Argentine film locations and simultaneously project a generic urban United States and use a U.S. English-language dialogue, albeit at times accented. Dialogue and onscreen spaces are crucial ways in which the films appeal to U.S. viewers by imitating the United States. In the case of the Spanish-language films that I examine, the films' *argentinidad* comes through in film locations, language, humor, and cultural references that cater to an Argentine audience.<sup>6</sup> The films, some oriented towards a U.S. audience and some towards an Argentine one, create a spectrum in which the films imagine both U.S. and Argentine audiences. The films' dynamics of imagining different national audiences are tied to the question of circulation. Benjamin Lee and

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<sup>5</sup>Argentine horror films are distributed in numerous Latin American, European, and Asian countries. To allude one example, several Argentine horror films are distributed in Germany and can be obtained through the German branch of <amazon.com>.

<sup>6</sup>With the term *argentinidad*, I refer to some expression or embodiment of Argentina and/or Argentine cultures. Since views of what constitutes *argentinidad* can fluctuate over time or among regions, I support instances of *argentinidad* in Argentine horror films with allusions to other expressions of Argentine culture such as non-horror films, literature, websites, and periodicals.

Edward LiPuma have written about circulation in general terms, and the following comment is instructive in considering how Argentine horror cinema appeals to both Argentine and U.S. viewers: “circulation always presupposes the existence of their respective interpretative communities, with their own forms of interpretation and evaluation” (192). If the films imagine Argentine and U.S. audiences in different ways (again, language and cultural allusions, obscuring versus revealing a film’s location), all the films remain recognizable as horror films by virtue of their adherence to horror subgenre codes. Moreover, if the films prioritize one national audience, they also possess some particularities that may appeal to the other. To revisit the examples already cited, in the case of *Death Knows Your Name* and *Dead Line*, Argentine audiences can identify actual film locations in Buenos Aires among the fabricated onscreen United States. In the case of the Spanish-language films ostensibly aimed at Argentine viewers, U.S. viewers should recognize allusions to the United States in *Plaga zombie: Zona mutante* when a character quotes George W. Bush’s speeches during the build-up to the War on Terror.

Projections and traces of two national cultures broach the larger issue of how Argentina and the United States manifest themselves onscreen in the same film. Allusions to both countries assume the form of cinematic allegories that manipulate horror subgenre codes, and I am principally interested in allegories of Argentine and U.S. crises: the Argentine Dirty War (1976-83), the implementation of neoliberal policies and the popular reaction against such policies in Argentina during the last two decades of the twentieth century, 9/11, the War on Terrorism, and urban paranoia in Argentina and the United States.

Allegory is an apt tool for detecting portrayals of crises. As Ismail Xavier writes, on a very basic level, allegory is “[...] a kind of utterance in which someone says one thing but means another, or makes manifest one thing to allude to something else” (“Historical” 337). In the

context of cinema, allegory can manifest itself through editing and visual compositions (Xavier, “Historical” 338). Particular subgenres of horror offer additional ways of encoding events to create an allegory. These include familial conflict over the inheritance over a mansion (Gothic), slapstick-like gore (zombie films), axe murderers preying on young women in the countryside (slasher). Such motifs can acquire an allegorical dimension when linked to a national context, or in this case, two.

Theories of allegory are also useful when considering the dynamic of how the films are produced and possibly received by Argentine and U.S. audiences. Interpreting the film does not solely depend on a film circulating within a particular national context and viewers projecting meanings upon it. As intimated above, the films are also *imagining* audiences within two particular national contexts thus creating two poles: one, audience interpretation and, two, the films’ encoding processes. With regards to an audience’s allegorical interpretation, a viewer may sense that something onscreen alludes to a reality off-screen. In turn, the viewer may connect the film, or parts of the film, with events beyond the work itself. As for the films’ encoding processes, I return to Xavier’s formulation of allegory, specifically allegory as conceived in classical Greece: “The dynamics that typify allegory undoubtedly allow for the identification of encoding processes” through the use of certain techniques (“Historical” 338). The aforementioned horror subgenre codes offer encoding techniques through which the films project multiple Argentine and U.S. crises.

Allegory has long been used to project national dilemmas in Latin American cinema from the 1940s on (Xavier, “Historical” 355-360). Argentine horror cinema allegorizes national

crises as well.<sup>7</sup> What is exceptional, however, is the allegorization of U.S. crises in the same film, sometimes in the same scene. To offer another example which I explore in my analysis of *Plaga zombie: Zona mutante* in chapter 3, marauding legions of the undead are more than just zombies. They embody the contemporary presence of mass political groups in Argentina such as *piqueteros*, while engaging with a longstanding national preoccupation with the role of unruly mobs or crowds as reflected in Argentina's literary and cinematic production. The undead in *Plaga zombie: Zona mutante* do allude to Argentine crowds.<sup>8</sup> Yet when a human survivor refers to the zombies as "pura maldad" ("pure evil"), the undead also embody the "evil" that George Bush used to describe Al-Qaeda following the 9/11 attacks to justify the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq.

The multiple national meanings of a zombie horde may or may not be guaranteed among Argentine and U.S. audiences as the film circulates in the two countries. First and foremost, audiences within Argentina and the United States will recognize the zombie horde, or another horror motif, as crucial to a film's belonging to a particular horror subgenre. A viewer's allegorical interpretation of that motif may differ based on his/her location and/or cultural knowledge brought to a film. Argentine audiences and U.S. audiences may or may not recognize each other's crises in the films. Insofar as the films' allegories are contingent on a viewer's

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<sup>7</sup>While I further address the issue of the multiple meanings of allegory in chapter 1 with my discussion of Fredric Jameson's ideas about national allegory and Third World literature, allegory is often conceived as "polysemous" (Teskey 63-64), and thus my reading of national allegory can hardly be exhaustive. In other words, I hold out the possibility that the films allegorize something else besides Argentina and the United States.

<sup>8</sup>*Piqueteros* has often been translated into English as "picketers." *Piqueteros* generally refer to associations of unemployed workers who organize various actions such as *cortes de ruta* ("roadway blockades") or blockades of financial buildings to protest government policies and to demand unemployment relief.



location, the films' circulation between the two countries provokes and obscures possible allegorical readings of crises.

I place my study of Argentine horror cinema between two corpuses of film criticism: academic and non-academic. On one hand, an examination of Argentine horror cinema follows on the heels of recent academic scholarship on Argentine and Latin American cinema that deals with horror and exploitation cinema and criticism of themes relevant or, at least tangential, to horror cinema, such as screen violence. I have encountered only one academic essay on classical Argentine horror cinema: María José Moore and Paula Wolkowicz's study of monsters and doubles in Argentine horror films from the 1940s and 1950s, such as *La luz en la ventana*/"A Light in the Window" (Manuel Romero, 1942). Albeit unpublished, Carina Rodríguez's master's thesis on the film festival Buenos Aires Rojo Sangre (BARS) and the distribution company Videofilms offers crucial insights into the exhibition and circulation of contemporary Argentine horror cinema.

A number of texts provide an entry point into my examination of contemporary Argentine horror cinema. *Violence in Argentine Literature and Cinema*, an anthology edited by Carolina Rocha and Elizabeth Montes Garcés, analyzes representations of violence in contemporary Argentine novels and films. The authors' new representations of violence in works produced in the past two decades, connecting the change to former president Carlos Menem's implementation of neoliberal policies beginning in 1989. My interests lie specifically with the essays that focus on cinematic portrayals of violence.

In her essay "Violence and Representation: Postdictatorship Visions in Lita Stantic and Albertina Carri," Ana Forcinito examines director Albertina Carri's use of Playmobil toy to illustrate her parents' kidnapping during the Dirty War Carri's *Los rubios*/"The Blondes" (2003).

Forcinito considers the ethical dimensions surrounding the portrayal of sensitive historical events and their effects on social memory (84). In her essay about masculine violence in *La furia*/"The Fury" (Juan Bautista Stagnaro, 1997) and *Cenizas del paraíso*/"Ashes of Paradise" (Marcelo Piñeyro, 1997), Rocha argues that the violence in contemporary national cinema points to "the disintegration of the social fabric and the severance of ties among different members of the national community" ("Barbaric" 94). Gabriela Copertari detects the presence of violence in both city and rural spaces in *El cielito*/"Little Sky" (2004). Natalia Jacovkis considers the violence that unfolds in Israel Adrián Caetano's *Bolivia/Bolivia* (2001), particularly the violence committed against a Bolivian immigrant, as emblematic of the "violence that neoliberalism brought about in the country's social network" (164).

All of the essays' aforementioned topics – the stylization of violence, the ethics of representing violence, social memory, the circulation of violence in urban and rural spaces, and fragmentation among a citizenry – figure into my analyses about how certain Argentine horror films allegorize neoliberalism in Argentina. For example, the violence in Bogliano's slasher films permeates both urban and rural spaces as in *El cielito*. Distinct from the aforementioned films from Montes Garcés and Rocha's book, the Argentine horror films' allegorization of contemporary crises does not stop with neoliberalism in Argentina, but rather extends to other Argentine and U.S. dilemmas: the Dirty War, 9/11, and the War on Terror.

Additional essays provide a crucial space for framing contemporary Argentine horror cinema. In *Cines al margen* ("Cinemas at the margin"), a collection of essays edited by María José Moore and Paula Wolkowicz, various authors describe filmmaking practices and styles such as realism and self-reflexive documentaries that differ from mainstream cinema, particularly Hollywood, and often rely upon various modes of funding, exhibition spaces, and distribution.

In some respects, a number of Argentine horror films conform to what constitutes a marginal cinema according to David Oubiña in the prologue to Moore and Wolkowicz's book: small budgets, various sources of funding, exhibition venues besides multiplexes, and formal experimentation (14-15). However, recent decisions by INCAA (Instituto Nacional de Cine y Artes Audiovisuales; National Institute of Cinema and Visual Arts) to fund production of some horror films suggest a change in horror cinema's national status.<sup>9</sup> Over the past five years, INCAA has backed *Visitante de invierno/Winter Visitor* (Sergio Esquenazi, 2007), *Lo siniestro/The Uncanny* (Sergio Mazurek, 2009), *Sudor frío/Cold Sweat* (Adrián García Bogliano, 2010), *Malditos sean/Cursed Bastards* (Fabián Forte and Demián Rugna, 2011), *Penumbra/Penumbra* (Adrián García Bogliano, 2011) and *Todos mis muertos*/"All My Dead" (Mad Crampi). INCAA's recent support implies Argentine horror cinema may not be permanently marginalized, opening the door for some horror films to enter the mainstream.

An additional collection of essays, *Latsploitation, Exploitation Cinemas, and Latin America* edited by Victoria Ruétalo and Dolores Tierney, provides yet another point of departure for considering contemporary Argentine horror cinema. The films covered in *Latsploitation* share a number of characteristics with Argentine horror films, which primarily exist outside mainstream cinemas – both Hollywood and a national cinema. Moreover, Argentine horror films conform to the more "fluid" (3) criteria that Ruétalo and Tierney associate with latsploitation versus the conception of exploitation cinema in the United States. Latsploitation encompasses films made with big and small budgets, "transnational model[s] of production" (i.e., co-productions between countries), and international distribution (2-3). While most Argentine

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<sup>9</sup>INCAA is the national government film production company in Argentina, which, among other things, provides crucial funding for the production of films.

horror films are made on budgets of a few thousand dollars or less, *Jennifer's Shadow*, an Argentine-U.S. coproduction, was made on a relatively large budget of \$1 million (Loreti). The international distribution of some Argentine horror films also suggests latsploitation may be an appropriate rubric under which to place Argentine horror. However, Argentina horror cinema's possible break with latsploitation comes primarily with Argentine films' belonging to the horror genre. Latsploitation, as the editors themselves acknowledge (2), includes an incredible array of exploitation subgenres ranging from Italian cannibal films, movies by cult auteur Alejandro Jodorowsky's, Brazilian *pornochanchadas*, and sharksploitation movies. Even if Ruétalo and Tierney's book encompasses analyses of horror films by the likes of León Klimovsky and Emilio Vieyra, both Argentine directors, latsploitation differs vastly from contemporary Argentine horror films in terms of formal elements such as narrative, camera work, tone, and sound. Classifying Argentine horror films as latsploitation risks obscuring those characteristics that make a film a horror film.

Two studies of horror cinema in specific Latin American national contexts also inform my analysis of contemporary Argentine horror. In his formalist studies of Mexican horror and exploitation films from the 1960s, 70s, and 80s, Doyle Greene considers such films as representations of a crisis in Mexico's collective psyche following the Tlatelolco Massacre in 1968.<sup>10</sup> While Greene's studies lack an extensive theoretical foundation for allegory, his locating expressions of national dilemmas in horror films is an allegorical move that I also make, although those dilemmas also include those of the United States and the films' countries of origin (Argentina).

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<sup>10</sup>For example, Greene argues that the horror film *Alucarda, la hija de las tinieblas/Sisters of Satan* (Juan López Moctezuma, 1978) momentarily projects the Tlatelolco Massacre (*Mexican* 90).

In her book *Reckoning*, Diane Nelson considers the possible attractions that U.S. horror cinema poses for local audiences in post-civil war Guatemala. Nelson's meditation on the different ways a horror film can be received following a national trauma proves especially cogent for my examination of Argentine horror cinema vis-à-vis the Dirty War. For Nelson, one reason U.S. horror cinema is popular among Guatemalans is that the films operate as a memory practice that project different facets of the civil war (i.e., who is the killer?) and, in scenes of graphic screen violence, also act on the audience's bodies (i.e., flinching, covering one's eyes) to remind them of the violence that transpired during the conflict (87-114). Albeit in two different national contexts (Argentina and the United States), I also consider the possible modes of reception given the looming presence of the Dirty War. U.S. viewers watching an Argentine horror film are likely to have interpretations distinct from their Argentine counterparts. If there are analogous elements in Nelson's analyses, my study of Argentine horror films distributed in the United States differs in terms of how particular films imagine their audiences. U.S. horror films do not necessarily prioritize a post-civil war Guatemalan audience, while, as I have discussed above, Argentine horror films explicitly imagine a U.S. audience through English-language dialogue and the erasure of Argentina and Argentine culture from the diegesis.

My project draws upon a second body of criticism unaffiliated with academia. Pablo Conde and Pablo Mérida's *Cine bizarro y fantástico hispano-argentino entre dos siglos* and Matías Raña's *Guerreros del cine: argentino, fantástico e independiente* have proven to be indispensable references. Conde and Mérida's book, a collection of interviews with Argentine and Spanish directors, offers a primer not only on the work of several Argentine horror film directors, but also provides context for the horror genre's status in the country and, along with Raña's book, places Argentine horror among a movement of filmmakers working in genres such

as fantasy, animation, and science-fiction films. Essays by Darío Lavia and Pablo Sapere on websites such as [quintadimension.com](http://quintadimension.com) and [cinefania.com](http://cinefania.com) have proven equally crucial in shaping my views of Argentine horror cinema culture and its criticism. These websites contain articles not only about contemporary Argentine horror, but also older national horror films and horror from outside Argentina. They boast a level of historic and international awareness that mirrors that of other horror or genre-film websites elsewhere in the world. Websites for particular directors (Daniel de la Vega, Demián Rugna, Fabián Forte) and production companies (Paura Flics, Gorevision, FARSA Producciones, Druida Film, among others) likewise demonstrate a degree of internationalism with posts and links to articles about their films from Argentine media and media in other countries.

Argentine horror film culture, like that of the United States or any number of other countries, belongs to a transnational horror cinema culture. Both fan and directors' sites show a level of international awareness which underscores how Argentine directors can make films steeped in horror genre codes that U.S. and Argentine fans can understand. Just as Argentine sites demonstrate an awareness of U.S. horror and that of other countries, U.S. horror sites such as Fangoria and [bloodydisgusting.com](http://bloodydisgusting.com) show an awareness of Argentine horror as well as the horror cinema of other nations.

Textual or virtual, academic or non-academic, my dissertation inevitably diverges from these sources by its exclusive focus on Argentine horror films that are distributed in the U.S. on DVD as well as the film cultures surrounding the circulation of those DVDs. In the first chapter, I provide an overview of the film cultures that foster an Argentine-U.S. transnational horror culture. The transnational extends to the films' content to varying degrees, therefore in the latter

part of chapter, I theoretically trace the ways in which allegory enables the films' content to project a plurality of Argentine and U.S. crises, often times within the same film.

In the subsequent three chapters, I analyze multiple layers of allegories in six films, two per chapter. In the second chapter, I examine the paranoid aesthetics of two Argentine English-language films, *Dead Line* and *Death Knows Your Name*. The films' projections of paranoia unfold in anonymous urban spaces that are made to look like the United States with Argentine actors speaking accented English. The accented English-language dialogue and the traces of Buenos Aires tender a controlled, and thus pleasurable, moment of paranoia, specifically for U.S. audiences. The films portray a United States and its citizens with non-U.S. actors to a degree unprecedented in other foreign-made films. Making the imitation of the United States all the more intriguing, it comes at a moment when fear and resentment of Latin American immigrants, who are often times marked by their accents, remain at a high in the United States. While the paranoia of Latin American immigration can hardly be construed as a widespread phenomenon among horror film viewers in the United States, the idea of Latin Americans (Latinas/os within the U.S.) imitating the United States presents an additional dimension of pleasurable paranoia in addition to that on-screen.

In the third chapter, I analyze films set in Argentina: *Jennifer's Shadow* takes place in Buenos Aires while *Plaga zombie: Zona mutante* is set in Haedo, a small town outside Buenos Aires. Spectacular scenes of violence unfold in recognizable spaces, and the violence both defamiliarizes the spaces and allegorizes political and socioeconomic events. Through the inclusion of U.S. characters and cultural allusions, along with monologues and rhetoric parodying George Bush's speeches following 9/11, audiences potentially see the War on Terror in a different light. For example, in an instance of parallel editing, one character, John West,

declares the zombies “pura maldad” (“pure evil”), a phrase that Bush used to describe Al-Qaeda following 9/11. The film cuts from the words “pura maldad” to a chaotic scene of graphic violence in which zombies and humans battle. The parallel editing thus shows what can hide behind grandiose declarations like Bush’s: utter carnage. Spectacles of violence are also crucial for allegorizing Argentine culture. The threat of eviction in *Jennifer’s Shadow* dramatizes the spike in housing evictions during Argentina’s economic crisis in 2001. The zombie hordes in *Plaga zombie* likewise engage with a discourse on crowds in Argentine literary texts such as Esteban Echeverría’s *El matadero/The Slaughterhouse*, as well as the spectacle of crowds in the contemporary Argentine socio-political landscape.

The fourth chapter focuses on rural and urban imaginaries in two slasher films by Adrián García Bogliano *Habitaciones para turistas* and *36 Pasos*. The films are primarily set in rural Argentina, yet include brief and violent scenes in cities. While the country is often depicted as an escape from the bustle of the city in Argentine and U.S. cultural production, incidents of violence in both rural and urban settings within the same film nix the rural/urban divide. In keeping with the slasher genre, which I argue to be a global genre, the films’ violence committed against women, occasionally by women, permits a discussion of gender and how rural and urban settings become gendered through violence.

In the final chapter, I analyze the relationship between film violence in Argentine horror cinema and the memories of the Dirty War that took place from 1976 to 1983, a period during which nearly 30,000 people were kidnapped, tortured, and killed. Until recently, horror film directors have largely avoided explicitly engaging with the Dirty War in their movies, lest they



risk severe criticism.<sup>11</sup> In the first half of the chapter, I consider how particular horror motifs such as screen violence and themes of pursuit and captivity inevitably evoke images of the Dirty War. U.S. audiences may or may not be aware of Argentine history and could possibly overlook the films' allegorization of other crises such as urban violence and collective responses to neoliberal socioeconomic policies. The films' distribution in the U.S. can operate as a boon or onus for the films. In the latter half of the chapter, I examine *Crónica de una fuga/Chronicle of an Escape* (Adrián Caetano, 2006), a film that explicitly deals with the Dirty War and is often categorized as a drama rather than a horror film. I focus on the film's use of horror cinema conventions to portray acceptable ways in which horror can project the Dirty War.

My dissertation contributes to various fields. Within Latin American and Argentine film studies, my project focuses on a genre, which for perhaps any number of reasons, has been largely passed over by academic scholarship.<sup>12</sup> While I hesitate to consider Argentine horror cinema as latsploitation, I align my study with Ruétalo and Tierney's work in recent Latin American film scholarship that considers "Latin America's increasingly globalized and transnational mediascapes" (2). Argentine horror cinema by no means circulates strictly within its own national borders. It forms part of a transnational horror film culture, a topic I will address in the first chapter.

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<sup>11</sup>As I will remind readers in chapter 5, two recent Argentine horror films *Sudor frío/Cold Sweat* (2010) and *Malditos sean/Cursed Bastards* (Fabián Forte and Demián Rugna, 2011) allude to the Dirty War in explicit ways.

<sup>12</sup>In their introduction to *Latsploitation*, Ruétalo and Tierney cite a number of possibilities for the lack of criticism on exploitation genres, among which they include horror: (1) the tendency for a "critical elite" to overlook disreputable film genres for fear of tarnishing their country's cinema; (2) latsploitation's appropriation of motifs from Hollywood cinema or the redubbing of films in English problematizes the notion of a national cinema that resists Hollywood's dominance; (3) latsploitation films risk playing into colonialist stereotypes of the weird, wonderful, and the 'savage'" (1). Whether such ideas extend to Argentina's film critics would require further work and interviewing of critics.

My dissertation also contributes to horror cinema studies through an engagement with current issues in the field, such as screen violence, allegory, and the notion that contemporary horror cinema's functions as a critique of failed state authority. Screen violence is central to horror cinema, as intimated in the following quote by James Kendrick: "Violence of some kind, even if understood as simply the threat of violence, is absolutely essential to the horror genre" (79-80). Screen violence in Argentine horror cinema is no different and should hardly be dismissed as gratuitous. Episodes of film violence can produce national allegories. Allegory in horror cinema scholarship has gained prominence recently with the publication of Adam Lowenstein *Shocking Representation* and Linnie Blake's *The Wounds of Nations*, two books that speak to the topic of national allegories. Lowenstein's and Blake's books provide reassurance about tracing national allegories in horror films; however, I extend the notion by considering how national allegories of two countries appear in the same film. As for the critique of failed authority, in *Monsters and Mad Scientists*, Andrew Tudor coins the category of "paranoid horror" to describe some of the chief developments in U.S. and British horror cinema around 1968, one of which was the ineffectiveness of military, police, and government officials to defeat a monster, either supernatural or human (217). The Argentine horror films I analyze adhere to Tudor's definition of "paranoid horror." However, while Tudor largely refrains from connecting the changes in U.S. and British horror cinema with specific societal changes, I consider an Argentine horror film's portrayals of ineffective authority to be an allegorical commentary on the Argentine government's shrinking role in the face of neoliberal policies that advocated the selling of state enterprises, among other changes.

My study also bears relevance to hemispheric studies. In their introduction to *Hemispheric American Studies*, editors Caroline F. Levander and Robert S. Levine, articulate a

goal of the anthology to be “to chart new literary and cultural geographies by decentering the U.S. nation and excavating the intricate and complex politics, histories, and discourses of spatial encounter that occur throughout the hemisphere” (3). An examination of Argentine cinema in the United States likewise attempts a decentering with the U.S. as a destination and U.S. audiences as a prioritized audience for a cinema coming from elsewhere. Yet, the whole notion of a “spatial encounter” between Argentina and the United States diverges from Levander and Levine’s formulation. Here, the encounter between Argentina and the United States is not physical, per se, in the sense of a face-to-face meeting or an Argentine filmmaker’s or scriptwriter’s visit to the United States. The meeting between two national cultures instead occurs largely mediated via cinema and websites. The films’ circulation traces linkages between Argentina and the United States on various levels that emerge around the horror genre. This first occurs at the level of a cinematic infrastructure bringing Argentine horror cinema to the United States (distribution companies, exhibition spaces, downloading technology, etc.) and, second, at the level of the films’ allegorical content that intimate shared anxieties over dilemmas such as economic instability and paranoia over urban crime.

My investigation of Argentine horror cinema and its reception in the U.S. also places my dissertation squarely in the realm of transnational cinema. My attention to the particularity of film cultures in Argentina and the United States subscribes to a kind of “critical transnationalism” as advocated by Will Higbee and Song Hwee Lim in the premiere issue of the journal *Transnational Cinemas*. Higbee and Lim argue for a transnationalism that accounts for “the interface between global and local, national and transnational” (10) and considers “the aesthetic, political or economic implications” (10). While I focus primarily on transnationalism at the level of aesthetics, I consistently link the aesthetic back to the political and economic in

two different countries. My focus on an Argentine-U.S. circuit creates an instance of transnationalism that is composed of national contexts; the national is not lost in a discussion of transnational, but rather it is enabled by it.

Higbee and Lim's formulation of multiple interfaces in which a national dimension remains intact is commonplace in conceptions of transnational cinema. In her essay "Notes on Transnational Film Theory," Kathleen Newman considers "the scale of the transnational" (national, regional, continental, and international) and "how a film instantiates the geopolitical imaginary of a particular historical time and place, whom the film addresses and from what geopolitical perspective, and what a film accomplishes as a narrative" (3-4). Newman's intention is not to answer how a film does so, but rather to foreground the significance of scales in transnational cinema studies, which includes the national.

Various studies of regional or national cinemas place those cinemas in a transnational context and underscore the very issue of scales broached by Newman. In their introduction to *Transnational Cinema in a Global North: Nordic Cinema in Transition*, Andrew Nestingen and Trevor Elkington warn that irrespective of the transnational dimensions (funding, directors, content) of Nordic cinema, "we should not overlook the elements that remain insistently national and are a key part of maintaining cultural expression in domestic markets" (7).<sup>13</sup> Likewise, in *Latin American Cinemas: Local Views and Transnational Connections*, Nayibe Bermúdez Barrios advocates a transnational vision for Latin American film studies that accounts for cultural, economic, and diasporic "global flows" (6). Even if Bermúdez Barrios is critical of the nation-state for its imposition and marginalization of certain sectors of the population (5), the national remains part of the dynamic along with the global as demonstrated in the titles of essays

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<sup>13</sup>Nordic cinema includes those films emerging from Iceland, Finland, Denmark, Sweden, and Norway.

appearing in the collection that Bermúdez Barrios edits.<sup>14</sup> The same holds true for transnational conceptions of Hong Kong cinema, even if the interaction among multiple scales does not include Hong Kong itself as a national node.<sup>15</sup> In the introduction to *Hong Kong Connections: Transnational Cinema in Action Cinema*, Meghan Morris cautions against losing the specificity of Hong Kong in “Western effusions about global ‘popular’ culture” (8) that may overlook how Hong Kong’s history and culture fit into the study of its cinema. If my study of Argentine horror cinema takes a similar approach to maintaining a focus on the national within the transnational, my study is distinct from the aforementioned essays and introduction for its exclusive focus on two national nodes (Argentina and the United States) and a particular genre (horror).

Finally, the distribution of Argentine horror cinema in the United States constitutes a unique instance of circulation that merits attention and ideally makes this project attractive to a broad audience. Globalization has long garnered attention from academics and cultural critics with attempts to map the flows of people and commodities (or even, people as commodities). Argentine horror cinema is distinct among flows of cinema, especially from Latin America. It is no secret that U.S. cinema enjoys global distribution, and a severe imbalance exists in the distribution of films between Argentina and the United States. Octavio Getino’s research makes clear the asymmetry: “La oferta nacional de películas en las salas de cine no supera habitualmente el 20% del total de los estrenos anuales, reservándose las majors norteamericanas entre el 55% y el 65% de la oferta” (“The selection of nationally-produced films generally do not

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<sup>14</sup>For example, see Rebecca L. Lee’s “National Belonging in Juan José Campanella’s *Luna de Avellaneda*,” Isabel Arrendondo’s “Watching Rape in Mexican Cinema,” and Juana Suárez’s “At the Transnational Crossroads: Colombian Cinema and Its Search for a Film Industry.”

<sup>15</sup>Hong Kong is a Special Administrative Region of China with its own currency and legal system.

exceed 20% of premieres each year, while 55% and 65% of films are reserved for U.S. conglomerates"; 36).<sup>16</sup> Select and critically-acclaimed Argentine filmmakers enjoy distribution in the United States and elsewhere: Pablo Trapero, Lucrecia Martel, and Adrián Caetano, among others. Yet, my study points to a parallel and two-way flow of horror cinema between Argentina and the United States with dynamic horror film cultures interacting in both places. Big-budget horror films from the U.S. regularly play in Argentine cinemas. Although Argentine horror cinema by no means commands a similar status in the United States, several Argentine horror films indeed have a presence. In their introduction to *Horror International*, Steven Jay Schneider and Tony Williams describe the circulation of horror cinema as symptomatic of the present state of globalized culture in which "the nature of horror films (narratively, thematically, stylistically, and economically) from various geographical and cultural locations are more fluid and transitional than ever before" (3-4). Argentine horror cinema presents a case of such circulation. By using interviews with film directors and journalists, recent criticism and scholarship on horror cinema, theories of allegory and spectacle, and feminist and film geography, I seek to map the cinematic circuit of horror cinema from and between Argentina and the United States.

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<sup>16</sup>All Spanish to English translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

## CHAPTER 1

### ARGENTINE HORROR CINEMA CULTURES IN ARGENTINA AND THE UNITED STATES

I begin by heeding Néstor García Canclini's suggestion on how to make a study of cultural globalization feasible. In *La globalización imaginada*, Canclini writes, "El vértigo e incertidumbre que produce tener que pensar a escala global lleva a atrincherarse en alianzas regionales entre países y a delimitar – en los mercados, en las sociedades y en sus imaginarios – territorios y circuitos que para cada uno serían la globalización digerible, con la que pueden tratar" ("The vertigo and uncertainty that comes with thinking on a global scale leads one to entrench oneself in regional alliances between countries and to delimit – in markets, societies, and their imaginaries – territories and circuits that for each one would be a digestible globalization, with which can deal"; 13). Argentine horror cinema enjoys distribution in numerous countries.<sup>17</sup> Isolating Argentine horror cinema's flow between Argentina and the U.S. is a question of practicality, of making cultural globalization "digerible" ("digestible") not in the sense of easier to accept, but rather easier to examine. I narrow my focus here in order to achieve a more thorough analysis of a circuit and, more importantly, the films I analyze prioritize Argentine and U.S. viewers.

Argentine horror cinema is akin to sewing together a monstrous body composed of disparate parts. Mapping Argentine horror cinema requires collecting and piecing together a vast

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<sup>17</sup>Argentine horror cinema, moreover, circulates on a global scale. Whether through Internet file sharing programs distribution companies like London-based One-Eyed Films that distributes three of Adrián García Bogliano's films in Europe, Argentine horror cinema has a global reach.

range of parts and agents, in addition to selecting parts to highlight. I conceive Argentine horror cinema largely as a transnational horror film culture. In his study of Italian cinema between 1896 and 1996, Pierre Sorlin defines a national film culture as “not a set of films which help to distinguish a nation from other nations, [but rather] the chain of relations and exchanges which develop in connection with films, in a territory delineated by its economic and juridical policy” (10). If Sorlin focused on a national cinema, one that he himself found suspect, my examination of Argentine horror cinema is transnational since I account for multiple facets of film cultures that emerge around contemporary Argentine horror films in both Argentina and in the United States. Those facets include distribution companies in Argentina and the United States, different modes of public and private exhibition in the two countries, Argentine and U.S. websites and blogs that occasionally cover Argentine horror and, in what occupies the bulk of this project, the transnational content of the films, an element that I discuss below. While I focus on recent manifestations of Argentine horror film culture in Argentina and the United States, I also diverge from the current era in order to acknowledge Argentine horror films prior to 1999, thus avoiding any presentism.

In this chapter, I provide an overview of Argentine horror cinema in three sections: (1) a truncated history of Argentine horror cinema; (2) an overview of contemporary Argentine horror film cultures in Argentina and the United States; (3) the ways the films in this study project crises in both countries. As isolating a tangent of circulation between Argentina and the United States makes globalization more feasible, the three sections are intended to make Argentine horror cinema and its film cultures in Argentina and the United States comprehensible. To refer again to the metaphor of sewing together different parts to make a monster, I am piecing together



that which constitutes a transnational horror cinema culture that links Argentina with the United States.

### **A BRIEF HISTORY OF ARGENTINE HORROR CINEMA<sup>18</sup>**

I begin with a brief history of Argentine horror cinema between 1942 and 1999. My motivation for starting with a historical overview of Argentine horror cinema is two-fold. First, I attempt to demonstrate that contemporary Argentine horror cinema does not emerge from a vacuum. By no means do I insinuate that Argentine horror cinema lacks a tradition of horror cinema and simply takes its cues from foreign horror cinema. Although keenly aware of trends in horror cinema from around the globe, Argentine directors, critics, and fans are also cognizant of a national tradition. By briefly considering Argentina's own tradition of horror cinema one may ascertain how contemporary directors engage with or ignore that tradition in their own work. Moreover, one can sense how the output of Argentine horror films over the past decade does not signal the establishment of a national horror cinema, but rather highlights a resumption and production of horror cinema on a larger scale and more frequent basis.<sup>19</sup> A historical narrative that spans between 1942 and 1999 hardly constitutes a unanimous periodization among Argentine horror film directors, critics, and/or fans. Nevertheless, as I demonstrate below, 1942 and 1999 appear to mark key moments in the development of Argentine horror cinema culture, both past and present. The first Argentine horror film was released in 1942. Decades later in 1999, Argentine horror cinema finds a significant exhibition space in the film festival, Buenos Aires Rojo Sangre.

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<sup>18</sup>The following history of Argentine horror cinema is incredibly brief. For a more complete history, see Darío Lavia's "Evolución del cine de terror argentino" ("Evolution of Argentine Horror Cinema"), an article to which the first-half of this section is deeply indebted.

<sup>19</sup>With the exception of one movie, I am using the criteria of horror films made in Argentina with Argentine directors to classify whether a film is a national horror film.

While critic Darío Lavia locates some elements of horror in *El hombre bestia, o la aventura del Capitán Richard*/"The Man-Beast, or the Adventure of Captain Richard" (C.Z. Soprani, 1934), Lavia, among others, considers the first Argentine horror film to be *Una luz en la ventana*/"A Light in the Window" (Manuel Romero, 1942) ("Evolución"). *Una luz en la ventana* features Narciso Ibáñez Menta in his screen debut as the deformed Dr. Herman. As I explore below, Ibáñez Menta, often heralded as the "The Lon Chaney of Argentina," would play a crucial role in the development of Argentine horror in film, television, and theater. Following *Una luz en la ventana*, subsequent national horror film releases do not appear until 1951 with *El extraño caso del hombre bestia*/"The Strange Case of the Manbeast" (Mario Soffici, 1951), *Si muero antes de despertar*/"If I Die Before I Wake" (Carlos Hugo Christensen, 1952), and *El vampiro negro*/"The Black Vampire" (1953) by the Uruguyan director Román Viñoly Barreto. In the late 1950s, television became a crucial medium for shaping the visual horror imaginary in Argentina. In 1959, Argentina's sole television station broadcasted the show *Obras maestras del terror*/"Masterpieces of Terror" starring Narciso Ibáñez Menta and his son Narciso Ibáñez Serrador. *Obras maestras del terror* ran for three seasons and eventually inspired a movie of the same name, starring Ibáñez Menta and directed by Enrique Carrerras in 1960. The film consists of three vignettes based on short stories by Edgar Allan Poe, foreshadowing the influence that Poe would exercise on contemporary Argentine horror directors.<sup>20</sup> Between 1965 and 1967, Emilio Vieyra delved into horror and exploitation to direct films that would not gain national release until the beginning of the next decade, and were often intended for foreign markets, particularly the United States (Dapena 90). In 1969, a number of horror productions featuring

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<sup>20</sup>*Obras maestros del terror* also confirms Poe's salient influence on the literary production of Argentina and Latin America. See the chapter entitled "Poe in Spanish America" by Susan F. Levine and Stuart Levine in the collection of essays entitled *Poe Abroad: Influence, Reputation, Affinities* edited by Lois Davis Vines.

Narciso Ibáñez Menta appeared on television, such as *El hombre que volvió de la muerte*/"The Man that Returned from the Dead" and inspired several imitations due to their popularity.

The next two decades ushered in several horror film productions, including *El inquisidor de Lima*/"The Inquisitor of Lima" (Bernardo Arias, 1974), an Argentine-Peruvian co-production. *La casa de siete tumbas*/"The House of Seven Tombs" appeared in 1982 and, in 1988, *Alguien te está mirando*/"Someone is Watching You" (Horacio Maldonado and Gustavo Cova, 1988) was the last national horror film to enjoy theatrical distribution until 2008. Although it may seem Argentine horror disappeared for twenty years, this is not the case. It went underground.

Exhibition venues were crucial to the emergence and survival of horror cinema culture in Buenos Aires in the 1970s. The start of the decade marked the beginning of Bela Lugosi Club, an exclusive cinema club founded by figures who at the time were journalists and directors, such as Moira Soto, Edgardo Cozarinsky, and the late Juan Carlos Frugone (Scherer). Taking its name from the Transylvanian actor who famously starred in numerous classic horror film productions, the club was closed to the public and showed an eclectic mix of horror, fantasy, and exploitation films, both national and international. The military's seizure of power in 1976 triggered the demise of the Bela Lugosi Club, although its mission would continue years later with other clubs.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>According to Scherer, the Bela Lugosi Club suffered a gradual demise after the military's seizure of power for at least two primary reasons: "por un lado las películas eran secuestradas o censuradas y por el otro la mayoría de los periodistas que conformaban el club debieron exiliarse" ("first, the [club's] films were stolen or censored and, moreover, the majority of journalists that made up the club had to go into exile"). After the dissolution of the Bela Lugosi Club, Cine Club Nocturna at Centro Cultural Rojas and the now defunct Cine Club La Cripta played a significant role in the maintenance of horror cinema culture in Buenos Aires and Argentina (Scherer).

During the 1990s, aspiring filmmakers in Buenos Aires began making short horror films steeped in gore. Their films circulated primarily as VHS cassettes, were available through specialized video stores, and exhibited in film clubs in Buenos Aires (Curubeto and Peña 99). In 1997, FARSA Producciones used a VHS camera to make *Plaga zombie* (Pablo Parés and Hernán Sáez), a film that became a cult hit within Argentina and was distributed in the United States and elsewhere. Its importance cannot be overstated. *Plaga zombie*'s success and the capacity to make films using home movie equipment inspired other horror filmmakers to make their own films on shoe-string budgets; its importance cannot be overstated. As Matías Raña's writes, "No es exageración decir que *Plaga zombie* fue el punto de partida de una generación nueva y libre de cineastas, que rompieron los esquemas y se animaron a hacer lo que querían" ("It is not an exaggeration to say that *Plaga zombie* was the starting point for a new generation of filmmakers who broke with the typical schemes of making movies and were encouraged to do what they wanted"; 27).

The sheer profusion of low-budget horror films and the lack of places to screen them eventually led to the creation of Buenos Aires Rojo Sangre (BARS), a cine bizarro film festival, in 1999.<sup>22</sup> The festival's beginning was a watershed moment in the evolution of horror cinema culture in Argentina. In my estimation, its establishment marks the beginning of a new phase of Argentine horror cinema culture. Many film directors and horror film aficionados credit BARS

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<sup>22</sup>Here, the term "bizarra/o" relates specifically to Latin American cinema. "Bizarra/o" in this context does not translate as "brave or courageous" (as defined by most English-Spanish dictionaries), but rather "strange." While it is difficult to trace the genesis of "bizarra/o" in Argentine film culture, Fabián Manes first used "bizarra/o" to refer to a film series he curated and organized as "Medianoche's bizarras." Diego Curubeto's book *Cine bizarro* further cemented the term's meaning (Scherer; Curubeto 15). The boundaries of *cine bizarro* are incredibly elastic and encompass horror, fantasy, and exploitation cinemas.

for providing them a space where they can screen their films, host book presentations, workshops, and discussions. Since the festival accepts both short films and feature length movies from Argentina and abroad, there is an incredible variety of horror cinema, along with other genres such as science-fiction and animation. In a Durkheimian sense, BARS provides a kind of annual and communal ritual. In *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Emile Durkheim writes about how rituals help to maintain a community by renewing or cementing a sense of cohesion. BARS provides such a ritual among fans, critics, directors, and technicians that work on horror films, while also giving visibility to the horror film community in Buenos Aires and Argentina.<sup>23</sup>

## **ARGENTINE HORROR FILM CULTURES**

Returning to Sorlin's definition of a film culture, Argentine horror cinema is composed of more than just films. The notion of a film culture can be amplified in various ways. In his book on Alfred Hitchcock's British films, Thomas Ryall offers the term "film culture" to encompass all "the ensemble of practices" affiliated with cinema (2).<sup>24</sup> "Film culture," for Ryall, refers to "the immediate contexts in which films are made and circulated such as studios, cinemas, and film journals, and those contexts which have to be constructed from the material network of the culture, the philosophies and ideologies of film" (2). Modes of production and consumption are

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<sup>23</sup>Numerous news outlets including national newspapers and television channels have given coverage to BARS.

<sup>24</sup>Hitchcock's British period, as attested by Ryall's aforementioned book, is usually conceived of films the director made with British studios (Islington, Elstree, Sheperd's Bush, etc.) between 1925 and 1938.

intricately linked with the idea of a film culture, and Ryall considers fan responses alongside the work of studios in his assessment of Hitchcock's British films.<sup>25</sup>

"Film culture" furnishes an apt framework to consider contemporary Argentine horror cinema. In this section, however, I focus on the forms of production and consumption affiliated with Argentine horror cinema both in Argentina and the United States. I do not wish to imply that the "philosophies and ideologies" component of a film culture, as defined by Ryall, is insignificant. I will address the philosophies and ideologies of select films in the subsequent four chapters through allegory.

Michel de Certeau's articulation of production and secondary production furnishes a second useful term when considering Argentine horror cinema culture and how it is used and consumed. Certeau deems consumption as "'another production,'" or "secondary production" that encompasses the ways in which consumers use a product (xii-xiii). While he refrains from entering into a detailed discussion, Certeau's allusion to television and the need to study "what the cultural consumer 'makes' or 'does' with the images" (31) offers a starting point to think about what Argentine and U.S. consumers do with Argentine horror cinema. It may be writing an article, posting a comment on a website, publicizing the screening of a film on Facebook, or participating in the Buenos Aires Zombie Walk.<sup>26</sup> The line of demarcation between production

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<sup>25</sup>I am indebted to Barbara Klinger's allusion to Ryall's term in her book on home cinema, *Beyond the Multiplex*. Klinger appropriates and refines Ryall's conception of "film culture" to conceptualize "home film cultures," which relate to the evolution of home entertainment systems and viewing practices.

<sup>26</sup>The Zombie Walk in Buenos Aires is a fascinating phenomenon that has manifested itself elsewhere in Latin America and beyond. In short, scores of people dressed as zombies converge in public spaces in Buenos Aires such as Plaza San Martín and lumber about. The Buenos Aires Zombie Walk has often happened during or immediately prior to the BARS film festival that takes places at the end of October and early November. Zombie walks are international

and consumption is obviously blurred in Certeau's calculus, as is the line between producers and consumers.<sup>27</sup> In other words, the film directors and production companies are not the sole producers of Argentine horror cinema culture. According to some theorists of cultural studies, consumption is not only a means of participating in a culture (a film culture, in this instance), but it also composes and defines a culture: "Culture is not something already made which we consume; culture is what we make in the varied practices of everyday life, including consumption. Consumption involves the *making* of culture" (Storey 132). As I describe below, the making of Argentine horror film culture is transnational in scope and spans Argentina and the United States and, of course, numerous points in between and beyond.

### **ARGENTINE HORROR FILM CULTURE IN ARGENTINA**

Argentine horror films emerge from different parts of the country. Buenos Aires Rojo Sangre has screened short films from La Plata, Jujuy, Salta, Santa Fe, Neuquén, Córdoba, Mendoza, Río Negro, and Tucumán. As for feature-length movies, Gustavo Postiglione's *Tremendo amanecer/Tremendous Dawn* (2004) was filmed in Rosario, a city in Santa Fe province, and *La Prueba/The Audition* (Lucas Giuggia, Román Lassalle, 2005) was filmed in San Nicolás, a city in the north of Buenos Aires province. Paura Flics, the company that produces Adrián García Bogliano's films, among other directors, is located in La Plata, the capital city of the province of Buenos Aires.

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phenomena that even enjoy international coordination and sharing advice among participants in different countries or within countries (see [zombiewalk.com](http://zombiewalk.com)).

<sup>27</sup>Given Certeau's blurring of production and consumption, below I will often fuse the two terms and write them as "production/consumption."

Nevertheless, geography matters. Buenos Aires is the indisputable hub of Argentine horror cinema, and my focus inevitably falls on that particular city's horror film culture.<sup>28</sup> The city's status is not accidental; numerous other culture industries are located in the capital. Moreover, the city provides a constellation of institutions and agencies that have fostered the country's evolution of horror cinema. Buenos Aires boasts a high number of public and private film schools, and several horror film directors who are from Buenos Aires have attended these schools.<sup>29</sup> The opening of special effects schools and agencies such as Metamorfosis FX and Rabbid FX has also helped to establish Buenos Aires as the epicenter of Argentine horror. Scores of small production companies such as FARSA Producciones, Furia Films, 1971 Cine, Gorevision, and Argentina Druida Films are located in Buenos Aires and, in some cases, were created by horror directors themselves. The city also offers numerous exhibition spaces, distribution networks for Argentine horror cinema, and an assemblage of print and visual media outlets that are taking notice of the country's burgeoning horror cinema and its popularity.

While recent developments suggest changes, the convergence of various institutions in Buenos Aires does not automatically translate into the most propitious of circumstances for the flourishing of national horror cinema. National horror cinema does not enjoy regular visibility in the national and mainstream press. Moreover, Argentine horror cinema has historically lacked financial assistance from the national government's entity that supports film production, INCAA, and wanted for exhibition spaces on a large scale. Although recent events suggest a change,

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<sup>28</sup>This is not to imply that other cities such as Córdoba, Rosario, and La Plata do not merit attention. Examinations of horror film cultures in places other than Buenos Aires offer other areas of research.

<sup>29</sup>There are numerous public and private film schools in Buenos Aires, which include Universidad del Cine, Escuela Nacional de Experimentación y Realización Cinematográfica (ENERC), and Centro de Investigación Cinematográfica (CIC).



Argentine horror cinema is largely a marginal cinema, which as I will demonstrate below, occasional flirts with a mainstream in some fashion.<sup>30</sup> Though an ostensible detour, understanding Argentine horror cinema's status as a marginal cinema is directly related to the specific forms Argentine horror film culture assume and its various modes of consumption/production such as exhibition in particular spaces, forms of distribution, and the significance of horror film websites.

Positioning Argentina horror cinema as a marginal cinema can be a difficult task given the frequency with which the terms "marginal" and "independent" are bandied about these days.<sup>31</sup> David Oubiña's introduction to *Cines al margen* provides criteria in considering ways in

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<sup>30</sup>One indication of such change is INCAA's recent support of various horror films or films with a horror film dimension: *Visitante de invierno/Winter Visitor* (Sergio Esquenazi, 2007), *Lo siniestro/The Uncanny* (Sergio Mazurek, 2009), *Sudor frío/Cold Sweat* (Adrián García Bogliano, 2010), *Malditos sean/Cursed Bastards* (Fabián Forte and Demián Rugna, 2011), *Fase 7/Phase 7* (Nicolás Goldbart, 2011), and *Todos mis muertos/"All My Dead"* (Mad Crampi).

<sup>31</sup>A thorough investigation of the use of "marginal" and "independent" would take me too far afield. Here, I begin specifically with Oubiña's use of the term "marginal" to discuss horror cinema in Argentina. In general, "marginal" often appears to refer to a film's production, distribution, exhibition, and/or reception. A marginal film generally does not receive copious amounts of funding either from a media corporation such as Sony Pictures, or support from a state apparatus such as INCAA. It lacks a widespread national and/or global distribution, is not screened in multiplexes, and is either overlooked by or snubbed by mainstream cinema critics. In contrast, an independent film can refer to a movie's production (i.e., outside a major film studio or not fully funded by a major studio), or whether it possesses an aesthetic that differs from mainstream blockbuster despite being financed by a major film studio or a studio's specialty division such as Paramount Vantage. Of course, an independently produced film can be marginal according to criteria such as its distribution, exhibition, and/or reception by critics and audiences. For example, Paramount Vantage (originally known as Paramount Classics) produced *Trekkies* (Roger Nyard, 1997), a documentary about Star Trek fan cultures, and was released on only 339 screens in the U.S. (imdb.com). In contrast, a film such as *Fight Club* (David Fincher, 1999) was released on 1,963 screens in the U.S. (imdb.com). Further compounding their usage, as I address below, terms such as "marginal" and "independent" are mutable and change over time and within particular geographies. For example, one could consider why films associated with New Latin Cinema are marginal. According to Ana López, films such as Glauber Rocha's *Antônio das mortes/"Antonio of the Dead"* (1968) or *La Tierra*

which marginal and mainstream cinemas are conceived in Argentina. Oubiña traces common characteristics in the essays that apply to many filmmakers (Martín Rejtman, Lisandro Alonso, Albertina Carri, video collectives in Patagonia), genres (documentaries, science fiction, art house), and theoretical topics (meta-critical forms of documentary, post-national identities, representations of global capitalism in Argentine film, realism). For Oubiña, marginal films are defined by their dependence on “formas de financiamiento no convencionales, circuitos alternativos de exhibición y aproximaciones críticas desprejuiciadas” (“unconventional forms of financing, alternative circuits of exhibition, and impartial critical interpretations of films”; 15).<sup>32</sup> Oubiña further defines marginal films by how they are made, a characteristic through which Oubiña creates a binary between mainstream and marginal cinemas: “por un lado, [cine del mainstream tiene] la forma de un espectáculo omnipresente gobernado por reglas muy precisas y, por otro, [cine marginal tiene] diversas formas cuya característica principal consiste en seguir apostando por la experimentación y el riesgo” (“On one hand, [mainstream cinema has] the form of a ubiquitous spectacle governed by strict norms and, on the other hand, [marginal cinema] has diverse forms whose main characteristic consists of relying on experimentation and risk”; 15). Oubiña thus assigns a level of spontaneity and adventure to marginal cinema. In

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*Prometida* “The Promised Land” (Miguel Littín, 1973) “did not include industrial films, or any films that relied on the structures and strategies of the dominant sector in their production methods, aesthetics, distribution, or in their relationship to audiences. These were independent films, marginal cinemas on the fringes of existing industries (Argentina, Brazil, Mexico) or artisanal practices in nations without a developed national cinematic infrastructure (Chile, Uruguay, Bolivia, etc.)” (150). To give a more contemporary example that pertains to geography, a mainstream film in Argentina such as Lucrecia Martel’s *La ciénaga/The Swamp* (1999) could be considered a marginal film within the U.S. beyond audiences that do not possess a specific knowledge or awareness of Argentine and/or Latin American cinema.

<sup>32</sup>In regards to Oubiña’s last point, he assigns film critics a special task of helping to create a margin in which non-mainstream films can “sobrevivir y puedan hacerse visibles” (“survive and can be visible”; 15).

contrast, mainstream cinema is characterized by an adherence to established rules and, as Oubiña notes later in the same paragraph, a fixation with new technology (15).<sup>33</sup>

Argentine horror cinema in some ways conforms to Oubiña's criteria of a marginal cinema. The films are almost invariably produced on a small budget with different sources of funding (oftentimes self-financed by the director), a dependence on alternative forms of exhibition, varying degrees of experimentation, and a reliance on film critics for visibility, although such critics rarely, if ever, command the same cultural cachet as Oubiña. Argentine horror, as it will become clearer later on, is distinct. Grouping the majority of horror films alongside those of Rejtman or Alonso would be a gross simplification that ignores differences in aesthetics, exhibition, and the status of critics who write about Argentine horror. While I refrain from entering into a tit-for-tat comparison between Argentine horror films or other genres considered "independent," it is telling that the book in which Oubiña's introduction appears is entitled *Cines al margen*, and Argentine horror cinema is nowhere to be found.<sup>34</sup>

One is hard pressed to pinpoint the genesis of Argentine horror cinema's marginal status or the overarching reason for its marginalization.<sup>35</sup> In many ways, the question of Argentine

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<sup>33</sup>Oubiña's differentiation between marginal and mainstream films based upon risk and technology can, of course, easily break down. Using new cinematic technology can itself be a form of experimentation and risk-taking, as in James Cameron's *Avatar* (2009).

<sup>34</sup>The issue of labeling Argentine horror cinema sometimes has generated significant debate among Argentine horror film critics, fans, and directors. Some critics and fans have designated Argentine horror films as "*ultraindependiente*" ("super-independent"), as do the organizers of BARS ("Historia del festival"). The publication of Matías Raña's *Guerreros del cine: Argentino, fantástico e independiente* in November of 2010 reopened the debate, which is hardly settled.

<sup>35</sup>Besides the reasons I cite here, one might also consider horror cinema as an affront to the tastes of potential producers, which, in turn, intimates the position of horror, as well as other genres, within a national hierarchy of tastes. Although such claims would require considerable sociological research among Argentine producers and moviegoers, in an interview Daniel de la

horror cinema's visibility is due to interrelated factors: lack of financial support from INCAA, which, again, appears to be changing, translates into few screenings of Argentine horror films in national cinemas, which leads to sometimes scarce coverage by national newspapers or select publications exclusively devoted to cinema. For horror filmmakers, and filmmakers of other genres for that matter, INCAA functions much like a gatekeeper. Funding from INCAA enables the filmmakers to pay not only production costs, but also comply with the rules and regulations as set by the Sindicato de la Industria Cinematográfica Argentina (SICA; "The Union of the Cinematic Industry of Argentina"), the national cinematographic film union. SICA regulates working conditions in the film industry, and its rules run the gambit from establishing pay scales, setting the minimal number of technicians working on particular types of films (feature length, animation, documentary, etc.), and specifying holidays. Films that do not comply with the union's statutes will not be "classified," or approved, by INCAA (Sindicato 33), and are not released in any national cinemas.

Many horror filmmakers have grouched about the lack of support from INCAA and the onerous nature of SICA's regulations. Since most of Argentine horror films are made with a paltry budget, the filmmakers simply cannot afford to comply with SICA's rules. FARSA Producciones, for example, feel INCAA as cumbersome and create an environment in which "no hay cine privado, es todo estatal" ("There is no private cinema; everything is associated with the state"; Conde and Mérida 156). INCAA's traditional lack of support for horror cinema has

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Vega likened the reaction of some producers to financing a horror film to making a pornographic movie: "Conozco a muchísimos productores de la Argentina, y muchos otros me conocen, sin embargo la propuesta de llevar un proyecto de género siempre fue catalogada como pornográfica" ("I know many Argentine producers, and many know me. Nevertheless, the proposal to make a genre film always was considered like a pornographic film"; Conde y Mérida 57). A genre film is simply a film that possesses clear and recognizable genre characteristics such as a Western, comedy, or science-fiction movie.

necessitated filmmakers' dependence on one another to realize a film.<sup>36</sup> In reading the credits of several movies, one can compose a list of names of directors who lend their technical skills to help bring to fruition a film directed by a peer. For example, in Daniel de la Vega's *Death Knows Your Name* a number of the film's personnel are themselves film directors or technicians who have worked on other Argentine horror film productions: Demián Rugna (writer) directed *La última entrada/The Last Gateway* (2007) and co-directed *Malditos Sean/Cursed Bastards* (2009), Fabián Forte (assistant director) directed *Mala carne/Carnal* (2003) and co-directed *Malditos Sean*, Mad Crampi (art direction) directed *Run Run Bunny!* (2003) and *Mondo Psycho* (2006), Hernán Findling (production manager) directed *Causa efecto/Cause Effect* (2001), *Director's Cut* (2006), and *Breaking Nikki* (2009), and Jimmy Crispin (sound) directed *Ultra-Toxic* (2005).

Exhibition is a crucial component of Argentine horror film culture. By no means ample with regularly scheduled screenings, several alternative venues show of Argentine horror films in Buenos Aires and elsewhere. The aforementioned Club Cultural Pachamama has screened a few national horror films as part of its film series, "No todo el cine argentino es aburrido" ("Not all Argentine cinema is boring"). La nave de los sueños, a Buenos Aires-based company, is dedicated to developing exhibition spaces for cinema, music, and poetry, among other media. In July and August of 2009, La nave de los sueños organized a film series entitled "Fantástico y bailable": Un paseo inmoral por el cine de ciencia ficción, el terror y la aventura" ("Fantastic and danceable: An Immoral Stroll Through Science-Fiction, Horror, and Action Cinema") at the Biblioteca Nacional in Buenos Aires. A number of Argentine horror films were screened as part of the series, including Paula Pollachi's *Inzomnia*/"Inzomnia" (2007) and FARSA

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<sup>36</sup>*Visitante del invierno* was the first national horror film INCAA funded in 20 years.

Producciones's *Nunca asistas este tipo de fiestas*/"Never Go to Those Kinds of Parties" (2000). The Museo de Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires (MALBA) screened Daniel de la Vega and Pablo Parés's *Jennifer's Shadow* (2004) in February 2009 as part of the release of two books dealing with horror cinema from Argentina and Spain. Also in 2009, the Espacio INCAA KM 2, located in the San Telmo neighborhood of Buenos Aires, screened FARSA Producciones' horror comedy *Nunca más asistas a este tipo de fiestas*/"Never Again Go to This Kind of Party" (Pablo Parés and Hernán Sáez, 2010), among other films produced by FARSA. An indication of horror cinema's evolving status in Argentina, a sparse number of Argentine horror films have enjoyed runs in national theatres. In 2008, Sergio Esquenazi's *Visitante de invierno* (2008), an Argentine-Catalan co-production, was screened briefly in a theatre in Buenos Aires. In 2011, *Sudor frío* was released in numerous movie houses for an extended period, with Sergio Mazurek's *Lo siniestro* also being released in cinema in November of that same year. As Rodríguez observes, Argentine horror is screened in a myriad of alternative venues (17-18). Cinemas, cultural centers, libraries, and museums aside, horror films have also been screened in bars, hostels, and universities.

Film festivals have also offered a critical venue for viewing Argentine horror films to be seen. Horror films have been accepted at a various festivals in Buenos Aires and elsewhere in Argentina. Adrián García Bogliano's *No moriré sola*/"I Will Not Die Alone" (2008) was screened as part of the fifth *Festival de cine inusual de Buenos Aires* in October of 2009. The film was also shown at the 5th International Festival of Independent Cinema in Mar del Plata (MARFICI) in May of 2009, which has also shown additional national horror films. Pantalla Pinamar, an international film festival taking place in Pinamar, has screened several Argentine horror films, including *Visitante de invierno* in 2006. However, the most established exhibition

space for horror cinema in Buenos Aires and Argentina is, as previously mentioned, Buenos Aires Rojo Sangre (BARS).

Viewing Argentine horror cinema, nevertheless, can be largely a private experience. Retail stores that specialize in horror cinema DVDs are integral to the maintenance of horror cinema in Buenos Aires. Mondo macabro, Splatter House, and Dark Room, retail stores in the capital, have a wide catalogue of horror cinema from Argentina and elsewhere. Depending on the store, one can rent or purchase DVDs, thus providing a significant mode of distribution for Argentine horror cinema. The distribution company Videofilms is located in Buenos Aires and counts a number of national horror films among its catalog. Several shops, rental stores, and production company offices in Buenos Aires and elsewhere serve as places to purchase films distributed by Videofilms.

Various forms of media piracy constitute additional modes of distribution and viewing of Argentine horror cinema. Taringa is a popular file sharing website in Argentina, and it possesses a number of national horror films among its vast online catalog. While there is no data available on the quantity and frequency with which a film is downloaded, the practice appears widespread.<sup>37</sup> Likewise, many Argentine horror films can also be purchased cheaply at various informal street markets in Buenos Aires, and at least one Argentine film director gave pirated copies of his films to DVD rental stores in order to show Argentine horror cinema existed.

Print, television, and virtual media are significant modes of consumption/production of Argentine horror cinema. Even though many of the country's newspapers and publications are located in Buenos Aires, horror cinema's close proximity to the major media outlets traditionally has not earned regular visibility in the mainstream press. Media coverage of Argentine horror

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<sup>37</sup>According to Nicanor Loreti, "Everyone downloads films."

cinema within Argentina is inconsistent and disproportionate in light of the number of horror film directors in the country.<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, various directors and production companies such as Daniel de la Vega, Paula Pollachi, FARSA Producciones, Fabián Forte, Demián Rugna, and Paura Flics have appeared in national newspapers such as *Clarín*, *Página 12* and *La Nación*. The articles generally pertain to the making of a film, its success, or news about a movie's distribution outside Argentina. Moreover, the aforementioned newspapers, along with local television stations, have recently devoted more coverage to national and local horror cinema, especially when the BARS film festival occurs.

Articles about Argentine horror cine in cinema publications are, at times, scarce, depending on the publication. *KM 111* and *El Amante/Cine* appear to have overlooked national horror cinema. The August 2009 issue of *El Amante/Cine* represents a kind of curious, but instructive omission. The first quarter of the issue is devoted to international horror cinema. A still from *Drag Me to Hell* (2009), a horror film by U.S. director Sam Raimi, braces one side of the cover.<sup>39</sup> Inside, the content excludes both contemporary and classical Argentine horror cinema. Other cinema publications, to their credit, have covered Argentine horror. In August of 2007, *Haciendo Cine* published an extensive article on Argentine horror films, specifically films distributed on the U.S. DVD market, in addition to other articles. *Escribiendo cine* has published several articles about national horror cinema, as has *24 cuadros*. *La cosa*, a widely

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<sup>38</sup>As some indication of the number of horror film directors in Argentina, Pablo Sapere, programmer for BARS, estimates some 500 films have been screened at Buenos Aires Rojo Sangre since the festival's inception in 1999 (Sapere).

<sup>39</sup>*El Amante/Cine* usually has two covers on each side of the magazine, as opposed to the back side being reserved for full-page advertising.



circulated magazine devoted to fantasy cinema, has given coverage to Argentine horror over the past several years, especially during the BARS festival.<sup>40</sup>

Websites devoted to horror, science-fiction, and fantasy cinema often compensate for the lack of coverage of Argentine horror cinema by mainstream publications. Sites such as *QuintaDimensión*, *Zona Freak*, *Cinefania*, *Terror Universal*, and *Horas de Horror* collectively provide an extensive overview of Argentine horror cinema, both classical and contemporary.<sup>41</sup> Several of the sites embody the blurring of production/consumption and possess a high degree of interactivity between writers and readers, where readers may post a comment about articles. For example, *QuintaDimensión* provides forums for readers' comments, as well as *La Zona Crítica* ("The Critical Zone"), "un lugar donde todos podemos ser críticos" ("A place where we can all be critics").

Several Argentine directors also engage in do-it-yourself marketing through websites, blogs, email updates to subscribers, and YouTube channels. While each director's or production company's website differs, Demián Rugna's website provides an example in self-marketing.<sup>42</sup> On his home page, one finds a list of awards Rugna has received along with upcoming projects. One can click on any number of links to arrive at biographical information about Rugna. There are additional links to Rugna's entries in the Internet Movie Database, a link to the director's blog, and a link to his YouTube channel which features short films, behind the scenes footage from *The Last Gateway*, and a home movie showing Rugna, Daniel de la Vega and others after

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<sup>40</sup>One can view a sample of *La cosa*'s content online at:  
<<http://www.terra.com.ar/cinefantastico/>>.

<sup>41</sup>The websites also given extensive coverage to horror, science-fiction, and fantasy cinema from other places.

<sup>42</sup>Demián Rugna's site can be viewed at: <<http://www.demianrugna.com.ar/>>.

receiving awards for *Death Knows Your Name* (2007) at the Tabloid Witch Film Festival in 2007.

Social media such as Facebook and Twitter also constitute an important aspect of Argentine horror film culture. One can subscribe to the Facebook pages for any number of events related to horror cinema such as the Buenos Aires Zombie Walk and to the pages of distribution companies such as Videofilms. The Facebook page for BARS shows the possibilities social media can offer a film culture. Announcements about the festival, links to articles about Argentine horror in different periodicals, and clips from Argentine television news broadcasts, among other items are available. BARS's Facebook page also functions as a debate forum about topics germane to Argentine horror cinema, such as the labeling Argentine horror as "independent." Facebook's global reach intimates ways in which a film culture affiliated with a national cinema can expand over national borders and reach a country such as the United States.

### **ARGENTINE HORROR FILM CULTURE IN THE UNITED STATES**

Distinct from Argentina, Argentine horror film culture in the United States is less about the actual making of films and more about other forms of production/consumption such as distribution, exhibition, and criticism. Argentine horror is largely distributed on DVD by small and mid-size companies in the United States, such as Maverick (*Death Knows Your Name*), Timeless Media Group (*Carnal*), Alebrije Entertainment (*The Last Gateway*), Fangoria International (*Plaga Zombie: Mutant Zone*), and Maya Entertainment (*36 Pasos*). There are, however, exceptions; the sizable Lionsgate distributes *Jennifer's Shadow*.

Independent of the company's size, U.S. distribution provides Argentine horror cinema crucial visibility. Films can be purchased or rented through various retail websites such as amazon.com, blockbuster.com, Netflix, and even DVD rental stores on occasion. Moreover, as

in Argentina, media piracy is common in the United States, and several Argentine horror films can be downloaded illegally through scores of websites. Some channels of distribution in the United States, specifically amazon.com, bestow a certain cachet on a film and/or director, which is often reflected on directors' websites, such as those of Daniel de la Vega or Demián Rugna. Their websites have links to amazon.com through which one can order the films.<sup>43</sup> Given amazon.com's distributive reach beyond the U.S., someone in Argentina or elsewhere could possibly purchase the film online, although doing so would be impractical.<sup>44</sup>

Viewing Argentine horror in the United States is not entirely a private affair (i.e., with DVDs). Argentine horror cinema is occasionally screened in theaters. As noted in the introduction, *Habitaciones para turistas* was given a theatrical release at Two Boots Pioneer Theater in New York City in October of 2005 (Kern). Argentine directors have shown their works at horror and fantasy film festivals in the United States. Daniel de la Vega's *Death Knows Your Name* was screened at the Tabloid Witch Festival in 2007, Fabián Forte's *Carnal* at the Fearless Tales Genre Festival in San Francisco in 2005, Hernán Findling's *Breaking Nikki* at the Phoenix Film Festival in 2009, and Adrián García Bogliano's *Sudor frío* at South by Southwest Film Festival in Austin, Texas in 2011. The films received various awards, thus gaining some notoriety in both Argentina and the United States.

The exhibition of and various modes of distribution accorded Argentine horror cinema in the United States gives way to criticism in different forums. A review of *Habitaciones para*

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<sup>43</sup>The websites for Demián Rugna, Daniel de la Vega, and Paura Flics are <www.demianrugna.com.ar>, <pauraflics.com>, and <www.danieldelavega.com.ar/>, respectively.

<sup>44</sup>Of course, the shipping price would be higher in Argentina, and there are cheaper ways of obtaining a film there, such as downloading or purchasing the DVD from a distribution company in Argentina proper.

*turistas* appeared in *The New York Times* when the movie was screened in New York.

Otherwise, criticism of Argentine horror cinema in the U.S. is generally confined to websites specializing in horror or other less reputable genres such as science-fiction or fantasy. For example, writers at the website Twitch have covered Argentine horror cinema for the past several years, usually through brief articles about upcoming theater releases in Argentina as well as DVD releases of Argentine horror films in the United States.

Along with Twitch, numerous kinds of websites constitute instances of consumption/production for Argentine horror cinema in the United States. Retail websites such as amazon.com and film database sites like imdb.com contain reviews of Argentine horror film available in the United States. Horror film websites based in the United States, or frequented by users from the United States, also devote space to Argentine horror. This possibly confirms Steffen Hantke's observation that U.S. horror fans have turned to local and foreign horror cinema as a way to solidify their subcultural capital (xxii).<sup>45</sup> Bloodydisgusting.com,

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<sup>45</sup>Hantke grounds his idea of subcultural capital by using the work of Sarah Thornton, who draws on Pierre Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital. For Bourdieu, cultural capital originally accounted for "the unequal scholastic achievement of children originating from the different social classes" (243). In short, cultural capital might refer to the education (in the broadest sense) and societal position that students attained or occupied given their socioeconomic status, factors that influence a student's achievement beyond the confines of a school. For example, a student's membership within a well-connected family may confer upon him or her access to particular kinds of social networks that enable his or her entrance into a prestigious school. In such a case, a student would have higher cultural capital than a student who lacked such a social network. While conceived of three different kinds of cultural capital (the embodied, objectified, and institutionalized states), my, Hantke's, and Thornton's use of cultural capital refers to its embodied state, a form of capital that Bourdieu adduces as "culture, cultivation, [and] *Bildung*" (244). Thornton writes about certain forms of knowledge that "delineate the boundaries of a subculture" against a "mainstream culture" (11), and, according to Hantke, a horror film fan's knowledge of foreign horror cinema may endow him or her with a particular cachet within a U.S. horror film culture. The websites I list here do not exclusively focus on local and/or foreign horror cinema and do not shun mainstream horror film releases such as *The Shining* (Stanley Kubrick, 1980) or *Halloween* (John Carpenter, 1978). Nevertheless, the inclusion of Argentine horror cinema, as well as other foreign horror film releases, does set the websites apart from

bloodgoodhorror.com, gomorrahy.com, rue-morgue.com, and ossuary.best-horror-movies.com all feature synopses or protracted reviews about Argentine horror films, specifically those available in the United States. The website for *Fangoria*, often considered the standard for fan publications about horror cinema, likewise features articles about Argentine horror. *Fangoria*'s case, however, merits special attention. Nicanor Loreti, an Argentine film critic, script writer, and director, writes English-language articles about Argentine horror films, in addition to films from other countries. According to Todd Brown, Loreti's English-language articles have helped to bring attention to Argentine horror cinema through *Fangoria* (Brown). Loreti's own crossing over into English-language journalism has helped Argentine horror cinema cross over into other markets. Since fans from Argentina and the United States rarely interact on horror cinema websites, Loreti's work, as well as that of other journalists in both Argentina and the United States, provides a nexus between the two countries' communities of fans.

Some Argentine horror film directors reason that the visibility gained outside Argentina through exhibition and criticism can translate to visibility within Argentina, as if the vindication of one's craft comes from elsewhere. Daniel de la Vega poignantly captures such a sentiment: "Se nos reivindicado porque afuera nos han reivindicado" ("We have been vindicated because we have been vindicated outside Argentina"; Conde and Mérida 57). The various modes of consumption/production in the United States (some of which emerge from Argentina, as in the case Nicanor Loreti's journalism) have created visibility for Argentine horror in the United States. Such visibility has even yielded a collective identity for a genre of national cinema that is

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other film websites that may limit themselves to horror films that have received a theatrical release.

otherwise disparate.<sup>46</sup> In 2004, writers at Twitch branded Argentine horror as “HorrAR,” a portmanteau combining “Horror” and “ARgentina” which is not necessarily used with any regularity (Brown). Nevertheless, as demonstrated by de la Vega’s comment, Argentine horror film directors and critics in Argentina welcome the attention, even if it comes from outside Argentina.

### **MONSTERS OF THE AMERICAS: THE TRANSNATIONAL DIMENSIONS OF ARGENTINE HORROR CINEMA AND THE ROLE OF ALLEGORY AND PARANOIA**

The geographic location of various agents (fans, critics, journalists, programmers, distributors, directors, film festival organizers) associated with Argentine horror cinema spans both Argentina and the United States, and beyond. The “ensemble of practices,” to recall Ryall’s phrase, transcends a single geographic entity and intimates the many transnational dimensions of Argentine horror film culture. While “transnational” carries various meanings, my use of the term here departs from Nataša Ďurovičová definition that “‘transnational’ acknowledges the persistent agency of the state,” which does not overlook “the relations of unevenness and mobility” among states (x).<sup>47</sup> In the context of Argentine horror cinema, however, the state’s role does not invariably and automatically imply a supportive one. INCAA, as a state agency, has arguably been both obstacle and supporter of Argentine horror cinema. Nevertheless, whether absent or present in a supportive mode, the state matters in how Argentine horror films have been produced, funded, exhibited, and critiqued. As described above, many modes of

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<sup>46</sup>When asked about the commonalities among Argentine horror films in interviews, various directors and critics cited films’ low-budgets. Otherwise, Argentine horror films regularly differ thematically and formally, something that will become more evident in subsequent chapters.

<sup>47</sup>Ďurovičová poses “transnational” against the terms of “global” and “international,” the former, for her, being a “concept bound up with the philosophical category of totality” (viii), and the latter implying “political systems in a latent relationship of parity” (x).

production/consumption surrounding Argentine horror have developed beyond the pale of the state.

The role of the state aside, Ďurovičová's mention of unevenness is crucial to resist the temptation to believe that the circulation of Argentine horror cinema between Argentina and the United States is somehow fluid, untrammelled, and egalitarian between and within the two countries. For instance, different viewers in different geographies have different ways of accessing Argentine horror cinema, some of which are easier than others.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, as mentioned in the introduction, U.S. films are distributed in far greater numbers in Argentina than Argentine films in the United States; the same can be said of U.S. and Argentine horror films.

Transnationality is nothing new to cinema.<sup>49</sup> While transnationality can refer to funding, distribution, casting, and the hiring of production personnel, among other elements, I am chiefly interested in the transnational aesthetics in Argentine horror films distributed in the United States and the ways in which the films project various political, socioeconomic, and cultural crises that have transpired or continue to transpire in both national territories. Mette Hjort's taxonomy of "strong vs. weak transnational" and "marked vs. unmarked transnational" is instrumental in my analysis of the transnational in several films (13-14). The former set of terms conveys the role of the audience's reception, and the latter set the role of the films' imagining those audiences. For

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<sup>48</sup>As noted above, Argentine horror films can be obtained in any number of ways, often times depending on the geographical context. Audiences in the United States can view Argentine horror through downloading, Netflix, purchase on various Internet retail sites, and the occasional film festival. In Argentina, one can order some films through the distribution company Videofilms, purchase the DVD at an informal market, view a film at a festival or special screening, download a film through a file sharing site such as Taringa, and/or obtain a copy through a retail store. Despite the myriad channels of distribution, some films are more available than others in certain local markets.

<sup>49</sup>See, for instance, Marvin D'Lugo's essay "Aural Identity and Hispanic Transnationality," which among other things, alludes to Carlos Gardel's pan-American popularity in films made by Paramount in New York and Paris during the 1930s.

Hjort, “strong and weak transnational” enables “a scalar concept allowing for the recognition of strong or weak forms of transnationality” that can vary from film to film, and relate “to levels of production, distribution, and reception, and the cinematic works themselves” (13). A film with strong transnationality is one that hypothetically enjoys international distribution, funding from sources located in various countries, and has technicians of different nationalities. In considering other possibilities of transnationality, a film could have a strong transnationality in one sense and not in another. For example, a film could have a strong transnational aesthetic in terms of production (i.e., funding from entities located in different countries), but possess a weak transnational distribution.

Two facets of transnationality ground my analysis of Argentine horror cinema. First, the distribution of Argentine horror films in the United States defines which films to examine. In addition, transnationality applies to the different ways a film can be received as horror in Argentina and the United States. As I describe in the following chapters, the films have moments of strong and weak transnational horror aesthetics. In some cases, a horror cinema convention (e.g., a zombie horde) reflects both a weak and strong transnationality. For example, a zombie horde is recognizable to both Argentine and U.S. audiences alike as part of the zombie subgenre, therefore having a strong transnationality. Yet, such a horde acquires a national specificity given their actions and the national context that they occupy onscreen. Thus, the zombies sometimes take on a weak transnationality in those moments in which they embody a particular national facet.

Similarly, Hjort treats “marked and unmarked transnationality” as a spectrum that can change from film to film. She hypothetically illustrates the idea of marked transnationality in the instance in which the agents working on a film (directors, technicians, producers, actors, etc.)



“intentionally direct the attention of viewers towards various transnational properties that encourage thinking about transnationality” through editing and/or cinematography (14).<sup>50</sup> Hjort’s remarks are useful for considering Argentine horror films and their transnational aesthetics. As mentioned above, the transnational varies. Most importantly, however, Hjort points out how the transnational does not solely depend on reception. While I refrain from assigning any intentionality to directors, the films *imagine* Argentine and U.S. audiences to varying degrees. The films reflect a marked transnationality by including horror conventions and formal elements associated with horror cinema. Hjort’s focuses on cinematography and editing, and Argentine horror cinema’s use of these techniques qualifies as marked transnationality. For instance, the medium close-ups and high contrast lighting that characterize the interior of the old mansion in *Habitaciones para turistas* is typical of horror cinema irrespective of its national origins, and different national audiences will recognize such formal elements as part of the horror genre.

My analyses of the transnational aesthetics and the projection of Argentine and U.S. crises in select Argentine horror films are theoretically grounded in conceptions of paranoia, allegory, and cinematic landscapes. I use paranoia and allegory as interpretive tools. In his essay on paranoia in contemporary U.S. novels, Patrick O’Donnell describes his own way of looking at manifestations of paranoia as cultural paranoia: a “method [,] a way of seeing the multiple stratifications of reality, virtual and material, as interconnected or networked” (182). I adopt a

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<sup>50</sup>There are numerous examples of how transnationality appears in a film. To give one example, in the Jason Bourne franchise Matt Damon’s character appears to seamlessly move between cities, countries, and even continents through elliptical editing, with Bourne able to speak numerous languages. There is simply not enough space here to interpret the transnational dimensions in the Jason Bourne films. However, Bourne’s capacity to move between countries as an ex-CIA trainee mirrors the film’s capacity to move through different national markets as a Hollywood vehicle.

similar mode of paranoid interpretation when describing Argentina and United States as two nodes composing a cultural circuit linked by Argentine horror cinema. Film distribution is the first level to consider, with the content of the films the second. I ask how Argentine and U.S. crises manifest themselves within Argentine horror, and use allegory as method to locate the national crises.

In addition to being a method of tracing connections, paranoia has also been employed to categorize contemporary horror films as paranoid horror films. In *Monsters and Mad Scientists*, Andrew Tudor provides a cultural history of horror films distributed in Britain between 1931 and 1984 and posits “the [horror] genre’s major developmental pattern: the passage from secure to paranoid horror” (213). While not precluding a film’s mixture of the two categories, Tudor dates secure horror as pre-1968, which contains several common narrative elements: the defeat of the threat by experts (government, scientists, military), human action as effective, and the threat as external and distant (as opposed to being within one’s family or one’s body). Alternatively, with paranoid horror, experts are nonexistent or useless, human intervention is only temporarily effective, and the threat resides closer and remains at large by the narrative’s end (Tudor 217). All of the Argentine horror films I analyze here largely conform to Tudor’s definition.<sup>51</sup>

I also use allegory as interpretative tool. In *Anatomy of Criticism*, Northrop Frye famously wrote “all commentary is allegorical interpretation” (89). A critic’s allegorical way of interpretation enables a work to possess allegory, which is my charge in subsequent chapters: to locate and explicate Argentine and U.S. crises in Argentine horror films. Yet, as will become clearer, the films also lend themselves to allegorical interpretation. Again, I turn to Frye: “We

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<sup>51</sup>Tudor’s definition of a paranoid horror film is useful for examining not only Argentine horror films, but films from other countries as well.

have actual allegory when a poet explicitly indicates the relationship of his images to examples and precepts, and so tries to indicate how a commentary on him should proceed” (90).<sup>52</sup>

Viewing allegorically enables the generic characteristics of a paranoid horror film to project national crises. On a very fundamental level allegory may be defined as “saying one thing and meaning another” (Tambling 56). Thus, the absence or complicit role of government officials in an Argentine horror film produced in 2001 suggests the shrinking of the Argentine government and expansion of corporate enterprises through the institution of neoliberal policies. Likewise, select films imagine the United States (and not just a U.S. audience) by projecting allegories of U.S. crises. In *Plaga zombie: Zona mutante*, when a cowboy-wrestler begins to parrot George Bush’s notorious phrases such as “Vivo o muerto” (“Dead or alive”), the onscreen violence resulting from a clash between zombies and humans intimates the mayhem and carnage of the War on Terror unfolding on the other side of the globe.

In many respects, horror cinema and allegory provide an ideal mode for examining cinematic representations of crises. Horror cinema has long been considered an ideal form of depicting national dilemmas, albeit usually as a way of challenging prevailing and dominant ideologies.<sup>53</sup> Recent scholarship on horror cinema supports that tendency. In *The Wounds of Nations*, a work that engages with questions of horror cinema and national trauma, Linnie Blake takes “the horror film’s ability to challenge models of national identity promulgated by a nation’s economic and political masters through other branches of mass culture” (6) as a major point of

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<sup>52</sup>Frye’s interpretation of allegory as both mode of writing (i.e., the author making allegory) and mode of interpretation is hardly novel and was developed by classical Roman writers (Tambling 19).

<sup>53</sup>For example, see Robin Wood’s often cited essay “An Introduction to the American Horror Film,” which was published in 1979.

departure. Akin to the horror film, allegory has traditionally been associated with crises of some kind. In his overview of the concept, Jeremy Tambling observes that “allegory appears to have been produced during periods of emotional and/or religious crises, whether personal or historical or both” and references the works of Dante, William Langland, John Donne, George Herbert, John Bunyan, and Edmund Spenser to support his claim (72-3).

In addition to Blake’s work on horror cinema and the nation, recent scholarship on Argentine cinema reinforces the use allegory to examine cinema as a barometer of national crises. Gonzalo Aguilar’s *Otros mundos/Other Worlds*, Joanna Page’s *Crisis and Capitalism in Contemporary Argentine Cinema*, and Gabriela Copertari’s *Desintegración y justicia en el cine argentino contemporáneo* (“Disintegration and Justice in Contemporary Argentine Cinema”) unanimously view cinema as a way of making visible the transformations in Argentina’s political, socioeconomic, and cultural landscape over the past twenty years.<sup>54</sup> Although the authors invariably express some misgivings with Fredric Jameson’s claim that all Third World narratives are “national allegories” (16), allegory is crucial to representing the nation in some form.<sup>55</sup>

Objections to Jameson’s statements are understandable and do not need to be repeated here.<sup>56</sup> Nevertheless, I begin my exploration of allegory in specific Argentine horror films based

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<sup>54</sup>Although it focuses on Brazilian cinema from 1960s and 1970s, Ismail Xavier’s *Allegories of Underdevelopment* merits special mentioning for its extensive theorization of cinematic allegory.

<sup>55</sup>As to how the authors confront Jameson’s argument, see pp. 7-8 in Page’s *Crisis and Capitalism*, pp. 13-14 in Copertari’s *Desintegración*, and p. 16 in Aguilar’s *Other Worlds*.

<sup>56</sup>In *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*, Aijaz Ahmad offers a forceful rebuttal to Jameson’s claim. While a full discussion of the debate would take us too far afield, Jameson argued, “All third-world texts are necessarily [...] allegorical in a very specific way: they are to be read as what I will call *national allegories*, even when, or perhaps I should say, particularly

upon Jameson's ideas. First, I consider the films as socially symbolic acts in which an individual work "has been reconstituted" in the form of a collective (Jameson 76). In Jameson's case, the collective is "the great collective" (76), which he characterizes by citing "The Communist Manifesto" as "a single great collective story: [...] 'the history of class struggles'" (20). In my study, the collectives to which allegories point are national, but not solely Argentine. The United States also manifests itself allegorically onscreen, which give the aesthetics of some Argentine horror films a transnational dimension through their allusions to two separate national collectives.

Confined to scenes in the films, the national allegories I highlight are baroque in the sense that Walter Benjamin averred, "In the field of allegorical tuition the image is a fragment, a rune. Its beauty as a symbol evaporates when the light of divine learning falls upon it. The false appearance of totality is extinguished" (176).<sup>57</sup> Such fragmentation allows for what Benjamin calls "the antinomies of the allegorical" (174): "any person, any object, any relationship can

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when their forms develop out of predominantly western machineries of representation, such as the novel" (69). Among other objections, Ahmad finds problematic Jameson's interchangeable use of the terms 'nation' and 'collectivity' in describing the breadth of allegory: "The difficulty of this shift in vocabulary is that one may indeed connect one's personal experience to a 'collectivity' – in terms of class, gender, caste, religious community, trade union, political party, village, prison – combining the private and the public, and in some sense 'allegorizing' the individual experience, without involving the category of 'the nation' or necessarily referring back to the 'experience of colonialism and imperialism'. The latter statement would then seem to apply to a much larger body of texts, with far greater accuracy" (110). For a general description of the various responses to Jameson's essay, as well as a defense of Jameson, see Neil Lazarus's "Fredric Jameson on 'Third-World Literature': A Qualified Defence."

<sup>57</sup>This quote comes from Benjamin's *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*. Here, Benjamin alludes to baroque allegorical script and how "the extreme character of the typographical arrangement and [...] the use of highly charged metaphors" undermine a text's "single and unalterable complex," or meaning (175-176). Benjamin contrasts the fragmentation of the baroque allegory with notions of the totality in classicism and romanticism.

mean absolutely anything else” (175). Fragmentation displaces “a single great collective story” that Jameson posits. Here, the collectives are nations. The circulation of Argentine horror films in Argentina and the United States, along with the films’ imagining of those audiences, allows for the emergence of different national allegories. In other words, both circulation and allegory operate to unfix a film’s meanings and the projection of a single national collective.

The projection of more than one national collective also occurs via the projection of different national cinematic landscapes, which, in turn, tethers the allegory to two countries. I conceive the national and transnational through the notion of a cinematic landscape that is open and porous, a conception that is rooted in both film geography and feminist geography. In “Cinematic Landscapes,” Chris Lukinbeal delineates a taxonomy for film geographies and uses the term ‘landscape’ to “emphasize landscape and cinema as a cultural production, a space that is mediated by power relations” (Lukinbeal 4). Cinematic landscape can operate as place, space, spectacle, or metaphor; I will consider and revise Lukinbeal’s classifications in my analyses of particular films. The horror films’ cinematic landscapes are distilled both from Argentine culture and other national cinematic and literary cultures, one of which is at times the United States. For instance, while Domingo Faustino Sarmiento’s *civilización y barbarie* (“civilization and barbarism”) binary, a concept that infuses much of Argentine cultural production, appears in Bogliano’s *36 pasos*, the influence of Edgar Allan Poe in de la Vega and Parés’s *Jennifer’s Shadow* is readily evident. Such national and transnational allusions are projected in the films’ cinematic landscapes and forge a spectrum in which a cinematic landscape oscillates between national (Argentina) and transnational (Argentina and the United States). That is, in some instances a film’s cinematic landscapes are characterized by its *argentinidad*. In other instances,

visual and aural allusions to U.S. culture seep into the same film and render the landscape transnational.

The aforementioned presence of genre elements shared between Argentine horror films and films from other places indicates the open nature of the films' landscapes and can be framed through an approach to feminist geography articulated by Doreen Massey in her influential book *Space, Gender, Place*. According to Massey, "Places are not so much bounded areas as open and porous networks of social relations" (121) with the identities of places "constructed through the specificity of their interaction with other places rather than their counterposition to them" (121). For Massey, social relations play a crucial role in determining space, gender, and gender relations. The open nature of a space acquires multiple scales with Massey's idea of "[t]he spatial' [...] as constructed out of the multiplicity of social relations across all spatial scales" (4) from global, national, local, workplace, and home. A similar dynamic is at work in Argentine horror films. National and global cinematic imaginaries converge within a cinematic landscape making the films into horror films for audiences in different geographical spaces. At the same time, the films possessing specific national particularities.<sup>58</sup> Returning to Jameson's idea of collectives, the national/transnational dynamic denies the projection of a single national collective and, instead, projects two national collectives: Argentina and the United States. Just as Massey conceives space as open to different scales, the landscapes of Argentine horror films are likewise open.

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<sup>58</sup>In his essay "Global Noir: Genre Film in the Age of Transnationalism," David Desser alludes to neo-noir as a transnational genre with films, irrespective of their national origin, sharing some common narrative elements such as "The Stranger and the Femme Fatale," "the couple on the run," or "the heist gone bad" (Desser 521-524). Similarly, the horror subgenres to which the films I examine belong (zombie, gothic, slasher, apartment horror) are aware of such subgenres as expressed in films from various countries and, as I have intimated above, manipulate some of the genre's fundamental elements to imbue the films with an Argentine particularity.

Despite an undermining of a single national collective, Jameson's notion of a political unconscious as it relates to the allegory of crises remains at least partially intact. Through allegory, I am "detecting traces" and "restoring to the surface of the text" (Jameson 20) the films' *momentary* projections of crises in different countries. The allegorization of Argentine and U.S. crises, however, is not a totality. If, like Jameson, I "argue the priority of [a form] political interpretation" of the films, I leave open the possibility of other kinds allegories or other modes of political interpretation.<sup>59</sup>

Using allegory as a primary methodological tool allows me to connect Argentine horror cinema to a transnational film culture embodied by different modes of production/consumption. This use of allegory places my study of Argentine horror cinema squarely in the realm of production/consumption. Here, I treat allegorical interpretation as a mode of consumption, or a way of reading the films that invoke cinematic allegories of national crises. The material form of production is my examination of Argentine horror cinema, the way in which I use images. My study not only results from, but also contributes to the transnational film culture organized around Argentine horror cinema in Argentina and the United States.

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<sup>59</sup>Horror film criticism offers vast ways in which a film can be received. Such modes of reception include, but are not limited to psychoanalysis, feminism and gender studies, and queer studies. See Brigid Cherry's *Horror* (2009) for an overview of horror cinema and different modes of critique. Of course, additional ways of receiving a horror film exist beyond academia and can include focusing on gore and special effects, and characterization. This aside, by referring to other modes of reception as political, I echo Jameson's argument that "everything is 'in the last analysis' political" (20). While I will refrain from exploring this idea at length, even the idea to somehow perform an 'objective' and non-political reading involves a political decision to try to be apolitical.



## CHAPTER 2

### BODY SNATCHERS: ENGLISH-LANGUAGE ARGENTINE HORROR FILMS AND PARANOID HORROR CINEMA

Two Argentine horror films – *Death Knows Your Name* and *Dead Line* – perform the ruse of concealing their actual location (Buenos Aires) and anchoring the film within a generic version of another country (the United States). The films are intended for a U.S. market, so their respective portrayals of the United States must pass a loose standard of realism. Hiding the setting's identity is not a question of making some part of Buenos Aires appear to be New York, Miami, or some other U.S. city, but rather to make the Argentine capital appear to be Anytown, USA or, better said, Anycity, USA; *Death Knows Your Name* and *Dead Line* unfold exclusively in urban milieus.<sup>60</sup> The two films traffic in urban technologies – stoplights, high rise apartments, sidewalks, subway trains – that could appear in any global city. The films lack an iconography that anchors them to a particular U.S. city (e.g., The Sears Tower = Chicago, Golden Gate Bridge=San Francisco), and we never see superimposed captions or diegetic street signs that indicate a particular onscreen city. Argentine actors speak in English, sometimes with an accent, and never name their exact whereabouts (Kozloff 35). No regional U.S. accent is employed that would point to a particular part of the United States. Camera placement and movement, lenses, sound, global product placement, set design, and English-language dialogue help to create the

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<sup>60</sup>Demián Rugna's *The Last Gateway* is another English-language Argentine horror film distributed in the United States which, given its projection of a generic United States, is similar to *Death Knows Your Name* and *Dead Line*. For lack of space, I must unfortunately set aside Rugna's film for a later project.

onscreen U.S. urban spaces: elements that simultaneously efface Buenos Aires. However, the Argentine capital is not hermetically sealed off; instead its presence seeps through in various ways.<sup>61</sup>

The creation of generic onscreen versions of the United States relates to the larger issue of the films as paranoid horror films that allegorize Argentine and U.S. paranoia. *Death Knows Your Name* and *Dead Line* adhere to Tudor's definition of paranoid horror films: experts, or any human action, are generally ineffective in subduing the threat, the threat originates and resides in close quarters with its potential victims, and the films lack narrative closure (217). The films' paranoia, however, extends beyond that of a designation and each film exhibits a similar but distinct aesthetics of paranoia. In other words, the films project a character's paranoia, which as a point of departure, I conceive in a broad sense: "the belief by an individual, or among a group, that it is being conspired against with the intention of inflicting harm" (Pratt 12). The films project paranoia by conveying characters' suspicions – both real and delusional – of being pursued by unseen forces that intimate overarching systems of power that emerge over the course of the film. The films' paranoid aesthetics present national allegories of paranoia at work in both contemporary U.S. and Argentine cultures via a character's suspicions (both delusional and real)

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<sup>61</sup>*Death Knows Your Name* and *Dead Line* are hardly the first films to draw on the accoutrements of urbanism to undermine a film's actual location and to anchor the film's diegesis elsewhere. In *Cities and Cinema*, Barbara Mennel alludes to Jackie Chan's kung-fu action-comedy films and how urban visual textuality evacuates the location's specificity, irrespective of the narrative taking place in Hong Kong, Los Angeles, or New York. According to Mennel, "By using generic urban structures, such as parking garages, staircases, and skyscraper walls as the terrain for Chan's acrobatic action style, the cityscape stands in for any city, anywhere" (93). Mennel is obviously focusing strictly on architecture and discounting other filmic elements that can anchor a film to a particular locale such as language (English vs. Cantonese), superimposed words that indicate location, or even the racial makeup of characters. This point aside, *Death Knows Your Name* and *Dead Line* are not aspiring to a transnational urban aesthetic or a cinematic anywhere, but rather, as I state above, the specific creation of a generic urban United States.

at being pursued by forces and being caught within conspiratorial networks beyond their comprehension. The films project allegories of national paranoia in two national spaces.

Cultural paranoia appears widespread in both Argentina and the United States, although the causes may differ. In an article appearing in the national newspaper *Clarín* in 2007, Guido Braslavsky describes the results of a national opinion poll in which the top concern among Argentines was by far *la inseguridad* (“safety”). While Richard Hofstadter considered paranoia to be fixture of the U.S. political landscape, recent paranoia in the United States can be attributed to any number of causes depending on the sector of the population: fear of terrorist attacks since 9/11, disease outbreaks in metropolitan areas, fear of fallout from the housing market collapse, and fear of employment loss.<sup>62</sup>

Transnational allegories of paranoia aside, the films’ orientation towards a U.S. market allegorizes a specific kind of paranoia in the United States: immigration from Latin America. The rest of the world, including Argentina, has long figured into films from the United States, and it is not unusual for an onscreen United States to be filmed outside its borders. What proves exceptional about the two English-language Argentine horror films is the use of Argentine actors and locations – non-U.S. actors and locations – to create an onscreen United States within Latin America. While some may construe traces of Buenos Aires and the accented English dialogue as flaws, I argue that the flaws tender a specific paranoia for U.S. viewers regarding immigration. The flaws indicate something is amiss with a representation of the United States, and the paranoia stems from the realization that U.S. culture has been studied from Latin America, the source of immigration. *Death Knows Your Name* and *Dead Line* are systems unto themselves that have observed, studied, and learned the United States in order to project a replica of the

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<sup>62</sup>See Hofstadter’s essay “The Paranoid Style in American Politics.”

country, including its anxieties. However, U.S. viewers' realization of being studied does not prompt unease. Instead, U.S. viewers may see the films as playful, and thus pleasurable, depictions of their own culture, especially its paranoia.

I begin the chapter with analyses of the two films – *Death Knows Your Name* and *Dead Line* – in which I largely focus on the creation of onscreen urban U.S. spaces and the aesthetics of paranoia in each film in order to uncover elements of circulation and transnationality. Following the analysis of *Dead Line*, my discussion centers on how the two films allegorize a general paranoia in both the United States and Argentina. I conclude with a discussion of the films' capacities to appeal to a pleasurable paranoia in the United States regarding Latin American immigration to the United States.

### ***DEATH KNOWS YOUR NAME: SYSTEMS WITHIN A SYSTEM***

In *Death Knows Your Name*, a young psychiatrist, Bruce Taylor (Ricardo Aragón) works at a mental hospital. The hospital is connected to an older and abandoned mental institution, a structure with which Dr. Taylor is obsessed. Dr. Taylor locates a skull beneath the older hospital and, after the skull is reconstructed, its face is identical to that of his. With the help of a patient and a colleague, Dr. Taylor learns that one hundred years ago, he was William Vanhess and was buried alive by his twin brother, Gregor Vanhess (also played by Ricardo Aragón), where the abandoned hospital now stands. Gregor remains living despite being 130 years old due to a Faustian-like pact with a diabolical mirror. He resides in a local nursing home. In an elaborate and carefully executed scheme, Gregor harnesses the space of the hospital and the energy of its inhabitants to be reborn in the form of Bruce Taylor/William Vanhess. Gregor is reborn through the womb of Dr. Taylor's wife, Melissa (Veronica Mari), and returns to bury Bruce

Taylor/William Vanhess alive. By the film's end, Gregor assumes the identity of Bruce Taylor and exits the grounds of the hospital.

An anonymous Buenos Aires provides the filming locations for *Death Knows Your Name*. An apartment, nursing home, university lecture hall, and hospital give rise to a coherent and generic United States. Despite the location's anonymity, Buenos Aires hardly operates exclusively as an accidental backdrop and is crucial for creating paranoia, especially within the hospital. The hospital is the primary setting for the film, and its corridors, open spaces, exteriors, and roof top constitute a space with various systems of organization and logic, including architecture, medicine, and even bodies. The vast physical structure of the hospital and its other systems nevertheless exist within a larger system that is merely suggested at first and then is confirmed and materializes into the physical character of Gregor Vanhess. Gregor is an invisible and amorphous force at the start of the film, perceptible only through sight and sounds or possessing and speaking through a patient's body. Prior to his materialization, or rebirth, Gregor appropriates other systems within the hospital for his own ends, creating a vast network through which he pursues his brother and engenders in him a constant paranoia.

The cinematic space of the hospital is an elaborate labyrinth that encompasses more than examination rooms and corridors. The hospital has an expansive interior and multiple exteriors (the front and the roof), which may appear a departure from other cinematic spaces in horror films.<sup>63</sup> With the help of set designs and sound, the camera in *Death Knows Your Name* carves out specific spaces within the hospital to impart a claustrophobic feeling.

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<sup>63</sup>One can think of any number of spaces typical of horror films such as houses, cars, apartments, or even deserts in the case of *The Hills Have Eyes* (Wes Craven, 1977). Irrespective of how vast the spaces may potentially appear, the camera in horror films condenses those spaces to make that which is fearful appear more intimate.

Towards the beginning of the film, the camera jumps among various levels in the hospital and glacially tracks forward or rotates.<sup>64</sup> One sees a winding staircase from above, a narrow corridor beset with white tiles and shadows, a room itself divided with shelves of medical files, and the cellar beneath the hospital where Bruce Taylor finds his own skull. The camera creates a spatial and temporal tension through its lurking movements maintained over the shots of different spaces within the hospital. In the staircase shot, which is captured from above, the camera slowly closes in on stairs and twists to trace the stairs' descent. The slow pace of the camera imparts a foreboding weight that is reinforced by ominous music and indecipherable whispers. In contrast to the sometimes hyperactive pace of contemporary television hospital dramas, the film demands the viewer mediate on and imbibe the hospital's space. The camera's shoulder height and movement between levels and slow movement within those levels suggests the presence of a shapeless force making its way through the building, one that can move between different levels and sites within the hospital at will. The shots of the staircase and shelves of medical files further underscore the levels present in the filmic space.

The hospital functions as a system in itself to be upended and subsumed within the larger designs of Gregor Vanhess. The mental institution's systemic quality is signaled by its scientific rationality, and Dr. Taylor at first seems its most outspoken champion. Soon after Dr. Taylor finds the skull beneath the hospital early in the film, he subjects it to microscopes, and a forensic anthropologist reconstructs the skull's face. Hospital personnel in surgical scrubs, white coats, and white nursing uniforms, along with x-rays that occasionally fill the backgrounds of shots, solidify science's fundamental place within the hospital at the film's start. Science, however, is

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<sup>64</sup>The opening shot is somewhat reminiscent of the opening shots in *The Cat and the Canary* (Paul Leni, 1927) or *Alien* (Ridley Scott, 1979). However, unlike the sequence in *Alien*, which many consider suggests a womb-like space (for example, see Barbara Creed's *The Monstrous-Feminine*), the opening shot of the hospital in *Death Knows Your Name* is hardly maternal.

merely a straw man only to be foiled and used by Gregor, a greater system. Dr. Taylor's actions, as well as those of other hospital personnel, are ineffective and thus conform to one of Tudor's tenets for paranoid horror: the ineffectiveness of experts.

Dr. Taylor's discovery of his own skull buried beneath dirt intimates another architecture: interior topographies of different minds. When Dr. Taylor learns the discovered skull is identical to his own, he effectively takes on the memories contained in the other skull. The skull's exhumation corresponds with Dr. Taylor starting to uncover a memory of being killed by his brother, Gregor, a century ago. The skull was buried beneath the hospital, as was Dr. Taylor's memory of his murder as William Vanhess. A space projected in the film, the hospital's cellar, approximates a kind of unconscious that contains a repressed memory of Bruce's own murder when he was William Vanhess. The discovery of the skull does not instantaneously yield a transparent memory for Bruce, but rather a mere suspicion – a paranoia – that sets into motion his search for the skull's owner.

Although the hospital's cellar corresponds to Bruce's unconscious, a precise topographic mapping of the character's mind is not traced in the hospital's architecture. As noted above, the hospital architecture holds a number of levels or floors. Those levels, however, do not conform to any already existing topographic model of the mind, Freudian or otherwise. One cannot point to particular level or part of the hospital and claim it figuratively resembles a preconscious or conscious.<sup>65</sup> In other words, there is no specific level of the hospital's architecture in which Dr. Taylor regularly arrives to attain clarity and/or grandiose epiphanies. Instead, Bruce Taylor operates like a detective collecting clues from different sites within and beyond the hospital so as

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<sup>65</sup>Here, I am alluding specifically to the mind's topography that Freud articulates in *The Ego and the Id*.

to ascertain the circumstances behind his own death as William Vanhess more than a century ago.

Gregor represents an overarching system within the narrative, a kind of super villain with omniscient and omnipotent abilities. His plan unfolds through his manipulation of human bodies within the mental hospital. Gregor remains unseen for the first fifty minutes of the film at which point he appears as a bedridden 130-year old man. Prior to that moment, Gregor asserts his presence through obscure means. Shortly after Bruce finds the skull, patients and hospital workers begin to suffer what seems a vigorous form of yellow fever, an event that first signals the seeping of Buenos Aires's history into the narrative.<sup>66</sup> The patients in *Death Knows Your Name* appear jaundiced, and soon corpses begin to pile up.

The absence of a monster figure at the start of *Death Knows Your Name* points to the film's lack of what Noël Carroll calls "a geography of horror [that] situates the origin of a monster" (34). Monsters may emerge from sewers or graveyards or descend from outer space. In *Death Knows Your Name*, the origin, or even presence, of Gregor is unexplained for the first half of the film. There is no evidence for what is causing the yellow fever outbreaks or wreaking general havoc. The lack of a material monster inspires fear in characters and viewers for not knowing when, where, and why the fever is spreading and paranoia ensues. Without a physically present Gregor, the visible manifestations of yellow fever on people's bodies give Gregor an amorphous spatialization. Again, we see no sign of Gregor, but only evidence of his work and the yellow fever gives the character a horrifying shape precisely because it lacks a definitive shape. Gregor as a disease pervades the space of the hospital as an invisible entity that shows

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<sup>66</sup>A devastating outbreak of yellow fever that killed thousands of people occurred in 1871 in Buenos Aires.



itself only after it attacks.<sup>67</sup> In *Death Knows Your Name*, jaundiced bodies in the hospital signal the presence of both a disease and a character (Gregor) who communicates and assumes the form of a contagion that potentially infects everything and everyone.

Gregor provokes paranoia in Bruce Taylor. Dr. Taylor cannot know how his brother will manifest himself; Gregor is an all pervasive system that rarely is visible. If Gregor communicates his presence by infecting physical bodies with yellow fever, he privileges the bodies of the insane to carry out the most extreme and elaborate parts of his plan for rebirth. Such an arrangement echoes Susan Sontag's observations on the ideas about the insane in the twentieth-century in *Illness as Metaphor*. Sontag describes insanity as "...the repellent, harrowing disease that is made the index of a superior sensitivity, the vehicle of 'spiritual' feelings and 'critical' discontent" (35). The bodies of the insane in *Death Knows Your Name* are privileged insofar as they alone are attuned to Gregor's machinations. Patients hear the voice of restless spirits buried beneath the institution and, in numerous shots, patients dawdle on the hospital lawn seemingly aloof, but move their heads acknowledging a voice's screams. The mental hospital's patients alone possess an ability to perceive the impending force of Gregor and, at the film's end, the burying alive of Bruce Taylor.

Gregor uses patients' bodies as conduits, vehicles, and mouthpieces to carry out his plan; again, Gregor is a system appropriating other smaller ones. Gregor's use of Richard Ian Patterson (Kevin Schiele) is a prime instance in which bodies are manipulated in a larger scheme. Richard is Dr. Bruce Taylor's patient and has been at the hospital for several years. Gregor uses Richard to communicate with Dr. Taylor. Gregor invades and possesses Richard's body, although the moments in which Gregor uses Richard as a mouthpiece are slightly

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<sup>67</sup>Such a dynamic recalls Michel Foucault's observation in *Birth of the Clinic* that "... the solid, visible body is only one way [...] in which one spatializes disease" (3).

ambiguous. Richard's voice does not alter drastically and, with the exception of jaundiced skin, Richard's complexion and physical body do not metamorphose à la Linda Blair's character, Regan, in *The Exorcist* (William Friedkin, 1973). A viewer is sometimes forced to decide whether Richard is speaking as Richard – a patient in a mental hospital – or as Gregor – a malevolent spirit harnessing Richard's body and vocal cords.

A scene on the hospital's roof in which Dr. Taylor confronts Richard lays bare the nature of Richard's possession by Gregor and illustrates how Buenos Aires is concealed while the United States is projected. Hospital personnel inform Dr. Taylor that Richard is on the hospital's roof cutting himself. With Bruce's arrival on the roof, the camera slowly tracks to the right with close-ups of the mortified faces of a nurse and three orderlies. The camera eventually frames Dr. Taylor and Richard in an establishing shot (see Figure 1). The shot is the sole instance in the film in which Buenos Aires is in focus and is remotely recognizable to those viewers intimately familiar with the city. A large telecommunications tower cuts the image in half separating the two characters. The characters' positions in relation to the tower give symmetry to the shot: on one side, Richard is possessed and fully comprehends Gregor's plans, while, on the other side, Dr. Taylor remains ignorant of the situation at hand. If the tower distinguishes the two characters' conditions, it also fuses them together. All three vertical figures in the image – tower, Richard, and Dr. Taylor – are vehicles, vessels, and instruments for receiving and communicating some kind of message or plan. Just as the tower receives and transmits signals, Richard does the same for Gregor. Dr. Taylor, for his part, is only a receiver of messages at this point in the film.

The shot of Buenos Aires exemplifies the construction of an onscreen United States which obscures Argentina. The telecommunications tower amidst tall buildings is an

unequivocal symbol of a global metropolitan city. The tower endows the space with a high degree of development. Buenos Aires's disguise is further ensured by the scene's physical elevation. One does not see the city's sidewalks where one could encounter advertising in Spanish or some other cultural element that might give away the film's location. Instead, one sees building facades and several telecommunication towers in addition to the larger one bisecting the image.<sup>68</sup>



Fig. 1. Dr. Bruce Taylor confronts Richard as an anonymous Buenos Aires looms in the background.

The interaction between Richard and Dr. Taylor on the hospital roof merits attention for underscoring Gregor's capacity to subsume other systems (in this case, a body) and marks a point in the film in which Bruce Taylor's paranoia becomes full-blown. Richard declares himself possessed, and he tells Dr. Taylor, "'Doctor, what you just found [the skull], won't leave either of us alone. It's horrible. It's all your fault and I got to get it out of my body.'" His admission of knowing about Dr. Taylor's discovery of the skull reveals Gregor's omniscience

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<sup>68</sup>If the elevation ensures Buenos Aires is kept under wraps, the framing also helps. The DVD extras include a short documentary, "Making of DKYN," "DKYN" being an abbreviation for the film's title. The short documentary includes some shots of the hospital roof. One sees a large Argentine flag flying to the left of Dr. Taylor, an obvious symbol of Argentina that had to be excised from the frame if the film's location were to remain anonymous.

through Richard; Dr. Taylor discovered the skull alone and only has revealed his discovery to his father and a handful of colleagues. Gregor speaks through Richard. The patient's voice changes slightly, and he addresses Dr. Taylor by his full name rather than by "Dr. Taylor" as Richard did in previous scenes: "'You can't help anyone Bruce Taylor. You are making the same mistakes as before. It's inevitable.'" We then see a close-up of Richard cutting himself, after which the camera moves to his face and Richard says, "'It's making nest in my head. I can feel it. It's making me say and do things I don't want to do.'" Richard then slowly lifts the sharp end of the mirror shard and trembles as if fighting his own arm. Richard then bites the shard. Orderlies wrestle the patient to the ground, pull the bits of mirror from his mouth, and take him away.

Richard alludes to "it" repeatedly and how "it" operates upon him. "It" invades his brain and makes him speak and acts in ways against his will, an element epitomized by Richard's self-mutilation. The entrance of "its" voice (presumably Gregor's) into the scene, the lack of "it" having its own physical shape, and the power of "it" gives the voice the status of what Michel Chion calls an *acousmêtre*. In *The Voice of Cinema*, Chion defines the *acousmêtre* as "a voice, and especially when this voice has not yet been visualized – that is, when we cannot yet connect it to a face – we get a special being, a kind of talking and acting shadow" (21). One can think of any number of films, especially horror films, that contain *acousmêtres* and whose narrative concerns the revelation of the *acousmêtre*'s body: *Scream* (Wes Craven, 1996), *Black Christmas* (Bob Clark, 1974) and *Halloween* (John Carpenter, 1978). Chion ascribes four powers to the *acousmêtre*: "ubiquity, panopticism, omniscience, and omnipotence" (24). Gregor possesses these very powers. He is largely an undisclosed presence for the first fifty minutes of the film. His spatialization in the form of yellow fever and his abilities to spread the disease and to know of Dr. Taylor's discovery of the skull renders Gregor an ideal *acousmêtre*.

Richard's allusions to "it" introduces a fate into the narrative, which in turn feeds Dr. Taylor's paranoia. Speaking through Richard, "it" tells Dr. Taylor he can help no one, which includes himself, and that he is repeating past errors. Moreover, in a language replete with ambiguity, "it" communicates to Dr. Taylor that "It's inevitable." Neither Dr. Taylor nor we are privy to the exact nature of the inevitable. Like Dr. Taylor, we cannot ascertain when and how some calamity will occur. The utterance "It's inevitable" nevertheless lays out a bleak end for Dr. Taylor and an expectation for viewers. Tragedy will befall Dr. Taylor, and he and the audience remain on edge as to when, how, and the form of tragedy will take. At the moment of Richard's uttering "It's inevitable," Dr. Taylor's doom appears controlled by an unseen, almost divine-like figure. In a scene after the one on the hospital's roof, Dr. Taylor asks Richard for information about the skull found under the hospital at a moment that Gregor has fully possessed Richard's body. Gregor responds to Dr. Taylor, through Richard, "You are not ready for the message yet. You are not ready to fulfill your destiny. You are ready when you believe my words."

Dr. Taylor's paranoia deepens with the realization of his own approaching demise. Gregor's system does not afford Dr. Taylor the suffering of a single fate, but rather makes dying a repeated exercise. As noted above, in their conversation on the hospital roof Richard channels Gregor and tells Dr. Taylor, "You are making the same mistakes," as if Dr. Taylor is unwittingly hurling himself to an end he has already suffered. The idea of a repeated death manifests itself in the film in other ways. A 130-year old Gregor asks Dr. Taylor to kill him and remarks, "It is your destiny" and, after a reborn Gregor has reburied Dr. Taylor/William Vanhess, he states, "We will see each other again. I will need your blood when this body asks me to give it death."

Gregor's creation of a repeating system infuses Bruce Taylor's paranoia with the uncanny. Towards the beginning of his essay "The 'Uncanny,'" Freud lays out two possible methodologies to investigate the uncanny only to spell out a shared conclusion and a concise definition: "the uncanny is that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar" (220). While repetition is implicit in Freud's definition, he explores repetition as a source of the uncanny and, in one part, underscores how helplessness can accompany the uncanny. Freud describes his own experience of being lost in a skein of streets in Italy. His attempts at finding his way back to a particular site invoke the uncanny and helplessness when he returns to the same place three times (237). Dr. Taylor/William's fate is essentially an inevitable and horrified return to the familiar: the rediscovery of his death at the hands of his brother. Such a return is filled with the collateral damage of dead colleagues and his spouse, Melissa. Dr. Taylor/William appears helpless as he tries to understand the origin of the skull and the plans of Gregor.<sup>69</sup> By the film's end, like Freud's return to the same place from which he tries to escape, Dr. Taylor/William returns to the exact spot where his brother buried him alive a century ago, the same spot where Dr. Taylor discovered the skull at the beginning of the film.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup>Dr. Taylor's helplessness as part of the uncanny is visually captured by the circumstances of his death. After Gregor's rebirth, Dr. Taylor goes to a corridor of the abandoned hospital where he eventually encounters Gregor and the end of one corridor opens up onto larger spaces that contain doors. Gregor conjures his monstrous reflection which resembles a scaly man and walks with an extremely slow gait. Given the monster's slow pace and the hospital's open spaces and many doors, one might expect for Dr. Taylor to escape the monster. However, fate does not allow it.

<sup>70</sup>Place is crucial to Dr. Taylor's/William's cyclical fate, and *Death Knows Your Name* appears to draw on a number of ideas from Freud's essay, "The 'Uncanny.'" The manner in which Dr. Taylor/William Vanhess is buried, or reburied, is significant. Freud wrote, "To some people the idea of being buried alive is the most uncanny thing of all" (244).

Doubles are also crucial for forging an aesthetic that projects paranoia over an approaching death that is cyclical but temporarily and spatially unknown.<sup>71</sup> Besides the presence of Gregor and Dr. Taylor/William, doubles abound in the film. No less than three sets of twins appear at different points. The doubles do not appear necessarily at tense or traumatic moments, but rather periodically. Moreover, the twins consistently appear in the same frame as Dr. Taylor and prior to Gregor's appearance in the film. One may be tempted to draw on Freud's idea that the sets of doubles in the film act as "the uncanny harbinger of death" (235), specifically Dr. Taylor's death. The twins indeed foreshadow death, but not merely by their own appearance. The twins appear in the frame beside Dr. Taylor and *without* Gregor. The sets of twins create a visual asymmetry next to Dr. Taylor whose match Gregor remains unseen but will eventually make his entrance.

Doubles also appear through the ubiquitous and sometimes random presence of mirrors in the film. Several mirrors hang in Bruce and Melissa's apartment, one appears in the middle of a stairwell of the hospital's abandoned wing, and another is beside the elevator when Dr. Taylor searches frantically for Melissa after learning she has gone into labor. When Dr. Taylor confronts Richard on the rooftop, Richard wields a shard from a broken mirror. Besides producing doubles, the location and commonality of mirrors reinforces the widespread presence of Gregor as a pervasive system and reinforces Bruce Taylor's paranoia. As anyone who has looked around their local convenience store could confirm, mirrors are a common device in surveillance (e.g., two-way mirrors, convex mirrors). As intimated above, Gregor has a strong association with mirrors; his pact with the diabolical mirror provides him the opportunity to live

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<sup>71</sup>For a detailed reading on doubles in horror cinema, see Steven Jay Schneider's essay, "Manifestations of the Literary Double in Modern Horror Cinema" in *Horror Film and Psychoanalysis*.

eternally. Although he is not physically present, the mirrors suggest Gregor is peering at Bruce Taylor, and Dr. Taylor cannot escape the all-seeing eye of his brother who constantly looms over him.

### ***DEAD LINE: MY OWN PRIVATE PARANOIA***

*Dead Line*'s aesthetics of paranoia emerge from the clash of two conflicting systems and the onscreen spaces in which these systems and particular characters operate. One system is largely composed of personal delusions. Martin (Andrés Bagg), the protagonist, suffers from an acute paranoia over being pursued from different directions and through different means. Martin's paranoia is most pronounced within the claustrophobic space of his apartment whose narrow dimensions are exacerbated by framing, camera movement, and sound. The apartment's interior thus becomes a space that projects Martin's paranoia, which is fraught with aural and visual hallucinations. Martin's system of delusions is at loggerheads with a second system, a reality shared among characters, including Martin at times. The boundary between the two systems at first seems a question of interior and exterior spaces. If Martin's apartment operates as a kind of pressurized interior, then the images of an anonymous city's sidewalks, streets, and urban skylines temporarily relieve that tension. Over the course of the film, Martin's system of delusions nevertheless leaks out from the apartment and into the city as he descends into a murderous insanity.

*Dead Line* is set entirely in an unnamed city. Martin is a twenty-something professional who loses his job at an advertising agency.<sup>72</sup> His wife Ann (Alejandra Lapola), a former prostitute that we learn Martin used to visit, has left Martin for her personal trainer, Alex Vinelli

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<sup>72</sup>The character's name is perhaps a tribute to the title character of George Romero's vampire film *Martin* (1977). The Martin from Romero's movie of course suffered from his own kinds of delusions, namely the belief he was a vampire.



(Martin Capuccio). Despite help from two friends and former colleagues, Laura (Virginia Lustig) and Aaron (Oliver Kolker), Martin has fallen into a depression that morphs into paranoia. Martin suffers from the delusions of persecution and hallucinations that originate from his apartment telephone. Martin believes he is able to eavesdrop on the conversations of a male neighbor who hires prostitutes only to murder them. Martin tries to intervene to find out the murderer's identity until he believes the murderer has begun to pursue him. By the film's end, we learn the extent of Martin's delusions. He murdered his wife and her lover and stores their heads in his apartment's refrigerator. Moreover, Martin's eavesdropping and seeking out the prostitutes' murderer was simply not possible; Martin's telephone service had been cut off and no murders were reported. Soon after Laura asks Martin to seek professional help, he fatally stabs her and a neighbor. In the film's final sequence, Martin, who has become a nearly unrecognizable bum rummaging through trash cans at a metro stop where, upon encountering Aaron on a train, presumably stabs him.<sup>73</sup>

The onscreen urban space approximates the United States in various ways. The characters' English-language dialogue transforms the filmic space into a cinematic and generic United States. Albeit accented at times, the actors speak a U.S. form of English complete with slang that distinguishes the film's English from that of other English-speaking countries or regions within those countries (England, Ireland, New Zealand, Australia, etc.). Dialogue aside, U.S. viewers, and viewers elsewhere in the world, will recognize global brands such as Jim Beam, Asics, and Adidas, whose products the characters use or consume. *Dead Line* also traffics in generalized characterizations and clichés of U.S. culture. Martin reads a newspaper entitled *The Daily Tribune*. Towards the beginning of the film, Martin and his friends, Laura and Aaron,

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<sup>73</sup>The final shot of the film is of a metro train making its way towards a tunnel and one hears Aaron's scream with the violence off screen.

meet in Roxie, one of Buenos Aires's U.S.-style diners.<sup>74</sup> A prostitute tells the telephone *acousmêtre* to meet her at "1422 Main St." and to park on "Freedom," a buzzword perhaps borrowed from the frenzied bouts of patriotism in the United States following the 9/11 attacks. Elsewhere, Martin is stopped by a police officer for speeding as he appears to bury a prostitute's corpse that the murderer left in his apartment. Martin convinces the police officer he was speeding to meet his wife at "Bellevue Hospital," where she is giving birth.<sup>75</sup> Film locations, English-language dialogue, product placement of global brands, and allusions to the United States and U.S. cultural production all help create a generic urban U.S. space onscreen.

If the film's selective fragmentation of Buenos Aires enables the creation of a generic United States, traces of the Argentine capital still seep through. *El subte*, the city's subway system, figures prominently at times as a backdrop for Martin's wandering through the city and, in the closing scene, one sees a sign for the Florida stop. Martin drives through the onscreen city and one can occasionally see shop signs in Spanish. In one shot, Palacio Borolo on Avenida de Mayo fills the entire frame before cutting to a shot of Martin's friends knocking at his door (the order of the two shots suggests Martin's apartment is in Palacio Borolo). Martin's bathroom has a bidet, which is uncommon in the United States. One also occasionally sees graffiti written in Spanish and numerous images of apartment buildings characteristic of Buenos Aires or shots from rooftops looming in the background.

In order for Buenos Aires to pass as an urban generic United States for U.S. viewers, *Dead Line* depends on those very viewers' ignorance of the Argentine capital. *Dead Line* does

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<sup>74</sup>Roxie, located in Palermo, exhibits any number of stereotypical characteristics of a U.S. diner: a free-standing structure covered in corrugated metal, a black and white checkerboard floor, an "OPEN" neon sign, a long countertop with cushioned stools that swivel, and of course a menu that includes burgers and fries.

<sup>75</sup>"Bellevue Hospital" is the name of the mental institute in Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, a fitting reference underscoring Martin's mental decline.

not outright divulge the filmic location by showing the most obvious icons of Buenos Aires, such as the Obelisk on Avenida 9 de Julio, Plaza de Mayo, or Teatro Colón. Instead, as mentioned above, the film generally restricts itself to projecting urban elements (subway, tall buildings, streets, etc.) that qualify as urban in Argentina or the United States. Since U.S. viewers might not be familiar with, say, certain architecture in Buenos Aires or the subway, the city remains anonymous. By the film's end, after being evicted from his apartment, Martin embraces his paranoia and becomes an anonymous bum in an anonymous city driven mad by an anonymous murderer.

*Dead Line* can be categorized under a subgenre of horror cinema and psychological thriller often referred to as apartment horror. Roman Polanski's apartment trilogy – *Repulsion* (1965), *Rosemary's Baby* (1968), and *The Tenant* (1976) – is largely responsible for establishing the subgenre and rendering the apartment as an architectural space ideal for helping to forge an aesthetics of fear and anxiety.<sup>76</sup> The apartment becomes part of an onscreen space that projects a mental demise, perhaps most evident in the accumulation of garbage and the hallucinations of Catherine Deneuve's character in *Repulsion*. The apartment in *Dead Line* likewise embodies a character's unraveling; garbage piles up in Martin's apartment mirroring the character's declining condition.

The apartment as a horror film space is crucial for projecting Martin's paranoia and illustrates how a domestic space and refuge is often precarious. Oftentimes in horror cinema, the security of home is undermined in light of a threat entering the home, or already existing within a home if the murderer is a family member (e.g., *The Stepfather*, Joseph Ruben, 1987). The

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<sup>76</sup>Polanski's trilogy aside, one could categorize any number of horror and psychological horror films as apartment horror: *Pi* (Darren Aronofsky, 1998), *Eraserhead* (David Lynch, 1976), *Rec* (Jaume Balagueró, Paco Plaza 2007), *Apartment Zero* (Martin Donovan, 1988), *Los inquilinos del infierno*/"The Tenants from Hell" (Damián Leibovich and Juan Cruz Varela, 2004).

apartment in *Dead Line* works in a similar way in that it offers little protection from an imminent threat with the exception of a crucial difference: the location of the threat itself. As is the case of *Dead Line* and the other aforementioned apartment horror films, the threat is not that of an intruder entering the space, but rather the paranoia over the perceived threat emanates from *within* the architectural space. In other words, the problem is not Michael Myers or Jason Vorhees, or some other boogiemer getting in. The fear is already inside in the apartment, which offers Martin a very finite space to flee or hide. Moreover, the apartment as a closed and urban architectural space and a site of horror in *Dead Line* draws on paradoxes and tensions particular to a city. Martin is surrounded by people within his apartment building and on the street, but suffers from paranoid delusions that are most intense when he is alone in his apartment. Martin isolates himself, and his neighbors become less a source of solace than a threat to a mind besieged by fear of persecution.

Martin's apartment is a space charged with tension and temporal instability. The onscreen apartment has no windows, thus creating a kind of pressure cooker. The interior appears hermetically sealed, keeping Buenos Aires under wraps, but also depriving the viewer of any escape valve for the anxiety within the apartment. Moreover, a viewer's inability to determine if it is night or day from within the apartment lends a temporal instability to the onscreen space. One cannot tell what time Martin awakes or suffers from paranoid delusions. The character himself has lost any notion of time or routine after losing his job and the collapse of his marriage.

Martin's aural delusions and the appearance of a cloaked figure also suggest the apartment's status as a paranoid space. Martin imagines he is pursued. Any noise or hallucination Martin perceives within the apartment is construed as an immediate threat, and

there is nowhere to run. With doors appearing to open and close and phones and door bells ringing, a potential encounter between Martin and an intruder seems imminent. Martin hears the apartment's front door open and shut only to find the door locked. In one instance, reality and dreams blur as Martin finds a cloaked figure at the foot of his bed. The figure removes the hood and we see a close-up of a woman's disfigured face with her eyes and mouth sewn shut. Martin then awakens and the cloaked figure is nowhere to be found.

Close shots of the apartment and camera movement add to the tension and the notion that Martin is pursued. Images of the apartment generally lack a deep focus with the exception of showing a corridor that leads to the front door.<sup>77</sup> The camera is confined to single rooms and never projects a room in its entirety from above or from a single corner. The camera instead projects Martin's claustrophobia as if the camera were a pursuer who follows and hovers. One sees close-ups of and forward zooms on Martin, the camera's close forward tracking behind Martin's back, and multiple angle shots of the same object. One sees Martin's paranoia in the onscreen space of the apartment.

Noises and the cloaked figure aside, Martin's paranoid delusions of persecution chiefly emanate from the apartment's telephones. Indeed, the telephone occupies a crucial role in the narrative, as reflected by the film's title, and commands a certain presence and power in one of the film's opening scenes. Martin sits in a bath and relaxes. A cordless telephone sits next to the bath, and through the static Martin hears the conversation between a man and a woman. Martin learns that the woman is a prostitute, and the man is inquiring about her availability and birthday, a detail that will prove crucial later in revealing the man's identity as Martin.

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<sup>77</sup>An apartment as a filming location should by no means preclude deep space or deep focus within a shot or scene. To give one example, in Alfred Hitchcock's *Rope* (1948), the camera usually remains in the sitting room and points towards the kitchen and one can perceive action in the background.

Martin's split being is largely articulated through the telephone, reiterating the importance of the film's aural elements. *Dead Line*'s aesthetics of paranoia are largely contingent upon Martin's split being, a doubling of sorts through sound, that happens largely through the telephone.<sup>78</sup> Much like Gregor in the first half of *Death Knows Your Name*, the voice through the phone operates as an *acousmêtre*. At first, neither Martin nor we have any clue about the material person attached to the voice. The voice, which is distinct from that of Martin's, quickly acquires omnipotence and near omniscience once it speaks to Martin.<sup>79</sup> The voice knows Martin's name and phone number and seemingly possesses the capacity to physically enter Martin's apartment and escape detection. The owner of the voice could be anywhere.

In contrast to the ubiquitous voice, Martin is framed within a very finite space: his apartment. Martin's apartment, or rather fragments of his apartment within the onscreen space, places Martin in a position that essentially generates paranoia in him. The possible emergence of the voice's owner, what Chion terms its *deacousmatization*, or "finally showing the person speaking" (23), could quickly render Martin a captive through physical confrontation. The voice thus lays the groundwork for the murderer's tantalizing physical entrance into the frame. And yet, since the murderer is a product of Martin's paranoid delusions, the murderer never materializes.

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<sup>78</sup>In some ways, the narrative device of the phone and the splitting of the character recalls Michael Cane's character, Dr. Robert Elliot, in *Dressed to Kill* (Brian De Palma, 1980) speaking to his murderous transsexual side, Bobbi, through the phone.

<sup>79</sup>The voice's lack of knowing Martin's movements during conversations suggests a level of restriction on the voice that is at variance with other telephone *acousmêtre*'s in horror cinema. The telephone *acousmêtre*'s in *Scream* (Wes Craven, 1997) and the vignette "The Telephone" from Mario Brava's *Black Sabbath* (1963) possess a level of omniscience in that they know a character's movement and wield that knowledge to generate fear for the onscreen characters and the audience.

As noted above, the *acousmêtre*'s lack of physical being in *Dead Line* endows the voice with a presence that elevates Martin's sense of paranoia. Although the voice does not admit to knowing Martin's movements, the camera's movements when Martin speaks on the phone suggest he is being watched. In an opening scene to which I have already alluded, Martin sits in a bathtub with the telephone close by. Shortly after Martin begins to listen to a conversation between the murderer and a prostitute, the camera cuts to different angles of Martin in the bath and slowly zooms in on the character. First, the camera cuts to a high angle and slowly zooms down on Martin suggesting a set of spying eyes bearing down on its subject, a shot reminiscent of the opening scene in *The Conversation* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1974), albeit confined to a bathroom. Next, the camera cuts to a shot level with Martin's body in the bathtub and, again, slowly tracks forward towards Martin. The camera embodies a gaze that has now shifted and sizes up Martin from a different angle.

Later in the film frenetic camera movements convey Martin's growing paranoia. Objects that generate sound – particularly, the apartment's doorbell and telephones – initiate the camera's rapid and unsteady tracking towards objects and Martin. Thirty minutes into the film, Martin has been contacted by the voice through the phone and he is deeply frightened. The doorbell rings, and the camera quickly tracks in on Martin's face, going from a medium shot to an extreme close-up. The ring unnerves Martin, and the camera movement projects Martin's mindset, as if he assumes the owner of the voice stands on the other side of his apartment door. Martin's paranoia peaks with the possible appearance of the murderer.

In two instances, the telephone's ring likewise sets off frantic camera movement that projects an elevated paranoia. However, instead of a zoom solely on Martin as in the case of the doorbell, the phone's ring is accompanied by rapid and unsteady tracking on both Martin and the

telephone. The telephone rings and the camera quickly and unsteadily tracks towards Martin ending in an extreme close-up. The camera then cuts to a shot of the telephone and the camera shakily tracks towards the camera at a fast pace. The tracking shot on Martin implies an assault on the senses that cancels out the rest of the onscreen space. The camera movement empowers the phone's ring to such a degree that it dominates the frame and solely captures Martin.

The successive and nearly identical tracking on Martin and telephone, as an extension of the voice, brings Martin and the *acousmètre* face-to-face. The confrontation is created through successive and nearly identical tracking shots that end in close-ups of Martin and then the telephone. In *Cinema 1: the Movement-Image*, Gilles Deleuze articulates how objects resemble faces through close-ups. "The thing has been treated as a face: it has been 'envisaged' or rather 'faceified' and in turn stares at us, it looks at us . . . even if it does not resemble a face. Hence the close-up of a clock" (88). The close-up of the telephone, specifically its face plate, provides the telephone, or better, the voice, with a face. The voice's stare, however, is by no means passive. The hectic tracking onto Martin suggests the phone's eyes aggressively bear down on the character. The telephone's ring is given a force that shrinks the onscreen space, as if it had the power of motion through the ring's projection and prosthetic legs to run at Martin. For Martin, the telephone is not just a face, but rather a body that physically and forcefully confronts him and sometimes physically dwarfs him (see figure 2).

Martin's hermetically sealed apartment is in stark contrast to the cityscape in *Death Knows Your Name*. One sees sidewalks, streets, building facades, parks, subway stations, and restaurants. Depending on the film location, one can see open skies and, within interior structures, there is often a deep space that is absent from shots of Martin's apartment. While characters are sometimes framed in close-ups against various urban spaces, one also sees them in



medium and long-distance shots and the camera lacks the forward tracking and the rapid, unsteady zooms associated with Martin's apartment. Differences in camera movement and framing enables the city to act as an escape valve for the paranoid tension that characterizes Martin's apartment.

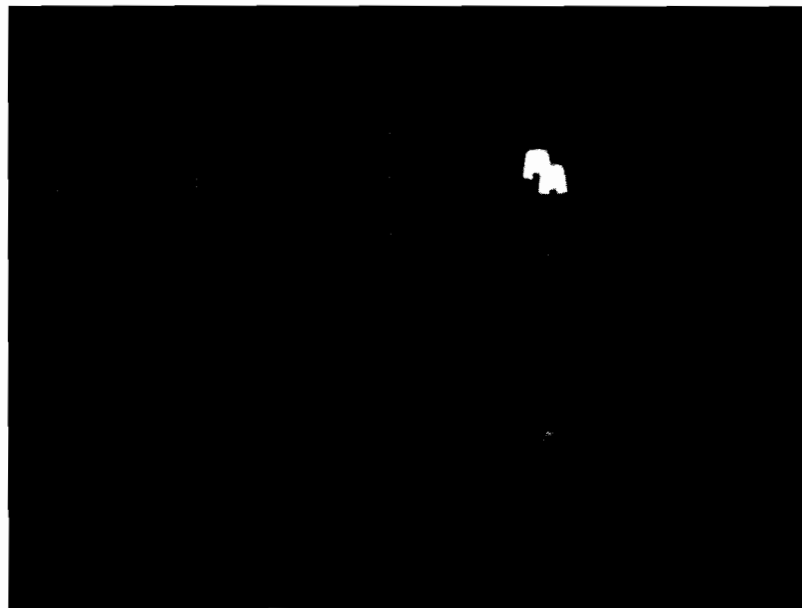


Fig. 2. The phone's power over Martin is demonstrated by the object's appearance in the frame's foreground. Martin, on the other hand, is dwarfed and out of focus.

The city becomes a paradoxical urban space for viewers given the exterior shots of Martin's apartment. On several occasions, one sees long-distance shots of an apartment immediately before the camera cuts to the interior of Martin's apartment. The exterior shots create continuity prior to the camera entering Martin's apartment; the viewer assumes she or he is looking at the exterior of the Martin's apartment and then the interior. The exterior shot also plays on a common shot in horror or science-fiction horror films in which some particular harrowing scene is about to unfold within the confines of secluded house or ship.<sup>80</sup> A long-

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<sup>80</sup>For examples, see *Scream*, *High Tension* (Alexandre Aja, 2003), *Alien* (Ridley Scott, 1979) or *Event Horizon* (Paul W.S. Anderson, 1997).

distance shot of the house or ship captures the entire structure within woods or a field or, in the case of a space vessel, floating in space. The shot projects the isolation and helplessness that characters must contend with in the face of a human or alien intruder. In the case of the exterior shots of Martin's apartment, he is simultaneously isolated and surrounded. His apartment sits among thousands of other people, yet he remains alone contending with his own paranoid delusions.

If *Dead Line* allows urban spaces to release tension, then the city is hardly a refuge for Martin. Martin's delusions follow him beyond his apartment and pervade his interactions with the city. In one instance, with the camera focalized on Martin, we see him imagine that he reads English-language articles about murdered prostitutes in a newspaper as he stands on a sidewalk. In another, we watch Martin bury a dead corpse in a field that we eventually learn never existed. Martin also inexplicably visits a sort of abandoned office building where he imagines he is pursued by a partially visible man in a bathroom, peers through a door to see a listless hand, and is then chased by a rabid dog. As with the interior of Martin's apartment, the film projects Martin's paranoia. One sees close-ups of Martin, the listless hand, and the dog, and a frantically shaking forward tracking shot that follows Martin as he flees from the dog. Through the film, selected parts of the city are incorporated into Martin's imagined fear of persecution. The city offers little refuge.

### **ARGENTINE BODY SNATCHERS: SHARED PARANOIA AND ALLEGORIES OF CIRCULATION**

*Death Knows Your Name* and *Dead Line* have both distinct and similar aesthetics of paranoia. Sound, lighting, architecture, camera movement, and narrative all operate to elicit

anxiety from the characters' onscreen, and possibly the viewers.<sup>81</sup> Characters suffer from both real and delusional suspicions of pursuit from multiple directions and remain at the mercy of obscured systems of power, often of a character's own making, in the case of Martin. The films' narrative arcs reveal the extent and functioning of those systems.

With a general effacement of Argentine culture and the creation of two generic United States, which includes the use of English-language dialogue, *Death Knows Your Name* and *Dead Line* also share a target audience: an English-speaking U.S. audience. I by no means want to suggest that a target audience located within a particular geography precludes audiences from other countries from comprehending the films' intricacies. Many filmgoers in other countries would recognize the urban codes and global brands as part of creating an onscreen United States. However, the films' distribution in the United States, along with the projections of generic United States, nevertheless prioritizes a U.S. audience. This prioritization translates not into a glib pandering or celebration of U.S. culture, but rather a complicated dance of audience accommodation and a critique of the target culture.

The foregrounding of paranoia is a primary mode of appealing to a U.S. audience, as paranoia has long been part of U.S. political culture and cinema. Richard Hofstadter, in his essay "The Paranoid Style in American Politics" published in 1964, detected an alarmist rhetoric about the Free Masons, as well as the existence of anti-Catholic groups, as evidence of the aforementioned "style" whose primary contention was "the existence of a vast, insidious, preternaturally effective international conspiratorial network designed to perpetrate acts of the

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<sup>81</sup>Numerous contemporary studies of horror film reception have pointed to the variety of responses to screen horror among viewers that move beyond the essentialism of gender. It is in light of these studies, that I use the qualifier "possibly" in alluding to the reactions of viewers. See Carol Clover's *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*, Isabel Cristina Pineda's *Recreational Terror*, and Brigid Cherry's *Horror* for a discussion of the multiple receptions of horror cinema.

most fiendish character” (14), namely the undoing of the United States.<sup>82</sup> While Hofstadter focuses on examples contemporaneous with his own historical moment, one of Hofstadter’s primary arguments is the recurrence of a paranoid style in U.S. history (7), a style that remains intact with the Tea Party movement (Kim).

As for paranoia within U.S. cinema, in *Projecting Paranoia* Ray Pratt provides an overview of cinematic narratives about paranoia (gender, sexual, racial paranoia) in mostly U.S. films from the 1930s to the late 1990s. Paranoid narratives continue to pervade U.S. cinema. In “The Return of the Paranoid Style” Ross Douhat detects a return to a paranoid cinema associated with the ‘70s (i.e., conspiracy, slasher, vigilante films). According to Douhat, in light of the sheer number of political thrillers such as the Jason Bourne franchise and the remakes of scores of 1970s horror films such as *The Hills Have Eyes* (Alexandre Aja, 2006) and *Halloween* (Rob Zombie, 2007), “another decade entirely seems to have slouched round again: the paranoid, cynical, end-of-empire 1970s” (54). English-language Argentine films tap into and allegorize an insistent paranoia afoot in the United States. The release of these two Argentine films in the United States in the aftermath of 9/11 is especially cogent, and capitalizing on a surge in cultural paranoia.<sup>83</sup>

Amidst the War on Terror and a proliferation of paranoias to fit one’s political stripe (fears of homegrown terrorists, government surveillance, gay marriage, immigrants, immigrants’ fear of Immigrations and Customs Enforcement, gun control, death panels for the elderly), the two Argentine films allegorize a paranoid “structure of feeling” that manifests itself in U.S.

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<sup>82</sup>Hofstadter is careful to note that the paranoid style is not exclusive to the United States and is characteristic of minority political groups across the political spectrum.

<sup>83</sup>*Dead Line* and *Death Knows Your Name* were released in 2005 and 2007, respectively.

culture and cinema at the time.<sup>84</sup> Recalling Benjamin's contention that "the antinomies of the allegorical" (174) enable "any person, any object, any relationship can mean absolutely anything else" (175), the films project a nebulous national paranoia that is not attributed to any single cause. The nature of the threats and the conflicts the films present are too nebulous to allegorize a specific U.S. political and/or cultural event over the past decade.<sup>85</sup> The films' generalized forms of paranoia collude with the generic versions of the United States to portray a country as beset with paranoia. In other words, the anonymous filmic spaces (specifically, urban spaces) enable paranoia to be associated not with a particular U.S. city such as New York or Washington, D.C., or even a particular town or region. Paranoia can manifest itself any urban setting, and the notion of allegory unmoored to any particular space allows the films to embody a generalized national paranoia.

*Death Knows Your Name* and *Dead Line* do not operate solely as allegories of U.S. culture; the United States hardly holds a monopoly on paranoia. The films allegorize not only a

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<sup>84</sup>"Structure of feeling" is a term coined by Raymond Williams in *Marxism and Literature*. The term provides a means for conceptualizing "the undeniable experience of the present" and denotes art's capacity to represent "a social experience which is still in process" (Williams 128, 132). See pages 128-135 in Williams's *Marxism and Literature* for more detailed discussion of "structure of feeling."

<sup>85</sup>Dr. Bruce Taylor in *Death Knows Your Name* is pursued by his brother, Gregor, in order to be reborn, a scenario that can be interpreted as a cyclical violence within families. According to Bruce/William Vanhess, Gregor attacked him because "'Gregor thought he was unique,'" which simply does not speak to any larger political rancor that was unfolding in the post-9/11 United States at the time. In the case of *Dead Line*, Martin's murdering of his ex-prostitute wife and her lover, as well as neighbors and friends, suggests a retributive violence that is fraught with a guilt that is imagined and verbalized through a telephone. Martin's delusions imagine threats from all quarters, an arrangement that perhaps intimates a ubiquitous fear in the United States in which everyone is a suspect and there is a fear of having one's phone tapped by the government. However, the identities of those who Martin perceives as threatening do not correspond with the threatening Others that characterize a post-9/11 United States (i.e., Muslim, Latina/o immigrant, etc.).

single national culture (the target market for the film: the U.S.), but also the culture from which the film emerges (Argentina). A dynamic of circulation between the two countries leaves open the possibility of the films' allegorizing multiple forms of paranoia within both. Contemporary Argentine cinema reinforces the notion that paranoia figures prominently into the national culture. A cursory survey of contemporary mainstream Argentine films shows paranoia to be a salient characteristic of national cinema ranging from films dealing with the last dictatorship between 1976-1983 (*Crónica de una fuga/Chronicle of an Escape* (Adrián Caetano, 2006)), the pre-dictatorship (*El secreto de sus ojos/The Secret in Their Eyes* (Juan José Campanella, 2009)) and the country's economic crisis in 2001 (*La mujer sin cabeza/The Headless Woman* (Lucrecia Martel, 2008)). These Argentine films do not necessarily mark Argentina as a nation wholly consumed by paranoia. However, at the very least, insofar as a national cinema evidences structures of feeling, a degree of paranoia is indeed present.

Proof of paranoia in Argentine culture extends beyond cinema. After conducting scores of interviews with residents of Buenos Aires following the economic crisis that culminated in December of 2001,<sup>86</sup> Alicia Entel enumerates a catalogue of common preoccupations: "fear of being robbed and of street crime, fear of delinquency in general, fear of losing one's job or not getting a first job, fear of the inhabitants of other neighborhoods or cities, fear of the police, fear of drug dealers, fear of repressions, fear of a lack of future prospects, and fear that people will

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<sup>86</sup>I will provide a more detailed overview of Argentina's economic crisis in the next chapter. As for the significance of December 2001 here, the Argentine economy had a number of problems prior to December of 2001. Nevertheless, December 20 and 21 of that year marked the peak of the crisis in many ways. Amidst heavy protests and outbreaks of violence between police and civilians, President Fernando de la Rúa declared a state of emergency in the face of violent protests, and he resigned on December 21.

forget the crimes of the dictatorship” (49-50).<sup>87</sup> *Dead Line* explicitly projects such national anxieties over employment by highlighting Martin’s depression that deepens with the loss of his job. Yet, the notion of allegory, as articulated by Benjamin, allows for the emergence of different meanings. In other words, *Death Knows Your Name* and *Dead Line* project paranoia with multiple causes and allegorize multiple systems that are largely beyond the control of citizens: employment, crime and illegal drug networks, police, and other people’s memories of the last military dictatorship that ended in 1983. All such systems are allegorized through the systems projected in the two films. In other words, akin to the films’ possible allegories as received by a U.S. audience, the films speak to paranoid structures of feeling in Argentina that, again, has multiple causes.

The films’ allegories nevertheless gain a measure of specificity when considering how the films may stir paranoia in the U.S. over Latin American immigration. Latin American immigrants have set off fits of hysteria and paranoia among some sectors of the U.S. populace, especially since 9/11. Minutemen militias, the controversial Arizona Senate Bill 1070 passed in April of 2010, and the mailing of lists of illegal immigrants to law enforcement and media outlets in Utah in July of 2010 are only some of the most obvious manifestations of the paranoia over Latin American immigrants. The Argentine films potentially provoke paranoia among U.S. viewers by suggesting that Latin American filmmakers are watching U.S. society and are sending clones of U.S. cinema from Latin America. In other words, Argentine English-language horror films are a kind of Latin American body snatcher that looks like a U.S. horror film, but in fact are something else.

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<sup>87</sup>The quote above originally appears on p. 467 of Catherine Leen’s article, “City of Fear.”

Latin American filmmakers, as well as viewers, cannot help but to imbibe U.S. cinema given its ubiquity. U.S. films dominate Argentine movie houses and, as cited in the introduction, Octavio Getino's research on the topic underscores the disparity: "La oferta nacional de películas en las salas de cine no supera habitualmente el 20% del total de los estrenos anuales, reservándose las majors norteamericanas entre el 55% y el 65% de la oferta" ("The selection of nationally-produced films generally do not exceed 20% of premieres each year, while 55% and 65% of films are reserved for U.S. conglomerates"; 36). I by no means imply that the circulation is one-way, and Argentina does influence the cinema of the United States. As is well-known, Carlos Gardel starred in several films for Paramount and U.S. production companies have remade a number of Argentine films including *Nueve reinas/Nine Queens* (Fabián Bielinsky, 2000).<sup>88</sup> However, the circulation of U.S. cinema to Argentina dwarfs anything coming from Argentina to the United States.

What Argentine filmmakers and Argentine audiences may glean from U.S. cinema inevitably includes lessons about U.S. cultural paranoia. Pratt entitles the opening chapter of *Projecting Paranoia* "'Our Greatest Export is Paranoia'" without attributing the quote to a specific person, fleshing out what the title means, or ever alluding to the sheer number of films the U.S. exports around the globe. Yet, the title's implication for what U.S. cinema gives to Argentine audiences, as well as the rest of the globe, is unintentionally useful for understanding the circulation of cinematic paranoia from the United States to Argentina. Pratt's study, along with Douhat's overview of contemporary U.S. cinema's return to a paranoid style of cinema he associates with 1970's, suggests paranoia is a fixture in U.S. cinema, an element that cuts across multiple genres (film noir, horror, action, etc.). U.S. cinema can hardly be reduced to a paranoid

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<sup>88</sup>The remakes is entitled *Criminal* (Gregory Jacobs, 2004).



style. Yet, to characterize a sizeable portion of U.S. films as paranoid in some form is not far off the mark. For paranoia to be an export within the film results in an unintended consequence that U.S. majors and the Motion Picture Association of America perhaps never intended in the conquering foreign markets. For decades the rest of the world has been watching an onscreen United States besieged with paranoia.

The spread of the English-language through U.S. cinema is another ramification that is perhaps more obvious than paranoia. This has long been the case. As David Crystal notes in *English as a Global Language*, given U.S. cinema's early global dominance, the advent of sound in cinema technology virtually ensured that "the English language [...] suddenly came to dominate the movie world" (91). In light of Getino's findings cited above, such dominance continues in Argentina, as well as in other countries.

The spread of English through cinema is hardly an innocent phenomenon. In *Unthinking Eurocentrism*, Ella Shohat and Robert Stam observe, "Hollywood proposed to tell not only its own stories but also those of other nations, and not only to Americans but also to the other nations themselves, and always in English" (191). English thus becomes a way of denying other countries the capacity of self-representation through one's own language (Shohat and Stam 192), which likewise chiefly accommodates an English-speaking audience. One form of English in a non-English-speaking setting onscreen includes the use of accented English. On countless occasions U.S. films have been set in a country in which English is not the dominant tongue and 'native' characters speak a kind of accented English that simultaneously incorporates and renders a character Other. The 'native' is understood linguistically by native English speaking characters and an English-speaking audience, but his or her accent still sets them apart. In a slight variation, some U.S.-produced films feature an entire cast of characters that are coded as 'native'

who reside in a foreign setting, but nevertheless speak in accented English. The accented dialogue allows the foreign world onscreen to be both exoticized and accessible to an English-speaking audience. Chris Hampton's *Imagining Argentina* (2003) and Martin Donovan's *Apartment Zero* (1989) are two examples of such films set in Argentina.

*Death Knows Your Name* and *Dead Line* offer a distinct English-language dynamic. The films project a United States, but generally lack native English-speaking actors. The accented English is hardly a mark of Otherness among characters. The films' dialogues are composed of an assortment of accents. A handful of characters speak with a native or near-native U.S. accent, while the accents of most characters are quite noticeable. Leo (Chris Longo), a character in *Dead Line*, speaks with a thick Bronx accent, while that of Bruce Taylor in *Death Knows Your Name* evidences he is not a native English speaker.

With paranoia and English-language dialogue as two salient features, *Death Knows Your Name* and *Dead Line* offer a kind of cinematic blowback for U.S. viewers. The films' paranoid aesthetics, the English-language dialogue, and the projection of generic versions of the United States constitute an instance in which Argentina sends back to the United States selected elements of its cinema, albeit with some flaws, which explain my labeling them as body snatchers.<sup>89</sup> Besides the accented dialogue, signs written in Spanish, and occasional images of Buenos Aires, the characters would all be considered Latinas/os in the United States. The lack of non-Latina/o characters, even as walk-ons, in a generic urban United States might be deemed a departure from realism by some viewers.

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<sup>89</sup>The extraterrestrials in Don Siegel's *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956) replicate actual people in the town of Santa Mira with the exception that they lack emotion. A similar dynamic is at work in Philip Kaufman's 1978 remake with the same title.

The films' supposed flaws are hardly a liability. In fact, these flaws, and a horror film exclusively featuring Latinas/os, can reinforce the films' paranoid aesthetic for U.S. viewers. Accented speech spoken by Latinas/os is particularly important for stirring up paranoia in nativists in the United States, especially in light of Arizona's aforementioned legislation. Since police officers were required by the bill to determine a person's immigration status if there was a reasonable suspicion about an individual's status, accented English instantly becomes something scrutinized by police. Beyond Arizona, the paranoia over accented English is reinforced through the growth of accent reduction courses in the United States – courses that immigrants often enroll in to lessen their own paranoia and the suspicions of others. While Latin American immigrants are hardly the only individuals using the courses, Edgard Jiménez, a Mexican immigrant in Los Angeles, captures what it is at stake with accented English: ““As soon as you sound foreign, people do give you a different reaction,”” he said (Gorman). ““People do judge you if you have an accent. I've experienced it”” (Gorman).

The accented English dialogue and the presence of Latinas/os in Argentine horror cinema do not necessarily inspire a visceral fear in U.S. horror cinema viewers. Such a claim would only add to the unfortunate stereotypes of horror cinema fans as disturbed, bloodthirsty individuals suffering a kind of arrested development. Part of watching a horror film at times, however, can be an exercise in watching other people's horror or fears. While one viewer may be terrified of the zombie-like beings in *28 Days Later* (Danny Boyle, 2002), another viewer might find it humorous to see the speed at which the zombies can run, a departure from the lumbering undead that populate George Romero's zombie films. In the case of *Death Knows Your Name* and *Dead Line*, U.S. viewers likewise laugh at what would be deemed dreadful by those in the United States who suffer from paranoia over Latin American immigrants.

Instead of fear, the accented English-language dialogue and the Latina/o actors potentially tender a pleasurable paranoia. Pineda articulates a pleasure of horror that she calls recreational horror. Pineda argues, “[W]hat makes ... anxiety-inducing elements of fictional horror not only tolerable but pleasurable is the genre’s construction of recreational terror, a simulation of danger that produces a bounded experience of fear not unlike a rollercoaster ride” (5). Special effects and a viewer’s awareness of special effects as artifice are important in Pineda’s conception of recreational terror. Horror fan magazines such as *Fangoria* are crucial for educating viewers about special effects. For Pineda, understanding special effects provides the viewer a critical distance from the violence and enabling them to recognize “the trick, e.g., the cut from the actor to the prosthetic device” (56). In turn, viewers perform a kind of “deconstructive operation” permitting them “to enjoy the pleasure of seeing (more fully) without taking the effect so seriously that it becomes threatening” (Pineda 56).

Viewers, in the United States and elsewhere, can likewise derive pleasure from the flaws in *Death Knows Your Name* and *Dead Line* that go beyond the films’ special effects. The accented English dialogue and traces of Buenos Aires may undermine the realism or verisimilitude of the films as set in the United States, but they still enhance a paranoid reception for U.S. viewers. This is a reception that is aware of other people’s paranoia over Latin American immigrants in the United States. A paranoid reception can also arise in a U.S. audience’s realization of the film’s origins and to what degree the film imagines a U.S. audience. The films target U.S. viewers to an unprecedented degree for a film made outside the United States by non-U.S. directors with non-U.S. actors. The flaws only slightly or temporarily disrupt the flow of the narrative, but, like knowledge of special effects according to Pineda, indicate the constructed nature of the film which largely rests on the projection of a United States.

The films project slightly flawed versions of the United States: Argentine body snatchers packaged as low-budget horror films. The films seemingly project the United States complete with English, recognizable brands, and urban environments. Yet, something is amiss, which can inspire suspicion and paranoia within the context of viewing a film. However, to echo Pineda's notion of recreational terror, the paranoia and suspicion are pleasurable within the context of a horror film.

## CONCLUSION

In an interview with Daniel de la Vega, he referred to his English-language Argentine horror films as “caballos de Troya” (June 10, 2009).<sup>90</sup> Keenly aware of the dominance of U.S. cinema in Argentina, de la Vega considers his films as exercises in “sending something back in a losing battle” (June 10, 2009). To conceive of *Death Knows Your Name* and *Dead Line* as “caballos de Troya” is apt. The films largely obscure their Argentine origins, instead projecting an onscreen United States that lacks an anchor to a specific U.S. city. Argentina or, more specifically, Buenos Aires, manifests itself through what ostensibly appear as flaws (an image of Buenos Aires, Spanish-language signs, or accented English dialogue). The films indeed send something back in the form of paranoid aesthetics and themes that have long been a salient element in many U.S. films. The films also send back the English language, harnessing the tongue like a kind of disguise or camouflage.

In their introduction to *Latsploitation, Exploitation Cinemas, and Latin America*, Victoria Ruétalo and Dolores Tierney characterize Latin American exploitation cinema as “doubly marginalized, firstly as the product of the developing, or ‘Third World’ [...] and seconding as disreputable material” (6). *Death Knows Your Name* and *Dead Line* use English – along with

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<sup>90</sup>Besides, De la Vega's *Death Knows Your Name*, *Jennifer's Shadow* is another English-language horror film co-directed by De la Vega. I discuss *Jennifer's Shadow* in chapter 4.

other modes of creating a United States – as a means of overcoming marginality in both Argentina and United States. As I have noted before, though conditions are changing, horror cinema in Argentina is considered a minor genre and de la Vega has commented on production of horror films in English for the U.S. market in order to gain visibility in Argentina. The significance of English is shown in a personal email from Al Perez, Alebrije Home Entertainment’s Vice-President of Sales and Acquisitions, who commented, “A horror film in English can do better in the U.S. [than one in Spanish]” (Perez).<sup>91</sup> English-language dialogue becomes a way of sending the wooden horse a little closer to U.S. audiences.

*Death Knows Your Name* and *Dead Line* allegorize two different countries suggested by the national spaces that appear onscreen. A single national allegory is eclipsed in the representation of the projected location (the United States) and the actual location of the filming (Argentina) largely comes through in fleeting instances. Although one might consider the blemishes that give away Argentina to be characteristic of low-budget horror films, the flaws are productive in their embodiment of circulation. One sees both the United States and Argentina. For U.S. viewers, the films’ so-called flaws can signal that something is amiss, a realization that can enrich the films’ paranoid aesthetics and give rise to a paranoid pleasure. The paranoia over Latin American immigrants in the United States is addressed not in the narrative, but rather in the construction of the film, particularly the use of Argentine actors speaking English. The United States thus becomes an imagined projection emerging from Argentina.

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<sup>91</sup>Alebrije Home Entertainment distributes *The Last Gateway* (Demián Rugna, 2009)

### CHAPTER 3

#### TELLING CARNAGE: SPECTACLES AND ALLEGORIES OF CRISES IN ARGENTINA'S NEOLIBERALIZATION AND THE U.S. WAR ON TERROR

Viewing cinematic landscapes in Argentine horror films as generic spaces invites the question as to how Argentine horror squares with the trends of cinematic realism that characterize much of the country's filmic output, specifically *Nuevo cine argentino* ("New Argentine Cinema").<sup>92</sup> In an essay entitled "La posibilidad de un territorio," ("The Possibility of a Territory") Marcos Adrián Pérez Llahí opens with a broad and bold diagnosis of Argentine cinema: "El cine argentino está enfermo del realismo" ("Argentine cinema is sick with realism") (69). For Pérez Llahí, throughout the history of Argentine cinema – from cine tanguero to Nuevo cine argentino – directors have largely subscribed to cinematic realism, as evidenced by recognizable spaces on-screen. In other words, the audience's recognition of a space as Argentine qualifies the greater part of Argentine cinema as realist. But all is not lost for Llahí. Anomalies do exist. He alludes to several films such as Hugo Santiago's *Invasión/Invasion* (1969), Esteban Sapir's *Picado fino/Fine Powder* (1998), and Aldo Paparella's *Hoteles/Hotels* (2004) as movies that depart from realism by undermining the stability of familiar spaces. What Llahí cites as exceptions to realism project a recognizable location – a cinematic landscape as place to use Lukinbeal's taxonomy – only to defamiliarize that location by exoticizing certain landmarks such as stadiums and hospitals. In *Invasión*, for instance, *La Bombonera*, the stadium

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<sup>92</sup>For a consideration of the various ways in which *Nuevo cine argentino* conforms to and diverges from cinematic realism, see the section entitled "The Realist Manifestation" on pp. 27-31 in Gonzalo Aguilar's *Other Worlds*.

of the soccer club Boca Juniors, is the site where the film's protagonist is cornered and subdued by a contingent of invaders. A familiar and renowned place in Buenos Aires figures into a science-fiction film, acquiring associations distinct from a space exclusively for soccer matches.

Contemporary Argentine horror cinema fits into Pérez Llahí's formulations about realism and space, albeit on terms specific to each film. While *Death Knows Your Name* and *Dead Line* obscure their actual film locations to project a generic United States, several Argentine horror films project cinematic landscapes as legible places.<sup>93</sup> Audiences, particularly those familiar with cities such as Buenos Aires, Rosario, or Haedo, may recognize a projected onscreen locale through iconographic buildings or common architectural styles, language, and cultural allusions, among other elements.<sup>94</sup>

Issues of cinematic landscape in Argentine horror cinema, however, transcend questions of audience recognition of a place. Recognizable cinematic landscapes may be linked to allegory and spectacle by investigating how spectacles project allegories of crises depending on the cinematic place in which the events unfold. In many Argentine horror films, onscreen versions

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<sup>93</sup>In *Image of the City*, Kevin Lynch uses the term 'legible' in drawing an analogy between a printed page and a well-planned city. Just as a page is recognizable to a reader through "a related pattern of recognizable symbols, [...] a legible city would be one whose districts or landmarks or pathways are easily identifiable and are easily grouped into an over-all pattern" (Lynch 3).

<sup>94</sup>There are numerous other Argentine horror films that take place in spaces that are recognizable as Argentine. To give only a few examples, in *Baño de sangre/Blood Bath* (Paula Pollachi, 2003) one recognizes the urbanscapes of Palermo, a neighborhood in Buenos Aires, and, in *Mala carne* (Fabián Forte, 2003), a *cartonero* appears in the background as the film's protagonist walks the streets of Capital Federal in search of a late-night pizzeria ("Cartonero" comes from the word "cartón" ("cardboard"). The term refers to those individuals in Argentine cities, particularly Buenos Aires, who recover recyclable material (glass, cardboard, etc.) as part of a city's informal economy). Beyond Buenos Aires, Gustavo Postiglione's *Tremendo amanecer/Tremendous Dawn* (2004) is a vampire film that takes place in Rosario. A number of Adrián García Bogliano's films are set in the rural confines of the *partido* La Plata (a "partido," in this case, is an administrative subdivision of Buenos Aires Province).



of Buenos Aires and other Argentine cities become sites of spectacle and excess that not only defamiliarize recognizable places, but also allegorize national economic and socio-political dilemmas.<sup>95</sup> However, the dynamic of spectacle as allegory is not tethered to a single national onscreen space, Argentina. Select spectacles also allegorize the U.S.-led War on Terror and invite other spaces such as Afghanistan and Iraq to appear in an onscreen Argentina.

Here, I will examine how horror film spectacles allegorize the neoliberalization of Argentina and the War on Terror in two films: *Jennifer's Shadow* (Daniel de la Vega and Pablo Parés 2004) and *Plaga zombie: Zona mutante/Plaga Zombie: Mutant Zone* (Pablo Parés and Herná Sáez 2001).<sup>96</sup> *Jennifer's Shadow* is set in Buenos Aires, while *Plaga zombie: Zona mutante* takes place in Haedo, a town that is located in Buenos Aires Province, but is part of Greater Buenos Aires.<sup>97</sup> Buenos Aires and Haedo become sites of spectacular violence that allegorize national and U.S. dilemmas. I begin by outlining a theory of spectacle specific to select genres of horror cinema and the ways in which spectacle as screen violence can project allegory. I will then examine *Jennifer's Shadow* as a Gothic horror film that transforms Buenos

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<sup>95</sup>My use of the term “defamiliarize” is not accidental and comes from Victor Shlovsky’s essay “Art as Technique.” Shlovsky, whose essay was published in 1917, observed, “The technique of art is to make objects ‘unfamiliar,’ to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged” (12). For Shlovsky, “After we see an object several times, we begin to recognize it. [...] Art removes objects from the automatism of perception” (13). Inherent in Shlovsky’s notion of defamiliarization is the obstruction and slowing down of perception, specifically in regards to literature. As I will argue, spectacle in many horror films is less endeared to slowing down than the speeding up and constitutes a different mode of defamiliarization.

<sup>96</sup>While I will focus on particular aspects of Argentina’s neoliberalization with respect to particular films, it is worthwhile to have a general understanding of what neoliberalization entailed for the country. Industries formerly belonging to the state were privatized, the economy was opened to foreign investors, and tariffs protecting Argentine industries were sharply reduced.

<sup>97</sup>Greater Buenos Aires includes the Argentine capital and the surrounding conurbation.

Aires into a theater of war in which a familial conflict between two U.S. characters unfolds. Spectacles of violence project military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq onto a screen version of Buenos Aires, in addition to depicting the spike in housing evictions in Argentina at the height of the economic crisis. I then analyze *Plaga zombie: Zona mutante* and consider how the War on Terror appears onscreen alongside allegories of neoliberalism in Argentina or, more particularly, the national population's reactions against the implementation of neoliberal policies during the 1990s and the start of the twenty-first century.

### INVITING VIOLENCE: "SPECTACULAR HORROR" AND ALLEGORY

Different modes of screen violence are common to cinematic representations of Argentina's neoliberalization and the War on Terror. Countless numbers of Argentine films from the past decade have contributed to a cinematic discourse on violence allegorizing the implementation of neoliberal policies in the country: *El bonaerense/The Bonaerense* (Pablo Trapero, 2000),<sup>98</sup> *Pizza, birra, faso/Pizza, Beer, and Cigarettes* (Israel Adrián Caetano and Bruno Stagnaro, 1998), *Nuevas reinas/Nine Queens* (Fabián Bielinsky, 2000), *Un oso rojo/A Red Bear* (Israel Adrián Caetano, 2002), *El delantal del Lili/Lili's Apron* (Mariano Galperin, 2004), *Hoy y mañana/Today and Tomorrow* (Alejandro Chomski, 2003), *La mujer sin cabeza/ The Headless Woman* (Lucrecia Martel, 2008). Likewise, in one style or another, screen violence often figures into U.S. films of various genres which project the War on Terror, including horror (*Hostel* (Eli Roth, 2005)), thrillers (*Rendition* (Gavin Hood, 2007)), comedies (*Harold and Kumar Escape from Guantanamo Bay* (Jon Hurwitz and Hayden Schlossberg, 2008)), and documentaries (*Standard Operating Procedure*, Errol Morris, 2008)).

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<sup>98</sup>"Bonaerense" refers to someone or something from Buenos Aires province as opposed to the capital.

*Jennifer's Shadow* and *Plaga zombie: Zona mutante* contribute to the discourses of violence surrounding Argentina's neoliberalization and the War on Terror. Screen violence and spectacle are intrinsic to contemporary horror cinema, and the two Argentine films in question are no exception. As James Kendrick observes, "[...] Violence of some kind, even if understood as simply the *threat* of violence, is absolutely essential to the horror genre; otherwise, there would be no suspense and no reason to fear the film's threat, whether it be human or supernatural" (Kendrick 79-80). As *Jennifer's Shadow* and *Plaga zombie: Zona mutante* circulate between Argentina and the United States, the violence helps an Argentine horror film to be classified as horror by both national audiences.

Spectacles are often considered as a break from narrative. For instance, in her discussion on how women in Hollywood cinema often constitute "an indispensable element of spectacle," Laura Mulvey argues that the woman as spectacle "tends to work against the story line, to freeze the flow of action in moments of erotic contemplation" (11). Such ideas about spectacle rupturing a narrative flow are echoed in academic criticism specifically dealing with horror cinema. In her book, *Body Fantastic*, Linda Badley argues, "Like love scenes in adventure films, the spectacle of effects momentarily [arrest] the plot" (7). Similarly, Annalee Newitt writes of class issues in *Silence of the Lambs* (Jonathan Demme, 1991) as if they are obscured by gore: "The spectacles of murder and mutilated bodies are so heavily foregrounded that the questions about social class and economic mobility which fuel the narrative are safely contained as subtext" (4).

Various critics formally define a cinematic spectacle through the close-up. In "Spectacle and Narrative Theory," Lea Jacobs and Richard de Cordova characterize spectacle through an array of close-ups and extreme close-ups of Marlene Dietrich in films such as *Scarlet Empress*

(Josef von Sternberg, 1937). Likewise, Mulvey adduces close-ups of women's legs and faces as examples of how the camera renders a woman as a spectacle onscreen (11-12). I do not dispute the use of close-ups to create a spectacle. However, the close-up is only one of several formal elements that define violent spectacles in horror cinema. I am primarily interested in screen violence as spectacle, and close-ups alone do not necessarily translate into screen violence.<sup>99</sup>

Similar to the ways in which sequences of singing and dancing in musicals are conceived of as spectacles, horror cinema, or rather, particular genres of horror cinema, possess their own formal components that constitute a spectacle. In his article "Spectacle Horror and *Hostel*: Why Torture Porn Does Not Exist," Adam Lowenstein introduces the category of "'spectacle horror': the staging of spectacularly explicit horror for purposes of audience admiration, provocation, and sensory adventures as much as shock or terror" (42).<sup>100</sup> While simultaneously negating the subgenre,<sup>101</sup> Lowenstein cites so-called torture porn films as examples of spectacle horror and uses Tom Gunning's notion of cinema of attractions as a point of departure for defining spectacle horror: direct address of the audience, "inciting visual curiosity," shock or surprise in the audience, and "theatrical display [that dominates] over theatrical absorption" (Gunning 58-59; qtd. in Lowenstein "Spectacle Horror" 44).

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<sup>99</sup>For an overview of spectacle in different film genres, see the collection of essays edited by Geoff King entitled *The Spectacle of the Real: From Hollywood to 'Reality' TV and Beyond*.

<sup>100</sup>Lowenstein positions "spectacle horror" against another category of horror he refers to as "'ambient horror'" ("Spectacle Horror" 42), which presumably is a kind of horror that relies on suggestion and not the depiction of graphic violence. Of course, one can find instances of ambient and spectacle horror in the same film.

<sup>101</sup>As the title of his article suggests, Lowenstein argues against the use of torture porn to describe U.S. films such as *Hostel*, *Hostel 2* (Eli Roth, 2007), and the *Saw* franchise. He feels such a term sensationalizes a film and obviates any serious critical consideration.

Lowenstein supports his own definition of spectacle through analyses of particular scenes in *Hostel* and associates particular formal elements with spectacle horror, namely gory special effects and an abandonment of camera shots that identify with a character's point-of-view. The spectacles that I will examine in *Jennifer's Shadow* and *Plaga zombie: Zona mutante*, largely conform to Lowenstein's characterization. However, as I argue below, other elements such as rapid parallel editing and sound also render the scene a spectacle. Criteria of a spectacle aside, Lowenstein's theorization of spectacle in horror cinema is crucial for allegory: the spectacle does not "break ties with narrative development or historical allegory" ("Spectacle Horror" 42). Spectacle, instead, projects allegory and confronts the audience in a direct and sometimes playful manner, which occurs in the two Argentine films analyzed in this chapter.

In addition to Lowenstein, other critics contend that cinematic spectacle remains part of the narrative. In her introduction to *The Violent Woman*, Hilary Neroni outlines different theoretical notions of screen violence. She refers to David Bordwell's lack of discussion of screen violence in *Narration and the Fiction Film* as an example of how screen violence does not rupture the narrative: "[...] Bordwell never mentions filmic violence as such but rather describes violent scenes in terms of their place within the larger narrative structure" (Neroni 3). Akin to Lowenstein's conception of spectacular horror, Neroni's representation of Bordwell's idea of screen violence does not break with narrative; spectacle, for Lowenstein, and screen violence, for Bordwell, remain part of the narrative. In my analyses of specific scenes from *Jennifer's Shadow* and *Plaga zombie: Zona mutante*, I consider screen violence as spectacle. In other words, violence constitutes the spectacles. The spectacles acquire meanings as allegories when viewed in relation to other parts of the narrative.

In focusing on allegories and spectacle in the films, I perform a paracinematic reading as articulated by Jeffrey Sconce in his essay, “‘Trashing’ the Academy: Taste, Excess, and an Emerging Politics of Cinematic Style.” Paracinema can encompass any number of exploitation film genres. However, in Sconce’s words, “[p]aracinema is [...] less a distinct group of films than a particular reading protocol, a counter-aesthetic turned subcultural sensibility devoted to all manner of cultural detritus” (372). Paracinematic readings are intertwined with the notion of excess. Sconce cites Kristin Thompson’s essay “The Concept of Cinematic Excess” to describe excess as those moments that seemingly have no motivation or are “non-diegetic” (Sconce 386). A conception of a paracinematic sensibility becomes more concrete in Sconce’s formulation of the manner in which paracinematic viewers differ from film academics in their conceptions of excess. Whereas Thompson observes, “Probably no one ever watches only these non-diegetic aspects of the image through an entire film” (387 qtd. in Sconce), Sconce considers paracinematic viewers as “perhaps the one group that does concentrate exclusively on these ‘non-diegetic aspects of the image’ such as ‘bad special effects, blatant anachronisms, or histrionic acting” (387). I do not look at a film’s flaws; instead I consider spectacle as generating meaning through allegory with the spectacle-as-allegory linked to other parts of the narrative. In short, I zero in on so-called excess as allegory.<sup>102</sup>

What proves exceptional about the two Argentine horror films’ spectacles is their capacity to allegorize crises unfolding in different parts of the world. In his article, Lowenstein analyzes allegory with specific regards to U.S. foreign policy. As mentioned in the first chapter, some Argentine horror films allegorize national crises unfolding in different countries and, in

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<sup>102</sup>Linda Williams’ essay “Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess” also proves useful for considering conceptions of excess, especially given the author’s focus on horror cinema.

*Jennifer's Shadow* and *Plaga zombie: Zona mutante*, this dynamic of allegorization is achieved in part through spectacles of violence which, to recall Neroni's articulation of Bordwell's view of screen violence, acquire meaning when interpreted alongside 'non-spectacular' moments in the film. In other words, Argentina's neoliberalization and the War on Terror enter the two films not solely through spectacles, but during less intense moments as well. The heightened spectacle, in turn, consummates or solidifies the allegories of neoliberalization and the War on Terror as suggested in other parts of the films. Whereas a character's words or costume may suggest a crisis, the screen violence reinforces and underlines the projection of that crisis.

## **TWO AMERICANS IN BUENOS AIRES: THE WAR ON TERROR IN *JENNIFER'S SHADOW***

*Jennifer's Shadow* serves as an appropriate bridge between the English-language Argentine films discussed in the previous chapter and the two films to be considered here. *Jennifer's Shadow* is an English-language film and a U.S.-Argentine co-production that was released straight to DVD in the United States under the alternate title *Chronicle of the Raven*. Although considered low-budget by Hollywood standards, the film had a substantial budget compared to other horror films made in Argentina. The main actresses are Gina Phillips and Faye Dunaway, and the rest of the cast, the directors, and technicians are primarily from Argentina. The casting of two well-known U.S. actresses and filming *Jennifer's Shadow* using Panavision cameras and lenses made the movie "a big deal" among Argentine horror releases, according to film critic and director Nicanor Loreti.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>103</sup>Faye Dunaway is well-known for her roles in films such as *Chinatown* (Roman Polanski, 1974) and *Bonnie and Clyde* (Arthur Penn, 1967). Gina Phillips gained notoriety through appearances in *Jeepers Creepers* (Victor Salva, 2001) and various television series such as *Ally McBeal*.

With the help of one of the producers, P.J. Pettiette, Daniel de la Vega and Pablo Parés wrote the script, and the narrative reflects the film's status as a U.S.-Argentine co-production. Gina Phillips plays Jennifer Cassi, who comes to Buenos Aires to claim her inheritance, an old mansion, following the death of her twin sister, Johanna. Mary Ellen Cassi, Jennifer's grandmother played by Faye Dunaway, originally came to Buenos Aires to find a cure for an undisclosed disease, and discovers that cure in a kind of ritualistic witchcraft called Malam. With the help of other characters, Jennifer learns her grandmother has cast a dark spell on her own family. Various family members (Jennifer's parents, sister, and aunt) are suspended in a liminal state between life and death, which allows the grandmother to feed off their energy and remain alive. The mansion operates as part of Mary Ellen's plot to survive, and her struggle with Jennifer over the mansion is a central conflict in the film's plot. For Mary Ellen, "The mansion is everything" to her, while Jennifer wants to sell off the property quickly and return to the United States. A raven that does Mary Ellen's bidding torments Jennifer in her dreams. By the end of the film, Jennifer burns her grandmother alive in a coffin, only for the grandmother to return to life seemingly unharmed. In the final shot following Jennifer's death, Mary Ellen stands over her granddaughter's coffin the victor.

Buenos Aires is a cinematic place from the beginning of the film. After the opening scene that shows the death of Jennifer's sister, Johanna, Jennifer's arrival to Buenos Aires is interspersed throughout the opening credits. Jennifer takes a taxi through the capital's downtown and the camera captures images of the *porteño* cityscape. Jennifer is encased in the taxi as she peers through a window.<sup>104</sup> As she is ferried through the city on Avenida de Mayo, the camera assumes Jennifer's point of view. The sky is overcast and, with the exception of a brief glimpse

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<sup>104</sup>Such a scene recalls, but is distinct from, the opening scene in *Lost in Translation* (Sophia Coppola, 2003) when Scarlett Johansson's character arrives in Tokyo.



of a glass skyscraper façade, the most architectural style of most of the buildings shown are art nouveau or neoclassical. The camera tilts up and down irregularly suggesting Jennifer is scanning the buildings from the car. Palacio Barolo, as well as other iconic buildings on Avenida de Mayo, is shot from a low angle. The buildings loom overhead as Jennifer peers at the city, and close-up shots of Jennifer's lips suggest a level of nervousness and vulnerability. Jennifer is returning to a city after a long absence; she is out of her cultural element, as will become clearer later in the film. The low-angle shots endow the buildings and trees with a kind of haunted mystique as if the motif of the haunted house or castle extends to an entire city (see figure 3). The scene's eerie music reinforces the notion of a haunted Capital Federal.<sup>105</sup>



Fig. 3. A shot of Palacio Barolo from Jennifer's point-of-view. The low angle and jagged branches give the building a Gothic mystique.

Some viewers may identify various structures or places more so than others, yet the city is fully recognizable in this scene and others. In addition to some of the buildings previously mentioned, places such as Chacarita Cemetery, Plaza Francia (also known as Plaza Intendente Alvear), and a car tunnel in the Belgrano neighborhood also appear. Particular shots help anchor

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<sup>105</sup>Buenos Aires is commonly referred to as Capital Federal.

the film to Buenos Aires, as does the dialogue when characters occasionally speak Spanish and mention Buenos Aires. The city thus acquires a prominent role in the film, as opposed to being relegated as a passive backdrop.

Albeit recognizable, the Buenos Aires in *Jennifer's Shadow* is in many respects suspended in time. The producers of the film arrived in Buenos Aires in 2000 to look into making a psychological horror film with settings similar to that of Roman Polanski's *Rosemary's Baby* (1968) (DVD Extras, *Jennifer's Shadow/Chronicle of the Raven*). The producers' vision of the city is symptomatic of a tourist's gaze, a gaze that Beatriz Sarlo describes in *La ciudad vista* as reducing experiences to "una suspensión del tiempo que sucede en un espacio también en suspensión" (186).<sup>106</sup> Upon arriving in Buenos Aires, the producers were immediately struck by what they called a "'70s feeling'" and an "'old, heavy European air,'" something that was ideal for their purposes (DVD Extras, *Jennifer's Shadow/Chronicle of the Raven*). The scene with Jennifer riding in a taxi illustrates how Buenos Aires is generally construed as a dated city within the film. The camera focuses on particular buildings with older architectural styles as opposed to lingering on skyscrapers or filming another section of the city, such as Puerto Madero. Even the cab that Jennifer rides in is an older Ford Fairlane, an appropriate choice given the film's status as a U.S.-Argentine co-production.<sup>107</sup>

After passing through Avenida de Mayo, Jennifer arrives at the family's mansion, an imposing and old structure. If the first image of Buenos Aires on Avenida de Mayo is a brief shot of a glass skyscraper, then Jennifer's arrival at the mansion is akin to travelling through a

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<sup>106</sup>"A suspension of time that happens in a space that is also suspended."

<sup>107</sup>De la Vega has said that a black Ford Fairlane would be the car that Death drives (interview 2009). While Ford is a brand associated with the United States, the company has manufactured cars in Argentina since 1913.

time warp to a foregone era. The mansion is removed from the city's center, and Jennifer enters into a Gothic realm.

De la Vega considers *Jennifer's Shadow* to be “an homage to [Edgar Allan] Poe” (2009) and allusions to Poe abound. The DVD's U.S. title, *Chronicle of the Raven*, is an obvious one, and the film's raven that Mary Ellen uses to carry out her plans, is referred to as “Edgar” in the closing credits. Jennifer, before going to sleep in one scene, quotes the refrain in Poe's poem “The Raven”: “Said the Raven, ‘Nevermore.’” Other Gothic aspects include the blurring of reality and dreams in Jennifer's nightmares. The use of a 50 percent bleach bypass on the film in post-production gives the characters a pallid disposition (DVD Extras, *Jennifer's Shadow/Chronicle of the Raven*). Jennifer, like other family members, suffers from an ailment that confounds doctors and renders her increasingly pale and gaunt. Finally, the camera often frames characters in mirrors, and the appearance of Jennifer's twin sister's corpse in various scenes make the doppelgänger a salient motif.

Gothic motifs defamiliarize Buenos Aires by projecting the city in a way that is distinct from that of other visual representations. Countless numbers of Argentine and films from elsewhere are set in the capital. In the case of *Jennifer's Shadow*, a viewer's encounter with the Gothic in Buenos Aires involves doubles, ravens, witchcraft, and downtown buildings depicted as ominous castles. Even the long exterior shots of the hospital where Jennifer goes after falling ill suggests a towering castle. The Gothic unsettles one's conceptions of Buenos Aires by offering a unique visual rendering of the city.

Buenos Aires as a site of conflict between two U.S. characters – Jennifer and her grandmother, Mary Ellen – further unsettles the space and violent spectacles between the two allegorize the War on Terror. De la Vega's description of the screenwriting process shows how

U.S. global and domestic politics figure into a film set in Argentina. According to de la Vega, one obstacle was creating the two U.S. characters played by Gina Phillips and Faye Dunaway. Neither de la Vega nor Parés knew any Americans, so they turned to contemporary news coverage in Argentina that prominently featured Americans. *Jennifer's Shadow* was made in 2004 and the Iraq War provided ample material for character development. According to de la Vega, he and Parés saw the U.S. military playing no small role in transforming Iraq “into a graveyard” through greed (2009).

The two U.S. characters’ greed in the film drives the narrative and literally transforms part of Buenos Aires – the front yard of the disputed mansion – into a graveyard. After initially spurning his offers of help, Jennifer seeks out Darío Baredevil, a former doctor who abandoned his career after he was expelled for his beliefs in the occult. Jennifer finds Baredevil in Chacarita Cemetery where he works and begs his help to end the curse her grandmother has cast on her family. Baredevil and Jennifer first burn the bodies of Jennifer’s parents and sister to release them from their undead state. Baredevil and Jennifer then transport the ashes to the disputed family mansion where they will be buried in the front yard. There Baredevil will perform a ritual to convert the mansion’s yard into a cemetery presumably to protect the family from Mary Ellen’s designs.<sup>108</sup>

Jennifer’s personality, interactions with Baredevil, and ultimately her nationality further suggest the Iraq War. Though Jennifer eventually falls victim to her grandmother’s schemes, she is hardly a likeable character. She is avaricious and plans to sell the inherited house quickly in Buenos Aires for a profit, thus effectively evicting her grandmother from the family home.

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<sup>108</sup>When Jennifer visits Baredevil earlier in the film, he informs her that if she wants to be safe from the forces tormenting her, the cemetery offers the only refuge. The conversion of the family mansion’s yard into a cemetery seemingly will protect the deceased family members.

Comparable to forces invading Iraq, Jennifer ventures into Buenos Aires seemingly for her own benefit with little disregard for the residents. Jennifer's relationship with Baredevil metonymically approximates a U.S.-Argentine "Coalition of the Willing."<sup>109</sup> In fact, at one moment in the film, Baredevil refers to himself and Jennifer as "an army of two people." The coalition is hardly symmetrical. Jennifer, the U.S. component of the alliance, often plies a reluctant Baredevil, regardless of his age or the fact that the pair are in Baredevil's country. When Baredevil appears momentarily reluctant to help Jennifer, she offers him money, not unlike the U.S. government, or any government for that matter, offering perks to foreign countries in exchange for supporting its own ventures.<sup>110</sup>

JENNIFER. With the money I will be making from the selling of the house, I can  
pay you whatever you ask.

BARDEVIL. Not everything has a price, Ms. Cassi.

JENNIFER. I am willing to give you everything.

Jennifer's offer of money arguably reflects her desperation to save herself from an impending death. However, given the duo's status as an alliance of two nationalities, Jennifer's willingness to buy Baredevil's help embodies the realities of international coalitions which are usually propped up by the exchange of benefits between countries, as opposed to some altruistic impulse.

Jennifer and Baredevil's conversion of the mansion's front yard into a graveyard constitutes a spectacle that builds on the Iraq War's allegorization. The spectacle's formal

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<sup>109</sup>"Coalition of the Willing" refers to those countries who supported U.S. military action in Iraq during the George Bush's administration.

<sup>110</sup>Robert Little's article "U.S. Dollars Wooed Ally in Iraq Coalition" appeared in *The Baltimore Sun* and describes an instance in which the Bush administration plied the Polish government to join the coalition by facilitating the purchase of fighter jets.

elements adhere to Lowenstein's criteria of gore and the abandonment of point-of-view shots. Yet, the graveyard scene in *Jennifer's Shadow* achieves a status as spectacle also through crosscutting, gory special effects, music, and lighting.

Shortly after Jennifer and Baredevil arrive at the mansion's front yard, he tells her to retrieve a voodoo-like doll from the attic where Jennifer's grandmother, Mary Ellen, performs magical rituals to torment Jennifer. As Baredevil digs graves for the urns containing the family members' ashes, Jennifer enters the vacant mansion. Jennifer pauses before climbing the stairs, and the spectacle builds in intensity as the scene progresses. Jennifer peers up the stairs and ominous music approximates a steady wind that peaks as Jennifer shines a flashlight at a wheelchair used by her sister and aunt before their deaths. The music changes to a muffled tone with an eerie creaking as if the mansion were an old ship rocking. The camera cuts to a blurry close-up of the raven cawing, and the bird soon comes into focus. The camera then cuts to the doll requested by Baredevil, which hangs in a cage, and crosscuts the image with Jennifer's ascent of the staircase. The soundtrack is punctuated with bursts of music as the camera cuts back from Jennifer to the raven who now feeds on the doll.

At the top of the stairs, Jennifer faints as the raven pecks at the doll, which is apparently an effigy of Jennifer. The screen momentarily goes black and a sound of thunder and the flashing of lights signals that Jennifer has entered a kind of trance or dream state. The camera crosscuts Jennifer's station within the house with Baredevil burying the urns. It then shifts locations outside and inside the house with a series of fades to black. The camera becomes increasingly mobile. From Baredevil, the screen quickly fades to black and cuts to the attic door opening, and we see Jennifer's head peering above the stairs. With another fade to black, the camera cuts to the stairs that Jennifer climbs. Another fade to black cuts to a mirror that sits

beside the attic door that Jennifer passes. Jennifer is bleeding from her neck, and she sees a heart in the cage that earlier contained the doll. Jennifer opens her coat and sees an open wound in her chest; her heart has been extracted. Jennifer grabs the heart as lights flash and thunder sounds.

Baredevil's ritualistic chanting works as dialogic bleed that anticipates the camera again crosscutting from Jennifer in the house to Baredevil's work outside. The camera soon cuts back to Jennifer who has exited the attic and now carries her heart. The camera is at a low height and tilts upward capturing Jennifer's torso and her own heart in her hand. The ship-like creaking continues on the soundtrack. Jennifer soon finds her own body collapsed on the floor where she fainted. With the sudden clashing sound of knives, Jennifer collapses next to her body and an obscured force or being begins dragging her body back towards the attic. In the meantime, Baredevil bursts through the mansion door and races up the stairs. Upon entering the attic, Baredevil finds Jennifer strapped to a bed, and the camera cuts quickly to close-ups of each bedpost. Steady drums begin on the soundtrack and the raven reappears. Baredevil picks up Jennifer's body, and the ship creaking sound begins anew. As Baredevil makes his way down the mansion's stairs, he continues chanting until his back is sliced by an unseen assailant or force. Baredevil eventually arrives in the front yard. In order to transform the yard into a cemetery, he plants a large cross in the yard. Flashes of lightning and thunder sounds, the grandmother's scream punctuates the soundtrack, and the camera cuts from various fragmented shots of the mansion's façade to a portrait of Mary Ellen hanging in the mansion. After cutting back outside to the yard, the camera lingers on Jennifer who lies on her back. The quick camera movement and cuts, intense soundtrack, and high contrast lighting eventually cease, and the spectacle ends.

The scene possesses no shortage of violence, and questions over who commits the violence help to invoke the War in Iraq. As mentioned previously, the characters function as metonyms for their countries' armies. However, U.S. characters do not commit much of the violence; proxy forces do. Mary Ellen is physically absent from the scene, and yet the force that drags Jennifer's body and the raven act on her behalf. Jennifer herself is rendered incapacitated after entering into a dream state and eventually fainting, and Baredevil must intervene. Both Jennifer and her grandmother are dependent on their coalition partners, much as the U.S. military was in Iraq, if not for combat missions, then at least for legitimacy.<sup>111</sup>

The mansion's newly created cemetery also reinforces the scene's allegorization of the War on Terror (see figure 4). De la Vega's comment that "the U.S. was transforming Iraq into a graveyard" is not a random metaphor given the headlines about combat in Iraq. In 2006, Iraqi morgues were deluged with corpses, and the dead were buried in soccer fields and mass graves (Tavernise). Converting the mansion's front yard into a cemetery visually captures the carnage generated during the U.S. occupation. However, the cemetery's location in Buenos Aires defamiliarizes the carnage unfolding elsewhere. The graveyard has been opened to include not only the Buenos Aires onscreen, but also Afghanistan and Iraq off screen.

The Iraq War's transposition to Buenos Aires testifies to the global reach of news about the Iraq War. Iraq as an allegory also places *Jennifer's Shadow* in the company of other horror films produced over the last eight years that project a particular form of paranoia or fixation in the U.S. over the opinion of U.S. citizens in foreign countries. In other words, in the U.S. there

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<sup>111</sup>The multi-national force in Iraq was composed of 32 countries. Outside of U.S., British, and Georgian forces, most countries kept their units confined to bases. Regardless, as one Canadian Major stated the composition of the coalition ostensibly lends legitimacy to the U.S.-led operations (Partlow).



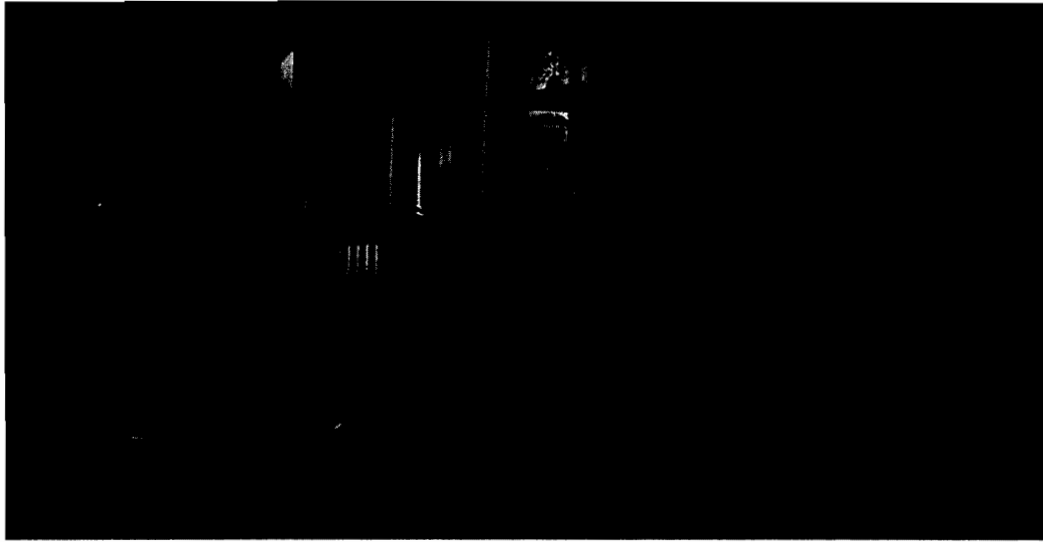


Fig. 4. A view of the yard that will be transformed into a cemetery. Here, Darío Baredevil carries Jennifer's body outside after both she and him have been attacked.

was, and continues to be on some level, a collective preoccupation of how other countries perceived U.S. citizens in light of the War on Terror or any number of political decisions made by the Bush administration that were construed as unilateral and dismissive of other countries' interests. Films such as Eli Roth's *Hostel* (2005) and *Hostel 2* (2007), John Stockwell's *Turistas* (2006), and Carter Smith's *The Ruins* (2008) are only a sampling of such horror films. Whether in Slovakia, Bahia, Brazil, or the Yucatan, a basic storyline is consistent: young Americans venture to a foreign country for fun, adventure, and/or profits only to suffer some horrific fate due to a character flaw or reckless inclination. *Jennifer's Shadow* is no exception. Jennifer is fixated on selling the family mansion for profit and, by the film's end, resides in an undead state in Buenos Aires, forever occupying the city.

#### **FALL OF THE HOUSE: EVICTIONS AND ARGENTINA'S ECONOMIC COLLAPSE IN *JENNIFER'S SHADOW***

In addition to the War in Iraq, the disputed family mansion in *Jennifer's Shadow* provides an additional layer of allegory that concerns Argentina following the economic collapse in 2001, specifically the spike in house evictions. House evictions greatly increased after the economic

collapse in December of 2001 and were directly related to the currency policies implemented during Carlos Menem's administration.<sup>112</sup> In March of 1991, the Argentine Congress approved the "Ley de Convertibilidad" ("Law of Convertibility"), which among other measures, set an exchange rate of one to one between the peso and dollar (Olarra Jiménez and García Martínez 59-63). The peso was drastically devalued following the economic collapse, with three pesos equal to one dollar. Homeowners who contracted loans from banks in dollars no longer could pay their mortgages in pesos and simply stopped paying (Osorio and Tedeschi 32). While the government took various measures to alleviate the problem, evictions increased ("Rematar").

The evidence and visualization of evictions can be traced through different media. In the Argentine daily *La Nación*, an article appeared on May 26, 2003 with the headline "Crece el número de desalojos por usurpación y falta de pago" ("The Number of Evictions for Seizure and Lack of Payment Rise"). The article begins with the bleak observation: "Cada día, por lo menos una familia es desalojada en la ciudad de Buenos Aires" ("Every day at least one family is evicted in the city of Buenos Aires"; Premat). Likewise, in another article appearing in *Clarín* in September of 2003, Georgina Elustondo writes that the number of legal proceedings related to evictions had doubled since 2001. House evictions have not escaped the national cinema, and the phenomenon has been dramatized in several contemporary Argentine films such as *Buena Vida Delivery/Good Life Delivery* (Leonardo Di Cesare, 2004), *Cama adentro /Live-In Maid* (Jorge Gaggero, 2004), *Hoy y mañana/Today and Tomorrow* (Alejandro Chomski, 2003), and *El delantal de Lila/Lila's Apron* (Mariano Galperin, 2004).

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<sup>112</sup>While the Argentine economy had a number of problems prior to December of 2001, December 20 and 21 of that year marked the culmination of the crisis in many ways. President Fernando de la Rúa declared a state of emergency in the face of violent protests and resigned on the December 21.

In the case of *Jennifer's Shadow*, the tragedy of house evictions in Argentina is displaced onto the dispute between two Americans, Jennifer and her grandmother. Jennifer arrives to Argentina fixated on selling the mansion, while her grandmother instead clings to the structure since it represents eternal life for her. The materials for her rituals (books, a doll, a bed with straps, the raven) are contained in the mansion, and the cemetery from which she can feed off her undead family members' energies is in Buenos Aires. Tension between the two characters resides barely beneath the surface and the standoff ensues hours after Jennifer's arrival. Mary Ellen ironically warns Jennifer to "not sleep. Life is short and opportunities never linger long" to which Jennifer states her intention to sell the house. Mary Ellen proclaims, "It is my house as well" and appears to grow physically ill at the idea of being turned out of her home.

The house is not without some history for both characters, which Mary Ellen invokes to try to persuade Jennifer to allow her to remain in the mansion. Jennifer spent part of her childhood in the house and apparently left for the United States at an unmentioned time. In Jennifer's words, her "parents wanted [her] to have a better life," which she understands now as selling the house and remaining in the United States. Mary Ellen, on other hand, moved from the United States and into the mansion with Jennifer's parents, sister, and aunt some years ago in hopes of recovering from the aforementioned unknown illness.

Both Jennifer and Mary Ellen are marked as from the United States. They rarely speak in Spanish and embody the worst stereotypes of Americans such as unmitigated greed. However, Mary Ellen and Jennifer's dispute as an allegory of the Argentine crisis does not involve a radical displacement in terms of nationality. In fact, the dispute between grandmother and granddaughter essentially pits someone from the United States who has become 'argentinizada' (Mary Ellen) against an Americanized Argentine (Jennifer). Jennifer is hardly at ease in Buenos

Aires. Buildings loom over her, she falls ill only to blame the city, and admits to her boyfriend Roberto, “I should not be here.” She does not speak Spanish and is visibly relieved when the first time she meets Baredevil and he speaks English. Mary Ellen, on the other hand, seems to have ‘gone native.’ She has gained the trust of several *porteños* including her maid and Roberto, both of whom seem at certain points in the film to be involved in Mary Ellen’s plot against Jennifer. Moreover, in one scene in which Jennifer reiterates to her grandmother her intent to sell the mansion, Mary Ellen bursts into Spanish and says “Es importante” and then tersely translates the phrase to Jennifer in a way that marks Jennifer as not from Buenos Aires: “It means ‘It is important.’” Mary Ellen is hardly the likable character. Nevertheless, her fight to remain in her home is a fight against eviction from an invading force (Jennifer) that is familial but nevertheless marked as foreign and unwelcome. The mansion in *Jennifer’s Shadow*, in turn, operates not only as a part of an allegorization of the War on Terror, but also a dispute over who controls the house and is evicted.

### **MULTIVALENT UNDEAD: *PLAGA ZOMBIE: ZONA MUTANTE*, THE WAR ON TERROR, AND NEOLIBERALISM IN ARGENTINA**

In her book *Pretend We’re Dead: Capitalist Monsters in American Pop Culture*, Annalee Newitt coins a subgenre of horror cinema and literature which she calls “economic horror.” For Newitt, “Capitalist monsters” are a fixture of the subgenre and embody the moral and economic ramifications of capitalism in the United States. Capitalist monsters, in all their unseemly and assorted forms, “are allegorical figures of the modern age, acting out with their broken bodies and minds conflicts that rip our social fabric apart” (Newitt 2).<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>113</sup>Over the course of her book, Newitt articulates a taxonomy of capitalist monsters which include “serial killers, mad doctors, the undead, robots, and people involved in the media industry” (6).

Newitz's notions of economic horror and capitalist monsters provide a fitting point of departure for considering *Plaga zombie: Zona mutante*'s allegorization of Argentina's neoliberalization and the 2001 economic collapse.<sup>114</sup> As intimated by the title, *Zona mutante* is essentially a zombie horror film that adheres to and plays on a number of the subgenre's characteristics: a communicable disease, legions of the undead, gore, and 'ordinary' heroes.<sup>115</sup> Aliens conduct experiments with government approval and infect the populace of Haedo, an Argentine town located in Greater Buenos Aires. Three friends (John West, Bill Russell, and Max Giggs) arm themselves with make-shift weaponry to fight scores of zombies not necessarily to save the city, but simply to escape.

Such a summary hints at the ways in which the film allegorizes Argentina's economic crisis. The collective force of zombies in *Zona mutante* constitutes a multitude and inevitably recalls images of *piqueteros* and *cacerolazos* protesting against government policies.<sup>116</sup> Moreover, the film's multiple spectacles of carnage – severed limbs, geysers of blood, trashed

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<sup>114</sup>I subsequently refer to *Plaga zombie: Zona mutante* simply *Zona mutante*. As I explain, *Plaga zombie: Zona mutante* is the second part in what is supposed to be a zombie movie trilogy. The first movie is entitled *Plaga zombie* and premiered in 1997, and the third part, *Revolución tóxica*/"Toxic Revolution" debuted at the Buenos Aires Rojo Sangre festival in October of 2011.

<sup>115</sup>For a comprehensive look at the zombie film and its conventions, see *Zombie Culture: Autopsies of the Living Dead* edited by Shawn McIntosh and Marc Leverette and *Zombie Movies: The Ultimate Guide* by Kay Glenn.

<sup>116</sup>*Piqueteros* has often been translated into English as "picketers." *Piqueteros* generally refer to associations of unemployed workers who organize various actions such as *cortes de ruta* (roadway blockades) or blockades of financial buildings to protest government policies and to demand unemployment relief. *Cacerolazos* refer to the massive protests that occurred in Argentina in 1996 and December of 2001. I describe both these terms and their significance later in the chapter.

houses – reiterate the crisis by portraying the consequences of economic collapse in a graphic manner.

Argentina's economic crisis a decade ago, however, constitutes only one layer of allegory. As in *Jennifer's Shadow*, *Zona mutante* projects dilemmas unfolding not only in Argentina, but also the United States, Afghanistan, and Iraq, which are fused together through the War on Terror. *Zona mutante* explicitly invokes the War on Terror via a parody of George Bush's speeches following the 9/11 attacks and leading up to the invasion of Afghanistan. The character John West, a cowboy/professional wrestler who battles zombies with brawn, channels Bush through indelible phrases ("Dead or alive," "Enduring freedom," etc.) and opens a window for *Zona mutante* to allegorize U.S. military operations in other parts of the film. As I describe later, the War on Terror and Argentina's neoliberalization thus occupy the same film, and, at times, the same moment. *Zona mutante* defamiliarizes both crises and cinematic places through their allegorization in a zombie horror film.

For those audiences acquainted with the depiction of the War on Terror and Argentina's economic hardships in news media and other films, *Zona mutante* defamiliarizes both phenomena through the subgenre of a zombie film made in Argentina.<sup>117</sup> I first describe how *Zona mutante* allegorizes various global forces, but prioritizes the War on Terror at a specific moment that offers up an interpretation for other portions of the movie. I then examine how *Zona mutante* projects Argentina's neoliberalization under Carlos Menem's tenure (1989-1999) and the country's economic collapse in 2001. In both cases, I focus on select spectacles of gore

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<sup>117</sup>*Zona mutante* is hardly alone as a zombie film that alludes to the War on Terror. The conflict figures into a number of contemporary zombie films including Joe Dante's *Homecoming* (2005) and George Romero's *Land of the Dead* (2005).

to illustrate how such spectacles reinforce allegories of crises that are suggested at other points in the narrative.

### **““QUIERO JUSTICIA INFINITA”/ “I WANT INFINITE JUSTICE:” THE WAR ON TERROR COMES TO ARGENTINA**

The beginning of *Zona mutante* shows a saga en media res. The film is the second installment in what is to be the Plaga zombie trilogy.<sup>118</sup> *Zona mutante* begins with a heated exchange that unfolds between two government officials, which furnishes the plot's exposition and builds on the previous film. “Señor,” who holds a higher rank, is portrayed in the most bureaucratic of ways with only his mouth visible on a wall-mounted screen. The lower official, “Agente” (“agent”) is framed in various medium close-up and close-up shots and canted camera angles. The camera cuts quickly between the two officials, a slide machine, and the images that are projected on a screen, while bursts of horns punctuate the soundtrack.

Circumstances are dire. Agente begins by stating “Señor, tenemos un problema” (“Sir, we have a problem”) and inquires if Señor recalls “Proyecto 335/027” (“Project 335/027”). Señor confuses the project with “Misión Kaihoró” (“Mission Kaihoró”), and agente proceeds to describe how the government's agreement with aliens to conduct limited testing of viruses in exchange for “protección” (“protection”) has gone awry. The aliens' tests have infected the entire town of Haedo, which is never named, but appears as a map among the slides agente shares with his superior. Agente shows additional slides of one victim's degeneration into a zombie, a government official striking a deal with one of the aliens, and images of three survivors: Max Giggs, Bill Russell, and John West. Agente hints at the need to execute them,

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<sup>118</sup>For want of space, I will focus on *Zona mutante*. The DVD, *Plaga Zone: Mutant Zone* is available in the United States. *Plaga zombie*, the first film in the trilogy, appears on a second disc included with its sequel. Although I devote most of my analysis to *Zona mutante*, I will occasionally allude to *Plaga zombie* for the purposes of clarifying plot elements.

while Señor explains that only the president has the authority to order the prisoners' mass execution and is MALAoccupied with other matters more important than a fast-spreading virus. Despite agente's objections, Señor acts on behalf of the president to order the prisoners' release, after which they presumably will be killed. Agente vigorously asserts that the prisoners must be executed immediately, only to be answered with Señor's shouts of "Es una orden" ("It's is an order").

The opening scene promptly inserts a geopolitical aesthetic into *Zona mutante*. In the introduction to *The Geopolitical Aesthetic*, Fredric Jameson questions the possibility of representing "the social totality [...] in the present age of a multinational global corporate network" (4). For Jameson, allegory offers the prospect of representing such a totality via the genre of the conspiracy film.<sup>119</sup> The conspiracy film embodies an exercise in cognitive mapping, which Jameson defines here as "an unconscious effort, collective effort at trying to figure out where we are and what landscapes and forces confront us in a late twentieth-century whose abominations are heightened by their concealment and their bureaucratic impersonality" (3). The accuracy of an ideological view proposed by a conspiracy film is unimportant; "it is the intent and the gesture that counts" (Jameson 3).

*Zona mutante* undertakes an endeavor similar to that of the conspiracy film as articulated by Jameson. Numerous global forces whose actual breadth defies cinematic representation converge in the film through allusions and fragmented allegories. Aliens from parts unknown exist in Argentina through backdoor deals with willing government officials. The FBI is afoot in the country with Argentina's own government figuring as a kind of appendage of the U.S.

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<sup>119</sup> Among the examples of conspiracy films, Jameson cites *Three Days of the Condor* (Sydney Pollock, 1975), *All the President's Men* (Alan Pakula, 1976), and *The Parallax View* (Alan Pakula, 1974).



agency. In the latter parts of *Zona mutante*, as well as in *Plaga zombie*, agente and officers dress in swat team-like suits and wear FBI badges. Towards the beginning of *Zona mutante*, Bill Russell, one of the government's captives, is released and dumped from a Mercedes with FBI novelty plates. Señor's query about "Misión Kaihoró," an allusion to Peter Jackson's *Bad Taste* (1987), forges a link with New Zealand and implies the Argentine government has secret operations on the other side of the world.<sup>120</sup>

The accuracy of *Zona mutante*'s geopolitical scheme does not merit comment. The film plays comically with conspiracy theories and science-fiction tropes of alien takeovers and government cover-ups. Nevertheless, the film's muddled plot intimates the complex nature of domestic and global political forces that can converge in particular places. Argentina is no stranger to the union of domestic and global political forces. The bombing of the *Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina* (Argentine-Israelite Mutual Association, or AMIA) cultural center in 1994 and the country's neoliberalization, during which the country was opened further to foreign capital, are just two obvious cases.<sup>121</sup>

*Zona mutante* refrains from being a direct and continuous allegory of a single political event in the country. The film's multifaceted and obscure plot traces how global forces can operate in and on Argentina. The alien invasion constitutes an onscreen materialization of global forces, and the theme of invasion is reiterated in both *Plaga zombie* and *Zona mutante*. In the former, the character Mike, reads the DC Comic mini-series "Invasion," which describes an alien invasion of Earth. In the opening scene from *Zona mutante* described above, "agente's" slides

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<sup>120</sup>"Kaihoró" is a fictitious town in Jackson's film, in which aliens have assumed human form and have devoured all the town's residents.

<sup>121</sup>In 1994, a van loaded with explosives was driven into AMIA's cultural center killing 85 people. While no arrests were ever made, official investigations have blamed Hezbollah and the Iranian government.

show various maps of Haedo and the virus's progression, a sequence that brings to mind a well-known and similar shot from the beginning of Hugo Santiago's science-fiction cult classic *Invasión/Invasion* (1969), in which a human force invades from air, land, and sea. The shot from Santiago's film frame a map of Buenos Aires in a close-up, which is referred to as Aquilea, and creates a tension between a 'real' urban space and an onscreen version that is renamed and transformed. Comparable to Buenos Aires in *Invasión*, the 'real' Haedo in *Zona mutante* is placed in tension with an onscreen version where different forces converge giving way to a localized apocalypse.<sup>122</sup>

*Zona mutante*'s depiction of an invasion within a zombie film is an apt mode for projecting a kind of imperialism in light of the origins of the zombie subgenre in cinema and literature. Many scholars have noted how the zombie figure entered into U.S. popular culture during and following the U.S. occupation of Haiti between 1915 and 1934. Peter Dendle notes, "Many of the marines stationed in Haiti, upon returning to the States, freely leveled charges of cannibalism and reported native superstitions such as the 'zombie'" (45). Zombies subsequently figured prominently into a Broadway play and initiated a wave of zombie movies in the 1930s starting with Victor Halperin's *White Zombie* (1932). In addition to cinema, Joan Dayan includes books such as William Seabrook's *The Magic Island* (1929) and John Huston Craige's

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<sup>122</sup> *Zona mutante* bears a number of other resemblances to *Invasión* that merit mentioning. Those who defend Buenos Aires in Santiago's film are a small band of 'normal' men, while the characters in *Zona mutante* are also unlikely heroes who are called into action for the sake of survival. The invaders in *Invasión* seek to install a kind of transmitter to facilitate a mass incursion into the capital, and an engulfing and slightly pulsating buzz simulates the transmitter's operation. The aliens in *Zona mutante* and *Plaga zombie* likewise transmit a signal to spread the virus and infect Haedo's residents. The similarities between *Invasión* and *Plaga zombie* are less instances of one film borrowing directly from another, rather they show how both films adhere to certain aspects of the science-fiction genre.

*Black Bagdad* (1933) as instrumental in perpetuating the figure of the zombie, and thus helping “to justify the ‘civilizing’ presence of the marines in ‘barbaric’ Haiti” (37).

*Zona mutante*, however, is simply not a naked depiction of U.S. imperialism. Other forces are present, and the alien invasion has multiple causes and players. The film’s capacity to portray U.S. military action in Iraq gains traction through an instance of parallel editing that cuts between a monologue and spectacles of film violence. Towards the end of the film, Bill and John are captured by zombies and taken to a kind of lair or headquarters. They soon learn that Max has been made the zombies’ leader, and Max orders the zombies to destroy his former friends. Before the zombies can act, a band of rebel humans attack the zombies, and Max exits by climbing some stairs. John soon follows and, eventually, Bill. The three characters are at odds, blaming one another for their predicament.<sup>123</sup>

At one point, as Bill and Max argue, John paces back and forth as if caught in a moment of indecision. Bill calls to John asking him to say something to relieve the tensions. John remarks, “Sí, digo algo” (“Yes, I will say something”). The soundtrack’s majestic sounding horns intimate something grandiose. The camera frames John in a medium close-up from a low angle giving the character an imposing stature, while he removes a piece of paper from his pocket. The camera cranes down and arcs slightly right to capture the piece of paper in John’s hand. The soundtrack’s horns become more frequent and a marching drum roll begins. Max and Bill cease moving, and eyeline matches suggest the two characters turn toward John. John then launches into a monologue that quotes George Bush’s speeches leading up to the military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq:

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<sup>123</sup>The collapse of human alliances is common to zombie films, and I explore the significance of this aspect in *Zona mutante* in my analysis of allegory and Argentina’s neoliberalization.

No sé quién tiene la culpa de todo esto. Pero, sí sé es que lo que está allí abajo, es peor que todo. Es pura maldad. Y si queremos seguir con vida, debemos mantenernos unidos y largarnos de aquí. Porque somos más fuertes, podemos seguir adelante. Tenemos que mostrarles, estos malditos zombies de qué somos capaces. Quiero encontrar lo responsable de esto, vivo o muerto. Quiero justicia infinita, así que tenemos libertad duradera. Ésta no es una guerra entre nosotros. Ésta es una guerra contra el terror. Éste es un golpe contra el terror. Éste es la humilde opinión de un simple vaquero que una vez entretenía a niños que hoy simplemente intenta salvar el mundo.

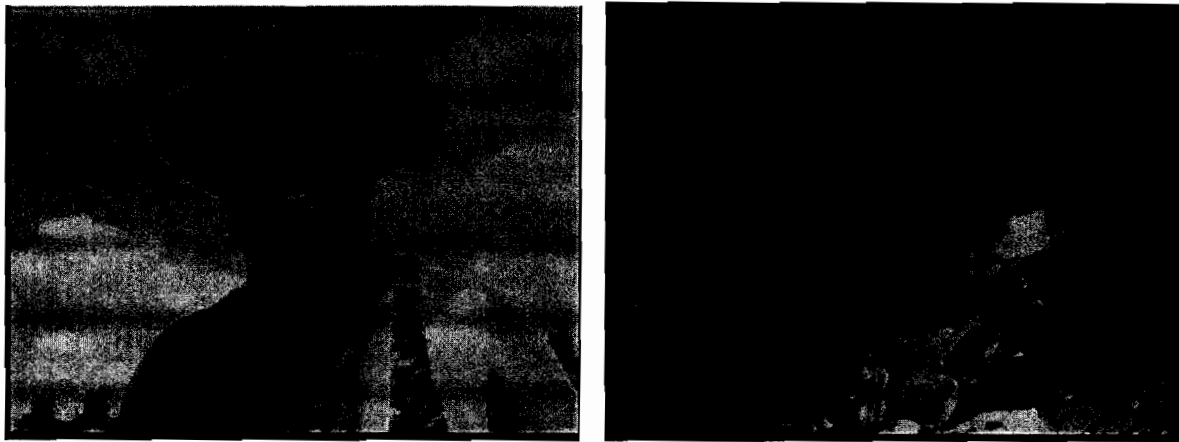
I don't know whose fault is all this. But, what I do know is that what resides below us, is worse than anything. It is pure evil. And if we want to continue living, we must stay united and get out of here. Because we are stronger, we can continue forward. We have to show them, those cursed zombies that we are capable. I want to find who is responsible for this, dead or alive. I want infinite justice, so that we have enduring freedom. This is not a war among us. This is a war against terror. This is a strike against terror. This is the humble opinion of a simple cowboy that once entertained kids and now simply wants to save the world.

The parallels between the rhetoric of Bush and West are unequivocal. Certain phrases – “pure evil,” “dead or alive,” and “war on terror” – are exact to those Bush used in his speeches and press conferences to justify U.S. military action in Afghanistan and to represent his interpretation of the 9/11 attacks. West also appropriates the names of military missions and transforms them into abstract goals, names that seem all the more bizarre within the context of a zombie film.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>124</sup>“Infinite Justice” was the original name of the U.S. military operations in response to the 9/11 attacks, which was renamed “Enduring Freedom” in response to Muslim protests (Becker).

The full significance of John West's monologue cannot be appreciated without taking into account the other cinematic elements in the scene. As John speaks, the camera cuts between him, Bill, and Max. Max and Bill are framed in medium close-ups with a stationary camera, while John and his words are given a more dynamic presence (see figures 3 and 4). In different shots, the camera captures John from different low angles, tilts, pans, and arcs with



Figs. 5 and 6. Here, one can gain some sense of the cross-cutting between John West channeling George Bush in one space and cross-cutting to another space where humans and zombies do battle.

medium close-ups of his torso and close-ups of his mouth and hand gestures as he reads his speech. The cuts between the three characters show the pacifying and inspiring effects of West's words on Bill and Russell. Bill and Max are enraptured bringing to mind the reactions of some audiences to Bush's lofty pronouncements. One can recall the almost euphoric and nearly non-stop applause Bush received in his address to Congress on September 20, 2001 and in his State of the Union address on January 25 the following year.

The War on Terror also figures more graphically into the scene. The different shots of Bill, Max, and John take place on a roof. The scene's spatial coordinates and West's words ("[...] lo que está allí abajo [...]"/"[...] what is down below") imply the fight between zombies and humans is unfolding directly beneath the characters' feet. The images of Bill, Max, and

John are cross-cut with spectacular carnage of zombies being dispatched in sundry and gory manners: heads decapitated, arms spilt, heads punched through, faces ripped off.

The crosscutting forges crucial connections between John's words and the screen violence. After John declares, "[...] lo que está allí abajo es peor que todo" ("what is there below is worse than anything"), the camera cuts from an image of Max's confused face to the zombie lair where a shaky camera frames a skinned face on the ground, a fire burning, and a figure turning over a makeshift table. The camera then cuts to John's face as he says "Es pura maldad" (It's pure evil") and back to the lair where a shaky camera captures a medium close-up of a zombie apparently crushing someone by wildly jumping up and down on a board; the zombies are gaining the upper hand on the humans. The camera cuts back to John as he declares, "Tenemos que mostrarles, estos malditos zombies de que somos capaces" ("We have to show them, those damn zombies, that we are capable") and then back to the lair. One of the rebels (director Daniel de la Vega) throws a zombie to the ground off screen and then proceeds to attack the zombie. Blood wildly splatters onto the rebel who wears a hockey mask (à la Jason Vorhees from the *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>* franchise) as he hoists the zombie's brain into view. Moments later, the camera cuts from John saying "justicia duradera" ("enduring freedom") and then shows a human severing the top of a zombie's head with a sword.

The parallel editing that selectively pairs Bush's language with images of spectacular violence bolsters an allegorical reading of the War on Terror. John's monologue and the onscreen carnage illustrate John's language while simultaneously mocking Bush's rhetoric. John's particular use of "pura maldad" to describe zombies is of course poking fun at Bush's occasional invocation of "evil," perhaps most notoriously in his 2002 State of the Union when he referred to Iran, North Korea, and Iraq as the "axis of evil." Zombies represent evil for John

West and labeling them as such defamiliarizes Bush's original use of the word "evil." Instead of using it to define other countries within geopolitics, zombies are the source of evil.

The carnage of fighting zombies and humans obviously differs from any realistic or mimetic portrayals of violence during the War on Terror. Footage of military operations can be viewed any number of places, particularly YouTube, in footage shot by soldiers or news organizations such as the Associated Press. The clips generally consist of gun battles or foot patrols, which is at odds with the scene described above from *Zona mutante*. No one in Afghanistan or Iraq until now has been forced to eat a lollipop, and no one's forehead has been chopped off with a samurai sword. However, to echo Jameson's argument about the accuracy of conspiracy films, accuracy is not the point of allegorically depicting the War on Terror's carnage. John West's appropriation of Bush's words is enough to connect the onscreen chaos with that of the War on Terror, and *Zona mutante* defamiliarizes the carnage in Afghanistan and Iraq through an aesthetics of screen violence. Blood splashes, limbs are cut off, and zombies are disemboweled. The quick-paced parallel editing, the military-like march of the soundtrack, and the shaky camera create a cinematic spectacle distinct from other representations of the War on Terror. As West appropriates Bush's words, a spectacle unfolds that undresses Bush's rhetoric. The parallel editing puts in no uncertain terms what belies a politician's supposed noble rhetoric of defense. Here, the spectacle of violence hardly departs from the narrative. Instead, the spectacle of violence crystallizes an allegorical element – the War on Terror – suggested by a monologue.

The projection of the War on Terror at a particular moment in *Zona mutante* threatens to influence the reading of the entire film. John West's monologue and the crosscutting of violence happen towards the end of the film and, in turn, one becomes tempted to read earlier instances of

screen violence and particular characters in relation to the War on Terror. Given his cowboy hat and “W” belt buckle, John West’s character seems a joking imitation of Bush. The character, however, existed long before Bush took office and appears in *Plaga zombie*, a film that was released in 1997. The allegorization of the War on Terror is thus fragmented and largely confined to the aforementioned sequence. The Bush-like figure of John West and his cohorts are not occupying Haedo; aliens are. John West and his friends, instead, do their utmost to escape from Haedo. Still, the temporary allegorization of the War on Terror in *Zona mutante* offers a kind of post-9/11 world that is turned on its head: a cowboy who speaks of “infinite justice” must contend with an occupying force and his own deteriorated standing. We see the anxiety of a global superpower on the wane.<sup>125</sup>

#### **SIGNS OF NEOLIBERALISM: ZOMBIE MULTITUDES**

Numerous Argentine scholars and cultural critics have characterized the country under neoliberalism during the 1990s as fragmented. Maristella Svampa and Damián Corral point to the “loss of social ties” (119), and Fernando Reati observes a “loss of the earlier sense of collectivity” (187) during the 1990s. Fragmentation can be further traced in the organization of space, specifically the advent of gated communities and pockets of wealth such as Puerto Madero in Buenos Aires, which accompany the growing disparities among economic classes.

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<sup>125</sup>John West as a projection the U.S. empire’s anxiety is suggested most forcefully towards the end of the film shortly before John’s monologue. At one point, John confronts Max and, after pushing Max against a wall, accosts him. “Nadie escapa de mí. Porque soy John West. ¿Entiendes? Soy John West,” (“No one escapes from me. Because I’m John West. Get it? I’m John West”) screams the wrestler. Max replies, “No, no. No eres John West. Eres un payaso” (No, no. You’re not John West. You’re a clown”). West becomes flustered and tries to punch Max only to be stopped by Bill. John’s anxiety over his own demise reflects that of a United States empire nervous over its own deteriorating position as the global superpower. For more about the anxiety over the United States losing its superpower status, see Frederick Kempe’s article, “U.S. Global Influence is Waning,” which appeared in *The Wall Street Journal* in 2005.



Michael Janoschka and Axel Borsdorf consider the increasing numbers of private neighborhoods in Argentina and elsewhere in Latin America as “homogeneous, highly segregated and protected areas” in which the middle and upper classes are separated from the lower classes, who may have formerly occupied the same space (96).

A real and discursive fragmentation reached a head in December of 2001 with the collapse of the Argentine government. The rhetoric of some observers signals chaos and a government seemingly in absentia. Writing in 2002, Rafael Olarra Jiménez and Luis García Martínez observe, “La vida social está desarticulada cercana al caos y la disintegración. El Estado se muestra incapaz de cumplir de manera aceptable sus funciones [...]” (“Social life is broken up and close to chaos and disintegration. The state shows itself to be incapable of acceptably fulfilling its functions [...]”; 7). Beatriz Sarlo notes, “En este marco, proliferan las violentas armadas para la autodefensa o las iniciativas barriales para que se les reconozca a los vecinos el derecho de organizarse en defensa propia, lo cual implicaría inducir a un estado de guerra de ciudadanos contra ciudadanos” (“In this atmosphere, violent bands who practice self-defense or neighborhood initiatives proliferate so that neighbors recognize the right to organize in their own defense. Such actions implies a state of war with citizens against citizens”; 56).

Such conditions have left their mark on the country’s cinema. In her book *Crisis and Capitalism in Contemporary Argentine Cinema*, Joanna Page traces numerous manifestations of the economic crisis in the country’s cinema ranging from themes of precarious employment to how budget constraints on a film’s production appear through registries of cinematic realism. In *Other Worlds: An Essay about the New Argentine Cinema*, Gonzalo Aguilar examines scores of films produced between 1997 and mid-2005 “to investigate the decade’s transformations” in Argentina (3). Although Aguilar resists automatically using a corpus of films as a means of

critiquing or explaining neoliberalism (3), he nevertheless locates new modes of projecting political national and global forces in contemporary national cinema that are distinct from earlier periods.

In addition to Page's and Aguilar's extensive studies, Fernando Reati traces an aesthetics of fragmentation in an essay about the film *Mala época/Bad Times* (Mariano de Rosa, Rodrigo Moreno, Salvador Roselli, and Nicolás Saad, 1998) and Rodolfo Fogwill's novel *Vivir afuera/Living on the Outside*. Both the film and novel are composed of vignettes that are tenuously intertwined by experiences and relationships among characters, and, for Reati, capture various processes of atomization.

*Zona mutante* proposes its own modes of fragmentation that embody the consequences of Argentina's transformation into a market economy and the collapse of 2001. The film projects fragmentation through the depiction of Haedo as a filmic space, the utter obliteration of bodies, and the breakdown and renewal of human alliances. Moreover, allegories of neoliberalism and collapse are themselves fragmented and fleeting within the narrative, and can be located in certain spectacles. Fragmented aesthetics nevertheless exist in tension with a unifying force: zombies. While human alliances often fail and reconvene, zombies constitute an entity that appears homogeneous in their ontological status (undead) and aim (flesh). The zombie hordes, however, are fragile and exhibit ruptures at times, an element that distinguishes the film's undead from those in other zombie films. With the government largely absent from preventing a large scale disaster and instead undermining their citizens' attempts at survival, reading *Zona mutante* as an allegory for neoliberalism in Argentina seems apt.

## THE ZOMBIES AND US: ALONE IN SPACE

One does not look at *Zona mutante* to ascertain a ‘realistic’ depiction of Haedo, the city in which the film is set. By virtue of a camera’s limitations, the film’s version of Haedo is fragmented as soon as it appears on screen, and a viewer must settle for a montage of shots that create an onscreen version of the city. Such shots, however, can be revealing.<sup>126</sup>

One such instance of a fragmented Haedo becomes significant in suggesting a spatial consequence of neoliberalization in Argentina. Twenty minutes into the film, Bill is captured by zombies, manages to escape, and is subsequently separated from John West and Max. As John and Max look for Bill, they arrive at the city’s limit, which is marked with a sign: “Límite de la Ciudad.” The camera frames the pair in a medium close-up from a low angle as they stand on the edge of a steep cliff. One assumes any bridge that was formerly there has now been destroyed. In a motif reminiscent of films like Sam Raimi’s *Evil Dead* (1981) and *Evil Dead 2* (1987) and *Cemetery Man* (Michele Soavi, 1994), the humans are confined to the same space as the threat; there is no exit. With buildings looming in the background in the long distance shot of Max and John at the precipice, Buenos Aires, the seat of the federal government, appears to reside in the background (see figure 7).

Many scholars have commented on the fragmentation of Buenos Aires as symptomatic of the fragmentation occurring in cities in Latin America and elsewhere (Janoschka and Borsdorf 95-96). The shot described above does not portray the fragmentation of space between Haedo and Buenos Aires – their physical separation is nothing new. However, the background presence

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<sup>126</sup>One is reminded of Henri Lefebvre’s acute skepticism of cinema’s capacity to “embody and ‘show’ the truth” about space (96), while still empowering cinema with the ability to present “a truth and a reality answering to criteria quite different from those of exactitude, clarity, readability and plasticity” (97).

of the Argentine capital – a metonym of the national government – suggests an authority oblivious to the apocalypse unfolding close by. Or worse, the Argentine government colludes with aliens and the FBI; as stated by “Señor” at the beginning of *Zona mutante*, the president is occupied with more important matters. In the previous chapter, I alluded to various tenets that



Fig. 7. Here, John and Max stand at edge of a cliff at the city limits of Haedo. Buenos Aires sits in the background.

Andrew Tudor traced in “paranoid” (post-1968) horror cinema, one of which is the absence of government agencies, such as the military or police. Such an element acquires a particular resonance in the case of an Argentine horror film made at a historical moment in which a form of neoliberalism in Argentina was afoot and arguably helped to precipitate mass chaos in December of 2001. Just as the government shrank through neoliberal policies under Menem, its onscreen presence is largely missing and, when present, is guilty of colluding with foreign powers against its own citizens.

The vacuum left by government in *Zona mutante* points to other forms in which the film projects neoliberalism. The absence of government necessitates new human alliances. *Zona mutante* resembles other contemporary horror films, especially those of the zombie subgenre, in

which groups form in an ad-hoc fashion often with ‘average’ heroes (i.e., not police or military officers) and are inevitably precarious.<sup>127</sup> Bill, John, and Max compose such an alliance. The three characters were friends prior to the alien invasion, but obviously had never contended with fighting an insurmountable force; they are among a scant number of survivors. Their ordinary stature comes through in numerous ways. None of them possesses any kind of training that would help his plight. Instead, in another element that keeps with the zombie subgenre, the friends arm themselves with makeshift weaponry such as a hedge trimmer, forks and spoons, and a body they carry around in a bag nearly three-quarters of the film. The coalition, however, is unfortunately fragile. Max allows the zombie to capture Bill, John allows Max to be captured, the three often argue, and, towards the end of the film, they knock each other unconscious. The three characters constantly mend their differences, although the resolutions are only temporary.

Such alliances in the film recall the newly formed organizations that emerged during the 1990s and after the December collapse in 2001. The *piquetero* movement began during the mid-1990s and, while there is no single *piquetero* group, unemployed workers, their family members, and/or sympathizers participate (Epstein 95). According to Edward Epstein, the *piqueteros* emerged with the undermining of conventional labor unions and “traditional neighborhood-based clientelist [networks]” (96).<sup>128</sup> With a ubiquitous distrust of conventional forms of governance, numerous self-organized groups emerged after the government collapse: “neighborhood

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<sup>127</sup>One can think of any number of zombie films in which individuals, who are themselves often metonyms of race, class, gender, and age, are forced into alliances (George Romero and Lucio Fulci’s zombie films), *Shock Waves* (Ken Wiederhorn, 1977), *28 Days Later* (Danny Boyle, 2002), *Zombieland* (Rubin Fleischer, 2009), etc.). The alliances, however, are inevitably fragile and often falter for any number of reasons.

<sup>128</sup>*Piqueteros* conduct a number of actions within communities, but are perhaps most known for *cortes de ruta* (“road blocks”) in their attempt to solicit government aid.

assemblies, barter clubs, workers' self-managed factories, and counter-cultural collectives" (Svampa and Corral 118).

Human alliances, however, are not the only ones in *Zona mutante*. Zombies constitute a collective force that ostensibly appears homogeneous and unified, which is distinct from that of the quarreling humans. Although the zombies differ in dress and appearance, they are all undead. They amble about and, sometimes, pursue humans. The desire to read the zombie multitude as allegorizing politics emerges in light of Argentine literature's occasional preoccupation with multitudes, who are sometimes portrayed as zombie-like. In *Facundo*, Domingo Faustino Sarmiento characterizes "la horda salvaje" ("the savage horde") (56) on the pampas and famously places the group in opposition to the civilized individuals residing in the cities. In Esteban Echeverría's *El matadero/The Slaughterhouse*, a political allegory of the country under then governor of Buenos Aires province, Juan Manuel de Rosas, the masses participate in the slaughter of animals in a kind of open-air abattoir. Descriptions of children playing with cattle tripe and adults covered in blood evoke filmic images of zombies feeding on intestines. Jorge Luis Borges and Aldolfo Bioy Casares's short story "La fiesta del monstruo"/"The Monster's Party" is a first-person narrative told from the perspective of a lower-class Peronist militant. Often seen as a rewriting of *El Matadero*, the narrator uses obtuse lower-class slang to describe to a friend his experience with other militants in which they kill a young Jewish boy. The mob violence, along with the difficult language (zombies typically cannot verbally communicate) in "La fiesta del monstruo," suggests a zombie element at work. The three aforementioned works portray crowds in a negative fashion, yet also acknowledge the multitudes' role as a political force in national politics. The multitudes are brutal yet crucial in power relations, as are the zombies in *Zona mutante*.

Perhaps no work offers a more germane tool to assess *Zona mutante*'s zombies as a national multitude than José María Ramos Mejía's *Las multitudes argentinas*/"The Argentine Multitudes." Published in 1898, Ramos Mejía traces the evolution of the Argentine crowd in three stages, which mirrors that of the country. While Ramos Mejía distinguishes his portrayal of the masses from the works mentioned above by considering the multitude as a potentially positive entity, his descriptions of crowds, which are steeped in positivism and indicative of his medical training, are often zombie-like in many respects.<sup>129</sup> Ramos Mejías speaks of "la abdicación de la personalidad consciente" ("the abdication of the conscious personality"; 16) in which an individual becomes part of a multitude. A multitude is "firme y homogénea dentro de su misma heterogeneidad" ("firm and homogeneous in its own heterogeneity"; 90) and "falta la inteligencia directiva" ("lacks a directive intelligence"; 73). While the zombies in *Zona mutante* are different in appearance, they are similar in their ontological undead condition. Where Ramos Mejías considers how a multitude "imprime a todas las cosas un sello violento por una especie de contagio o de sugestión profunda" ("imprints everything with a violent stamp through a kind contagion or profound suggestion"; 89), the zombies in *Zona mutante* do much of the same, laying waste to the interiors of houses. Ramos Mejías's use of the word "contagio" ("contagion"), which he borrows from his French contemporary Gustave Le Bon, describes an individual's provisional state of mind and is of course significant for a zombie film to be classified as such. The contagion, oftentimes unexplained, spreads, infects, and creates the multitude.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>129</sup>Ramos Mejía considers the multitudes (as opposed to the elites) as largely responsible for helping Argentina to defeat the British in 1806 and 1807 and gain independence from Spain several years later.

Beyond classifying the zombies in *Zona mutante* as a multitude, the zombies are by no means a continuation of Ramos Mejías's taxonomy of Argentine multitudes; placing the zombies on some kind of artificially historical continuum is a dead end. Instead, the film's zombie multitude is a multitude unto itself that politically and culturally allegorizes other multitudes in contemporary events in Argentina, such as the aforementioned *piqueteros* and massive *cacerolazos* that formed in protest against government officials in 2001. The zombies are not an exact depiction of *piqueteros* or any specific group protesting. Yet, the zombies are a political force in many respects insofar as they have aims. A marked departure from zombies in films such as *Dawn of the Dead* (George Romero, 1978) or *28 Days Later* (Danny Boyle, 2002), who appear to have no scheme or design, *Zona mutante*'s undead are organized. They have trucks that go around picking up humans and possess a headquarters to which they transport Bill and John West following Max's capture during which he loses his arm (it is replaced with a zombie appendage). When Max addresses the zombies as a kind of demagogic leader drunk with power, the political dimension of the zombies is unmistakable; even if they are being manipulated by aliens, the zombies are an organized and militant force.

Zombies offer a sustained collective presence that is distinct from that of other contemporary Argentine films. Aguilar points to depictions of the masses in recent Argentine cinema as being distinct from 'the people' portrayed in political cinema of earlier decades. Alluding to films such as *El bonarense*, *Pizza, birra, faso*, and *Silvio Prieto*, the "underclass constitutes not the promise of liberation (as the people could be) but fits of disorganized and rash

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<sup>130</sup>Despite the similarities to Le Bon's terminology and several of his concepts, Mejías Ramos's text is highly original and constitutes a theoretical lens through which to consider multitudes and crowds at particular historical moments in Argentina and perhaps elsewhere in Latin America.



violence” (126, 127). Characters of the lower class exploit each other and refrain from engaging in a principled politics of impassioned confrontation.

The zombies in *Zona mutante* embody Aguilar’s characterization of the masses as prone to violence. Although organized, the zombies attack humans and trash houses with reckless abandon. Then again, if the zombies are the perpetrators of violence, they are also primary and mass recipients of violence. Zombies suffer at the hands of humans in spectacular episodes of screen violence. Zombies have their spines ripped out, their scalps and various appendages torn off, and they suffer decapitations with copious amounts of blood gushing.

Such spectacles of violence allegorize neoliberalism and graphically highlight the consequences of political and economic policies. Steven Shaviro’s commentary on David Cronenberg’s body horror films is instructive: “Power does not work merely on the level of images and ideologies; it directly invests the flesh” (Shaviro 143). The violence committed against zombies shows neoliberalism’s capacity to mark the flesh in no uncertain terms. Neoliberalism does not sever limbs, cut people in half, or decapitate them. The over-the-top violence is characteristic of the zombie subgenre, and, in questioning the trigger of the violence, one understands the ways in which the allegorization of neoliberalism appears onscreen. An invasion of foreign forces in collusion with domestic entities precipitates an apocalypse, which allegorizes Argentina’s transformation into a market economy through the actions of multiple parties: governments, foreign investment, the International Monetary Fund. In *Zona mutante*, the consequences of neoliberalism on the body politic unfold on a massive and gory scale.

## CONCLUSION

*Jennifer’s Shadow* and *Zona mutante* allegorically project the consequences of the implementation of neoliberal policies and carnage resulting from the War on Terror. The

destruction of bodies, the transformation of the citizens into new collectives, extreme violence, and the reorganization of space are all elements common to the zombie subgenre and figure into *Zona mutante*. Likewise, mansions, familial conflicts, unknown diseases, and doubles are all staples of Gothic horror. Such elements provide a way for projecting both national problems, as well as those of the United States (along with Afghanistan and Iraq) via the War on Terror. With specific regards to the neoliberal crisis in Argentina, *Zona mutante* and *Jennifer's Shadow* suggest ways to represent the crisis that are distinct from films that are affiliated with *Nuevo cine argentino* ("New Argentine Cinema"),<sup>131</sup> which if we recall Pérez Llahí's comments above, includes a projection of recognizable spaces. These two horror films transform Buenos Aires and Haedo into sites of spectacle that simultaneously project domestic socioeconomic dilemmas and, with the War on Terror forming part of the dynamic, allegorize U.S. geopolitics as well.

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<sup>131</sup> Among the films associated with *Nuevo cine argentino* are those by Martín Rejtman, Adrián Caetano, Pablo Trapero and Lucrecia Martel. For an overview of *Nuevo cine argentino*, see *El nuevo cine argentino: Temas, autores, y estilos de una renovación* edited by Horacio Bernades, Diego Lerer, and Sergio Wolf.

## CHAPTER 4

### KILLERS ON THE PAMPA: GENDER, CINEMATIC LANDSCAPES, AND THE TRANSNATIONAL SLASHER IN ADRIÁN GARCÍA BOGLIANO'S *HABITACIONES PARA TURISTAS* (2004) AND *36 PASOS* (2006)

*Zona mutante*'s inclusion of elements common to other zombie films from other countries (disease, groups of undead, 'ordinary' heroes, and the failure of government) suggests the zombie subgenre is transnational with each film offering some particularity which could be construed as national. In his essay "Global Noir: Genre Film in the Age of Transnationalism," David Desser designates neo-noir as a transnational genre. Citing films directed by filmmakers of various nationalities such as Arturo Ripstein's *Profundo carmesí/Deep Crimson* (1997) and *City of Lost Souls* (Takashi Miike, 2000), Desser categorizes films according to common narrative elements: "the Stranger and the Femme Fatale," "the couple on the run," or "the heist gone bad" (Desser 521-524). For Desser, the sheer number of neo-noir films emerging from different countries evidences a transnational flow of cinema not only from Hollywood, but also from cinema industries located elsewhere such as Hong Kong.

Similar to the zombie and neo-noir genres, the slasher genre likewise achieves a transnational status, whether by tracing its origins or by investigating the manner in which the genre is appropriated and refashioned in different national contexts. While some critics consider Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) or Michael Powell's *Peeping Tom* (1960) predecessors to the first slasher film, Italian *giallo* films, most notably Mario Bava's *Sei donne per l'assassino/Blood and Black Lace*, *Reazione a catena/Twitch of the Death Nerve* (aka *Bay of Blood*, 1973), significantly

influenced the genre's trademark qualities, exemplified in subjective shots approximating the killer's point-of-view, and narrative elements, such as the final girl.<sup>132</sup> The slasher's historical genesis aside, Canadian productions like *Black Christmas* (Bob Clark, 1974), Spanish director Jesús Franco's *Die Säge des Todes/Bloody Moon* (1981) and recent productions from Germany, Australia, and France further underscore the global reach of the slasher and its capacity to acquire transnational distribution, attracting audiences worldwide.<sup>133</sup>

Within an Argentine-U.S. cinematic circuit, Adrián García Bogliano's *Habitaciones para turistas/Rooms for Tourists* (2004) and *36 pasos/36 Pasos* (2006) are global slashers with a transnational content that simultaneously speaks to Argentine and U.S. audiences and allegorizes national dilemmas in both spaces.<sup>134</sup> The two films project an *argentinidad* through language, humor, cultural allusions, and, at times, recognizable landscapes. The films, nevertheless, are not hermetically sealed from non-Argentine audiences, particularly those in the United States. As I will discuss below, the films either subscribe to the slasher subgenre (*Habitaciones*) or contain slasher elements (*36 Pasos*) through their inclusion of generic staples, such as screen violence, a whodunit narrative, the use of particular weapons, and a city-country binary. I will examine the aforementioned slasher genre elements as formative to the creation of the films' cinematic landscapes that imagine both domestic and transnational audiences, particularly U.S.

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<sup>132</sup>According to Mikel J. Koven, *giallo* films are considered murder-mysteries that often feature graphic violence against women, multiple murders, and the obscuring of a killer's identity (4). See Koven's *La Dolce Morte: Vernacular Cinema and the Italian Giallo Film*, particularly chapter 10, "From Giallo to Slasher," which describes the giallo's influence on the slasher genre.

<sup>133</sup>In my allusion to recent productions from Germany, Australia, and France, I am referring specifically to *Anatomie/Anatomy* (Stefan Ruzowitzky, 2000), *Cut* (Kimble Rendall, 2000), and *Haute tension/High Tension* (Alexandre Aja, 2003), respectively.

<sup>134</sup>I will subsequently refer to *Habitaciones para turistas* simply as *Habitaciones*.

audiences. While both films can be read as slasher films by Argentine and U.S. audiences alike, the films nevertheless acquire an Argentine specificity through their manipulation of select genre elements which allegorize national issues like abortion and engagement with national myths, particularly the *civilización y barbarie* (“civilization and barbarism”) dichotomy famously coined by Domingo Faustino Sarmiento in *Facundo*. The allegorization of city-country tensions, along with the violence against women, is not lost on U.S. audiences and is germane to U.S. culture as well. In addition to referencing slasher film scholarship, I rely on Lukinbeal’s classification of cinematic landscapes and Doreen Massey’s idea of space being “open and porous” to discuss the films’ cinematic landscapes as both national and transnational spaces, which enable them to circulate as Argentine slasher films between Argentina and the United States.

#### **VIOLENCE THAT BINDS: CITY-COUNTRY AND MASCULINE-FEMININE BINARIES IN *HABITACIONES PARA TURISTAS***

Adrián García Bogliano is a relatively young Argentine filmmaker, among many, contributing to the country’s emergence as a notable horror cinema producer. Like many of his fellow directors, Bogliano’s films generally have been made on incredibly low budgets; *Habitaciones*, for instance, was reportedly made for \$3,000 (Artigas). Working under the auspices of Paura Flics, Bogliano has had a prodigious output, directing, and, at times, co-directing, some 15 feature-length and short films, along with music videos and commercials. The director has attracted attention most recently for the success of *Sudor frío/Cold Sweat* (Adrian García Bogliano, 2010), one of two Argentine horror films to be released in national

theatres over the past twenty years, and which was one of the most popular national films of the first half of 2011 (“Las cinco”).<sup>135</sup>

Bogliano’s films often possess a very explicit transnational component, at times evincing an “allusionism” and cinephilia that cuts across genres and national cinemas.<sup>136</sup> In the credits of both *Habitaciones* and *36 pasos*, a section entitled “Ayuda espiritual” (“Spiritual guidance”) appears, which is presumably the director’s acknowledgement of certain filmmakers, actors, visual artists, and films that influenced the making of his own movie. The list forms a vast constellation of names and titles from various national cinemas, genres, and, at times, media: Lucio Fulci, Frank Miller, Kaneto Shindô, and Nicolas Roeg, to name a few. The director’s acknowledgements provide a tangible starting point to consider the national and transnational content of *Habitaciones* and *36 Pasos*.

As intimated above, I conceive the national and transnational in *Habitaciones* and *36 Pasos* through the notion of a cinematic landscape that is open and porous. The cinematic landscapes in Bogliano’s films are distilled both from Argentine cultures and, in part, global slasher films.<sup>137</sup> Bogliano’s films and other slasher films from elsewhere share genre elements, which indicates the open nature of the films’ landscapes, and can be framed through Massey’s idea of space cited in the first chapter. According to Massey, “Places are not so much bounded

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<sup>135</sup>The other Argentine horror film released in national theatres is Sergio Esquenazi’s *Visitante de invierno/Winter’s Visitor* (2008). MPI Media Group will distribute *Sudor frío* in the United States and Canada, and the film is set for a theatrical release in those two countries in the fall of 2011.

<sup>136</sup>In his essay “The Future of Allusion: Hollywood in the Seventies (And beyond),” Noël Carroll uses the term “allusionism” to refer to the tendency of Hollywood cinema from the seventies and eighties to reference other films through shots, plot motifs, and dialogue, among other ways (52).

<sup>137</sup>As noted above, Bogliano credits a number of different genres beyond horror or non-horror directors for “spiritual guidance” in the credits of *Habitaciones* and *36 pasos*.

areas as open and porous networks of social relations” (121) with the identities of places “constructed through the specificity of their interaction with other places rather than their counterposition to them” (121). The open nature of a space acquires multiple scales with Massey’s idea of “[t]he spatial’ [...] as constructed out of the multiplicity of social relations across all spatial scales” (4) from global, national, local, workplace, and home. A similar dynamic is at work in Bogliano’s films. Local, national, and global cultural and cinematic imaginaries converge within a cinematic landscape enabling the films to be slasher films for audiences in different geographical spaces. For my purposes, Argentina and the United States are those spaces.

Similar to Desser’s formulation of a global neo-noir genre, the transnational content in Bogliano’s films manifests itself through the films’ awareness of elements common to the slasher genre. These elements are shared among slasher films of various nationalities. In *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*, Carol Clover delineates many characteristics of U.S. slasher films, which can be found in films from elsewhere: the sexually disturbed killer, who is usually male (e.g., Norman Bates from *Psycho* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960), or Leatherface from *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Tobe Hooper, 1974)) (26-30); the Terrible Place, such as a dilapidated house or mansion (30-31); the use of weapons like knives, axes, hammers that necessitate a primal and intimate confrontation between a killer and his/her victim (31-32); instances of graphic screen violence against morally compromised teenagers, with the most gruesome punishment often reserved for female characters (32-35, 41); and the final girl who kills or temporarily dispatches the killer (35-41). In addition to Clover’s book, Richard Nowell’s *Blood Money*, a study of U.S. and Canadian slasher films released between 1974 and 1981, not only

reiterates some of Clover's points, but also highlights another crucial element of the genre which figure into my analysis: the intrigue over the identity of the killer, or killers.

I must also mention the common locations of slasher films for the sake of my discussion. Although Clover discusses the city-country binary in the context of rape-revenge films, this binary is often present in slasher movies in settings such as a summer camp.<sup>138</sup> In Nowell's description of the slasher's story-structure, "[a]ction is usually confined largely to a single non-urban location which, as a result of being labyrinthine, remote, and sparsely populated, transforms the everyday sites of the American middle-class into ideal arenas for activities that would otherwise be restricted, enabling youths to pursue their hedonistic urges" [i.e., drug use, sex, etc.], and likewise permits the killer to prey on the youths (20-21).<sup>139</sup>

As I will discuss below, the city-country binary serves as a crucial way in which Bogliano's films appropriate and modify one element of the slasher subgenre by infusing the film with an Argentine particularity. For Clover, who presupposes audience identification with urbanites or suburbanites in *I Spit on Your Grave* (Meir Zarchi, 1978), "The point is rural Connecticut (or wherever) [...] is a place where the rules of civilization do not obtain. People from the city are people like us. People from the country [...] are people not like us" (125). Whether a rape-revenge or a slasher film, this binary is reinforced frequently through the

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<sup>138</sup>Rape-revenge films are an exploitative subgenre that sometimes crosses over into horror. The narrative pattern typically involves the rape of a woman (or man, in the case of *Deliverance* (John Boorman, 1972)), her survival, and the victim's, or the victim's family, eventual revenge against her tormentor, or tormentors, carried out in a most gruesome fashion. Notable examples of rape-revenge films are *Last House on the Left* (Wes Craven, 1972) and *I Spit on Your Grave* (*Day of the Woman*) (Meir Zarchi, 1978). Despite its lowbrow status, it is worth noting that Ingmar Bergman's *Virgin Spring* (1960) is considered the first rape-revenge film.

<sup>139</sup>The latter part of Nowell's point regarding a location allowing a killer to strike comes from Martin Rubin's book entitled *Thriller*, which Nowell himself acknowledges.



distinctions between city and rural inhabitants. Rural residents are poor and unhygienic (e.g., the stereotypical redneck), while city dwellers are well-heeled and more urbane. In horror films, the warped nature of rural denizens often manifests itself through psychosexual deformities attributed to perverse familial relations and structures. From Leatherface in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* to Rob Zombie's *House of 1,000 Corpses* (2003), examples of sexually twisted hillbillies are abundant in the horror genre.

*Habitaciones* is astutely aware of the slasher genre. Five young women (Theda, Lydia, Ruth, Elena, and Silvia played by Elena Siritto, Victoria Witemburg, Brenda Vera, Jimena Krouco, Mariela Mujica, respectively) from Buenos Aires and La Plata take a bus to a fictitious rural town, San Ramón, where they intend to take a train onto their final destination, Trinidad, another fictitious town. Unknown to each other, all five seek abortions. San Ramón is an economically depressed town pervaded by a strict religiosity. Young men sit idle on the streets, and the newly arrived women witness a spectacular Pentecostal-like religious service during which a preacher performs an exorcism on a town woman (Miriam) before an animated congregation.

The five young women from the city eventually arrive at San Ramón's train station only to be told by an elderly attendant that the train for Trinidad has already passed and another will not come until morning. Néstor, a young man from San Ramón, offers the women a place to stay the night, and they accept. Néstor lives with his infant-like brother, Maxi, in their decrepit family mansion. According to the brothers, their mother burned to death years ago in an accident. Soon after falling asleep in their separate bedrooms, the women are brutally killed by various assailants who usually wield knives or an axe. Although the young women fight back and two manage to escape the mansion, only one, Theda, survives the ordeal. Theda, however, is

a maimed final girl. After Theda reunites with her father on the streets of Buenos Aires, he is killed, and her eyes are stabbed out by an unseen attacker.

*Habitaciones* is quickly recognizable as a slasher film to both Argentine and U.S. audiences. The city-country binary, the warped nature of rural residents, screen violence depicted with specific weapons, and the mansion as a Terrible Place all mark the film as a slasher movie and evidences a transnational give-and-take, so to speak, between Argentina and slasher films aligned with other national cinemas, such as the United States. Yet, if the inclusion of slasher genre characteristics in *Habitaciones* highlights the influence of cinema coming from elsewhere (the give), the film's reformulation of select elements (the take) to render them Argentine bespeaks a national particularity evident in a cinematic landscape which is inextricably bound by or through gender and gender relations.<sup>140</sup>

The cinematic landscape in *Habitaciones* projects a national dimension, even if it simultaneously forgoes a degree of geographical realism at the local level. The narrative largely unfolds in a rural national space that is also generically rural. Using Lukinbeal's taxonomy of cinematic landscapes as a reference, two such landscapes are termed landscape as space and landscape as place. The cinematic landscape is a space insofar as the camera minimalizes the narrative's location through certain shots (close-ups of characters, low depth of field) rendering

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<sup>140</sup>The projection of a cinematic landscape in a slasher film that constantly engages with questions of gender is not necessarily unique to Bogliano's films. Slasher films have long been a site to examine questions of gender with movies such as *Halloween* (John Carpenter, 1978) and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* often considered allegories of a particular cultural moment in the U.S. Besides Clover's aforementioned book, Adam Lowenstein's *Shocking Representation* and Linnie Blake's *The Wounds of Nations* examine horror cinema as national allegories and include forays into the slasher genre. Judith Halberstam's *Skin Shows* contains a helpful chapter focusing on gender and queer aesthetics in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2* (Tobe Hooper, 1986), and Adam Simon's documentary *The American Nightmare* is also useful for its examination of horror cinema and allegories of U.S. politics and culture during the seventies and eighties.

location generic; the film lacks an element that ties the shots to a specific and actual location. Cinematic landscape as place, on the other hand, “provides narrative realism by grounding a film to a particular location’s sense of place and history” (6), with extreme long shots capturing a city’s icons, and thus tethering the narrative to a recognizable location.

*Habitaciones* projects a cinematic landscape that is both space and place. Following the film’s opening scene in which a young girl, who unintentionally finds a fetus in the trash behind Néstor and Maxi’s mansion, is murdered by the brothers’ mother, the film’s rural space is established and tinged with a menacing veneer.<sup>141</sup> As two of the women travelling to San Ramón, Theda and Elena, converse on a bus, the film projects long shots of the country. The women’s conversation and the ominous sounds of a cello compose the soundtrack. The shots perhaps could come from the rural confines of any number of countries: grazing horses, houses sitting in open spaces behind fences, men driving tractors and planting crops. No icon anchors the rural images to a particular Argentine location. Moreover, the names of the towns to which the girls arrive – San Ramón and Trinidad – are not actual locations, but rather metaphorical designators that reinforce the religious dimension of the countryside (Trinidad) and the theme of abortion (San Ramón is the saint of midwives and expectant mothers).

The cinematic landscape nevertheless achieves its national anchor through other means: the actors’ Argentine accents and slang, allusions to Buenos Aires and Mar de Plata, cultural allusions to Argentine cinema, and, of course, abortion. Abortion has been a common theme in horror cinema,<sup>142</sup> and, given recent attacks on women’s access to abortion in the United States by

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<sup>141</sup>Néstor and Maxi’s mother was the town midwife until she was burned to death for reasons never stated in the film.

<sup>142</sup>Abortion has figured into several horror films such as *Black Christmas* (Bob Clark, 1974), *It’s Alive* (Larry Cohen, 1974), and *Progeny* (Brian Yuzna, 1998), among other films. For

right-wing legislatures and religious groups, *Habitaciones*' allegorization of abortion and violence against women would be familiar to U.S. viewers.

Given the geographical context, the abortion theme still acquires a particular national resonance in the film. Abortion in Argentina remains illegal; many women attempt to terminate a pregnancy themselves or, in the case of upper class women, seek abortions in private medical offices (Selser). *Habitaciones* makes abortion a narrative centerpiece and, in accordance with the genre's logic, ultimately affects the maimed condition of the film's final girl, Theda; she does not fully survive the ordeal. In her discussion of the typical victims of slasher films, Clover notes "Postcoital death, above all when the circumstances are illicit, is a staple of the genre" (33). All the young women in *Habitaciones* already have engaged in intercourse, so not only is their survival doubtful, but also the possibility of any final girl emerging unscathed (again, Theda's eyes are stabbed out at the film's conclusion).

The film's projects a national allegory about abortion linked with a city-country binary, which, in turn, is linked with a gender binary: male/country and female/city. These binaries rest on a fixing of locations and gender identities. According to Massey, multiple identities of place exist while with the identities hold different meanings for different people (121-122). In *Habitaciones*, multiplicity is reduced to create the binary that holds for most of the film. For the males of San Ramón, the country is a lawless space beyond governmental reach that accords them freedom to murder and provides a means of financial survival. As the town preacher Horacio (Óscar Ponce) states to Theda towards the end of the film, besides killing the young women from the city seeking abortion, the men take the money intended for their abortions and use it to support the economically depressed town. If one contrasts San Ramón's men with the

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information on legislative attacks on women's access to abortion, see Erik Eckholm's article in *The New York Times* entitled "Across the Country, Lawmakers Push Abortion Curbs."

solitary, urban female seeking an illegal abortion, the country reveals itself as a brazenly sinister landscape with a metaphoric dimension to it.

Referencing Lukinbeal's taxonomy again, cinematic landscape may acquire a metaphoric facet. Lukinbeal makes the distinction between small and large metaphors, with small metaphors acting similar to "rhetoric devices or literary tropes [... which] naturalize cultural stereotypes about landscape" (13) and large ones "structuring research paradigms" (14).<sup>143</sup> *Habitaciones* uses the city-country binary as a small metaphor that structures the relationship between the film's onscreen rural landscape and the largely off screen urban landscape. Bogliano's film inevitably taps into Sarmiento's *civilización y barbarie* dichotomy which juxtaposed an enlightened Buenos Aires with its surrounding rural areas. For Sarmiento, both the land itself and its inhabitants constitute a savagery beyond the confines of the city: "To the south and the north, savages lurk, waiting for moonlit nights to descend, like a pack of hyenas, on the herds that graze the countryside, and on defenseless settlements. [...] If it is not the proximity of savages that worries the man of the countryside, it is the fear of a tiger stalking him, of a viper he might step on" (46).

*Habitaciones'* conception of space not only resembles that of Sarmiento's, but also with other representations of the city-country binary in Argentine cultural production and, as stated above, in horror films from other national traditions.<sup>144</sup> As Ana Laura Lusnich states in her introduction to a collection of essays entitled *Civilización y barbarie en el cine argentino y latinoamericano*, "[d]esde 1845, fecha de la publicación del *Facundo* de Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, *civilización y barbarie* se han constituido en conceptos clave no solo en las explicaciones de los procesos históricos y culturales sino también en la producción de textos

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<sup>143</sup>Lukinbeal borrows the distinction large and small metaphors from an entry entitled 'metaphor' in Johnston, Gregory, Pratt, and Watts's *Dictionary of Human Geography*.

<sup>144</sup>One can also take into account other film genres such as westerns and road movies.

artísticos” (“Since 1845, the publication date of Domingo Faustino Sarmiento’s *Facundo, civilization and barbarity* has constituted a key concept not only in historical and cultural explanations, but also in artistic production”; 13). With specific attention given to Argentine cinema, the collection of essays edited by Lusnich attests to the persistence of the *civilización y barbarie* dichotomy in national cinema ranging from *Nobleza Gaucha* / “Gaucho Nobility” (Humberto Cairo, Ernesto Gunche, Eduardo Martínez de la Pera, 1915) to *El bonarense* / *El bonarense* (Pablo Trapero, 2002).

*Habitaciones*, of course, offers its own projection of Sarmiento’s binary. In *Habitaciones*, the country and its inhabitants create a threatening cinematic landscape that is predetermined by the slasher genre. The cinematic landscape of any slasher is hardly a pleasant place. As Clover and Nowell intimated above in their general descriptions of the slasher, the Terrible Place (mansion or summer camp) is paramount to the genre as it enables a killer to carry out his or her designs. The rural setting of *Habitaciones* is neither a site in which a hero sets out to prove his valor in battle, nor a placid refuge from the city’s stresses as in *El Viento se llevó lo que* / “Wind with the Gone” (Alejandro Agresti, 1998). Instead, the Argentine countryside is menacing, lurking, and ominous precisely because the narrative is focalized through young women seeking abortions in a slasher film, a genre which dictates a cinematic landscape to be a menace. The film’s formalist characteristics – ominous music, high contrast lighting, claustrophobic camera angles, and tight onscreen spaces – render the Argentine countryside a Terrible Place that is gendered masculine, particularly a hostile and misogynistic mode of masculinity.

The Argentine countryside as a masculine space is a counterpoint to a feminine city. The young women from Buenos Aires and La Plata are generally urbane, at least more so than their

rural male counterparts. One of the women, Silvia, studies filmmaking in La Plata and talks to Néstor about the merits of contemporary Argentine cinema, while Néstor relates how religion replaced the town cinema long ago. The country/male and city/female binary is reinforced in dialogue: all the urban women express unease or even hatred for the country. Horacio, San Ramón's preacher, remarks that everyone who comes from the city is an atheist. In contrast to the rural males, the young women simultaneously represent an urban space and a sensibility characterized by a supposed lack of religion.

Screen violence, specifically the kinds of violence used by male and female characters, further cements the city/female and rural/male binary. The most graphic incidents transpire within the brothers' mansion, a labyrinthine interior space in which violence looms for the different heroines. The screen violence is gendered male by its aggression and graphic nature. Silvia is decapitated, Ruth is hacked to death, and Lydia is shot in the head by Maxi. The film's feminine violence, in contrast, is purely defensive in that the women fight back against their various assailants for the sake of survival.

The mansion seems to be the primary site of violence, yet the violence is hardly contained within its walls. The misogyny evolves into a widely enveloping threat that encompasses not a single house, but rather an entire town and countryside. If Theda and Elena manage to escape from the house, there will be no refuge since the entire town is involved killing young women seeking abortions. The elderly train station attendant pretends to telephone the police, but the line is cut. Theda, however, temporarily saves herself from a pursuing mob by answering the church telephone and informing her father of her pregnancy, and her decision to keep the baby. She relays that Horacio, the town preacher, will drive her home to Buenos Aires, a potential safe haven.

City-country, however, are not separate spaces. In the case of *Habitaciones*, the two spaces are conjoined through a circulation of violence that mirrors the circulation of a misogynistic religion. Soon after stepping out of the car and meeting her father on a sidewalk, Theda notices a church across the street from her apartment and hears the militant chants of “¡Arde! ¡Arde!” (“Burn! Burn!”) similar to what she heard in San Ramón. Within moments, Theda’s father is killed in the streets of Buenos Aires by an unseen assailant, and Theda’s eyes are stabbed. She falls on the sidewalk as a crowd gathers around and blood pours from her face. Theda’s survival as a maimed final girl speaks to a hopelessness of political action to change abortion laws in Argentina in the face of a powerful Catholic church.<sup>145</sup> A town of zealots collectively represent the unrelenting killer present in many slasher films, who breaks through windows and doors, all the while evading the authorities. In light of *Habitaciones*’ allegorical depiction of abortion in Argentina, violence against women seeking abortion appears ubiquitous and constant in that neither city nor country affords refuge.

### **BIKINI KILL: MASCULINE AND FEMININE VIOLENCE IN *36 PASOS***

*36 Pasos* performs a similar negation of Sarmiento’s city-country binary through a circulation of violence. Six young women (Priscila, Violeta, Marilú, Pilar, Flor, and Emilia played by Priscila Rauto, Andrea Duarte, Melisa Fernández, Noelia Balbo, Priscila Caldera, and Ariana Marchioni, respectively) all attended the same childhood school. The women are kidnapped from various places (a parking garage, an apartment, a country road, a parking lot outside a school, and a stadium) and taken to an isolated rural home. There, they are forced to obey a regiment of rules based upon obligatory fun, “armonía” (“harmony”), and “coexistencia,”

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<sup>145</sup> According to a report written by Nina Zamberlin for [despenalización.org.ar](http://despenalización.org.ar), a group dedicated to the legalization of abortion in Argentina, since 1984 some 30 bills have been proposed to decriminalize abortion in all or some circumstances. None of bills has been adopted.



(“coexistence”) along with other rules we learn at the film’s end spoken in a voiceover by Pilar: “Tengo que aprender a callar. Tengo que tolerar. Tengo que escuchar. Tengo que ceder. Toda coexistencia armónica” (“I have to be quiet. I have to tolerate. I have to listen. I have to yield. All a harmonious coexistence.”). The family of a former classmate, Tamara, who the six young women bullied in grade school, perpetrates the kidnappings. *36 Pasos* foregrounds female vengeance, and Tamara’s family subjects the young women to a twisted game of survival. In addition to adhering to the rules during their captivity, the women must wear bikinis, prepare a birthday party for Tamara, and maim or ‘discipline’ one another with poison or other means if they are to have any chance of surviving. Tamara eventually arrives to the country home pretending to be another young woman (Lucia) and takes her place among the others in order to carry out the final parts of an intricate and vengeful plot. Only one girl survives, Pilar, and, at the film’s end, she is forced to remain with the family and partake in a macabre birthday celebration for Tamara.

*36 Pasos* does not exclusively fit into the slasher subgenre, although the film exhibits a number of slasher elements. Young women are subject to extreme violence through weapons such as a chainsaw, branding iron, sledgehammer, and butcher knife. The house, or rather property, to which the women are confined is a Terrible Place par excellence situated in a rural space without cell phone coverage. Tamara’s family is a warped collective consisting of a domineering mother, a physically imposing but childlike brother, a sadistic sister, and a reserved but vicious uncle. Finally, although Clover and other academic critics generally have overlooked how the slasher narrative often revolves around a holiday,<sup>146</sup> Tamara’s birthday as a key event is

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<sup>146</sup>Slasher films that revolve around holidays are numerous and include *Black Christmas*, *Halloween*, *My Bloody Valentine* (George Milhaka, 1981), *Happy Birthday to Me*, *Graduation*

an additional nod to the slasher genre. Thus, I situate *36 Pasos* in the slasher subgenre because of its use of some slasher motifs.

Akin to *Habitaciones*, *36 Pasos* acquires its *argentinidad* in different ways. The actors' Argentine accents and slang, along with the majority of diegetic and non-diegetic music, help to anchor the cinematic landscape to Argentina. Actors' allusions to former president Juan Perón and musicians Sandro and Leonardo Favio also highlight the film's national origins. Finally, while not national icons in the sense of the Obelisco or the Casa Rosada in Buenos Aires, images of Estadio Jorge Luis Hirschi, the stadium of the soccer club Estudiantes in La Plata, and buildings emblazoned with the words 'La Plata,' at times render the film's cinematic landscape a recognizable place. Similar to *Habitaciones*, *36 Pasos* juxtaposes a generic countryside with some specific urban places. The film's rural cinematic landscape lacks any geographical realism beyond being "dos horas de la ciudad" ("two hours from the city") outside Buenos Aires.

Cultural references aside, the city-country binary reminiscent of the *civilización y barbarie* binary remains at work, albeit in muted form in relation to Bogliano's other film previously discussed. *36 Pasos* lacks the sharp and reiterated contrasts between city and country that appear in *Habitaciones*. No pronounced generalizations about country dwellers and inhabitants of the city are present. There is no corresponding binary between city-country and masculine-feminine. The country nevertheless occasionally is gendered as a misogynistic space in which women are either reduced to prostitutes or captives. At the film's outset, two young men from the city are driving in the countryside at night in search of a bordello spoken about by one of the young men's grandfathers. The men tease each other, tell jokes, and poke fun at each other's mothers. While the country operates as a site for potential sexual adventures for the

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*Day, April Fool's Day* (Fred Walton, 1986), *Silent Night, Deadly Night* (Charles E. Sellier Jr., 1984), and *You Better Watch Out* (Lewis Jackson, 1980).

young men, the space takes on a historical dimension when one character references Juan Perón and Argentine industrialization. According to the young man, the bordello is left over from the 1940s during which truck drivers would drive to different factories in the countryside and would frequent prostitutes. The countryside was and, given the expectations of the men, remains a place in which sexual relationships with women are merely a question of money. When the men accidentally hit a bikini-clad woman fleeing from Tamara's family's house with their car, the men's sexual desire appears thwarted. Assuming the point-of-view of one young man, the camera passes over the young woman's dismembered body and pauses briefly on an exposed breast. Soon afterwards the two young men get back into the car and leave the woman for dead. While one voices his opinion that his grandfather was correct about the brothel's existence, Tamara's brother steps out onto the road from a cornfield. The country is thus cast as a perilous space for women. In the country, they are expendable either for sex or a game of vengeance.

The Argentine countryside is cast again as a hostile, misogynistic place through a recurring non-diegetic song and its accompanying images. At various points during *36 Pasos*, the soundtrack contains a slightly out of tune guitar slowly strumming the nursery rhyme "Diez Indiancitos" with lyrics in Spanish: "Uno, dos, tres indiecitos" ("One, two, three little Indians"). As the music plays, one sees images of the young women engaged in obligatory fun such as playing with a water hose or swimming. Another instance in which the song is played in the latter half of the film, the accompanying images are more dire. The kidnapped women sit together in an open yard with their hands bound and heads covered by white hoods.

This sequence invokes the historical violence committed in the Argentine countryside, namely state violence against indigenous inhabitants and the kidnapping and captivity of white women by indigenous tribes. Hearing "Diez indiecitos" over images of the Argentine

countryside recalls the military campaigns of the nineteenth-century such as *La conquista del desierto* that decimated rural indigenous communities in Patagonia, which broke apart indigenous families by selling their children and women to urban families, as well as forced the military conscription of indigenous men into Argentina's military.<sup>147</sup> While similar policies were carried out elsewhere in the country, the Argentine countryside was surely a site of extermination and colonization. Yet, the allusion in *36 Pasos* grows more complicated with an ostensible link between victim and victimizer. During raids into cities and settlements, indigenous groups often kidnapped white women. With Tamara's family's incursions into the city of La Plata to kidnap their daughter's former classmates, the rural family links themselves to the nation's indigenous.

Forging a connection between country residents and Native Americans is a common motif in U.S. horror cinema and, as with other elements of the genre, may be familiar to U.S. viewers. As Clover notes, the "mountain family" in *The Hills Have Eyes* and "redneck clans" in the various installments of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, *Hunter's Blood* (Robert C. Hughes, 1986), and *Deliverance* resemble Native Americans, or caricatures of Native Americans, in U.S. cinema, in costume, acting, and displacement of rural denizens in the name of development (134-137). Irrespective of horror, the "Diez indiecitos" sequences also recall U.S. policies of indigenous tribal extermination and colonization as well as indigenous capturing of white women.<sup>148</sup> *36 Pasos* not only invokes a specific chapter in Argentine history, but also recalls a comparable chapter in U.S. history.

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<sup>147</sup>See Carlos Martínez Sarasola's *Nuestros paisanos los indios* (1992).

<sup>148</sup>See Richard Slotkin's *Regeneration through Violence: the Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860*.

One may be tempted to ask metaphorically who is white and who is indigenous in *36 Pasos*. Before answering, however, we must acknowledge the blurring that takes place among different groups. In *Captive Women*, Susana Rotker argues that the official Argentine discourse of whitening historically omits the presence of indigenous, Afro-Argentines, and captive white women. She describes the ways in which a captive woman's body functions as a site where indigenous and white cultures converge. For Rotker, "the body of the captive is the place of encounter, of contagion, of confrontation and defeat, of racial mixing, of questioning the official discourse, about the 'reality' of the other side" (125). A similar convergence occurs in *36 Pasos*, although, as discussed above, the historical blurring between white and indigenous cultures does not hinge exclusively on the bodies of Tamara's classmates. The captive women's bodies in Bogliano's film are only one historical layer among many. The indigenous-like kidnappings of white women committed by a rural family, the use of "Diez indiecitos," and the images of the Argentine countryside all enable a dizzying rewriting of history which resists an easy disentanglement.

The screen violence in *36 Pasos* reinforces the violent dimension of the rural cinematic landscape. However, both males and females commit violence, which, as in *Habitaciones*, broaches the question of gendered forms of violence based on performativity. Violence sometimes has been construed as the sole prerogative of males. According to Hillary Neroni, "[s]erving as a fundamental signifier of masculinity, we not only consider violence more the province of men than women, but it is also an activity that inevitably enhances a man's masculinity as much as it would conversely detract from a woman's femininity" (42). While Neroni's point is certainly valid, gendered forms of violence are more variegated in slasher films, and the genre creates its own expectations for it. Screen violence committed by a male killer

hardly constitutes a surprise, while the defensive violence of the final girl is another staple of the genre.<sup>149</sup> Sometimes operating as a nuance, the possibility of a female killer further undermines absolutist notions of gendered violence, specifically the idea that women are incapable of aggression. Violence gendered as masculine or feminine in a slasher film depending on any number of factors, particularly the performative aspect, with regards to weapons, and/or causes of violence.

The gendered forms of violence in *36 Pasos* gives Bogliano's film a specificity vis-à-vis slasher films from elsewhere and projects a national allegory about gender relations and patriarchy that is relevant in other countries, including the United States. The presence of violent women, however, gives the film an Argentine specificity and allegorizes the increasing role of women in Argentine society, albeit tinged with a pessimistic skepticism. Cristina Fernández de Kirchner's assumption of the Argentine presidency and, Felisa Miceli's and Nilda Garré's appointments as economic and defense ministers before Kirchner's election, respectively, represent symbolic gains for women in Argentine society. Symbolic gains have not necessarily translated into a wave of women taking institutional leadership roles (Di Marco). Bogliano's film questions whether the prominent role of women in Argentine society indicates change in the patriarchal system – a question relevant to U.S. society as well – or rather, whether business proceeds as usual.

Business as usual, or the functioning patriarchy, is largely investigated through gendered screen violence. In *36 Pasos*, aggressive masculine violence sets up the vengeful game through kidnapping. Within the context of Tamara's family's house, masculine violence also regulates

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<sup>149</sup>Slasher films with aggressive female killers include *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>* (Sean Cunningham, 1980), *Happy Birthday to Me*, *Graduation Day*, and *Haute Tension/High Tension* (Alexandre Aja, 2003).

and ensures the realization of the revenge plot. Males discipline the women through violence. Tamara's brother and uncle are stationed in a shack close to the house where the women are held captive. While we never see any video cameras suggesting surveillance, the captive women reside in a panopticon.<sup>150</sup> When one of the women, Violeta, dismisses the game and its rules and announces her intention to escape, Tamara's brother quickly enters the house and viciously knocks her in the head with a sledgehammer.

Feminine violence in the film, on the other hand, grows more aggressive and graphic as the film progresses to its chaotic end during which any notion of gendered violence is upended. For most of the film, occasional bullying among the kidnapped young women is the extent of the feminine violence. They bicker over who is to perform certain chores. The women periodically find envelopes around the house containing commands to do certain tasks or instructions about where to find objects such as bullets, foreshadowing an ominous conclusion. Their arguing aside, the feminine violence remains within acceptable societal norms. Returning to Neroni, who comments on U.S. society in the nineteenth-century, "[p]oisoning was acceptable because it was ladylike; it was (theoretically) nonviolent" (65). On two occasions, Marilú is ordered to place poison in another captive's, Priscila's, food and drink, an act that remains within the realm of feminine violence.

If bullying and poisoning early on in the film conform to expectations of feminine violence, the conclusion of *36 Pasos* foils any expectations for a slasher film. In slashers feminine violence is often legitimated through defense against a male assailant (Dika 129). The male assailant is frequently absent in Bogliano's film. Concomitant with the arrival of Tamara,

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<sup>150</sup>The late eighteenth-century philosopher and social theorist Jeremy Bentham designed the panopticon as an architectural structure intended for use as a prison. The objective was that all prisoners could be seen, although those same prisoners could not discern if they were being watched.

the violence among and against the captive women is ramped up. Marilú poisons Priscila while Tamara's brother chops off Emilia's finger as punishment to reign in Tamara's feigned ignorance of the house's rules. Marilú then attempts to spray cleaner in Emilia's eyes, and Pilar knocks Marilú in the head with the ceramic toilet lid. When Marilú recovers and finds a gun in the toilet's cistern, the violence reaches a crescendo, and soon the entire 'game' descends into violent anarchy. Marilú begins to wildly fire the pistol at her fellow captives. The brother takes Emilia to a shed and, in a particularly gruesome scene, brands her mouth. Soon afterwards, Emilia finds a chainsaw, cuts into Marilú, and then seeks out her captors only to be deterred by Tamara's sister holding a rifle. Emilia eventually realizes Tamara's actual identity and seeks her out as well only to be killed by Pilar who shoots Emilia with a nail gun. Pilar, however, also realizes Tamara's identity, but only after killing Emilia.

Aggressive feminine violence violates a system of gendered violence established at previous points in the film, in which masculine violence maintains the course of events and the unfolding of an intricate plot. The epitome of the system's disturbance occurs when Tamara's uncle flees into the cornfields at the sight of Emilia and her chainsaw. Emilia's and Marilú's actions achieve a violence previously reserved for the brother and uncle. The enraged female figures bring to mind Neroni's comments that horror films from the seventies (e.g., *Halloween*) and eighties (e.g., *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (Wes Craven, 1984)) "can only imagine a woman as capable of violence if she is entirely enraged, and this anger can only occur when she is tortured, violated, and pushed into a state of total fright" (31).

*36 Pasos* traces an upward curve of feminine screen violence that progresses from bullying and poison to guns and chainsaws. The captive women are indeed pushed into an enraged state, but by whom? The feminine violence is neither committed against a male



aggressor nor wielded purely as defense. Instead, Bogliano's film is a critique of patriarchy, albeit a patriarchy lacking a visible male head. The kidnapped women are forced to wear bikinis, to perform a synchronized dance reminiscent of an MTV video, and to obey a system of rules that effectively renders them passive. Through flashbacks to the women's lives prior to their kidnapping, most are ambitious in their careers, school, or athletic teams. Violence, nevertheless, is not entirely beyond the women. During a flashback to Marilú's kidnapping, we see her working as a party organizer. When an employee refuses to wear a bikini and jump out of a cake because she does not want to degrade herself, Marilú browbeats her into complying with her wishes. Marilú exhibits an internalized patriarchy that permits a kind of feminine violence (i.e., bullying) and objectification of women for her own ends, namely her job.

The idea of patriarchy without a male figurehead is reiterated in a particular harrowing sequence three-quarters the way through *36 Pasos*. After Priscila and Emilia talk about their vague memories of Tamara, the scene cuts to a sequence in which the kidnapped women are nude and bound in a device that fits around their necks and holds their wrists. Strobe-like lighting illuminates the scene, and the camera cuts to different images of the bound women. Tamara's sister appears holding various signs that read "SILENCIO" ("SILENCE") and "OBEDIENCIA" ("OBEDIENCE"), and Tamara's brother wields a sledgehammer and also makes whipping gestures, as if the kidnapped women are being tamed. At the end of sequence, Tamara's sister holds a sign that reads "FELICIDAD" ("HAPPINESS"), and the women must repeat the words on the sign and hold a smile to be set free. While it may be construed that the women are being trained to conform to some kind of patriarchal conception of women as passive, the male figurehead in the sequence, Tamara's brother, is not in charge. Low camera

angles give Tamara's mother an imposing stature, and she emerges as the ultimate authority who wields power within the family structure.

Declaring patriarchy as the ultimate cause of violence is complicated within the family's house. No male figure exercises control over the vengeful plot. At best, the brother and uncle serve more as enforcers, while Tamara and her mother occupy more commanding, albeit obscured, roles. Tamara and her mother direct the rules of the game, and the male figures ensure the game's direction by extreme acts. Tamara and her mother impose patriarchy for the sake of vengeance against the kidnapped women for their actions against Tamara years earlier. As leaders of the plot, the mother and daughter help kidnap, brutalize, subjugate, and objectify the other women without ever actually performing a violent act. Yet, both male and female figures perform masculine and feminine kinds of violence. Tamara's brother and the kidnapped women commit the most extreme (i.e., masculine) acts. The film's violence creates a spectrum of feminine and masculine forms of violence. Masculine forms of violence committed by women against other women constitute the film's climax and the climax of a vengeful plot. Feminine vengeance against other women is consummated through masculine violence.

## CONCLUSION

*Habitaciones* and *36 Pasos* engage with binaries of gender and landscape that can be traced to either national myths and/or the slasher genre. The films allegorize those binaries, in addition to undermining the supposed polarities by providing a unique take on the city/country and masculine/feminine violence dichotomies. If violence links the city and country in *Habitaciones*, in *36 Pasos*, the country becomes a site in which feminine and masculine violence appears ostensibly identical. The nixing of such binaries gives Bogliano's films a particularity that frequently acquires a national dimension. It does not necessarily shut out U.S. audiences,

but merely indicates the film's different layers of reception depending on a viewer's location, or more interestingly, a viewer's attention to and awareness of national and cultural contexts.

*Habitaciones* and *36 Pasos* both conform to generic criteria of the slasher and possess a level of specificity distinct from slasher films from elsewhere. This conformity and specificity highlight the ways certain horror subgenres have achieved a transnational status akin to other more esteemed film genres like the western and film noir. The distribution of Bogliano's films, as well as those of other Argentine horror directors, in markets outside Argentina, reinforces a horror exchange circuit between Argentina and the United States. However small, the presence of Argentine horror cinema in U.S. markets suggests the traffic in horror cinema moves both ways. If screen violence is crucial to horror and slasher genres and binds city and country in Bogliano's films, it also binds Argentine and U.S. national markets, which suggests that violence is part of horror's transnational appeal, a topic that I will explore in the conclusion.

## CHAPTER 5

### IS IT THERE?: SPECTERS OF THE DIRTY IN ARGENTINE HORROR CINEMA AND SPECTERS OF HORROR IN DIRTY WAR CINEMA

Over the course of the last three chapters, I have articulated the ways in which some Argentine horror films allegorize political, socioeconomic, and cultural crises in both Argentina and the United States. While stylized violence helps to make an Argentine horror film a horror film, that same violence can likewise be crucial in allegorizing crises in both countries. By projecting crises unfolding in or associated with two national spaces, allegorical screen violence is able to show a multiplicity of national crises through allegorical reception. Film violence can be allegorical on a basic level. To recall Tambling's definition from chapter one, allegory is often "saying one thing and meaning another" (56).<sup>151</sup> Argentine horror film violence, as I have argued, can say one thing and mean another thing for different audiences in different countries. One example, zombie violence in *Zona mutante*, can allude to both the violence that erupted in response neoliberal policies as well as the violence of the War on Terror.

Argentine horror cinema's capacity to allegorize multiple national crises nevertheless confronts an obstacle that potentially obstructs the polysemous nature of allegory: the country's Dirty War (1976-1983). While Argentina was besieged by a climate of violence committed by both left and right-wing factions at the time, a military junta seized power on March 24, 1976

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<sup>151</sup>As noted in the first chapter, cinema's allegorical capacity has been examined by numerous scholars. With specific regards to contemporary Argentine cinema, Joanna Page's *Crisis and Capitalism in Contemporary Argentine Cinema*, Gonzalo Aguilar's *Otros mundos*, and Gabriela Copertari's *Desintegración y justicia en el cine argentino contemporáneo* all employ allegory as a mode of examining the content of select films.

and instituted what they referred to as *el Proceso de reorganización nacional* (“The National Reorganization Process”), or *el Proceso*, for short. The military employed brutal policies of kidnapping, clandestine detention, systematic torture, and murder against those suspicious of undermining the junta’s objectives. The dictatorship’s tactics resulted in some 30,000 deaths, and with the consequences of the Dirty War reverberate today on numerous fronts.<sup>152</sup>

Various causes can influence and shape viewers’ horizons of expectation for Argentine horror cinema. First, critics, including myself, endow horror cinema with a capacity to allegorize crises. This tendency is present in contemporary scholarship on horror cinema. Adam Lowenstein’s recent book *Shocking Representation: Historical Trauma, National Cinema, and the Modern Horror Film* locates national traumas through allegorical moments in horror films from Germany, Japan, the United States, Canada, and Great Britain. For Lowenstein, “the modern horror film may well be the genre of our time that registers most brutally the legacies of historical trauma” (“Shocking Representation” 10). In the case of Argentine horror cinema, the country’s most tragic, documented, and perhaps well-known contemporary crisis – the Dirty War – might be considered an automatic or inevitable allegory in an Argentine horror film. The deaths of some 30,000 people at the hands of a brutal military dictatorship transpired in the recent past, and such a large scale national trauma seems a likely candidate for narrativization in the country’s horror cinema.

The term “horizon of expectation” used above comes from Hans Robert Jauss’s *Towards an Aesthetic of Reception* and his discussion of literary genres. For Jauss, “A literary work, even when it appears to be new, does not present itself as something absolutely new in an

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<sup>152</sup>The legacy of the Dirty War continues in various ways, such as converting former torture centers into museums, the trials of a scant number of military officials and the immunity given to others, and the discovery of some young people that, upon birth, were taken from their captured parents and given to military families.

informational vacuum, but predisposes its audience to a very specific kind of reception by announcements, overt and covert signals, familiar characteristics, or implicit allusions” (23).

While a single text can conform or alter the border of a genre, a horizon of expectation alludes to a reader’s preconceived assumptions about a text due to its belonging to one or more genres. In a novel of detective fiction, one expects in the very least, a detective figure and a crime that instigates an investigation. The horizon of expectation that Argentine horror cinema refers to the Dirty War does not and cannot solely hinge on national horror cinema. Neither a tradition of national horror films alluding to the Dirty War, nor a corpus of criticism within academia and among film critics and fans has established such a horizon. I will argue that a particular horizon of expectation is thus shaped by any number of factors: horror cinema and horror cinema criticism from elsewhere (e.g. Lowenstein), legacies and memory practices about the Dirty War, the Argentine government’s use of national cinema as a memory practice, and the ways in which viewers in other countries see Argentine cinema. A viewer’s horizon of expectation thus can be shaped by both national and global factors, a dynamic which correlates with the national and transnational dimension of this project.

Argentine cinema’s international reputation can easily foster the belief that Argentine horror cinema automatically allegorizes the Dirty War. In *Cinematic Tango*, Tamara Falicov describes how director Manuel Antín’s appointment as director of the *Instituto Nacional de Cinematografía* in 1983 initiated a program in which Argentine cinema acted as a catharsis for national audiences following the end of the dictatorship and as an “ambassador [that] would help revitalize the [country’s] image as a newly democratic and free country” for audiences abroad (48).<sup>153</sup> The domestic and foreign successes of films from the 1980s such as *Camila/Camila*

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<sup>153</sup> *Instituto Nacional de Cinematografía* was renamed INCAA in 1994.

(María Luisa Bemberg, 1984), *La noche de los lápices/The Night of the Pencils* (Héctor Olivera, 1986), and *La historia oficial/The Official Story* (Luis Puenzo, 1985), the last of which received an Oscar for best foreign film, can inform a narrow conception of contemporary Argentine cinema that it is thematically dominated by the Dirty War. Although the Dirty War as a theme would eventually recede,<sup>154</sup> Argentine cinema since the 1980s, and even films and literature from non-Argentine filmmakers and authors, reinforce the conception that contemporary Argentine cinema inevitably deals with the Dirty War.<sup>155</sup>

Although the film is an Argentine drama rather than a horror film, A.O. Scott's 2009 review of Lucrecia Martel's *La mujer sin cabeza/The Headless Woman* (2008) in *The New York Times* illustrates the perception that all Argentine cinema pertains to the Dirty War. In Martel's film, an upper-class middle-aged woman believes she has run over a boy while driving in the country. However, no evidence confirms the woman's belief, and she subsequently suffers from memory loss and becomes aloof. Scott cites Martel's comment that her film is "about Argentina's refusal to acknowledge a widening economic disparity between the middle and lower class," while Scott himself proposes that the movie is "a meditation on Argentina's

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<sup>154</sup>See, for instance, the afterword in John King's *Magical Reels: A History of Cinema in Latin America*.

<sup>155</sup>Films such as *Kamchatka/Kamchatka* (Marcelo Piñeyro), *Los rubios/"The Blondes"* (Albertina Carri, 2003), *Garage Olimpo/"Olimpo Garage"* (Marco Bechis, 1999), and *Sur/"South"* (Fernando Solanas, 1988) are just a handful of movies by Argentine directors that deal with the last dictatorship. As for cultural production beyond Argentina's borders, Carlos Saura's *Tango* (1998), Martin Donovan's *Apartment Zero* (1988), Chris Hampton's *Imagining Argentina* (2003), which is based on Lawrence Thornton's novel of the same name, and Nathan Englander's novel *Ministry of Special Cases* (2009) all use Argentina's Dirty War as a substantial part of the narrative. Carlos Saura is Spanish, Chris Hampton is British, and Lawrence Thornton and Nathan Englander are both from the U.S. Martin Donovan constitutes a special case of transnational ties, something that is reflected in *Apartment Zero*'s content: the film is set in Buenos Aires, has English-language dialogue, and stars Colin Firth, a British actor. Donovan was born in Argentina but has worked extensively in Italy.

historical memory of the Dirty War.” His interpretation is not wrong, *per se*.<sup>156</sup> Nevertheless, his linking Martel’s film with the Dirty War reveal how the conflict can overdetermine a viewer’s reading of an Argentine film, especially a viewer outside Argentina. Argentine horror cinema, particularly those films distributed outside the country, can be subjected to the similar expectation that the Dirty War inevitably manifests itself in a national horror film; first, for being Argentine in some way, and, second, given Lowenstein’s comments about horror cinema and trauma, for being a horror film.

A personal anecdote further underscores a horizon of expectation that considers Argentine horror cinema an inevitable allegorization of the Dirty War. In the summer of 2007, I attended a Robert Flaherty Film Seminar on Latin American and African cinema. After one of many film screenings, a fellow participant asserted, “All Argentine cinema has to do with the Dirty War.” I was a bit startled by the sweeping generalization and mentally ran through a catalogue of Argentine movies that had no such connection. Despite the fallacy of my colleague’s claim, this chapter is intended to refute, complicate, and at least problematize the contention that the Dirty War blankets Argentine cinema, specifically a genre of national cinema that might be considered ideal for allegorizing national traumas.

In the first half of this chapter, I examine select scenes from three Argentine horror films distributed in the United States. I consider how the Dirty War may or may not appear onscreen as well as the interpretative pitfalls of privileging the Dirty War over other allegorical readings that I have outlined in the previous chapters (paranoia, neoliberalism, city-country binaries, etc.).

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<sup>156</sup>As Maristella Svampa, as well as others, has noted, the last dictatorship’s opening of the economy to foreign investors and the deregulation of particular industries marked the first implementations of neoliberal policies (Svampa 22-23). Scott’s remarks, however, are not concerned with growing economic or social inequalities, but rather the memory of the dictatorship.



The temptation to locate the Dirty War in a national horror film hinges on moments that appear to evoke the conflict through depictions resembling actual occurrences under the dictatorship. However, those instances in which the Dirty War appears to make a fleeting appearance, through kidnappings for example, are simultaneously mainstays of the contemporary horror cinema genre. Dynamics of prohibition, saturation, and generational differences among Argentine audiences further problematizes the idea that Argentine horror cinema is about the Dirty War. A viewer is thus faced with the dilemma of gauging whether particular moments in the films are allegorical moments about the Dirty War, an adherence to contemporary horror cinema conventions, both, or neither.

Ultimately, I argue that Argentine horror cinema does not automatically and exclusively project the Dirty War. Instead, it projects multiple crises (e.g., fears of urban violence, neoliberalism, etc.), one of which can be the Dirty War. In the chapter's second half, I analyze Adriano Caetano's *Crónica de una fuga/Chronicle of an Escape* (2006), a film explicitly anchored during Argentina's last dictatorship and often classified as a drama. I use Caetano's film to turn on its head the question of whether and how the Dirty War appears in national horror films. Rather than asking whether, if, and how the Dirty War manifests itself in an Argentine horror film, I ask how horror appears in a Dirty War film, while investigating what is at stake in terms of the film's invocation of horror cinema codes.

### **SOMETIMES A KIDNAPPING IS JUST A KIDNAPPING: EVASIONS AND ERUPTIONS OF THE DIRTY WAR IN ARGENTINE HORROR CINEMA**

In a 1994 essay entitled "El cine del Proceso: Estética de la muerte" ("The Cinema of the Process: Aesthetic of Death"), Sergio Wolf analyzes various ways in which the Dirty War manifests itself in movies produced during the last dictatorship. Wolf alludes to various "códigos de significación" ("codes of signification"; 268) in the films' mise-en-scène, themes,

theme songs, and characters as ways in which the Dirty War is projected in films made during the dictatorship. The recurrent themes of confinement, silence, nostalgia for the past, films with didactic lessons, and the images of factions (as in Emilio Vieyra's *Comandos azules*/"Blue Commandos"), among other elements, allegorize what was happening under the Dirty War.



Fig. 8. In a dream sequence in *Jennifer's Shadow*, Jennifer finds herself bound to a bed.

Similar to films made during the last dictatorship, some Argentine horror films ostensibly allegorize the Dirty War through their resemblance of what actually transpired some thirty-five years ago. Daniel de la Vega and Pablo Parés's *Jennifer's Shadow* features a scene in which Jennifer is strapped to a bed and her innards are eaten by a raven. Jennifer reads passages aloud from "The Raven" one evening before falling asleep.<sup>157</sup> She shuts her eyes and an unseen force is set into motion. Ominous music sets in, Jennifer's bedroom door opens, and the lighting takes on more defined contrasts. Jennifer reopens her eyes, and both she and the audience remain confounded as to whether she momentarily resides in a dream or not. Upon 'awakening' into a dream, the wooden headboard has been replaced by a metal one, and Jennifer's arms and legs are tethered to four metal bed posts with leather straps. The camera rests above Jennifer in a full

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<sup>157</sup>De la Vega has commented that *Jennifer's Shadow* is an "homage to Poe."

body shot accentuating her powerlessness and cuts to close-ups of Jennifer's bound hands. A raven flies into the frame and lands on Jennifer's stomach and pecks at her belly (see figure 8). Jennifer screams, and, in a rapid sequence of images, we see close-ups of Jennifer screaming and the raven holding pieces of Jennifer's entrails in its beak. The camera's rapid cutting between Jennifer and the raven quickens, yet is interrupted by an image of Jennifer's grandmother standing over a casket with a point-of-view shot from the casket, an image that foreshadows Jennifer's demise at the film's end.<sup>158</sup>

The scene, or, more specifically, parts of the scene, approximates the representations of torture during the *el Proceso*. The last dictatorship used torture in a brutal and widespread fashion. Scores of Argentines, as well as some non-Argentines, were brutally tortured in detention centers. The resemblance between the scene from *Jennifer's Shadow* and the actual torture of thousands stems from the presence of the bed, Jennifer's confinement to it, and her extreme distress. The *Nunca más* ("Never Again") report commissioned by President Raúl Alfonsín upon his election in 1983 is filled with vivid testimonies by people who were subjected to sundry forms of torture, including being severely and repeatedly beaten, waterboarded, shocked with a cattle prod and/or electrodes, and raped. While the methods varied, the authors of the *Nunca más* report boil down the process in which victims were detained and the manner in which they were treated. The authors adduce the experience of "C.G.F.," a married Argentine woman, by noting her abduction at her workplace and then preface the remainder of her testimony with a generalization: "The usual procedure followed – car without markings ... blindfolded ... ending up in an unknown place ... tied to a bed" (45). "C.G.F.," as well as other

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<sup>158</sup>The fleeting shot of the grandmother recalls William Friedkin's terse insertion of images of a devil-like figure in *The Exorcist* (1973) or, more recently, Lars Van Trier's *Antichrist* (2009). The incredibly brief images in *Jennifer's Shadow*, unlike the other films, are more salient to the film's plot by gesturing towards a conclusion.

victims whose testimonies appear in the report, suffered extreme brutality at the hands of her government captors. Jennifer's being bound to a bed and tortured in Buenos Aires ostensibly evokes the torture that occurred during the Dirty War.

Similar references to the Dirty War appear in Bogliano's *36 Pasos* and Demián Rugna's *The Last Gateway*, an English-language film. In the case of *36 Pasos*, the rhetoric of "reglas" ("rules") and "armonía" ("harmony") recalls the military's own discourse of supposedly desired harmony. Although a simplification of its doctrine, the dictatorship sought the reestablishment of national values while invoking a form of Christianity to justify the seizure of power and policies of state terrorism.<sup>159</sup> On the day of the coup on March 24, 1976, the military Junta released a document outlining their objectives. A discourse of harmony or establishment of order is readily apparent. Under a section entitled "Propósito" ("Purpose"), the Junta professed the aim of "restituir los valores esenciales que sirven de fundamento a la conducción integral del Estado [...]" ("[...] restore the essential values that serve as a base for the comprehensive conduct of the State"; García 169). Elsewhere in the same document, the military's leadership also declares its aim for a "[r]elación armónica entre el Estado, el capital y el trabajo, [...]" ("[...] harmonious relationship between the State, capital, and labor"; García 170). In numerous speeches subsequent to the military's seizure of power, the leaders reiterated and underscored a rhetoric of order and harmony. For example, in 1976, Jorge Videla, General Commander of the Army and Argentina's de facto president between 1976 and 1981 spoke of the "[...] reimplantación de la libertad, la moral, el orden, la justicia y el derecho de la República" ("[...]

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<sup>159</sup>I am omitting the junta's views on matters of the economy, as well as a discourse that saw Argentina as a potential victim of international Marxism and, thus, a battleground for the Cold War. For a more comprehensive overview of the intellectual foundations for the military's actions, see Donald C. Hodges's *Argentina's "Dirty War": An Intellectual Biography*.

reimplementation of liberty, morality, order, justice, and law”; García 175). Even with the return of democracy in 1983, Law 22.294/83, which pardoned the military for their brutal actions, mentions “[...] la voluntad sincera de reconciliación y la búsqueda de común de caminos para una armoniosa convivencia” (“[...] the sincere will of reconciliation and the shared search for paths towards a harmonious coexistence”; García 211). “Harmony” seemed consistently to be on the dictatorship’s tongue.

In *36 Pasos*, the rhetoric of harmony, rules, and order is likewise a continuous and explicit theme. In a voice-over at the film’s beginning, Violeta (played by Andrea Duarte) establishes the theme regarding rules: “‘Todo en armonía. Todo gobernado por reglas’” (“‘Everything in harmony. Everything governed by rules’”). Violeta articulates the so-called “reglas de coexistencia” (“rules of coexistence”) throughout the film, reviewing and enumerating all of them at the film’s conclusion: “‘Tengo que aprender a callar. Tengo que tolerar. Tengo que escuchar. Tengo que ceder. Toda coexistencia armónica.’” (“‘I have to be quiet. I have to tolerate. I have to listen. I have to yield. All a harmonious coexistence’”).

*36 Pasos* ostensibly broaches the Dirty War through both abductions and subversion of traditional concepts of family. As described in the previous chapter, the kidnapping of the various women appears to be a family affair. Tami’s brother, mother, sister, and uncle collectively participate in the different kidnappings. Abductions were tragically a common occurrence during the last dictatorship and figure regularly and prominently into the *Nunca más* report. Victims were not only kidnapped from their homes, but also from other sites such as the street, work, and school (*Nunca más* 11).<sup>160</sup> The different places from which the young women

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<sup>160</sup>The government’s *Nunca más* report contains different statistical data regarding abductions and the places in which people were detained. Homes were, by far, the most common places where people were captured (62 %), followed by the street (24.6%), work (7 %), and place of

in *36 Pasos* are abducted (home, school, work, a stadium, a roadway) tenders another resemblance between a film's profilmic events and the methods employed by the last dictatorship.

As for the subversion of family in *36 Pasos*, Judith Filc highlights the various conceptions of family that the last dictatorship promoted. Family became "[...] el único sostén del orden social" ("[...] the unique support of social order"; Filc 45). The family, a unit specifically based on a conservative principles (a father, mother, and children adhering to traditional roles), also acquired a physiological dimension as a "celula de la nación" ("cell of the nation"; Filc 52). Such an idea made the family both protective of and vulnerable to a so-called subversive cancer or infection and allowed for a dichotomy of 'good' and 'bad' families (Filc 52). A good family protected their child from subversive ideas, while a bad family did the opposite by neglecting to protect the child. The family in *36 Pasos* appears a near parody of the military's conception of family. With an absentee father and a murderous and vengeful mode of 'protecting' her (i.e., murdering the bullies and tormentors from the grade school), Tami's family takes the military's notion of a 'good' family to an excessive degree; it is as if the family's love of their daughter is proportional to an accruing body count.

*The Last Gateway* likewise features a character in which allusions to the Dirty War are seemingly apparent. The film relates how Victor (Hugo Halbrich), an ex-priest schooled in the occult, mistakenly opens a gateway to hell on the stomach of his new neighbor, Michael (Rodrigo Aragón). Various monsters and figures either pass through Michael's stomach or appear inexplicably as if Michael's mere presence in a town or space conjures monsters through unseen portals in addition to the one on his midsection.

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study (6 %). 0.4 % of people were disappeared "while legally detained in military, penal or police establishments" (11).

A witch-like figure appears various times in a hotel in the town of Plesentville (sic), to which Michael and his wife Marianne (Salomé Boustani) flee.<sup>161</sup> The witch is pallid and decrepit (see fig. 2), and, as suggested by the thudding sounds that accompany her heavy gait. In a particular misogynistic element that plays on the fear of female reproduction, the witch leaves blood, or some kind of substance, in her wake, and the camera often frames the witch's legs in medium close-up shots showing the liquid splatter down onto the floor from what one assumes to be her womb. She initially appears within the first ten minutes of the film. She lumbers down a flight of stairs in the hotel and moans, "Where is my son?" The witch later appears in Michael and Marianne's room where she levitates and again asks "Where is my son?" Towards the end of the film the hotel attendant, John (Patricio Schwartz), strikes the witch with a bat, and for good measure Marianne also pummels the witch. John and Marianne then drag the witch's body to the basement where she revives herself and threatens Marianne.

The witch in *The Last Gateway*, more specifically her repeated questioning of "Where is my son?" recalls Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo, an icon of the Dirty War. Las Madres were generally the mothers of children and wives of husbands who were disappeared by the dictatorship. In a very public display of defiance and grief, Las Madres marched weekly often carrying photos and demanding to know the whereabouts of family members. The witch in *The Last Gateway* is marked as a bereaved mother in numerous ways. She moans and lumbers about

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<sup>161</sup>Michael and Marianne are pursued by a cult interested in the gate, as well as a priest (Adrián Spinelli), and a man dressed in black (Kevin Schiele), an avatar of evil.

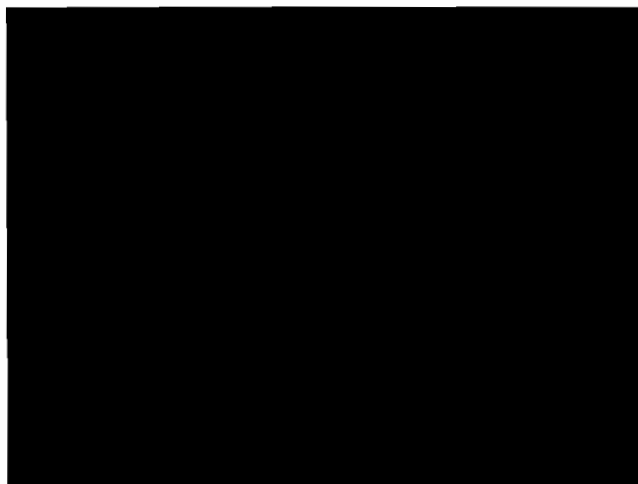


Fig. 9. The abject-mother figure from *The Last Gateway*.

as if grieving heavily. She bleeds from her womb and demands to know her son's whereabouts. Moreover, the witch's repeated appearances in the film recall the repetition of the mothers' protests against the dictatorship despite the military's crackdown on them.

The projection of the Dirty War in the aforementioned scenes appears indisputable by virtue of how the events onscreen resemble the actual events that occurred during the last dictatorship. The figures of a distraught mother, acts of kidnapping, captivity, depictions of the family, and the rhetoric of "harmony" seem to allegorize the Dirty War through analogy. The correspondences between the actual acts of violence that occurred under the last dictatorship and scenes of horror film violence ostensibly pierces the "veil" of allegory, that which "indicates that the text is split between surface or literal meanings and an allegorical meaning" (Tambling 30).<sup>162</sup> In other words, the onscreen violence evokes real violence through resemblances and facile equal signs. Torture in a film equals torture under the dictatorship, kidnapping in a film equals kidnapping under the dictatorship, etc.

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<sup>162</sup>My use of the term "veil" comes from Tambling's interpretation of particular moments in Dante's *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* (30-31). Other notions of allegory possessing a veil also appear in the Bible and Boccaccio's "The Genealogy of the Gentile Gods" (Tambling 28-30).



However, the same reading that foregrounds the Dirty War is fraught with limitations and pitfalls. First, the specific scenes and narrative elements to which I allude are all staples of global contemporary horror cinema, of which Argentine horror cinema directors are astutely aware.<sup>163</sup> The torture by raven in *Jennifer's Shadow* is a somewhat restrained variation of the torture in so-called torture porn films, such as *Hostel* (Eli Roth, 2005), *Wolf Creek* (Greg McLean, 2005), and the *Saw* franchise (James Wan et al., 2004-2010).<sup>164</sup> The particular scene in *Jennifer's Shadow* thus adheres to and manipulates components of contemporary horror. Likewise, as mentioned above, the abductions, the rhetoric of “armonía” and “reglas,” the subversion of the family, and the maternal figures in Argentine horror cinema have long appeared in horror cinema from elsewhere at different points in history. Kidnapping is remarkably common to contemporary horror film narratives.<sup>165</sup> The theme of rules corresponds to the often warped didactic element of horror cinema narratives, lessons most commonly doled out to wayward teenagers in slasher films. As for the subversion of family, Tony Williams’s *Hearths of Darkness* offers extensive evidence of the ways in which conceptions of family figure

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<sup>163</sup>Various directors’ keen awareness of horror cinema codes is apparent in the films themselves, and, as I have mentioned, enables the films to be read as horror in Argentina, the United States, and other countries. The most explicit demonstration of one director’s understanding of horror cinema and other genres from around the globe appears, as I discussed in chapter 4, in the credits of *36 Pasos* under the rubric of “Ayuda espiritual” (“Spiritual guidance”). Among the names and films, Bogliano lists Dario Argento, Alexandre Aja, Jesús Franco, Rob Zombie, and Kinji Fukasaku, all noted horror directors from different countries.

<sup>164</sup>Torture porn is characterized by the extremely graphic nature of its screen violence that can feature torture and mutilation against both men and women but usually committed by men.

<sup>165</sup>Countless horror films contain instances of kidnapping: *Murders in the Rue Morgue* (Robert Florey, 1932), *Last House on the Left* (Wes Craven, 1972), *Silence of the Lambs* (Jonathan Demme, 1991), and *House of 1000 Corpses* (Rob Zombie, 2003) to name a few. To give some indication of how frequently abductions happen in horror cinema, the website [buried.com](http://buried.com) has a database on horror films classified according to subgenres and other motifs. The database contains a list entitled “Horror Movies & Sci-Fi Movies Kidnapping,” which includes 345 movies featuring abductions.

into classical and contemporary horror cinema. *36 Pasos*, as well as other Argentine horror films, confront family dynamics and, in turn, demonstrate a keen awareness of the horror genre.

Finally, concerning the mother in *The Last Gateway*, the distraught decaying witch embodies Barbara Creed's notion of the monstrous-feminine, a concept that is indebted to Julia Kristeva's idea of the abject which manifests itself in countless horror films. Creed describes various forms of the monstrous-feminine, such as the archaic mother, the monstrous womb, the witch, the vampire, and the possessed woman, all of which relate in some form to the abject. Among the various ways in which horror cinema works as "an illustration of the work of abjection" is "the construction of the maternal figure as abject" in films such as *Psycho* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1968), *Carrie* (Brian De Palma, 1976), and *The Birds* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1963) (Creed 10-12). Here the mother's reluctance to allow a child to break away makes her abject because "of her problematic relation to the symbolic realm" (Creed 12). The child attempts to break away and the mother "is reluctant to release it" (Creed 11). The maternal body becomes symbolically unstable because of conflicting desires to keep and to release the child.

For Kristeva, the abject is "the jettisoned object" (Kristeva 2) which "does not respect borders, positions, and rules" (Kristeva 4). The abject "draws attention to the fragility" of a system, such as system of laws. Kristeva's fixation on bodily wastes such as vomit, feces, and blood as examples of the "jettisoned object" and her description of child birth in *Rigadoon*, a novel by Céline, as "the ultimate of abjection" (Kristeva 155) renders the mother in Rugna's film an abject figure par excellence. Having emerged from hell and into the real world, the mother is herself a jettisoned object that upsets order in *The Last Gateway* and, like the aforementioned elements in *Jennifer's Shadow* and *36 Pasos*, adheres to horror cinema motifs.

Cultural dynamics of prohibition, saturation, and generational differences in Argentina further complicate the inclination to interpret select moments in Argentine horror as allegories of the Dirty War. In *La imagen justa*, Ana Amado addresses the delicate question of how to represent the violence of the Dirty War in film. Buttressed by debates surrounding the unrepresentability of horror while keenly aware of the frequency and ubiquity with which stylized violence appears in contemporary media, Amado advocates an ethics of the image that consigns onscreen representations of the Dirty War offscreen: “Las tensiones entre vida y muerte, entre presente y pasado, entre rastro y memoria, solo pueden conjugarse en el marco de una estética límite o, más bien, de una ética de la imagen que [...] opta por desplazarla fuera de la escena, a los bordes del relato, por lo tanto, sometiéndola al régimen de la supresión” (“The tensions between life and death, between present and past, between trace and memory, only can be combined within the frame of an aesthetic limit or, better, within the frame of ethical image that [...] opts to displace that image off-screen, at the borders of the tale, thus submitting the image to a system of repression”; 108).

Argentine horror cinema, especially in instances of graphic violence like the torture-by-raven scene in *Jennifer's Shadow*, would obviously contravene Amado's notion of the ethical cinematic depiction of the Dirty War. Considering the films as allegories of the Dirty War presumes a director being willing to project the Dirty War in the most graphic terms but also ignores cultural prohibitions that would prevent such representations. Argentine horror directors and critics are keenly aware of such prohibitions. For director and critic Nicanor Loreti, Argentine horror cinema simply cannot broach the Dirty War. According to Loreti, the Dirty War is off-limits, lest one risk severe criticism, presumably from various sectors, such as survivors of the dictatorship and/or their families, film critics, and moviegoers. Critic Sebastián

Tabany as well as Demián Rugna likewise do not see any representations of the Dirty War in contemporary Argentine horror cinema.<sup>166</sup> Automatically and inevitably seeing the Dirty War in Argentine horror cinema effectively ignores prohibitions and ethics by which all Argentine filmmakers, horror included, are likely to abide.

Argentine horror cinema also refutes the stereotype that Latin American cinema ultimately and exclusively adheres to tenets of cinematic realism and/or constantly confronts the legacies of military dictatorships.<sup>167</sup> In his article about Argentine horror cinema's distribution outside Argentina, Fernando Milsztjan references films by the company Paura Flics and the ways in which the films "demostraron que el terror argentino no sólo tiene que ver con la dictadura militar" ("demonstrated that Argentine horror does not only have to do with the military dictatorship"; 28). In the same paragraph Milsztjan cites remarks by Hernán Moyano, a producer of Paura Flics, that intimate how Argentine horror cinema confronts global expectations about which countries or regions make particular genres: "Parece que los americanos pueden hacer cine de acción, horror y suspenso, los europeos el cine dramático y que a los latinoamericanos sólo nos queda la realidad social" ("It seems that the Americans can make action, horror, and suspense movies, the Europeans make dramas, and only films about social reality remain for Latin Americans"; 28). Argentine horror cinema thus becomes a foil to the prevailing expectation beyond Argentina that its national cinema is fixated on the Dirty War and that realism is the sole mode that dominates the country or entire region's cinematic output.

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<sup>166</sup>The times during which I conducted the aforementioned interviews predated the widespread theatrical release of *Sudor frío/Cold Sweat* (Adrián Bogliano, 2010) on February 4, 2011, which explicitly references the last dictatorship.

<sup>167</sup>By cinematic realism here, I refer to certain production choices such as using untrained actors and filming on location or themes that foreground a social issue such as poverty.

While Argentine horror cinema must contend with foreign expectations, it appears that the films have largely escaped a domestic interpretive reflex to view the films as allegories of the Dirty War. Articles on Argentine horror cinema in newspapers and online film journals and message boards largely lack any reference to the Dirty War. Instead, reviews and discussions typically revolve around issues of narrative, cinematography, acting, script, and special effects.<sup>168</sup>

In her book *Disappearing Acts*, Diana Taylor uses the term percepticide to describe “the blinding of the population that the military promoted by making what was so obviously visible [...] seemingly invisible,” namely the atrocities that were occurring. The absence of discussions about the Dirty War in Argentina is not a form of percepticide or a failure by Argentine horror fans and critics to see the resemblances between onscreen violence and state terrorism under the last dictatorship. Instead, as I have articulated in previous chapters, the onscreen violence alludes to other national crises (paranoia, neoliberalism, fear of urban violence), as well as crises outside Argentina (the War on Terror). They also can be received in other ways that do not foreground national socioeconomic dilemmas.<sup>169</sup>

Argentine horror films’ circulation in the United States can present various dynamics of reception contingent on a viewer’s familiarity with Argentine horror and to what degree she or he allows the Dirty War to govern an interpretation. A viewer who is completely ignorant of the

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<sup>168</sup>To see examples of such reviews and comments on message boards, visit film and horror film websites such as [zonafreak.com.ar](http://zonafreak.com.ar) or [quintadimension.com](http://quintadimension.com).

<sup>169</sup>Horror film criticism offers a vast number of modes in which a film can be received. Such modes of reception include, but are not limited to psychoanalysis, feminism and gender studies, and queer studies. See Brigid Cherry’s *Horror* (2009) for an overview of horror cinema and spectatorship. Of course, additional ways of receiving a horror film exist beyond academia and can include focusing on gore and special effects, music, and characterization.

Dirty War and Argentine history in general presumably will not consider the films as allegories of the last dictatorship. On the other hand, for those viewers who are exclusively aware of the Dirty War – either through Argentine films such as *La historia oficial* or some other medium – might be inclined to interpret Argentine horror films solely as allegorizations of the Dirty War. Additionally, viewers cognizant of the Dirty War and other national crises must consider whether the Dirty War ultimately governs interpretation to the exclusion of other events or whether it coexists with other possible allegories of crises in Argentina as well as crises in the United States.

The three ways of reading Argentine horror cinema embodies Judith Mayne's ideas about spectatorship as a negotiation between the film and the viewer: how the viewer uses, interprets, and appropriates a film, and how the film acts on a viewer. Mayne's idea of negotiation undermines any argument for a viewer's pure agency vis-à-vis a movie or, going to the opposite extreme, a film's working on a passive audience. For all her skepticism of different conceptions of negotiation and spectatorship studies in general, Mayne validates those local studies of spectatorship "insofar as they problematize the ideal reader" (94) and foster a kind of tension that complicates theoretical and one-dimensional abstractions of audiences.<sup>170</sup> Likewise, Mayne asserts the continuing importance of spectatorship identity (race, class, gender, sexual identity, age) (101). Besides conceiving the readings of Argentine horror films as a question of negotiation, I simply assert that a viewer's knowledge of Argentine and U.S. cultural and historical events is another facet to consider in terms of spectator identity. This knowledge can affect the spectator's negotiations with a film or group of films. In other words, a spectator's awareness or ignorance of Argentina and/or the United States may or may not result in

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<sup>170</sup>In chapter 4 of *Cinema and Spectatorship*, Mayne critiques ideas of negotiation in cultural studies (e.g., Stuart Hall) and Renaissance Studies.

allegorical readings of a single national crisis (i.e., Argentina's Dirty War), multiple crises (e.g., the Dirty War, neoliberalism, and/or the War on Terror), or no crises. Cultural and historical knowledge of Argentina and the United States, how that knowledge interacts with other facets of identity, and the way in which a film works on a viewer are all factors that problematize the notion of an ideal viewer. In turn, there are possibly multiple viewers constructing multiple allegories when viewing Argentine horror cinema.

The temptation to consider Argentine horror cinema to be solely about the Dirty War eclipses all other possible allegorical readings and effectively short circuits the very concept of allegory and its polysemous dimension. If the Dirty War dominates interpretation then a particular national allegory looms over all readings. However, if anything should emerge from my analysis of Argentine horror cinema, the films allegorize not a single national crisis, but rather multiple crises that have unfolded and/or continue to unfold in Argentina, the United States, and the countries the United States has occupied over the last decade: Afghanistan and Iraq.

Finally, for all my efforts to undermine a single and particular interpretation of Argentine horror cinema as an allegorization of the Dirty War, it nevertheless remains a possibility for the Dirty War to manifest itself in a film as what Jacques Derrida calls a specter. In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida describes how Marxism continued to haunt Europe despite the supposed triumph of capitalism and liberal democracy accompanying the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union. For Derrida, "The European alliance is haunted by what it excludes, combats, or represses" (77).

Derrida's claim gave rise to a philosophy of history – hauntology – in which, despite the claims for an end to a particular ideology, the same ideology remains as "traces of traces"

(Derrida xx).<sup>171</sup> In *Ghostly Matters*, Avery Gordon provides a framework for bringing such spectral ideas to bear on fictional narratives. For Gordon, a ghost does not refer to some spooky wraith: “[t]he ghost or the apparition is one form by which something lost, or barely visible, or seemingly not there to our supposedly well-trained eyes, makes itself known or apparent to us, in its own way, of course” (8). Gordon outlines ways to consider knowledge that escapes purely rational systems, and fiction proffers crucial sites to discern the aforementioned ghost: “[...] fictions are what stand on the other side of the facts in our lingering Manichean scheme, and so they have helped to highlight the problems with ‘logical and chronological frameworks’ and ‘the simplicity of casual chains’” (Gordon 25).

Returning to Derrida’s notion about the impossibility of shutting out Marxism, any attempt to exclude the Dirty War from interpretations of Argentine horror cinema likewise allows the conflict to loom precisely because an attempt at exclusion. The sheer indecisiveness of not knowing whether the Dirty War appears as a trace in Argentine horror makes the concept of the specter appropriate in this context. Whether particular codes of horror cinema as described previously are guises that merely allow Argentine horror films to be categorized as horror, or whether such codes double as allegories of the Dirty War is a complicated dance. As demonstrated already, Argentine horror film directors, critics, and fans appear to have omitted the Dirty War from discussions of Argentine horror cinema. Yet, the films’ circulation beyond national borders subjects them to various modes of reception elsewhere by viewers, myself included, who project particular expectations. Again referring to Derrida, “[t]he specter is also, among other things, what one imagines what one thinks one sees and which one projects” (125).

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<sup>171</sup>In the case of Derrida in *Specter of Marx*, his notion of haunting is particular to the lingering presence of Marxism despite Francis Fukuyama’s declaration that the demise of the Soviet Union resulted in the end of history, or better said, the end of the debate between capitalism and liberal democracy versus communism.



The question of whether the Dirty War appears in Argentine horror cinema highlights the fluidity of reception and brings forth other characteristics to consider about a viewer, such as geographic location, historical and cultural awareness, and how much those considerations will come into play. A wholesale exclusion of the Dirty War from interpretations of Argentine horror cinema is impossible. As I have tried to show in previous chapters, Argentine horror cinema possesses the capacity to allegorize multiple socioeconomic crises which unfold nationally and internationally. The viewer ultimately decides whether the Dirty War excludes other allegorical readings or is included as one of many allegorical readings.

### **MOMENTS OF HORROR: GENRE HYBRIDITY IN *CRÓNICA DE UNA FUGA***

In *State Repression and the Labors of Memory*, Elizabeth Jelin refers to an article by Patricia Rojas about youth and memory practices in Argentina. For Jelin and Rojas, graffiti, murals, and street singing illustrate how, in comparison to their elders, younger generations use different media to express their perspective of the last dictatorship. A similar dynamic of generational differences infuses Adrián Caetano's *Crónica de una fuga*.<sup>172</sup> The film represents *el Proceso* in ways that are distinct from that of other films about the Dirty War. Horacio Bernades's review of *Crónica* in *Página 12* highlights generational differences among film directors with the depiction of the Dirty War as a point of contrast. Bernades places Caetano's film in opposition to national cinema from 1980s, even going so far as to aver that it "parece enteramente pensada como reacción frente a aquel viejo cine" ("seems entirely conceived as a reaction against that old cinema [of the 1980s]")<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>172</sup>I will subsequently refer to *Crónica de una fuga* simply as *Crónica*.

<sup>173</sup>Bernades's point is valid and reiterates a critical perspective that often places Caetano's films as reactions against older national films. *Pizza, Birra, Faso/Pizza, Beer, Cigarettes* (1998), a film Caetano co-directed with Bruno Stagnaro, is often considered an important signpost

*Crónica* is based on a testimonial account written by Claudio Tamburini entitled *Pase libre: La fuga de la Mansión Seré*, along with the input of Guillermo Fernández.<sup>174</sup> Both Tamburini and Fernández were kidnapped by the dictatorship and held hostage together. The film starts by recounting the disappearance of Tamburini, a college student in Buenos Aires, in 1977. Falsely tipped off by another prisoner, military operatives invade Tamburini's parents' home and terrorize his sister and mother. The operatives eventually take Tamburini captive at his own apartment and transport him to Mansión Seré in Morón, a city located outside Buenos Aires. Tamburini is held with other male prisoners close to his age. Told elliptically over 120 days, their military captors subject the detainees to physical and psychological torture of various kinds. Sensing an impending death and hopeless dilemma, a group of five prisoners, which include Tamburini and Fernández, successfully escape from Mansión Seré.

*Crónica* is a hybrid infused with various genres, including suspense, western, and escape films.<sup>175</sup> Particular registries of horror also play a crucial role in *Crónica*. Horror's salient place in the film was immediately apparent to critics following the film's theatrical release. In *Clarín*, Diego Lerer likens the first hour of *Crónica* to a horror film, and at the moment that five

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embodying *Nuevo cine argentino* that emerged in the late 1990s. For discussions of *Nuevo cine argentino*, see *New Argentine Cinema: Themes, Auteurs, and Trends of Innovation* (Horacio Bernades et al., 2002), *Other Worlds: New Argentinean Film* (Gonzalo Aguilar, 2008), and *Nuevo cine argentino: de Rapado a Historias extraordinarias* (Agustín Campero 2008).

<sup>174</sup>While Tamburini's book has not been published in English, the title can be translated as "Free Pass – The Escape from Mansión Seré."

<sup>175</sup>While suspense and western films are more established and critiqued genres (i.e., one can usually locate suspense and/or westerns through such categories in a rental or online retail store), escape films are precisely what the appellation indicates: the escape of a character or group of characters is central to the narrative. Examples of escape films include *Stalag 17* (Billy Wilder, 1953), *Escape from Alcatraz* (Don Siegel, 1979), *Crónica de un niño solo/Chronicle of a Boy Alone* (Leonardo Favio, 1965), *Le Trou/The Night Watch* (Jacques Becker, 1960) and *The Shawshank Redemption* (Frank Darabont, 1994).

prisoners decide to escape “termina la [película] de terror [y] arranca la de suspenso” (“the horror film ends and the suspense film begins”). Writing in *Leer cine*, Santiago García associates particular formal elements in the film with precise forms of horror, even going so far as to link those elements with a particular director: “Los colores, las texturas, el sonido y los encuadres se asocian muchas veces con el cine de terror, pero no con cualquiera, sino con esa estilización clásica y funcional propia del cineasta John Carpenter” (“The colors, textures, sound, and framing often are associated with not just any horror cinema, but rather with a classical and functional stylization typical of director John Carpenter”). Likewise, Bernades identifies “el terror gótico” (“Gothic horror”) in the film.

I will offer a deeper examination of select horror codes, especially Gothic and classical horror, which appear in *Crónica* and the ways in which the film manipulates them within a Dirty War narrative. Classical horror films often possess Gothic themes, such as an eerie mansion or castle, doubles, or inexplicable ailments. The classic and Gothic horror codes in *Crónica* appear most starkly in the portrayal of a clandestine detention center and the general depiction of violence through suggestion rather than more graphic and explicit modes of screen violence. In contrast to other films that deal with the Dirty War, *Crónica* demonstrates one form in which the horror genre can cinematically project the conflict thus distinguishing itself from other Dirty War films.<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>176</sup>*Crónica* is by no means the only film that uses horror cinema to depict a narrative explicitly set during the Dirty War. One could argue that *Garage Olimpo* (Marco Bechis, 1999) also relies on horror cinema codes in its creation of claustrophobic spaces, for instance. Bogliano’s *Sudor frío/Cold Sweat* (2011) also features the Dirty War prominently and explicitly in its narrative. Paco Cabezas’s *Aparecidos/The Appeared* (2007), an Argentine-Spanish-Swedish co-production merits critical attention for its depictions of torture and sometimes haphazard allusions to multiple national tragedies (the Dirty War in Argentina, Pinochet in Chile, Franco in Spain, 9/11 in the United States). I will discuss *Aparecidos* only briefly towards the end of this chapter.

*Crónica*, which again is based on accounts of actual victims of the last dictatorship, possesses various anchors connecting the film to historical events, an aspect that distinguishes the film from the Argentine horror films discussed previously. One such anchor is the film's marketing. The film was screened at the Cannes Film Festival in 2005 under its original title *Buenos Aires, 1977*. Intimating its escape film dimensions, the cover of the DVD distributed in Argentina reads "Basada en una historia real. 120 DÍAS. 4 JÓVENES. UNA OPORTUNIDAD" ("Based on a true story. 120 days. 4 young men. One opportunity"). A circular seal also appears on the cover that reads "Versión libre de la novela Pase Libre: La fuga de la Mansión Seré. Claudio Tamburini" ("Loose adaptation of the novel Pase libre: La fuga de la Mansión Seré. Claudio Tamburini"). As for the film itself, *Crónica* opens with a lengthy epigraph that reinforces the film's historical and geographical anchors, as well as its testimonial sources. In addition to contextualizing the film's narrative by noting the date of the military coup, the epigraph alludes to the trials of military officials in 1985 for human rights violations. The text's last two lines read: "Esta historia está basada en el testimonio de dos víctimas de dicha dictadura" ("This story is based on the testimony of two victims of the aforementioned dictatorship"). The film's testimonial elements are reiterated ten minutes into the film during the opening credits. An imposed text reads: "Versión libre de la novela *Pase libre – La fuga de la Mansión Seré* de Claudio Tamburini con colaboración de Guillermo Fernández" ("Loose adaptation of the novel *Pase libre – La fuga de la Mansión Seré* by Claudio Tamburini with the collaboration of Guillermo Fernández").

*Crónica's* testimonial aspects – on both the film's aforementioned DVD cover and in the film's diegesis – preemptively and immediately place the film in tension with its horror dimensions while undermining any possible notion that the film will be a typical instance of *cine*

*testimonio* (testimonial cinema), which prioritizes particular modes of documentary and realism.<sup>177</sup> On the DVD cover (see figure 10), an image of the film's version of Mansión Seré sits in the center between two characters – Tamburini (played by Rodrigo de la Serna) and Huguito (played by Pablo Echarri) – and close to the aforementioned testimonial seal.<sup>178</sup> Mansión Seré is presented as a kind of haunted house. The structure is faded black and white and sits on a tilted plane, anticipating some of the oblique horror film-type angles in which the house is framed in the movie.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>177</sup>*Cine testimonio* can be defined in various ways. In *Cuban Cinema*, Michael Chanan refers to two forms of *cine testimonio* and several subgenres that are particular to Cuban cinema. Chanan associates one form of *cine testimonio* with the Mexican documentarist Eduardo Maldonado. A film becomes a way for a marginalized social group to “make public their point of view,” and the process of making a film enables a kind of *concientización* (the raising of consciousness or awareness) of that social group (Chanan 209). A second form of *cine testimonio* is inspired by testimonial literature, which, loosely defined, depicts the lived experiences of authors. For Chanan, testimonial literature inspires particular modes of documentary: filming “reality without subjecting it to a preplanned mise-en-scène,” focus on social themes, “audacious and intuitive styles of montage,” and use of interviews (Chanan 211). Chanan boils down these four principles of *cine testimonio* in documentaries through a paper presented by director, poet, and journalist Víctor Casaus, “El género testimonio en el cine cubano” (“The Testimonial Genre in Cuban Cinema”).

<sup>178</sup>Below, I will address the reconstruction and modification of the Mansión Seré in *Crónica*. Shortly following the escape of Claudio Tamburini and three of his fellow prisoners the military burned the structure.

<sup>179</sup>The cover of the DVD distributed in the United States lacks the same horror cinema motifs or allusions to testimonial literature but still deserves mention. Instead, the cover engages more with the escape film genre via a single image of an actor that does not even appear in the film. The actor, shirtless and wearing a pair of jeans splattered with white paint, looks backwards against a blurred background of buildings and a street suggesting an image still of an escape in progress. The image is a stark contrast to the prisoners in *Crónica* who escape in their underwear and who are emaciated after being detained and brutalized for 4 months. With the exception of a quote from *The New York Times* film critic Stephen Holden, the DVD cover foregoes any allusion to its testimonial sources. Yet, the cover does anchor the film in actual events with a superlative twist: “The true story of the most incredible escape of our time.”

Horror cinema motifs and explicit testimonial labeling coexist in the film as well. The opening epigraph that contextualizes the film and foregrounds its testimonial basis appears over

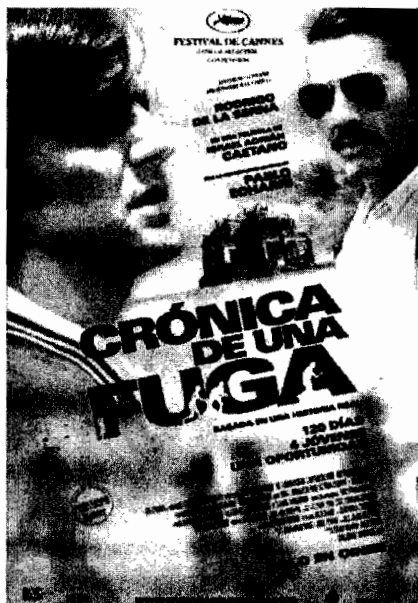


Fig. 10. The cover of the DVD distributed in Argentina. The circular seal advertising the film's testimonial source appears in red font in the bottom left corner.

a typical horror film soundtrack, that of a storm. The viewer hears bursts of thunder and the steady downfall of rain as the text appears. A steady thudding sound enters the soundtrack suggesting a heavy and approaching gait. The epigraph fades out, and the storm and thudding provide continuity to the next shot. From a blank black screen, one sees a point-of-view shot of someone already taken prisoner, Tano (played by Martín Urruty), who is held in a car. A blindfold is removed from Tano, and he and the viewer see what one supposes is the Tamburini family's home. The car that contains Tano and his captors sits in a storm and it becomes apparent the thudding is actually the swishing of windshield wipers the military operatives' car.

The film's adaptation of testimonial interviews and literature and use of horror cinema codes may appear incongruent. Testimonial literature, like its cinematic counterpart, enjoys a vaunted status as evidenced by the popularity of testimonials such as Rigoberta Menchú's *Me*

*llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia* (*I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala*) and the volumes of academic criticism of the testimonial genre. Among other factors, testimonial literature's esteemed position among critics is partially built upon authenticity and a kind of realism that yields truth. George Yúdice's definition of the genre conveys such a dynamic: "testimonial writing may be defined as an authentic narrative, told by a witness who is moved to narrate by the urgency of a situation (e.g, war, oppression, revolution, etc.). [...] Truth is summoned in the cause of denouncing a present situation of exploitation and oppression or in exorcising and setting aright official history" (17). Although *Pase libre* was written and published some twenty five years after the escape and was not dictated orally to an intermediary, the film's testimonial credentials appear intact.<sup>180</sup> As stated in the film's opening credits, the film is based on a written text and interviews with another escapee from Mansión Seré. More importantly, perhaps, the inclusion of the words "Versión libre" ("loose adaptation") in the credits permits a certain degree of latitude for the film's adaptation of testimonial sources.

Horror cinema, in contrast to testimony's position as a respected genre (at least within U.S. leftist academic circles), is generally regarded as disreputable. Brigid Cherry's comments which appeared in a recently published primer on contemporary horror cinema are instructive: "[...] the whole [horror cinema] genre is potentially tainted. It has therefore been denigrated or ignored, never quite wholly acceptable, and relegated to areas of low budget, independent production" (12). One is thus left to ask if *Crónica*, which is based on a work belonging to the venerated genre of testimonial literature, is somehow tainted by horror?

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<sup>180</sup>In her essay on Roque Dalton's *Miguel Mármol*, Barbara Harlow refers to the collaborative nature of not only Dalton's text, but also other testimonios by Domitila Barrios de Chungara, Rigoberta Menchú, Leila Khaled, and Elvia Alvarado (11). In each instance, the book is brought to fruition through the collective work of the person who endured an experience and that of the transcriber who writes down the person's experiences.

*Crónica*'s amalgam of testimony and horror, among other genres, is not necessarily unprecedented or at loggerheads. Zeroing in on a single facet of testimonial literature, its basis in reality, *Crónica* is hardly the first horror film based on or claimed to be based on real events.<sup>181</sup> Yet, the film's link to testimony from Latin America is exceptional. Testimonials and horror cinema work in concert to narrativize Argentina's last dictatorship and an experience of being disappeared, held captive, and escaping. Horror cinematic codes do not undermine testimonial sources by somehow rendering the narrative 'less real,' rather, in a point I will explore further, they operate primarily to imbue scenes with a psychological dimension enabling a cinematic rendering of written and oral testimonies (again, *Crónica* is based on *Pase libre*, Caetano's discussions with Tamburini and Guillermo Fernández). In fact, *Pase libre* itself makes use of horror motifs, especially in its textual depiction of Mansión Seré.<sup>182</sup> Horror and testimony thus coexist in both *Crónica* and the text on which the film is based.

If horror does not undermine testimony, then the testimony likewise does not undermine the horror. The film's premise adheres to very broad definitions of horror. To take one such definition from Rhona Berenstein, whose book on female spectatorship deals with classical horror, the dictatorship and its methods present a story that conforms to one of Berenstein's basic

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<sup>181</sup>Horror films that are based on and/or inspired by real events include *Psycho* (Albert Hitchcock, 1960), *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Tobe Hooper, 1974), *The Exorcist* (William Friedkin, 1973), and *The Amityville Horror* (Stuart Rosenberg, 1979).

<sup>182</sup>A comprehensive analysis of horror motifs in *Pase libre* is beyond the scope of this dissertation. The title of the book's second part – "Casa de sombras" ("House of Shadows") – gives a concise and glaring use of Gothic horror in Tamburini's text. *Pase libre*, however, deserves attention especially for its distinctions with other testimonial texts about experiences of being disappeared during the Dirty War, particularly Alicia Partnoy's *La Escuelita/The Little School* and Jacobo Timerman's *Preso sin nombre, celda sin número/Prisoner without a Name, Cell without a Number*. In contrast to the other two texts, Tamburini's account is much more attuned to space, particularly Tamburini's disorientation, becoming oriented, and the sensation that he melds with the space as he remains captive.



definitions of classical horror: a fantastic monster that defies logic (19). Figuratively, the logic-defying monster in *Crónica* is the military regime. Metaphoric analogies aside, horror manifests itself in *Crónica* not so much in the presence of illogical entities, but rather through formal cinematic elements characteristic of classical and Gothic horror cinema. These characteristics are invoked and refined to create cinematic spaces and characters beset with fear over their kidnapping and detention.

The adaptation of testimonial literature to the screen happens through particular registries of horror cinema codes. The aforementioned comments by Santiago García and Horacio Bernades have let the cat out of the bag, so to speak; classical and Gothic horror motifs generally dominate *Crónica*. In the introduction to *Screening the Gothic*, Lisa Hopkins identifies decaying castles and mansions as one of the primary markers of Gothic literature that appear in its cinematic form.<sup>183</sup> The Gothic as described by Hopkins is no more readily evident than in the depiction of Mansión Seré, a clandestine detention center where Claudio Tamburini and others are held captive.

Mansión Seré does not appear until some ten minutes into the film following Tamburini's capture by military operatives. The mansion at first seems isolated. The two cars holding the military personnel who capture Tamburini are shown driving through rural countryside and over railroad tracks. A black wrought-iron gate attached to two large cement columns foreshadows the mansion's dilapidated condition. The operatives' cars stop at the locked gate overgrown with vegetation. A gong-like sound is heard on the soundtrack, and the film's opening credits begin

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<sup>183</sup>Hopkins refers to other Gothic literary motifs which also appear in Gothic cinema: a mansion or castle being haunted by a "real or apparent threat of a supernatural presence, a mysterious and threatening older man and a vulnerable heroine, and a character poised between good and evil" (xi).

to appear. The mansion, or rather fragmented portions of it, takes center stage for approximately a minute. The mansion is almost exclusively the main attraction of the entire opening credits; we see no actors. The first shot of the mansion shows the structure's front door and steps framed from a low angle. The camera is tilted, and eerie violin and single piano notes play. Similar to the gate, vegetation covers the steps. The next shot is of the same door and steps, although the camera now tilts in a different direction. Such shots characterize the sequence of the mansion: the house is repeatedly framed from low angles by a tilted camera. We see *Mansión Seré* from different sides, but, again, only in fragments – a shuttered window, a portion of the patio, a terrace, a column – all in separate shots. The dilapidated state of the house is readily apparent from its gray streaks, peeling paint, broken shutter, missing rungs on terrace banisters, partially collapsed ceiling above a porch, and the overgrown plants and vines. The soundtrack is typical of horror film soundtrack: a melangé of violin, piano, and an intermittent high-pitched doppler-like sound. The music sometimes gives away to whispering as if the house is haunted.<sup>184</sup> After a nearly a minute, the caravan carrying the military personnel and Tamburini approach the mansion, and the camera is positioned inside the house from a lower level window. The absence of the caravan intimates the mansion's geographically marginal position. It is as if the caravan had been driving for a minute after passing through the gate in order to reach the house. Only when Tamburini is taken inside the house do we finally see an establishing shot of the entire front façade of the house. The house is framed from a low angle giving it an imposing presence.

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<sup>184</sup>These same kind of techniques (whispering and music, disorienting camera angles) appear in de la Vega's *Death Knows Your Name* with the initial depiction of the abandoned hospital wing. The hospital, of course, is an institutional space that is haunted, while *Mansión Seré* was originally a domestic space (i.e., a home) that had been converted into an institutional space for state terrorism.

The aforementioned sequence equates *Mansión Seré* with other cinematic depictions of haunted houses. Akin to the hushed voices heard at the beginning of *Death Knows Your Name*, the whispers on *Crónica*'s soundtrack suggest a ghostly presence. The low angles, tilted camera, and fragmented images of the mansion create a kind of visual incoherence and disorientation reminiscent of other horror films that feature haunted structures, such as *The Haunting* (Robert Wise, 1963), *Poltergeist* (Tobe Hooper, 1982), and *Evil Dead 2* (Sam Raimi, 1987). *Mansión Seré*'s almost invariably appears in such a manner even beyond the opening credits. A quarter of the way through the film, an Air Force jeep pulls up to the mansion and two soldiers. The camera frames the two soldiers from above. The soldiers descend from each side of the jeep and grab a large soup pot. The framing recalls a shot from Carl Theodore Dreyer's *The Passion of Jean of Arc* (1928) in which soldiers and civilians are framed upside down before Jean of Arc's execution. In *Crónica* the camera captures the Air Force soldiers from behind and above by



Fig. 11. A shot of *Mansión Seré* as soldiers carry a pot from a jeep to the front door.

panning to the left, which frames the soldiers against the tilted backdrop of the mansion (see fig. 11).<sup>185</sup>

<sup>185</sup>Dutch angles aside, the mansion receives a similarly eerie and imposing depiction when the prisoners make their escape in the latter-third of the film. As the prisoners run in front of the

The mansion's disorienting nature in *Crónica* extends to the house's interior and is reiterated at different points through sequences that again recall horror films, or films with moments of horror. Referring to the exploration of a haunted house by new tenants, Barry Curtis considers "the journey through the house [to be] characterized by visual incoherence and disorientation" (35). Shortly after the arrival and torture of Tamburini's character, we see a shot of a dimly lit corridor in which a man appears holding a maté gourd and a tea kettle. The camera does not induce any visual disturbance per se; instead, the set design produces the disturbance. A kaleidoscope of green wallpaper and nearly indistinguishable floor tiles envelope the man with the maté gourd. He never appears again in the film giving him a kind of ghost-like quality. Shots of corridors appear in any number of horror films, such as *Poltergeist*, *Inferno* (Darío Argento, 1980), *The Amityville Horror*, *Rosemary's Baby*, *The Shining*, *The People under the Stairs* (Wes Craven, 1991), *Nightmare on Elm Street* (Wes Craven, 1984), and de la Vega's *Death Knows Your Name*. The corridor shot in *Crónica*, which provides a unique twist on such a sequence, also helps to tether the film to the horror genre.

Later, in one of the few instances that the camera moves freely through the house's interiors, the film portrays the mansion's stairs in a disorienting manner. Immediately after the prisoners are ordered to kneel in the hallway and pray, the camera cuts away from the action and frames the multiple levels of the mansion from the first floor. While stark piano notes signal a moment of horror, the prisoners' praying creates an aural continuity between the images of the actors and those of the mansion's empty levels; as in the opening credits, the temporary focus is the mansion. Cutting from the praying prisoners, the camera spins slowly capturing from below

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mansion, the mansion dwarves the haggard, almost nude actors. Rain, thunder, and flashes of lightning underscore the structure's looming presence.

the parts of banisters on different floors. The camera eventually stops rotating when it reaches a staircase leading from the second floor to the ground level. The camera then tracks backwards showing the staircase. Numerous refrigerators, presumably plundered from victims who were kidnapped by military operatives, sit at bottom of the staircase.<sup>186</sup> Analogous to corridors, staircases are often filmed in such a way as to become a source of disorientation and/or claustrophobia in horror films or similar genres, such as psychological thrillers.<sup>187</sup> *Crónica* again reiterates its participation in the horror genre.

The centrality of *Mansión Seré* allows codes of horror cinema to exist in the film through space and architecture. *Mansión Seré* is like a haunted house in many respects. Eerie music and whispering heard over the soundtrack, disorienting images, confined spaces, and the house's dilapidated condition all invoke haunted house motifs. In another nod to haunted house movies, *Mansión Seré* houses a secret. Its domestic façade obscures the structure's actual function: a detention center to hold and torture prisoners. As Schwarzböck notes, "un exterior [...] sigue" ("a world outside continues") (74). The guards and select prisoners on occasion watch soccer

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<sup>186</sup>Stealing the belongings of prisoners was apparently the norm under the dictatorship. According to the *Nunca más* report, "[...] the violations committed by those responsible for repression involved not only attacks against the freedom and security of individuals, but also the systematic and simultaneous transgression of other legal rights, such as property and public documents to facilitate the transfer of goods or to set up non-existent transactions. False deeds, false documents, false car registrations and certificates of ownership were made out to expedite looting and theft" (272).

<sup>187</sup>Horror films that include sequences with stairs are numerous and could include *Night of the Living Dead* (George Romero, 1968), *Evil Dead*, or *The People under the Stairs*. In these instances, unlike the sequence in *Crónica*, the camera is relatively passive, and any potential fright on the part of the audience comes from not knowing what lies at the bottom of the stairs, which is usually obscured in darkness. As for stairs being filmed with an active camera so as to induce discomfort in a viewer, one cannot talk about disorienting staircases without mentioning Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958).

matches in the house, and cars passing by on a roadway are visible from a kitchen window. Again, “un exterior [...] sigue.”

The manner in which *Crónica*'s treats the secret presents at least one way in which *Mansión Seré* deviates from the typical haunted house. In general, haunted house films lay out a kind of archaeology in which tenants and/or neighbors along with the viewer learn about a structure's history. That history in turn explains the reason for supernatural disturbances. The prisoners in *Crónica* cannot investigate the house due to their captivity. Moreover, the film itself is a compromised form of archaeology. As stated at the end of the film, the military burned *Mansión Seré* following the prisoners' escape. The film's version of *Mansión Seré* is largely distinct from the original structure and, in a challenge to its testimonial dimensions, the film traffics in Gothic horror film codes in lieu of realism (i.e., a replica of the actual mansion).

Gothic horror cinema codes further manifest themselves in the portrayal of bodies, particularly bodies in pain. The lighting and use of a bleach bypass renders the prisoners' skins especially pallid. Their wounds – bruises and scrapes suffered from beatings – are set in relief by the skins' hue. The prisoners generally wear only underwear and a blindfold which they often lift in the absence of their captors. As Schwarzböck notes, the lack of clothing, their skin, and their wounds recall paintings of religious martyrs (55), perhaps more specifically El Greco's paintings of Jesus Christ and Saint Sebastian. Such a dimension, however, is potentially problematic, as if the prisoners were invariably all martyrs of sorts unwilling to renounce some belief the government deemed subversive. Many prisoners, as exemplified by Tamburini, had no political leanings that remotely approached the leftist ideals that the military was trying to eliminate. Tamburini, as happened to other detainees, was captured for the most unfortunate of reasons: another prisoner provided his name under the duress of torture. On the other hand,

*Crónica*'s depiction of the prisoners' bodies in alignment with religious aesthetics appropriates the very Christianity the dictatorship invoked in justifying their own doctrine. In other words, in the film the military metaphorically detain and torture icons of a religious doctrine they ostensibly exalt.

The prisoners' wounds are almost the only visual evidence of the torture that takes place offscreen. Viewers rarely see the causes of the wounds. Shortly after arriving at *Mansión Seré*, his captors torture Claudio Tamburini using a *picana eléctrica*, a metal prod charged with an electrical current similar to instruments used in slaughterhouses to goad animals. The initial torture of Tamburini transpires entirely off-screen. The camera assumes the point-of-view of Tamburini and shakes with each application of the *picana* in order to simulate the body's jolt.

Such a depiction of torture adheres to tenets of classical horror cinema that suggests violence. In his study of horror film and literature, A.S. Praver references Fritz Lang's *M* (1931) and various films produced by Val Lewton for RKO studios such as *Cat People* (Jacques Torneur, 1942), *I Walked with a Zombie* (Jacques Torneur, 1943), and *The Body Snatcher* (Robert Wise, 1945) as examples of films using different cinematic techniques to suggest murder. Stephen Prince identifies the use of shadows as one such common formal technique to intimate violence: "Silhouetted depictions of violence are a major and recurring visual code in films of the 1930s, providing an indirect means for depicting acts of brutality" (75). Suggestion, while not entirely absent from contemporary horror, is not the dominant mode of screen violence in recent horror cinema.<sup>188</sup> Instead, graphic depictions of violence usually centered on destroying the body dominate the genre. Adducing the gory depictions of violence in the films

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<sup>188</sup>For example, in her essay "Horror and Art-Dread" Cynthia Freeland considers *The Others* (Alejandro Aménabar, 2001), *The Sixth Sense* (M. Night Shymalan, 1999), and *The Blair Witch Project* (Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez, 1999) examples of contemporary horror films that uphold horror cinema's tradition of suggesting violence.

of Herschell Gordon Lewis, Dario Argento's *Deep Red* (1975), and David Cronenberg's body horror films such as *Shivers* (1975) and *Scanners* (1981), Philip Brophy summarizes the dynamic in many contemporary horror films: "It is [the] mode of showing as opposed to telling that is strongly connected to the destruction of the body" (8).<sup>189</sup> Recent movies such as *Hostel* (Eli Roth, 2005), *Wolf Creek* (Greg Mclean, 2005), and *Audition* (Takashi Miike, 1999) contain incredibly graphic depictions of torture which seem a culmination of what Brophy detected some two decades ago.

*Crónica*'s invocation of classical horror to depict torture acquires an ethics of image that adheres to Ana Amado's formulation mentioned previously in which violence that happened during the Dirty War should be displaced offscreen. In an interview, Caetano expressed a kind of catch-22 dilemma in portraying torture in a film about the Dirty War. For Caetano, "[e]s imposible hacer una película sobre este tema y no mostrar nada de la tortura. La tortura no se muestra, se cuenta" ("it is impossible to make a film about this topic and not show torture. Torture is not shown it is told"; Schwarzböck 82-83). Absent the visible torture, the viewer must perceive the act in other ways: auditorily through the battery buzz supplying current to the picanas and visually through the camera shaking simulating the jolt received by Tamburini.<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>189</sup>Brophy is hardly alone in detecting more explicit depictions of violence in contemporary horror cinema. See Linda Williams's "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess," Stephen Prince's introduction to *The Horror Film*, and Tania Modelski's essay "The Terror of Pleasure: The Contemporary Horror Film and Postmodern Theory."

<sup>190</sup>Stephen Prince's analysis of several horror films from the 1930s and the conduct of the Production Code Administration (PCA) in the United States prevents a broad generalization that would contend violence in classical horror films was inevitably suggestive. The PCA did not function as a censorship board; rather it helped production companies anticipate the objections of regional censorship boards in the United States and abroad (Prince 51). According to Prince, the PCA gave only a "cursory reading" of the scripts for some of the horror films that came out in 1931, such as *Frankenstein* (James Whale, 1931) and *Dracula* (Tod Browning, 1931). The PCA did not anticipate the controversies which erupted over horror films from the early 1930s which



Although most episodes of torture occur offscreen or are implied through their visible aftermath (i.e., bruises), we do see Tamburini tortured at least once. Following a brief interrogation shortly after arriving at Mansión Seré, his captors push Tamburini's head underwater in a bathtub. The camera sits beside and outside the tub but never in the water. The torturers are offscreen, and Tamburini's shoulders and face occupy almost the entire frame. The shot is not from the point-of-view of the torturer or torturers, but rather achieves a kind of omniscience that transcends any character's perspective. The camera sits outside the tub, but we hear Tamburini's voice as if the camera and microphone were in the water. Image and sound do not coincide.

While seeing Tamburini submerged under water contravenes Amado's notion of relegating torture offscreen, *Crónica's* ethics of image do not exclusively hinge on seeing suffering. In the case of Tamburini's submersion, the camera does not assume the assaultive or predatory gaze characteristic of horror films, especially the slasher genre, in which the camera mimics that movement of a stalker in pursuit of a victim. The camera in *Crónica* never assumes the point-of-view of the torturer, preempting any chance that a viewer would assume a sadistic form of spectatorship by identifying with the torturer.

With the exception of seeing Tamburini's submersion, *Crónica's* depiction of torture adheres to classical horror cinema codes, namely the haunted house-like portrayal of Mansión Seré and the prisoners' pallid and emaciated bodies. In the aforementioned interview, Caetano

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“unleashed a new wave of imagery depicting cruelty, torture, pain, and murder and disseminated it en masse to the nation's movie screens” (Prince 53). Through a comparative analysis of screen violence in *Frankenstein*, *Murders in Rue Morgue* (Robert Florey, 1932), and *The Black Cat* (Edgar G. Ulmer, 1934), Prince shows the tamping down of graphic violence that relied more on suggestion following objections to public outcry of horror films and a more rigorous participation of the PCA in its recommendations for production companies.

commented on the invocation of classical horror in lieu of other horror aesthetics. According to Caetano, “No quería hacer gore” (“I did not want to do gore”; Schwarzböck 84). Caetano’s remark suggests a kind of hierarchy of horror aesthetics that places classical and gothic horror over more graphic subgenres, such as gore or torture porn. Jeffrey Sconce delineates a hierarchy among horror genres by examining the critical reception of *Nightmare on Elm Street* versus *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* (John McNaughton, 1986). For Sconce, film reviewers’ praise of *Henry*’s realism and dismissal of *Nightmare on Elm Street* was indicative of how slasher films “remain a target of indiscriminate ridicule by the film cognoscenti” (103).

If slasher and realist horror compose a hierarchy for Sconce, then gore and classical horror compose such a hierarchy for Caetano. However, I would say that there is something more at stake than just a gore vs. classical horror hierarchy of tastes in horror cinema. Classical horror cinema initially seems a ‘safe’ mode for depicting the Dirty War, taking the teeth out, so to speak, of a genre that often forces a confrontation with uncomfortable realities. Commenting on Jörg Buttegeit’s *Nekromantik* films, Linnie Blake zeroes in on the films’ gore as a means of compelling viewers to deal with undesirable legacies of Germany’s role in World War II. For Blake, “[...] viscosity forces the audience to look at that which they would rather avoid” (Blake 24). If more explicit screen violence confronts the viewer, to use Blake’s words, *Crónica*’s use of classical horror seems to opt for a less confrontational and accepted way in which horror cinema could project the Dirty War. Film critics in Argentina did not complain about *Crónica* and its use of horror.

One is thus left to ponder the critical reception of more gory depictions of the Dirty War which explicitly broach the conflict as the main narrative unfolds. Adrián García Bogliano’s *Sudor frío/Cold Sweat* (2011) and Paco Cabezas’s *Aparecidos/The Appeared* (2007) are two

recently released horror films that allude to the Dirty War. While neither film is entirely set during the Dirty War per se, *Aparecidos* projects a scenario in which two children of a former torturer have visions of their father carrying out his work. The film contains graphic depictions of violence. Diego Lerer's review of the film in *Clarín* focuses on the nationality of the director and main actors and illustrates the problem of representing the military's violence in a horror film:

¿Una película de suspenso con los desaparecidos de la última dictadura militar? ¿No será mucho? Eso pensarán muchos argentinos que no se atreverían a tratar un tema así para generar sustos en el público. Es por eso que la película, si bien se centra en un misterio ligado a los desaparecidos locales, es de origen español. Su director y sus protagonistas son de allí, más allá de que la acción que transcurra en la Argentina.

A suspense film featuring the disappeared from the last military dictatorship? Wouldn't that be too much? That is what many Argentines will think who would not dare contend that such a theme be used to scare an audience. Is it for this reason that the film, if it focuses on a mystery linked to the disappeared, is of Spanish origin. Its director and actors are from there, further away from where the action took place in Argentina.

While Lerer goes on to praise certain parts of *Aparecidos*, his comments correspond to those of Nicanor Loreti concerning the pitfalls of representing the Dirty War through codes of horror cinema. To paraphrase Lerer's comments, a Spanish director and actors can make a horror film about Argentina's Dirty War precisely because they are Spanish. The director and actors of *Aparecidos* are not from where the actual trauma took place, Argentina. In turn, they have not internalized the same prohibitions of how the Dirty War can be represented in film. Given

Lerer's critique, Caetano's use of classic and Gothic horror appears justified insofar as he anticipates the film's critical reception in Argentina and what is permitted.

The presumption that gore or more explicit forms of screen violence in Argentine horror films automatically pertains to the Dirty War suggests a totalizing expectation that ignores the particular ways social and political traumas appear in a national horror cinema. In the case of horror cinema from the United States, a myriad of social traumas have often surfaced in horror films. Several well-known horror movies from the late 1960s and 1970s (*Night of the Living Dead*, *Last House on the Left*, *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*) have often been seen as thinly veiled allegories of race relations and the civil rights movement, a collective malaise stemming from opposition and support for the Vietnam War, and even oil shortages.<sup>191</sup> The stylization of violence and social and political traumas in U.S. horror films continues in torture porn films such as *Hostel* and *Saw*, which allegorize the War on Terror. The traumas which figure into U.S. horror films often differ in geographical proximity and severity than that of the Dirty War. Strictly in terms of military conflicts, the U.S. often exports its wars abroad, which serves to insulate its population from actual fighting. The war can continue without becoming entirely unbearable or unpopular since its effects are largely out of sight for the domestic population. In contrast, the Dirty War unfolded on Argentine soil in the not so distant past and directly affected

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<sup>191</sup>See Adam Lowenstein's *Shocking Representation* and Linnie Blake's *The Wounds of Nations*, which both deal with allegorization of national political and social traumas as represented in various countries' horror films, including those of the United States. As for oil shortages, the gas station has become a near generic icon of U.S. horror, often times as a place where a city dweller stops to ask directions and then either begins or continues a treacherous journey (e.g., *Devil's Rejects* (Rob Zombie, 2005), *The Hitcher* (Robert Harmon, 1986), *Wrong Turn* (Rob Schmidt, 2003)). The gas station in horror films thus frequently functions as an outpost of civilization or false refuge for victims, while entering into dialogue with other representations of gas stations in U.S. culture such as Edward Hopper's *Gas* (1940) or Walker Evans's various photos of service stations.

many lives. The expectation that Argentine horror films depict the Dirty War in more graphic terms than the classical horror elements that characterize *Crónica* ignores the prohibitions about cinematic memory that can be at play within a national culture. Argentine directors – both mainstream and the directors working in a marginalized genre like horror – can internalize such prohibitions. Their internalization comes through in *Crónica* with the use of formal elements from classical and Gothic horror cinema rather than other more graphic horror subgenres.

## CONCLUSION

In *Wounds of Nations*, Linnie Blake examines select horror films from different countries and the ways they challenge “totalising or essentialising formulations of national identity by traumatic events” (9). In other words, the horror films Blake examines indict prevailing official versions of national traumas supported by national governments. Argentine horror presents a distinct case. The trauma of the Dirty War saturates and dominates national cinema. If directors or producers endeavor to present other visions of Argentine cinema through the horror genre, evidently Argentine horror cinema cannot escape the legacy of the Dirty War in terms of spectatorship among audiences in Argentina proper and elsewhere.

Argentine horror film directors largely have little or no control over whether a viewer sees their films as something other than an allegorization of the Dirty War. While I have tried to undermine or at least problematize the automatic impulse to interpret Argentine horror films as allegories of the Dirty War, the question rests with the spectator who will inevitably determine if the generic elements typical of horror (kidnapping, torture, and captivity) signal the Dirty War. At the conclusion of a chapter on war photos in *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Susan Sontag writes about the different reactions to a photo which can transcend that of the photographer: “The photographer’s intentions do not determine the meaning of the photograph, which will have

its own career, blown by the whims and loyalties of the diverse communities that have use of it” (39). With its circulation in Argentina, the United States, and elsewhere, Argentine horror cinema, indeed, has a career beyond its director and beyond Argentina. Whether the legacy of the Dirty War follows a horror film in Argentina, the United States, and beyond, remains open.

## EPILOGUE

### IMAGINING AN ARGENTINE-U.S. HORROR GENRE COMMUNITY

Argentine horror cinema's circulation between Argentina and the United States exemplifies a transnational horror film culture. Channels of distribution, exhibition venues, and online and textual criticism compose the film culture, which spans two countries in the context of this project. The flow of Argentine horror cinema, however, does not move unabated. The flows of Argentine horror cinema between Argentina and the United States are by no means a liberal fantasy of globalization in which products flow unobstructed. As noted in chapter one, there is an extreme disparity in the amount of Argentine films of any genre distributed in the United States versus U.S. films distributed in Argentina. However, this disparity reiterates and underscores the exceptional nature of Argentine horror cinema: the capacity to gain entrance into the U.S. market. Countless numbers of people, including some Argentines, have reacted incredulously after learning that Argentine horror films exist. Argentine horror cinema indeed exists and, to date, eleven contemporary Argentine horror films are distributed in the United States.<sup>192</sup> Their distribution evidences Argentine horror cinema's foothold in the United States and demonstrates the evolution of the horror genre's status nationally.

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<sup>192</sup>Those films are *Mala carne/Carnal* (Fabián Forte, 2003), *Plaga zombie/Plaga Zombie* (Pablo Parés and Hernán Sáez, 1997), *Plaga zombie: Zona mutante/Plaga Zombie: Mutant Zone* (2001), *Habitaciones para turistas/Rooms for Tourists* (Adrián García Bogliano, 2004), *36 Pasos/36 Pasos* (2006), *Tremendo amanecer/Tremendous Dawn* (2004), *La última entrada/The Last Gateway* (2007), *Sudor frío/Cold Sweat* (2011), *La sombra de Jennifer/Jennifer's Shadow* (Daniel de la Vega and Pablo Parés, 2004), *La muerte conoce tu nombre/Death Knows Your Name* (Daniel de la Vega, 2007), and *Dying God* (Fabrice Lambot, 2008). *Dying God* presents a particular compelling case of transnational content and production. The film is a French-

Argentine horror cinema's distribution in the United States, however small compared to the number of U.S. films distributed in the country, creates a two-way flow of horror films and horror film cultures between the two countries. The dimension of exchange between the Argentina and the United States constitutes a transnational dimension as conceived by Kathleen Newman in her essay "Notes on Transnational Film Theory." When discussing how geographic and economic exchanges happen on multiple scales and their effects can mean for film studies, Newman suggests the possibility of "moving beyond any tendency to reduce the centers and peripheries of present-day capitalism to the past familiar binary of cultural imperialism" (9). While Newman does not overlook the inequalities among countries, the Argentine-U.S. exchange of horror cinema problematizes any tendency to see the presence of U.S. horror in Argentine cinemas merely as a pure imposition of U.S. horror cinema culture. Instead, as I have endeavored to show in the previous chapters, an Argentine component exists in the exchange. Traces of U.S. horror cinema on Argentine horror film culture can be discerned in various places, such as Argentine websites devoted to horror cinema. *Quintadimension.com*, for example, has articles on classic horror films from the 1930s and 1940s from Universal, as well as reviews of scores of U.S. horror films in the "Zona crítica" ("Critical zone") section of the site.

An Argentine-U.S. horror cinematic circuit thus presents itself as an exchange of horror film cultures between Argentina and the United States around the genre of horror. However, my exclusive focus on an Argentine website's content about U.S. horror films is slightly misleading. *Quintadimension.com* also boasts articles about Italian, Colombian, Canadian, and Mexican horror films. Similar to any number of textual and virtual horror publications (*Fangoria*, *Bloodydisgusting.com*, *Scream*, etc.), a horror publication's international coverage is the norm

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Argentine coproduction, written by Argentine scriptwriters, directed by a Frenchman with French, U.S., and Argentine actors speaking in English.



and lends credibility to a publication. As Mark Kermode writes in his autobiographical reflections on being a horror fan during his youth, “[...] no self-respecting horror magazine [...] is considered complete without in-depth coverage of the works of European film-makers like Mario Bava, Dario Argento, Lucio Fulci, Michele Soavi, Guillermo del Toro, even the irredeemably tiresome Jess Franco” (133). While Kermode errs by including Del Toro (who is Mexican) among a list of European directors, his argument holds true. Both Argentine and U.S. horror cinema fan cultures possess a level of international awareness, and an Argentine-U.S. circuit is a result of that internationalism.

Initially, I hesitate to categorize the separate horror film cultures in Argentina and the United States as creating a single community that spans two hemispheres. As stated in chapter one, while fan interactions within Argentine and U.S. horror film cultures are commonplace on websites, interactions between Argentine and U.S. fans, virtual or otherwise, seem uncommon, which suggests a linguistic barrier may prevent such exchanges. Interactions between Argentine and U.S. horror film cultures thus transpire more through intermediaries such as journalists like Nicanor Loreti, Todd Brown, or Charles Newberry, who has published several articles about or has mentioned Argentine horror cinema in *Variety*. On the other hand, calling the exchanges and flows of horror cinema cultures between Argentina and the United States a community may not seem too far off the mark. Rick Altman’s conceives genre communities in which a specific film genre serves as the node connecting a contingent of viewers. Altman, however, revises and specifies a notion of connectivity: “Most of the time, flesh-and-blood genre communities remain beyond reach. Though we may have intermittent contact with others fond of the same genre, we are usually reduced to only imagining their presence and activity” (161). In lieu of face-to-face contact with other viewers who share a taste in a genre, “the very process of spectatorship

becomes a symbolic method of communication with other members of that community. By taking a particular type of film-viewing pleasure I imagine myself as connected to those who take a similar type of pleasure in similar circumstances” (Altman 161-162). Merely by watching a film belonging to a particular genre, a viewer establishes some kind of link with other viewers by presupposing forms of shared pleasure. The question of analogous viewing conditions – a sparsely attended screening – also figures into the creation of a genre community for Altman. If Altman refers anecdotally to imagining kinship with another viewer in the same exhibition space with whom he never speaks (162), then Argentine horror cinema culture intimates a transnational horror genre community composed of Argentina and the United States through film exchanges from both countries. The exhibition spaces of Argentine horror cinema and Argentina and the United States are much more varied than Altman’s experiences. Kinship and bonds establish themselves in other ways, namely horror fan websites. While a language barrier complicates virtual north-south interactions among Argentine and U.S. horror cinema fans, Argentine and U.S. horror genre websites reinforce the notion of a transnational horror community through their shared appreciation of similar directors and an awareness of the horror cinema coming from each other’s countries. In their essay “Virtual communities as communities,” Barry Wellman and Milena Gulia write, “People on the Net have a greater tendency to base their feelings of closeness on the basis of shared interests rather than on the basis of shared social characteristics such as gender and socio-economic status” (186). Wellman and Gulia’s observation stems from their analysis of exchanges among participants via websites. Interaction between Argentine and U.S. horror fans may appear scant, but similar tastes in horror cinema among the two national fan communities as shown on websites create linkages between the communities.

Both Argentine and U.S. film cultures have a stake in making Argentine horror cinema visible, thus making visible a transnational horror genre community characterized by exchanges. In *Circuits of Culture*, Jeff Himpele describes the distribution of films in La Paz, Bolivia and refers to the convergence of spectators and their transformation into an audience at a film screening as a kind of temporary evidence of a public: “[...] audiences maneuver their own mobility, assemble, and become visible as publics at the sites of exhibition where they momentarily pertain – and then scatter” (64). In keeping with the critical transnationalism vis-à-vis Argentine horror I mentioned in the introduction, the national remains significant as it interacts with the multiple levels of “global and local” (Higbee and Lim 10). Such an interaction is projected in Argentine horror films distributed in the United States. Even in Argentine horror films explicitly made for the U.S. market, the national, some facet of *argentinidad*, persists. Accented English, sounds, or fleeting images seep through a diegesis to suggest the film’s status as Argentine. In a mingling dynamic of “global and local,” the “global” is given a specificity and concreteness by my focus on the United States. Allegories of U.S. crises make present the other national node in a transnational cinematic circuit of horror. This critical transnationalism extends beyond the films’ content and presents significant differences between the two national nodes, as in the case of public exhibition. In Argentina, *Visitante de invierno/Winter’s Visitor* and *Sudor frío* are horror films that enjoyed theatrical runs and enable instances akin to that described by Himpele: a temporary convergence of an audience and its subsequent dispersal. Moreover, Buenos Aires Rojo Sangre draws scores of people for films from Argentina and elsewhere making a more sustained and annual show of force. As for public exhibition in the United States, the temporary creation of a public around an Argentine horror film happens much less frequently and regularly than in Argentina and only at select film festivals that screen an

Argentine horror film. The visible component of a transnational horror cinema in the United States thus happens less through public exhibition and more through other means such as fans websites and the films' availability through Netflix and amazon.com.

While Altman touched on the role of imagining other viewers in a genre community, the imagining of Argentine and U.S. horror audiences happens beyond spectatorship. The imagining occurs in the Argentine horror films themselves. In short, the Argentine films conceive both domestic and U.S. audiences. Benjamin Lee and Edward LiPuma have written about circulation, and the following comment is instructive to consider the ways in which Argentine horror cinema arrives to the United States and how it appeals to both Argentine and U.S. audiences:

"circulation always presupposes the existence of their respective interpretative communities, with their own forms of interpretation and evaluation" (192). As I have shown in the previous chapters, the presupposition of interpretative communities manifests itself in the films' adherence to various subgenres of horror (slasher, apartment horror, zombies, Gothic horror) that are recognizable to both national audiences. A shared horror cinematic imaginary and literacy of horror cinema codes exist among the two national horror film communities, and the films have an eye on both domestic and U.S. audiences, irrespective of whether the films are in English or Spanish. To refer again to Kermode's view of horror's global reach, "[...] I can think of no other cinematic genre in which internationalism is so genuinely championed, and in which linguistic boundaries are so nimbly over-stepped" (133). Yet, the Argentine horror films' allegorization of specific national crises via the manipulation of select horror codes point to interpretative particularities for two different national audiences. Lacking an awareness of popular resistance against neoliberal policies in Argentina, U.S. audiences may not consider the significance of a zombie horde in *Plaga zombie: Zona mutante*. On other hand, Argentine audiences may not see

how a U.S. audience might connect an aesthetics of paranoia in *Dead Line* and *Death Knows Your Name* with the issue of Latin American immigration to the United States.

Given the existence of an Argentine-U.S. horror film circuit of exchange, it bears asking what makes the circuit move. In his comments, Altman describes his own pleasure in watching a genre film and pondering other viewers partaking in a similar pleasure. Altman's use of the term 'pleasure' is especially important for any discussion of horror cinema given the vast body of scholarship about the pleasures of horror cinema which, in general, try to answer why people like horror.<sup>193</sup> For me, the distribution of Argentine horror films in the United States and the creation of an Argentine-U.S. horror film circuit are, in part, about the pleasures of horror cinema and its creation of a transnational demand for cinema to satisfy that pleasure. I will refrain from attempting to enumerate the kinds of pleasures that Argentine horror cinema may tender for Argentine and U.S. audiences. To echo Matt Hills, horror cinema offers multiple kinds of pleasure to a heterogeneous group of viewers (5). Argentine horror films indeed traffic in the kinds of pleasures that critics have noted in horror cinema such as intertextual references to other horror films (Hills 163-197) and special effects (Pinedo 57). Nevertheless, I would argue that Argentine horror cinema offers new kinds of pleasures to Argentine and U.S. viewers. For Argentine viewers, the films appeal to the pleasure of seeing *argentinidad* coded within a horror film made in Argentina by Argentine filmmakers and actors. Pablo Parés captures such a sentiment in the prologue to Matías Raña's *Guerreros del cine*. Parés describes his youthful admiration for films such as the *Star Wars* trilogy and *The Neverending Story* (Wolfgang

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<sup>193</sup> Among the various works to theorize the pleasures of horror are Noël Carroll's *The Philosophy of Horror or the Paradoxes of the Heart*, Rhona Berenstein's *Attack of the Leading Ladies*, Isabel Cristina Pinedo's *Recreational Terror*, Carol Clover's *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*, Matt Hills's *The Pleasures of Horror*, and Julian Hanich's *Cinematic Emotion in Horror Films and Thrillers*.

Petersen, 1984) (14). Behind such admiration, however, Parés expresses a desire “ver el cine que más me gusta, pero hecho en mi país” (“to see the cinema I like but made in my country”; 14), which inspired him to make films. Argentine horror films not only provide the pleasure of seeing a horror film that adheres to genre conventions, but also achieve a level of national specificity through language, cinematic landscape, and humor. For U.S. audiences, as I described above and in chapter two, a possible pleasure comes from seeing a parallel and generic United States created onscreen with Latina/o actors at a moment in which paranoia over Latin American immigrants in the U.S. reaches a feverous pitch. U.S. horror audiences may gloat and chuckle at a projection of their fellow citizens’ alarm.

For my part, I am not beyond the dynamic of my object of study and its pleasures. I, too, derive various pleasures from Argentine horror cinema: special effects, the slapstick comedy of gore, and allusions to other horror films, among others. My pleasure extends to allegory, which on a basic level is common to the pleasures of horror and has provided an anchor for my study of Argentine horror cinema. Kermode describes his frustration at critics of horror cinema who fail “to see past the special effects, puncture the gaudy surface of the movies, pull apart their rubbery rib-cages and grasp their dark thematic hearts” (130). For Kermode, the horror fan sees the meanings that can emerge, for instance, from special effects. Kermode adduces the body’s contortions in *Videodrome* (David Cronenberg, 1983), *Society* (Brian Yuzna, 1989), and *Hellraiser* (Clive Barker, 1987) as instances in which special effects provoke issues of class, desire and the power of technology (130). Through allegory, I find in Argentine horror cinema a similar capacity to project a plurality of issues relevant to Argentine and U.S. cultures, namely their crises. Allegory and the labors of unpacking and mapping the allegories of crises do not forgo the pleasures of Argentine horror cinema. Indeed, allegory enables those pleasures. In a

single film, I see the layering of national cultures through allegories of crises. While the conditions of each country are unique, allegories point to some shared conditions between Argentina and the United States: urban paranoia, economic crises and anxiety of losing one's home, distrust of government, and abortion, among others. But not all is gloom and doom in the projections of crises. Several critics and scores of fans have noted the humorous dimensions of horror cinema. As William Paul writes in *Laughing Screaming*, "[l]aughter inevitably follows the most terrifying images in fright movies [...]" (67). The allegories in Argentine horror films not only signal shared national crises, they also highlight a shared laughter that resonates between and beyond Argentina and the United States – a gallows humor in the face of adversities.

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